

“King Solomon on Marriage”

ECCLESIASTES 9:7-9

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Most of us here this morning probably have some interesting memories from various weddings. As a minister, I have had the privilege of performing several weddings, even for some of you here this morning. I remember one of my first weddings where I asked the bride to take her finger and place it on the groom's ring...instead of taking the ring and placing it on his finger. I remember Clint and Jeri's wedding out on the front lawn at Quivey's Grove down near our house, where either a fire engine or an ambulance passed right behind us and we had to pause for a little bit. I remember my dad doing a wedding at another church building in the Chicago area, but what nobody realized was that the other building was in a different county. The bride and groom had applied for the marriage license in one county, but the wedding was actually to be in a neighboring county. So, on their way to the wedding, the entire wedding party pulled over to the side of the road, and dad did the legal part of the wedding right there on the side of the road. They got the license signed, and then they continued on and did what was basically a show wedding for the benefit of the guests. Many of us have some interesting memories from various weddings, and I know that as a minister, all of these experiences have helped me learn – not only about how to officiate a wedding, but also how to have a deeper appreciation for my own marriage.

One thing we have learned through the years is the importance of having some kind of pre-marital discussions. We start with some basic policies. For example, if the bride or groom or any key part of the wedding party shows up drunk, I have the option of canceling the wedding (believe me, there is a reason for this)! But beyond this, for those who want to get married, I ask that we get together at least twice well before the wedding so that we can go over just a few very basic ideas concerning God's plan for marriage as well as some very practical advice on how to get along together. I have seen premarital discussions handled poorly. Years ago, I talked with a couple who had been married 7 or 8 years. They were having just horrible disagreements over how they spent their time, and as we talked, we found out that the minister who performed their wedding had forced them to make a promise to each other: He was to be allowed to do as much hunting as he liked (and she had to promise to never say anything about it), and she was to be allowed to do as much shopping as she liked (and he had to promise to never say anything about it). They were absolutely miserable and really at the point of financial ruin. So instead of going at it in that way, I have tried to keep our emphasis on the fact that we are to go to God's word for answers.

So, over the past 20 years or so, I have narrowed the guide down to only 100 of my favorite questions. I shared this with all of you back in 2008 and asked for your help on it, so some of your thoughts are now included in this as well. But the discussion questions are designed for a couple to answer separately on their own, they return their answers to me, and then we get together to discuss some of the highlights. The questions are designed to cover some issues leading up to some of the major causes of divorce these days: Conflict over finances, conflict over how free time is spent, conflict over other relationships, and so on. And I know that when covering all of this in only two or three hours, it is almost like these young couples are trying to drink out of a fire hose, but there is a value to thinking about some of these things sooner rather than later:

- What is the meaning of Matthew 19:3-12?
- In view of Ephesians 5:21-33, please summarize the relationship between the husband and wife.
- What are your career goals?
- Have you ever hit anybody (and why)?
- Does your partner have any annoying habits or mannerisms?
- Who will be primarily responsible for paying the bills?
- How much money from your family finances should your partner be able to spend without your permission? How did you arrive at this figure?
- What is your idea of the perfect vacation?
- Who are your friends? List at least three and explain why they are your friends.
- Who are your partner's friends? List at least three and explain what you appreciate about them.
- Is there "woman's work" and "men's work" in a household? Explain.
- What family traditions do you want to carry on?
- Will there be any religious differences between you? If so, please explain.
- How would you like your own marriage to be different from your parents' marriage?
- How will you prevent your parents and in-laws from interfering with your relationship?
- And then finally: Ask someone whose marriage you admire for any wisdom or advice that they may have for you. Specifically, try to ask them, "What do you wish someone had told you before you got married?"

These are just a few of those 100 questions, and the goal in all of this is to direct the couple back to the Bible to see what the Word has to say on some of these issues. As we have discussed before, I believe that if any man and any woman on the face of the earth were to get married, they could make their marriage work if both of them were to live according to God's word. Sometimes today people have the idea that there is "the one" person out there who is meant for us, and we go out and date in an attempt to find "the one." Think about this: There are roughly 7 billion people on this planet – that means that when we go looking for a spouse, we have our choice of roughly 3.5 billion people! And yet, when we get married, we live together for a few years, and then we start to doubt, "Well, maybe this wasn't 'the one,'" and then we start to move along to maybe get it right the next time. Or maybe we take a test drive before marriage to get a little taste to see whether this one is truly "the one." But again, the concept of "the one" is not found in the Bible. Any two people on the face of the earth can make a marriage work if they decide to live according to God's law.

