

SERMON – 04/27/08
TO LOVE AND TO CHERISH – “Unhealthy Habits”
Ephesians 4:25-5:1 & 5:21-33

I'd like to begin today's sermon with a 'music video'... this is a new song by Tim Hawkins... let's watch.

- (Note: here are the lyrics to the song:)

“Hey honey, have you gained some weight in your rear end?”

“The dress you wear reminds me of my old girlfriend.”

“And where'd you get those shoes, I think they're pretty lame!”

“Would you stop talking 'cuz I'm trying to watch the game?!?”

If you're a man who wants to live a long and happy life

These are the things you don't say to your wife

“I planned a hunting trip next week on your birthday.”

“I didn't ask you but I knew it'd be okay.”

“Go make some dinner while I watch this fishing show.”

“I taped it over our old wedding video!”

If you're a man who... (done that!)...a long and happy life

These are the things you don't say to your wife

“Your cooking is okay, but not like mother makes.”

“The diamond in the ring I bought you is a fake.”

“Your eyes look puffy, dear. Are you feeling ill?”

“Happy Anniversary, I bought you a treadmill!”

If you're a man who wants to live a long and happy... (I've done that too!)

These are the things you don't say to your wife

If you're a man who doesn't want to get killed with a knife

These are the things you don't say to your wife

- Okay, so hopefully by now you've come to realize Tim Hawkins is a comedian!
 - But those are, nevertheless, great examples of “Things You Don't Say To Your Wife!” wouldn't you agree?!?

- Welcome to the 3rd sermon in a series called ‘TO LOVE AND TO CHERISH – a Biblical view of Love, Sex & Marriage’...
 - If this is your first week with us, welcome!
 - In week one, we looked at the inner lives of men & women, and how marriage was created by God to provide us with companions & helpers.
 - Last week we talked about how we can DO LOVE long after the ‘in love experience’ has worn off (which, research tells us, is usually about 2 years, max!).
 - If you missed either of those sermons, you can read them on the web... just go to our church’s website www.aumc.us and click on the link that says “SERMONS.”
- I also want to reiterate that I know not everyone is currently in a “married relationship”...
 - So for those of you who fit into that category, I invite you to listen today on behalf of those people in your life who ARE married!
 - You may have an opportunity down the road to speak a word of influence into their life... may you be able to hear what God might be saying today, as well!

Today we’re going to look at some of the **Unhealthy Habits** that husbands & wives sometimes fall into... habits that bring stress, discord & pain into the lives of couples.

I’d like to begin with something that might very well be considered the most controversial topics of this entire series (and we haven’t even reached next week’s topic of “sexual intimacy”)...

- Let’s be honest... how many of you got a little uncomfortable when we read those verses from Ephesians today?
 - I’m not talking about the “Let no evil talk come out of your mouths” passage from Ephesians 4...
 - Nor the “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another” either...
 - It was the “Wives, be subject to your husbands” part, though... wasn’t it?
 - I don’t think in all of my 14 year of ministry, that I’ve ever been brave enough (or is it stupid enough?!) to tackle this passage in a sermon.
 - But I gained a new perspective on this after reading a Rob Bell’s new book called SEX...GOD – Exploring the Endless Connections between Sexuality and Spirituality.

- We need to begin with Ephesians 5:21... the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible says, “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ”...
 - The Message Bible translation says, “be courteously reverent” to one another...
 - But the King James Version uses that pesky word, “SUBMIT!”
 - Now I know that word has been the basis for much abuse, domination & un-Christian activity over the centuries... (especially when it comes to verse 22: “Wives, submit to your husbands”)...
 - But I dare say it’s because we haven’t truly understood what it means!
- The word “submit” is the Greek word *hupotasso*... and it’s actually two words stuck together...
 - The word ‘upo,’ which means UNDER... and the word ‘tasso’ which is translated, “TO PLACE IN ORDER.”
 - So submit literally means ‘to place yourself under... to give allegiance to... to tend to the needs of... to be responsive to.’
 - Some scholars believe it originated as a military term... in the sense that when soldiers submit, they place themselves **under** their commanding officer.
 - This passage says that we are to place ourselves under one another out of reverence, or respect, for Christ.
 - Look at verse 25... *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”*
 - Men, we are called to follow Jesus’ example... just as Jesus gave himself away – over and over to a hurting world – ultimately leading to the sacrifice of his very life... so too, are we to love our wives... and give ourselves away for them, over and over!
 - We have to make sure we don’t stop reading Ephesians at verse 22: “Wives, be subject (submit) to your husbands as you are to the Lord...”
 - We need to remember that it’s also the role of the husbands to “be subject to” their wives, as well...
 - It’s a MUTUAL SUBMISSION... one that does not keep track of “who’s in charge” or “who wears the pants” (I personally hate that expression!)...
 - It’s about giving ourselves away for each other – over and over and over!

