

“Marriage Builders”–Desperate Households (1 of 4)

In 1986 I was a Junior in college and the church I attended down in Salem, Oregon was playing the film series, *“Turn Your Heart Toward Home”* by James Dobson. I didn’t know much about James Dobson or his ministry, Focus on the Family, but because my girlfriend was interested, I went! (Typical guy). It was through that series that I came upon these three verses from Philippians 2: *“Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.”*

“You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.” Philippians 2:3-5 (NLT)

My view of marriage and the family was forever changed. You see, I grew up in a household that although they acknowledged God, I didn’t see much of God lived out on a daily basis.

These verses, put in the context of your marriage or your family, have great power.

The Apostle Paul’s teaching to us tells us basically two things I want you to write down about ingredients and principles that will make your marriage, and by extension, last:

- **Actively Put Your Spouse First**

In all relationships we are to be servants and put other people first. Secondly,

- **Follow The Example Set By Jesus**

What Paul basically says is if you don’t know how to do this, just look at the life of Jesus and he will model it for you. He set the ultimate example for you to follow.

These verses will form the foundation of what we want to discover in our new series, ***“Desperate Households.”*** The condition of marriage and the family has changed drastically in the past 50 years. Consider this:

- In 1960, 60% of all households had a working father and a stay-at-home mother.
- By In 1990, that number had dropped to 7%—an incredible change in just 30 years!
- More than half of all marriages will end up in divorce.
- Today half of all the adults under the age of 30 will live with someone before marriage.
- Those who live together before marriage are even *more* likely to divorce than others.
- Today, six out of 10 children live in a single parent household.
- Today children spend less than 30 min per week in meaningful conversation with their mothers and 15 min a week with their fathers—and 4-6 hours per day watching T.V.!
- Today the average American generally believes that a life spent with the same partner is both unusual and unnecessary. I think our “Households are Desperate!”

I think I’ll take just a moment to recognize married couples who have been married together for 25 years or longer. Since this is a message on making a marriage last, if you’ve been married for 25 years or more together would you please stand. Let’s congratulate those in our congregation who are making marriage last. Wow, we honor you today.

As a pastor, I’ve done a lot of weddings. I’ve never seen a wedding that wasn’t happy. It’s the living together afterwards that causes all the trouble! Mrs. Billy Graham was once asked, *“Have you ever considered divorce?”* “No,” she responded. *“Murder many times, but never divorce!”*

Maybe you’re here today and you want a great marriage, one that pleases God and actually draws other people to him. I’m sure there are times when you feel that your marriage is a tiny outpost in the middle of enemy territory and the opponent is shooting at you from every side.

Maybe you’re here today and you feel that your marriage has endured too much pain to survive and there is not much hope left to cling on to.

The world may not be a friend of marriage, but God still is. After all, marriage was God’s idea in the first place! The family is God’s plan and design for a healthy world.

Yes, it is hard work and oftentimes painful. But is it worth it? I certainly believe so.

Today, as we begin this series, I’d like to share with you **Six Lessons** to ***“Making Your Marriage God The Distance.”***

Maybe you've been married longer than I have and you have a few lessons of your own. I'd love to hear them and share with the Sunrise body.

1. When The Going Gets Tough, The Tough Stay Right Where They Are

We're reminded in Ephesians 5: 31, "*As the Scriptures say, 'A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.'*" Ephesians 5:31 (NLT)

"Leave," "Joined," and "One." It's like a formula for a successful marriage right there!

Commitment is the very essence of a healthy marriage. The Spanish explorer, Cortez, knew the importance of commitment and insisted on it from his men when they landed in Mexico.

His plan was to invade the land of the Aztecs, but when he saw the crew's fear and hesitation, Cortez gathered them all on shore, set fire to the ships, and said, "*Now there can be no turning back!*" That is the kind of commitment needed to make a marriage last.

We live in a world of "throw-away" marriages. If it doesn't work, we can always throw away the relationship and find another one. We have forgotten just how serious God is about commitment.

Commitment is not based on feelings and feelings alone can't build a solid marriage. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that love is the basis for marriage. Love is not the basis for marriage. Marriage is the basis for love! If you are hanging on in the midst of a tough marriage, remember God is well aware of where you are and will provide everything you need to succeed.

Someone once asked Napoleon to explain his defeat at Waterloo. He replied, "*The British didn't win because they were better trained, larger, or more equipped. They won because they fought five minutes longer!*" We are to be faithful physically, mentally, and emotionally.

Failure in marriage is the result of wrong priorities and wrong choices. When our priorities are wrong, we are operating in our own strength and wrong choices will surely follow.

