

SERMON – 04/13/08
TO LOVE & TO CHERISH – “Getting to Know You”
Genesis 2:18, 21-25 & Colossians 3:12-17

It began during my birthday party... some friends of mine & I had been invited over to another friend's house on the grand occasion of my 18th birthday.

- At some point in the afternoon, we were sitting around talking about “The Most Beautiful People in our Senior Class”...
 - The girls shared which guys they thought were cute... and we guys, likewise, offered the names of girls we liked.
 - My friend, Chris, was the one who said it: “I think Jody McCollum’s beautiful.”
 - Suddenly a little index card in my brain with the name “Jody” popped up... and I started to think about this person in a way I’d never really thought before.
- You see, I knew Jody from our honors classes together at Waiakea High School on the Big Island...
 - She was friendly... smart... a hard-worker... always cheerful...
 - She was a strong Christian...
 - And though I never really thought of her as “dating material,” once Chris mentioned her in that context, I could definitely see it!
- Fast-forward about 6 weeks... it’s January, 1986.
 - All seniors had to buy their prom tickets by the 20th of the month... for a prom that was in APRIL!!!
 - Talk about pressure! A guy had to find a girl that would still be his friend 4 months down the road! (Was it even possible?)
 - Since I wasn’t dating anyone at the time, I did what every guy who didn’t have a girlfriend does... I made a “Top 10 list”!
 - That’s right... without any boundaries, I put down the names of 10 girls I’d love to take to the senior prom.
- On the afternoon of January 15th ... I drove over to Jody McCollum’s house to ask her to the prom.

- Jody likes to tell people that she was the 9th girl on my “Top 10 List”... which totally gives people the **wrong impression!**
- (Let me just say that the only reason she says this... is because, in a moment of weakness... I may have inadvertently let it slip that there were EIGHT other girls ahead of her on the list.)
- But, it doesn't matter... because she was the FIRST (and only) one I asked!
- So, you see... in my mind, that put her FIRST! (You're all with me on this, right!?!?)
- But none of that is really important. What's important is that she said “Yes!”
 - You wouldn't have expected anything less, right?
 - (Okay... as long as we're being completely honest with each other here... what she **actually** said, “Well, I was hoping this other guy would ask me, but since he hasn't yet, and it's getting close to the deadline... okay, I'll go to the prom with you.”)
 - You could tell that it was TRUE LOVE from the start!
- The next day in Calculus class I leaned over and said to her, “So, now that we're going to the prom together... do you want to go out sometime?”
 - Again, she said yes... and suddenly we had started the wonderful process of getting to know someone else.
 - (By the way, by Valentine's Day – just one month later – we were officially boyfriend/girlfriend!)

Welcome to a brand-new sermon series entitled: “TO LOVE AND TO CHERISH – a Biblical view of Love, Sex & Marriage”...

- Over the course of the next 5 Sundays, we're going to look at a variety of topics that affect men, women & relationships...
 - If you are currently married, I hope this will be of some help to you and your spouse...
 - If there's the possibility that you might be getting married sometime in the future, this will give you food for thought as you prepare for that opportunity...
 - For everyone else, whether you're single or no longer married (no matter what the reason may be)... YOU are in a **position of influence** in the lives of those around you!
 - I pray that this series will help you folks give wise & helpful advice to others who might fall into the first two categories!

- Now, in the words of Julie Andrews from “The Sound of Music,” let’s start at the very beginning... a very good place to start!
 - Open your Bibles with me to the very beginning (and no, I’m not talking about the Table of Contents)... the book of GENESIS... chapter 2...
 - You may remember from our “Tackling the Tough Questions” series in January, that there are actually 2 creation stories in the book of Genesis.
 - Chapter one is an orderly, systematic account of God speaking everything into creation... and it was all “good.”
 - In this account, humankind was created at the end of day 6... the very last of God’s creation.
 - The 2nd creation story begins with the second half of verse 4, chapter 2... *“In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up – for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground – then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.”*
- In Genesis 2... God’s very **first** act is to create man (‘adam = Adam) from the earth.
 - Genesis goes on to tell us that God planted a garden in Eden... complete with trees & rivers... and lots of freedom (with only a few restrictions)!
 - But there’s a problem in paradise. In the midst of this perfect, idyllic environment there’s something missing.
 - Adam is lonely.
 - (v.18) *“Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.’”*
 - I can do “partners,” God thought. So God created... ANIMALS... and BIRDS...
 - And, to be honest, they were fun for a while... but weren’t exactly the kind of “partner” that man was looking for.
 - So God went to plan B... and God changed his construction materials from “dust” to “ribs”...