Malcolm Gladwell, in his 2005 best-seller BLINK: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking introduces the term “thin slicing.”

- Thin-slicing is the ability to gauge what is really important from a very narrow period of experience.
 - Sometimes spontaneous decisions are often as good as (or even better than) carefully planned and considered ones!
- In his book, SEX...GOD, Rob Bell says he has a friend who’s a doctor and specializes in marriage & relational issues...
 - And he’s been able to master the art of ‘thin-slicing’ – to become incredibly accurate in his predictions of whether a marriage will last.
 - Bell says it’s hard to believe, but true! In just a matter of seconds, his friend can have a pretty good hunch as to the potential longevity of a marriage.
 - What’s his secret? **He observes how a couple looks at each other!**
 - How she looks at him. How he looks at her.
 - He says it’s all about RESPECT.
 - That look will tell him all he needs to know about whether a marriage will make it.

Well, I’m not that perceptive when it comes to “diagnosing couples”... but Pastor Adam Hamilton, in his book Making Love Last a Lifetime, has a chapter on unhealthy habits of couples... and he lists 5 primary areas that I’d like to share with you.

- The FIRST habit is actually a collection of similar habits... **Disrespect, contempt, (constant) criticism, and abuse...**
 - Neither men nor women can thrive in a relationship where they are treated in these ways...
 - It really bothers me to hear men & women cut their spouses down – even if it’s done in a spirit of ‘good humor.’
 - I know it’s human nature to tend to notice the negatives in others... but if we dwell on the negatives of our spouse, then over time, this can become incredibly demeaning.

- It has been said that it takes 5 words of praise before someone is ready to hear one word of constructive criticism... 5 to 1!
- (So, men & women... if you feel the need to offer a word of **constructive** criticism – which is quite different from mean-spirited criticism – then make sure you have a list of 5 things you absolutely LOVE about your spouse, before you offer that one word of criticism!)
- And it should go without saying (though I'm going to say it now)... that physical violence in a relationship is NEVER part of God's plan for couples. Never.
- Adam Hamilton shared this shocking statistic... 1/3 of all women have been hit, kicked, pushed, punched, or choked by a spouse or partner in their lifetime.
- That's ridiculous! If you're in an abusive relationship, you need to get help... and get it now!
- The SECOND habit of unhealthy relationships is **dishonesty & lying...**
 - Lasting relationships are based upon trust. When a man or a woman lies to the other, it undermines the very foundation of their relationship.
 - Proverbs 6:16-19 says this... *“There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that hurry to run to evil, a lying witness who testifies falsely, and one who sows discord in a family.”*
 - And Colossians 3:9-10 says, *“Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its Creator.”*
 - Lying... even “little white lies”... rarely leads to anything good in a relationship!
- THIRD, the **Poor Handling of Money** can be incredibly unhealthy in a relationship.
 - Adam Hamilton writes, “Few things have as much power to destroy a healthy relationship as money. This is especially true when we are faced with debt, which is often a result of living beyond our means.”
 - The Bible frequently talks about the importance of putting our trust in God first & foremost... not in material goods or security.

- We have to be careful about the value we give money & the “things” we own in this life... for that can lead to either good or evil, depending on our attitudes.
- We need to foster generosity in our lives... giving back to God in our tithes & offerings, and being willing to help those in need, as needs arise!
- In a culture where “keeping up with the Jones” is almost the national pastime, we have to be diligent about living within our means... and not pursuing the acquisition of more stuff, just for the sake of it!
- When at all possible, we need to save & avoid taking on debt.
- John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, used to say, “Make all you call so you can save all you can so you can give all you can.”
- By the way, we have a Personal Finance passion group here at Aiea UMC... you might consider joining this group of people who strive to be good stewards of the finances God has blessed them with!
- The FOURTH habit of unhealthy relationships is **Alcohol & Drug abuse**.
 - Very few extended families today are unscathed by the crushing effects of addiction.
 - These destructive habits generally do not result in the sudden death of a marriage... more often, the death is slow & painful.
 - Some people might become rather defensive when they hear this, saying to themselves, “I don’t have a problem in this area!”
 - But hear this... if your spouse thinks you have a problem, then whether or not you agree, you need to listen... because it’s obviously having an effect on your relationship!
 - This is one of those areas where there’s a variety of options for help, if you, or someone you love, needs it! Please consider it.
- And finally, **Infidelity** is the FIFTH habit of unhealthy relationships.
 - We’ll talk a bit more about this in the last week of our series... but let me simply say that having a **physically or emotionally intimate** relationship outside of marriage is utterly destructive.