Hold on to your commitment to God and your marriage.

2. Learn The Language Of Your Spouse

Paul continues in Ephesians 5: 33, "*So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.*" Ephesians 5:33 (NLT)

Your spouse speaks a language that you don't natively speak. It's like you married someone from Mars—or Venus! Wouldn't it be great if you could actually understand the opposite sex?

So many times in marriage we see that the husband is speaking, but the wife doesn't hear. And the wife is speaking, but the husband doesn't hear. What's going on?

We're saying the words, but the meanings behind those words are often lost.

Have you ever had a conflict with your spouse with you suddenly realize that the issue isn't the issue? Have you ever noticed the spirit of your spouse deflate? It's because you've crushed something, and you don't know what it is.

Look at the passage again. What is a husband called to do? Love. What is a wife called to do? Respect. Why? Because a woman's deepest need is love and a man's deepest need is respect.

Each of us think our way is right and the other side is wrong. But it's not necessarily wrong, just different. Husbands, your job is to learn the language of your wife. Wives, your job is to learn the language of your husband. You need to take a pro-active stance of teaching your spouse your language—and trusting in their good will when they can't remember the words!

3. Accept Your Mate And Change Yourself

Look at this monumental passage in Colossians 3: "*Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.*" Colossians 3:12-14 (NLT) Marriage relationships have a certain dynamic. If one person in the relationship changes, the entire relationship must change. We keep trying to make sure that our mate is the one doing all of the change! It's not God's will for you to change your mate—It's God's will for you to change to become more like God. Let him change your mate. Your "Change plan for your spouse" won't work! (**ILLUS: Dating**)

But a funny thing happens when you begin to change, you stir something up in your spouse that causes them to look at their

life and see the change that is needed.

What would happen if we unconditionally accepted our spouse? What would happen if we took the energy we waste trying to change our mate and used it to change our own life?

ILLUS: Dave Crandall, *“The running joke in our family is, I read marriage books to work on me. My wife reads marriage books to work on me.”*

4. Spend Time Alone With Your Mate

Three times in the Song of Songs you read this, *“My lover said to me, ‘Rise up, my darling! Come away with me, my fair one!’”* Song of Songs 2:10 (NLT) I love the romance of that! Men, when was the last time you said to your wife, *“Come away with me?”*

Weeds spring up overnight but it takes years for a mighty oak to grow. A great marriage takes a lot of hard work and a lot of time. We all have three choices about time. We can waste it, spend it, or invest it. Spending time alone with your spouse will be a constant battle, but it’s a battle that had better be won—or the friendship will be lost. Here are some ideas:

- **Take A Day Off Together**

Do you have a weekly time of rest together? Mary Beth and I do this every Monday. Monday night is our date night and we’ve had it for the 12 years when been married. It’s when we reconnect and talk, to set goals, to plan, to solve problems, to dream, and to have fun together.

Time alone creates healthy boundaries for your marriage. It makes it harder for the destructive elements to seep in the relationship.

- **Learn To Enjoy Being Together**

Do you know what makes your spouse tick? Do you know your spouse’s needs, interests, frustrations, dreams, hopes and fears? (**ILLUS: Running**)

ILLUS: Jodi Aleshire. Her husband, Dan, has been into racing their whole marriage. So what did she do? Get into racing! She knows all the different makes, models, and years of cars. She works with Dan got into land speed racing, she made the commitment to go along for the ride!

- **Schedule Time Away Together**

Do you take a regular retreat with your spouse? (**ILLUS: MEL and Me**) It combats the “creeping separation” that occurs because of life, work, and children.

- **End The Day Together**

This is the hardest thing for my wife and I to get to these days. It used to be easy to end the day together in reading and prayer. But with children and work, it’s gotten so much harder.

MARK CARMEN: WHEN A MAN LOVES A WOMEN

5. Feed Your Heart

Proverbs 17 tells us, *“A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person’s strength.”* Proverbs 17:22 (NLT) You know, you can get so serious about life that you lose our joy. The best marriages balance a lot of hard work with a lot of laughter and fun. The more challenging the marriage, the more important it is to have fun. Laughter brings health and healing.

6. Guard Your Mind

(**ILLUS: WBC**) *“And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.”* Philippians 4:8 (NLT) Don’t let anything into your life or mind that will rot the foundation of your marriage and family. This refers to movies, TV, books, and even some friendships. Don’t invite these things in and set up your marriage for failure.

REVIEW & QUESTIONS

Q: Which of these are you excelling in these days?

Q: Which of these needs the most work at this moment?

Q: What is one practical thing you can do to put your spouse first this week?