This morning, then, as we think about marriage for just a moment, I would ask that we look together at several verses from the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes – Ecclesiastes 9:7-9 (p. 1058). Verse 9 is the verse that applies to marriage, but it comes right at the end of a little section on the importance of enjoying life. The author of Ecclesiastes, of course, is King Solomon. We have been studying Solomon's proverbs in our Wednesday evening adult class, and we have found that Solomon does have some advice on marriage. Most

of us already know that when it comes to giving advice on marriage, King Solomon was uniquely qualified! Solomon, of course, was married to 700 women and then also had 300 additional concubines. Of all people, then, King Solomon knew something about the importance of having a happy marriage! Those women ultimately led to his downfall, but earlier in his life at the peak of his God-given wisdom, Solomon had some amazing advice. This morning, then, I would like for us to look together at the inspired word of God as recorded for us by the wisest man to ever live. As God's people, we need God's word on marriage, so let us please notice Ecclesiastes 9:7-9, the words of King Solomon,

Go then, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works. Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun.

As I said, I'd like for us to focus our attention on verse 9, and I would like for us to notice four very basic concepts that carry over into God's plan for marriage, even today, nearly 3,000 years after this verse was first written.

I. And first of all, as we look at verse 9, I want us to notice how King Solomon refers to the concept of LOVE in a marriage.

We look around us today, we even look at our own families, and we see marriages falling apart left and right. In fact, some would even claim that marriage itself is under attack. Some might say that the greatest threat to marriage is the image of marriage as portrayed by Hollywood. And I think we might admit that if all we knew about marriage came from watching *Everybody Loves Raymond*, very few of us would have ever made the choice to be married. After all, who needs that? And yet I would suggest that as horrible as Hollywood can be sometimes, the media is probably not the greatest threat to marriage.

Others might look at the growing trend of same-sex marriage as a threat to marriage. And yes, same-sex marriage is an abomination to God. We studied that in sermon form about a year ago. And yet, if two of my gay neighbors decide to get married, will that cause my own marriage to fall apart? Probably not. As destructive as it is to our society as a whole, gay marriage is probably not the greatest threat to God's plan for marriage today.

What about the ongoing practice of couples moving in together before marriage? Maybe that is a threat to marriage. Statistically speaking, living together before marriage is destructive to the marriage relationship. There have been many studies showing the danger of living together. And yet is it the greatest threat to marriage? As bad as it is, I don't believe it is the greatest threat to marriage.

What about divorce itself? I grew up in the northwest suburbs of Chicago where the divorce rate hovered around 70%. To me, that is absolutely amazing. I have seen how divorce has affected some of those who are closest to me in this world. I remember a teacher in middle school asking how many kids in the class were living in a home with both parents. As I remember it, it was either me or me and one other. Just amazing – that out of a class of roughly 30 children, there were only one or two who were living with both parents. And yet as destructive as it is, I would suggest that divorce is more of a symptom.

The real problem, the greatest threat to marriage today is simply the lack of love. Biblically speaking, love is the decision to do what is best for the other person. By definition, then, love is not selfish. Love is doing what is best for someone else. And so when I love, I am deciding to do not what I want, but what the other person needs.

Of course, what do most people today think of when they think of love? They think of a feeling. They think of “falling in love.” They envision having almost no choice in the matter. Love is pictured almost like a virus, something you catch, or maybe even something you’re born with. I have a high school friend who owns a gay bar, and on her Facebook page several weeks ago she posted an interesting quote from Nelson Mandela, and here it is, “No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.” Very interesting! I think I know what she was saying by sharing that quote. I would agree with that quote. But think about that: Is it true that we can “learn to love”? I think so. Perhaps my friend, though, admitted more than she cared to admit. We can learn to love another person. Biblically speaking, love is not some kind of mushy feeling that sneaks up on us and takes control of us, but love is a choice. We think of what Paul said in Ephesians 5:25, **“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave himself up for her.”** Was Paul saying, “Husbands, feel mushy?” No! Love in this context is a decision to do what is best for another person. Think about it: Did Christ die on the cross for our sins because we were cute? Because we were so attractive? Did he “fall in love” with us? Did he die on the cross for us because we were so well-behaved? Absolutely not! In Romans 5, Paul tells us that while we were still helpless, Christ died for us. He died for the ungodly. In fact, **“...God demonstrates his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”** Paul goes on to explain that Christ died for us while we were his enemies. He chose to love us in spite of how unlovable we were.

So, husbands are commanded to love their wives. And by the way, the same goes for wives. In Titus 2:3-4, Paul commanded the older women to teach the younger women to **“love their husbands.”** In other words, those younger women were to make a decision to do what was best for their husbands. Love is something we can learn. Love is something that can be taught. Love is a choice. Love is a selfless sacrifice.

