

SERMON – 05/11/08

TO LOVE AND TO CHERISH – Making Love Last a Lifetime

Several men are in the locker room of a golf club.

- A cell phone on a bench rings, and a man engages the hands-free speaker function and begins to talk. Everyone else in the room stops to listen.

HE: “Hello?”

SHE: “Honey, it’s me. Are you at the club?”

HE: “Yes.”

SHE: “I’m at the mall now and found this beautiful leather coat. It’s only \$1,000! Is it okay if I buy it?”

HE: “Sure. Go ahead, if you like it that much.”

SHE: “I also stopped by the Mercedes dealership and saw the new 2008 SLK! It looks really, really nice!”

HE: “How much was it?”

SHE: “\$63,000.”

HE: “Okay, but at that price, I want it with all the options.”

SHE: “Great! Oh... and one more thing... the house we wanted last year is back on the market. They’re asking \$950,000.”

HE: “Well, go ahead and make them an offer... but start at \$900,000.”

SHE: “Okay! I’ll see you later. I love you!”

HE: “Bye. I love you too!”

- The man then hung up the phone... you could tell that the rest of the men in the locker room were visibly stunned by what they’d just heard... **STUNNED!**
 - At which point the man smiled and said, “Does anyone know who this phone belongs to?”

Welcome to our 5th and final installment on the sermon series “TO LOVE AND TO CHERISH – A Biblical View on Love, Sex & Marriage”...

- And I know that all of the women here who have “Receiving of Gifts” as your primary love language felt as though that was probably **THE PERFECT HUSBAND**... (at least prior to the punchline!).

- But I hate to be the one to tell you... there are no perfect husbands.
- In fact, there are no perfect wives, either...
- And no perfect marriages, for that matter!
- Let me also say that I understand not everyone here is currently in a married relationship.
 - That's not to say, however, that probably everyone here not only knows but is in a fairly close relationship with someone who IS married...
 - Even if it doesn't pertain to you today... I still hope this sermon will give you wisdom & insight that you might be able to share with others, down the road.

So today I'd like us to do a number of things with this session titled, 'Making Love Last a Lifetime' ... to begin with, I'd like to lift up 4 general tips that are helpful for all of us to keep in mind:

- For starters, **put your spouse first**...
 - You may remember a few weeks ago, we looked at Ephesians 5:21 which said, "*Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.*"
 - This was 'mutual submission' ... not keeping track of who's the "boss" or who owes the other person what...
 - Instead, this scripture calls us to look to Jesus, and the sacrifice he made for us, as the model for husbands & wives...
 - In the words of Pastor Adam Hamilton, marriage is "a sacred calling by God to serve, give to, and sacrifice for another."
 - It's really a **ministry** that we provide for our spouse...
 - It goes beyond mere feelings... and becomes a choice – something we DO for the other – as we seek to respond to that calling from God.
 - I'd also like to lift up Luke 6:38... "*Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.*"
 - If marriage is a ministry, then we need to be about putting the needs of our spouse ahead of ourselves... as we invest in acts of love for one another!
- Second, we need to be **spiritually connected** with our spouse...
 - Make the time to worship together... pray together... have some sort of Bible study or reading together...
 - Sunday mornings are a great place to start... but don't let it end there.

- We all can probably make a little more time to pray or read scripture with our spouse...
- If this is new to you, You can start by setting up one or two nights a week where you read a few chapters together... talk about it... and then pray together.
- Ecclesiastes 4:12 reminds us that “a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” A husband & wife make up two cords, and God is the third! Wound together, there is much more strength than just the two alone!
- Third, to adapt a phrase from the real-estate business... it’s all about **communication, communication, communication!**
 - One of the truths I’ve come to know firsthand... both as someone who’s married, and as a pastor who works with couples... is the importance of communication.
 - This involves everything from checking in every day on how your spouse is doing... to talking about feelings & emotions... to being open enough to share even difficult issues together.
 - Some of my best ‘communicating’ times with Jody have been late at night, when we both were tired & ready to sleep... but somehow we got to talking about stuff that really mattered...
 - Stuff that either one or both of us have been thinking about, but neither had the courage enough to speak out loud.
 - I don’t know if other couples have those kinds of conversations... but when we do, ours usually last for a while... and often involve some deep emotions, that aren’t always pleasant – but ALWAYS lead to health & healing!
 - Heck, many of the movies today have, at their core, a communication PROBLEM... someone says something that’s misunderstood... or someone doesn’t say something that could have easily cleared up a major problem!
 - I can’t say enough how important it is to talk things out with your spouses, friends.
- In his book, *We Are Still Married: Stories & Letters*, Garrison Keillor has a story called “Three Marriages”...
 - The last section is a letter from a husband to his wife of many years... written while he was away with his buddies on a fishing expedition.
 - Partway through his letter, he brings up the topic of an old Christmas card he inadvertently discovered many years back... sent to his wife from her former college boyfriend.
 - Listen to how it affected him – and the lack of communication between them that contributed to his feelings...