- Every portion of Scripture... from the Law, Prophets, & Writings in the Old Testament... to the Gospels & Epistles in the New Testament... condemn extramarital affairs.
- And no one should think that their relationship is outside the possibility of succumbing to infidelity!
- Last week we talked extensively about the need to differentiate between the ‘in love’ experience and the emotional need to feel loved.
- That ‘in-love’ experience only lasts about 2 years... but when we choose to meet the emotional needs of our spouse to FEEL LOVED (by DOING loving things for them)... then infidelity has much less room to grow.
- None of these unhealthy habits are automatic marriage-killers... there’s always the possibility of healing, forgiveness, reconciliation & new life – even with infidelity...
 - But marriages take work... and sacrifice... and intentionality...
 - When you start adding these kinds of unhealthy habits, it makes it even that much more difficult to succeed!

One of the things that’s important to remember is that just as there are different seasons in nature... there are also different ‘seasons’ in our own lives... and in the life of a marriage!

- How a couple relates to one another when they’re first married, without children is quite different from how they’ll relate 25 years down the road when the children are grown & out of the house...
 - When Pastor Adam Hamilton did a similar sermon series at his 9,000 member church in Kansas City, he surveyed his congregation about the ‘happiness quotient’ in their marriage at various stages...
 - He found that one of the most challenging times for a couple was actually when they were in the 30’s, with young children.
 - Marriages in this “season” tend to be a little less fulfilling for couples – primarily because much of the love & energy gets poured into the children.
 - This doesn’t mean it’s less real or vital... but it’s a different “season” in a marriage.
- Pastor Hamilton shared a personal story of this very season in his own marriage...

- Let's watch & listen to his testimony...
- *[quick summary... Adam remembers just prior to the birth of their first child, how much he was in love with his wife. "It just doesn't get any better than this!" he thought. Things changed after the baby was born. His wife, Levonne, lost a lot of blood during her delivery, and took a few months to recover from that. Their daughter had colic for the first 3 months of her life. It was very difficult on their marriage. Sometime down the road, he realized he no longer was 'in love' with her anymore. He was committed to their marriage, but figured this was what happened to all married couples. The love they felt for each other was now transferred into their daughter. The end. God prompted Adam to get flowers and a card for his wife. Despite him not feeling like doing it, he obeyed the prompting of the Spirit. He felt God calling him to 'bless her' with his words, so he wrote a list of the things he appreciated about her in the card. Slowly, he started to feel a little bit of love for her at the end of that activity. He didn't know that God was prompting Levonne to do the same thing. After 3 or 4 months of both of them seeking to be a blessing to each other (without the other knowing about it), he realized one day, much to his surprise, that he was, once again, really in love with her!]*

One final note... for some people, the thought of going for marriage counseling feels almost like admitting that your marriage is bad and you're a poor husband/wife.

- I'd like to suggest a different way of thinking about counseling...
 - A marriage is a sacred & holy relationship... it needs to be treated with respect, honor, & dignity...
 - Marriage counseling should be seen as a powerful opportunity for strengthening something that's extremely important!
 - When two people go to counseling, they are saying that they're aware of what they have... and they're willing to protect it... care for it... and do whatever it takes to make it better!
- If there are relationships in this room today that need some help, I strongly encourage you to consider counseling.

- I'd also be happy to meet with you and help you find a marriage and family counselor who can meet your needs.
- Just ask!

All marriages take work... for remember our challenge is to constantly DO LOVE for our spouse, in ways that speak to their primary love language.

- But let us never forget that we're not in this alone...
 - When we entered into the sacred union with our husband or wife, there was One other entity who was present and made a commitment to us...
 - And that is God!
- Our song of response this morning is one we haven't sung before... it's called "Break Through"...
- No matter what the condition of our relationships are right now, there's always room for growth & change.
- As we sing this song together, may it be a prayer asking for God to break through whatever might be getting in the way of the kind of marriage God desires us to have...
- Let's join together...