- (v.22) *“And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man... Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.”*
- Okay, there are a lot of things going on here that we need to look at before moving on...
 - To begin with, man & woman were not “cut from the same cloth,” so to speak. They were created different by God... and that’s a good thing!
 - It goes far beyond simply “Dust and Rib”... there are inherent differences between the genders, that we’ll talk more about a little later.
 - The coming together of a man & a woman was designed by God to fulfill a purpose...
 - There’s a basic human need of companionship & help that all of us have...
 - Not to say that only married people are fulfilled people... for whether single or married, we all need healthy significant relationships of the opposite gender to help & be our companions.
- Pastor Adam Hamilton, in his study, “Making Love Last a Lifetime,” remarks that the mission of marriage is for men & women to be companions & helpers for each other.
 - It’s a sacred calling from God to serve, give to, and sacrifice for another.
 - It’s really a MINISTRY to one another!
 - (That’s a powerful thought, isn’t it? To say that my marriage is a ministry from God for me to fulfill!)
 - Choosing to marry is choosing to answer this calling toward the person we’re marrying... although we may not always feel like it!
 - We weren’t called to be “madly in love” every moment of our lives... (and any of us who have been married longer than 6 weeks can testify to the fact that we don’t always feel “in love” with our spouse!)
 - It’s not about feeling... it’s about answering the sacred calling by God.
 - And the Holy Spirit – God’s presence within us – can help us rise above our own self-centeredness... and focus on reaching out to our spouse.
- How do we do that? Well, we’ll go into more detail next week... but I’d like to bring back to mind the other scripture verse we read this morning... Colossians 3:12-15...

- Here, the apostle Paul is writing to all Christians... but it takes on new meaning in light of Genesis 2. As you listen to these words, think of them as instruction for a man & woman...
- *(v.12ff.) "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful."*
- God longs for us to love our spouses the way God loves him/her!
 - When we answer the sacred call of marriage... we are agreeing to put another person & their needs ahead of our own.
 - And as Christians, we believe that God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, gives us the ability to do this...
 - (Because on our own strength & abilities, we'd probably never be able to do so!)
- Maybe one of the best conversations those of us who are married can have with our spouses today will center around these 3 questions:
 - How can I be a better friend to you?
 - How can I be a better helper to you?
 - Am I doing my part to fulfill God's mission in our marriage?

So that is the Biblical foundation for relationships between women & men in the bonds of marriage... but it still doesn't provide much insight into how we get to know each other better.

- **PHYSIOLOGICALLY**, scientists have discovered that the average male brain is 100 grams heavier than the average female brain?! (It's absolutely true!)
 - But before we get too excited, men... it behooves me to report that MRI scans have indicated that women's brains have 15% more blood flow (which means, more going on up there, than we men!)
 - Women's brains also have different connecting links and can send more information to and from sections of the brain!

- Women use more memory & emotive language portions of their brain than men (so it's literally a fact that men have more one-track minds, can't multi-task like women can, can't remember things as well, etc.)!
- I found two wonderful books this week in my research, by Shaunti & Jeff Feldhahn... one is called For Men Only: a straightforward guide to the inner lives of women... while the other is For Women Only: what you need to know about the inner lives of men.
 - These Christian authors used a nationally representative survey... scores of focus groups & other research... and found key insights into better understanding men & women.
 - Since we can't multi-task as well, I'm going to start with information for us guys, first... this is a quick summary of the Feldhahn's research about women:
- **Women need to feel loved.**
 - They discovered that buried inside of most women, even those in great relationships, is a latent insecurity about whether their man really loves them, and whether their relationship is okay.
 - This is especially important during conflict situations... men need to reassure women of their love for them.
- **Women are emotional.**
 - This goes back to how women's brains are wired... they deal with multiple thought and emotions from their past and present all the time, at the same time – and these can't be easily dismissed!
 - The authors had a wonderful metaphor for those of us who are computer savvy: the thought lives of women are almost like a busy computer with multiple windows open & running all at once... and uninvited pop-ups (from the present or past) that invade every day!
 - If you ask a guy what he's thinking about, he might respond by saying, "Um... nothing"... and he's probably being honest with you!
 - Ask a woman that same question, and if she's honest, she'll NEVER say "nothing!"
 - The best thing we guys can do, is help women close those pop-ups... and that doesn't mean saying, 'Just don't think about it,' because that's not possible!
- **Third, women in general desire “emotional security” & closeness far greater than financial security.**