– I'll be reading towards the end of his letter...

“...You dated him for most of our junior and senior years and then he went to Stanford and you went with me. We were sitting in y car one night, I asked you about him, my heart pounding, and you thought for a *long* time and said, ‘I like talking to him. He was smart. He was good to talk to.’ So for years, whenever you and I didn’t have much to say, I’d look at you and imagine that you were thinking about him. Maybe writing letters to him. All the times I felt I wasn’t much fun to be with, which was about half the time, Dave was there in the shadows, a handsome man who was good to talk to. I guess I wished you would say what a terrible person he was, which is crazy- why would I wish that a woman I love had spent all that time being miserable? but there you are.

I read the letter. It wasn’t about joy in our hearts at this joyous season. It was about feelings from the past becoming stronger with the passage of time and closeness between old friends getting deeper and richer even though far apart – a real California Christmas letter. I could imagine a guy with slim hips and big shoulders in a blue pinstripe suit and red bowtie, a very youthful 40-year-old, not like your old tackle. I put Barbara Ann in her bed. I went ot bed. You came up after a while. We lay in the dark. I wished that I could extend my influence out into the joyous world and find David and kill him. I got up and prowled around... I felt like something was eating my heart. We went to church in the morning and I imagined that (our pastor) was winking at you from the pulpit. Why was he talking so much about love?

I am sorry! It was a miserable Christmas and you kept asking what was wrong, I should’ve said. I know you could’ve straightened it all out so well as you’ve straightened out so many things, but I let it eat at me. We had been talking about taking a vacation trip to California in June and I announced over Christmas dinner that we couldn’t go, we’d spent too much money this year already. The look of pain on your faces, the blank uncomprehending pain.

It’s years later. I’m still jealous. I still worry that if he’d asked you maybe you’d have chosen him. I imagine that one day you walk out the front door and there he is parked in a blue Thunderbird in the driveway and you have a choice, to stick with me and be yourself or go with him and be 17 and get to live your youth over again.

Well, that will be your choice, of course. I want you to choose me. Nothing makes me feel emptier than the thought of losing you. I would wish you were here right now except that it wouldn’t be nearly so wonderful as it will be when I come back to you tomorrow night.

Your loving husband,
Clarence.”

- Fourth, **trust God** to help pull you through the difficult times....
 - Psalm 46 reminds us... “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.”
 - It’s easy to trust in God when life (and one’s marriage) is going good... it’s another thing altogether to trust God when it feels as though the mountains are trembling & the seas roaring all around you...
 - 1 Peter 5:7 encourages us to “Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.”
 - There is nothing we can experience in a marriage that God can not see us though.
 - Having said that, it also doesn’t mean that regrettably, sometimes couples may need to part ways – especially if abuse is involved.
 - But too often we look first at how to end a difficult relationship, rather than how to salvage one.
 - Trust God to help pull you through difficult times.

Which brings me to probably one of the most difficult issues a couple can experience –
 FAITHFULNESS & infidelity.

- I noticed a few years ago at how prevalent films & books are that deal with the issue of infidelity...
 - Often times the only way they deal with it, is simply having one of the main characters form a relationship with another – without regard to whether one or both of the characters are already married.
 - The ‘in love experience’ is a powerful one, isn’t it?
 - It’s quite alluring... captivating... and enchanting to see two people fall “madly in love” with each other...
 - But as we discovered earlier in this series, that ‘in love experience’ will only last about 2 years... then the hard work starts!
 - Too often people move from one in love experience to another... looking for that relationship where the passionate feelings for one another will last.
 - But they never last... not in that same way.
 - It’s a natural part of our human nature, I think, for people to imagine & fantasize about what it would be like to be in a relationship with other people.