- This means feeling emotionally connected & close, knowing that you will always be there for her... as well as being best friends!
- (Remember one of the 3 questions for spouses to talk about today: “How can I be a better friend to you?”)
- Making time together as a priority is a wonderful way of fostering this emotional security.
- **Listening is the solution!**
 - When women share an emotional problem, what they are feeling about the problem is actually more important to them than the problem itself.
 - Instead of trying to fix the problem, if men would focus on the feelings behind the problem, that would actually go a long way to solving the problem!
 - (That means don't tell her she's 'overreacting'... or question her version of the facts... or wonder aloud if she's having her menstrual cycle... none of that helps!)
- **Fifth, physically women tend to crave sex less often than men do – and it's usually not related to their husband's desirability.**
 - We're going to spend an entire sermon on sexual intimacy in a few weeks... but it would suffice to say that most women (not all) are physically wired to crave sex less than men do – but that doesn't mean they don't enjoy it just as much!
 - Second, when women avoid their husband's advances, it has nothing to do with his desirability, but rather with the woman's physical difference (need for closeness in the relationship outside the bedroom & need for 'anticipation time').
- **Finally, women want to be attractive to their husbands...**
 - The authors write, “Inside your smart, secure wife lives a little girl who deeply needs to know that you find her beautiful – and that you only have eyes for her.”
 - In this “body obsessed” culture, women are not being protected emotionally... they're often being humiliated.
 - Men need to not only TELL their wives they are beautiful... but reflect it in our visual choices.
 - Women already feel in direct competition with every other beautiful woman (real or imagined), so we husbands have to control our looking.

Okay, now it's time for the women to learn a little bit more about us men...

- **Men need respect...**
 - Men would rather feel unloved than inadequate and disrespected.
 - Unfortunately, anger is often a man's response to feeling disrespected.
 - A man's heart is powerfully touched by the words, "I'm so proud of you!"
- Second, **Men are insecure...**
 - Despite our "in control" exterior, men often feel like impostors and are insecure that our inadequacies will be discovered.
 - This includes both the workplace and the home (as an employee and as a husband/father)...
 - Believe it or not, but in the Feldhahn's research, only 25% of the men surveyed actually felt regularly appreciated by their families.
 - We men need to be affirmed... early & often!
- **Men are providers...**
 - Even if their spouse made enough income to support the family's lifestyle, it would make no difference to the mental burden their husband feels to provide.
 - Men feel powerful when they provide... and we want to be depended on. It's one of the primary ways we say, "I love you" to our families.
- Fourth, **Men want more physical intimacy than women...**
 - Again, we'll talk more about this in a few weeks...
 - But research showed that a woman's sexual desire for her husband profoundly affected his sense of well-being and confidence in all areas of his life.
 - Men want to be wanted.
 - Sometimes saying no to intimacy is translated by us men as a personal rejection.
- **Men are visual...**
 - Even happily married men are instinctively pulled toward live & recollected images of attractive women.
 - The author describes it as every man having a mental rolodex of sensual images... that often arise without warning.
 - The challenge for us men, is whether we choose to dwell on these thoughts/images... or try to quickly dismiss them.

- Be assured that it's "a guy thing," and has nothing to do with our spouses... nor does it impact our feelings for you.
- Lust is a powerful demon... and we need all the prayers our wives can give us.
- Sixth, **Men are unromantic clods...**
 - Actually, most of us enjoy & want romance.... But sometimes find different things romantic... or are conflicted over our poor romantic skills.
 - I'll just leave that one right there for the time being.
- And finally, **Men care about appearance...**
 - Shaunti Feldhahn starts this last chapter by asking women to pray before reading any further... asking God to shepherd what they're about to read/hear.
 - She writes to women: "The effort you put into your appearance is extremely high on his priority list. Yet the chances that you know his true feelings are extremely low."
 - She called this last insight as life-changing... jarring her out of dangerous complacency.
 - Recognizing how complicated & hypersensitive this issue is for both partners... she said that in a way, this issue for men is like the romance issue for women.
 - Men are eager to help their wives do whatever it takes to make an effort in this area.

Well, I want to finish by reminding us all of a few key points from today:

- Men & women were created to be companions and helpers...
- Marriage is a divine calling by God...
- We respond to this calling by serving, giving & sacrificing for one another... even when we don't feel like it!
- And that through it all, the Holy Spirit should be allowed to work in and through our marriage... helping us fulfill God's mission for our relationship!

I look forward to journeying with you in the weeks to come as we examine more issues that profoundly affect men, women & relationships. AMEN.