- But when we're already in a committed relationship, we ALL need to be careful about protecting that relationship.
- Pastor Adam Hamilton, in his book Making Love Last A Lifetime, has an entire chapter of Faithfulness...
 - He has what he calls “Ways to Affair-proof your marriage”... though, I'd venture to say a more realistic take would be “**Ways to increase the chances of faithfulness in your marriage**”...
 - For starters, he says, make sure you're clear about how **unhealthy** adultery is to a relationship. In fact, the Bible warns against the damages of adultery numerous times – in all areas (Old and New Testaments!)
 - Next, he encourages us **not to feed sexual thoughts** & fantasies about someone other than our spouse... these kinds of thoughts WILL come... the challenge is not to spend any time dwelling on them.
 - Invite your mate to help you remain faithful... this may seem almost unnecessary to mention, but it is important. Keep **no secrets** from each other! If you begin to feel stirrings towards another person, be courageous enough to tell your spouse. That could be an important first step in maintaining faithfulness!
 - Do not spend extended periods of **time alone** with someone of the opposite sex. And the key here is “extended periods of time”...
 - Avoid entering into **intimate conversations** with someone of the opposite sex. This may seem like a strange prohibition... but intimate conversations open the door to intimate thoughts and feelings in conversation... which may soon open the door to physical behavior).
 - Be careful with email, letters, phone calls & other communication... which can lead to a false sense of emotional intimacy & excitement!
 - Finally, if you have feelings for a person other than your spouse, **keep those feelings to yourself!** Words have power.
 - The absolute worst thing you can do in this case is to tell the other person what you're thinking or feeling. It will either lose you a friendship... or get him/her thinking what you're thinking too... which puts infidelity in motion.
- I want to offer a word of encouragement... some couples here today may be experiencing a season of struggle in your relationship...
 - A few years ago the University of Chicago started a marital study...

- They met with couples who said they were “unhappily married”... asked them some questions about their relationship, and asked to interview them again 5 years down the road.
- Now here’s the interesting part... when they spoke again with those couples... 5 years later... 80% considered themselves now “happily married”... 80%... TO THE SAME PEOPLE!
- Relationships, like life, experience a variety of seasons... if this is a “winter” season in your marriage, take heart... it could very well be that spring is on the way!

I’d like to do something a little different as we close today... last week I told you about the Jewish tradition of the *chuppah*... the prayer shawl that a couple stands under to make their wedding vows together...



- The *chuppah* is also carried from the wedding ceremony into the groom’s bedroom... and the wedding party waits outside while the couple consummates their relationship. Then the marriage is official!
 - Don’t worry, we’re not going to reenact that part today...

- However, I would like to give couples the opportunity to stand under the *chuppah* together this morning.
- For the people of Israel, the *chuppah* was more than just a prayer shawl... it was a symbol of God’s presence in their lives...
 - Just as God hovered over the people as He led them out of captivity in Egypt... through a pillar of cloud by day, and fire by night...
 - So, too, does God hover over a marriage...
 - Providing for... guiding... directing...
 - To stand under the *chuppah* is to put yourself & your relationship under God’s covering.
- Maybe your marriage is experiencing one of those “winter” seasons...
 - You haven’t been communicating very well lately...
 - Things have been said that one or both of you wish never had been said...
 - Maybe there have been hurtful actions that have damaged the relationship...
 - And you’ve seriously wondered if it’s been damaged beyond repair.
 - If this is you, I invite you and your spouse to come forward and spend a few moments standing under the *chuppah* together.
- Maybe some of you aren’t in a winter season... but it’s not exactly Spring or Summer, either...
 - You haven’t really been fighting or arguing... but you haven’t really been connecting, either...
 - At least not the way you used to...
 - Most people who know you probably wouldn’t think anything was wrong, to be completely honest...
 - But since we’re being completely honest, you know things are all right.
 - If this is you, and you’d like to intentionally renew your commitment to each other, I invite you to come forward and stand under the *chuppah* together, too.
- And there may be some of you here today who are actually quite happy with your relationship right now!
 - It’s been a source of joy, encouragement & grace!
 - Sure, it’s not perfect... no marriage is... but for the most part, you feel incredibly blessed to have the privilege of spending your life with this particular person.
 - If this is you, I invite you folks to come forward and stand under the *chuppah* as well...

- Come and give thanks for all that God has done... and look forward to all that God still has in store for you both!
- Don't worry... we're not going to do this in categories... no one else needs to know why you and your spouse are coming forward... just come!
 - And for the rest of us who either aren't in a committed relationship... or our spouse is not present with us this morning...
 - We can do one of two things...
 - We can stay seated and meditate on the song we're about to hear from Steven Curtis Chapman, entitled, "I Will Be Here"...
 - Or we can silently pray for those who are coming forward...
 - Do what the Holy Spirit nudges your heart to do!

“And now abide faith, hope and love, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” (1 Cor. 13:13)

AMEN!