What, then, is the greatest threat to our marriages these days? I would have to say: A lack of love. Some time ago, I remember hearing about a man who went to his minister for some help with his marriage. When he came into the meeting, he had a long list of complaints against his wife. After a number of hours, the minister had finally had enough, and so he broke in and said, “If your wife is that bad, then why did you marry her in the first place?” At that point, the man said, “Well, she wasn’t like this at the beginning!” The minister then replied, “So, are you telling me that she is like this because she has been married to you for so long?” To me, there is a great lesson in that story. Our feelings may grow cold over time, but love is much more than feelings. Love is a promise to always do what is best for the other person – for richer or poorer, in joy or in sorrow, in sickness and in health, in prosperity and adversity, forsaking all others, for as long as we both shall live. So first of all, we learn that we are to love, and love is a choice that we make.

II. There is a second lesson for us to consider here, and that is: Solomon tells us that we are to ENJOY LIFE with this woman whom we love.

How about that! The Bible tells us that we are to **“enjoy life”**! We look around us, though, and it seems that there are some people who do NOT enjoy life. It is easy to go through life being grumpy! It is easy to be a grouch. It is easy to be crabby. It is easy to be cranky. It is easy to be argumentative all the time. It is easy to go to your friends (even on social media), and to go blabbing about how incompetent your husband or wife may

be. And yet notice what Solomon seems to be saying here: Life is too short to go through life with a bad attitude – especially when it comes to marriage!

And so instead of always being in a bad mood, the Bible tells us that we are to **“enjoy life”** with the spouse that God has provided for us. Over and over again, the Bible emphasizes that marriage was designed for our enjoyment – even in some of King Solomon’s other writings. We think of Proverbs 5:18-19, where Solomon was speaking to his own sons and said, **“Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love.”** Yes, the Bible actually says that! **“Rejoice in the wife of your youth.”** Life is too short to not enjoy being married. We could continue with Proverbs 12:4, where Solomon says that, **“An excellent wife is the crown of her husband....”** We could continue with Proverbs 18:22, where he says that, **“He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord.”** If we are married, the Bible tells us that we are to enjoy being married. We are to rejoice in it. We are to be happy in it. We are to have fun together!

In our family, we have really been enjoying “Date Night” over the past few years – one night every week, pretty much whether we feel like it or not! We love going out to eat, usually somewhere nearby, and we plan on it, we look forward to it. Someone might say, “But we can’t afford date night in our family!” And I understand that – that’s why I brought a Frisbee with me here this morning! If you can’t afford date night, I will give you my Frisbee, and you can take it and go have a blast with your wife. I like Frisbee, because on what I was hoping would be our very first date, I asked my future wife if she would go with me to play Frisbee at a state park down in Tennessee. We were all lined up, I was looking forward to it, but at the last moment she called to cancel – something about hurting her ankle. Of course, this was in the days before cell phones, and she called me from the phone in the student center. Here she is calling to cancel, and all I can hear in the background is what sounds like hundreds of people all playing pool and ping pong. And I think to myself, “Yeah, right! Twisted ankle! Sure it is!” She swears that she still has a doctor’s note, but I have never seen it. But Date Night is good. It is very important that we spend time together and that we enjoy spending time together.

Solomon tells us that we are to **“enjoy life.”** Let us, then, not waste a day in anger. Let us not waste a day being offended. Let us not waste a day with a cold-hearted attitude. Let us not waste a day being upset at each other. Let us not waste a day living in misery. Let us not waste a day wallowing in selfishness. But let us enjoy being married. For most of us, the problem is not ignorance. Most of us know what we need to do to have a happy marriage. For most of us, it is a matter of pride. It is a matter of arrogance. It is a matter of stubbornness. We know how to act, but we choose to live in misery, we choose to live in anguish, we chose to live with tension, giving up the joy that God intended. Solomon, though, says that we are to do what we need to do, and we are to enjoy being married.

III. There is a third idea in this verse, and that is: Marriage involves a LIFE-LONG COMMITMENT.

Notice: In verse 9, Solomon refers to enjoying life with the woman whom you love **“all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun.”** We won’t spend too much time on this – we have already noted this morning how many people look at marriage as being disposable. And I want to be especially careful here, because there is a distinction: Biblically speaking, it seems that some people commit divorce, some people perpetrate divorce, and other people suffer divorce. And I say that (I make that distinction), because the Lord does recognize one reason for a scriptural divorce – we read about it in Matthew 19:9, where the Lord said, **“Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”** So, there is a valid reason for divorce (we might say), but the emphasis here remains the

same: Marriage involves a life-long commitment. Jesus himself said so just a few verses earlier in Matthew 19:6, where he said, ***“What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”*** Marriage is not to be like buying a car, or worse, like leasing a car. This isn’t a case of trading up for a new model every few years. Years ago, a young bride-to-be talked to me before her wedding and said, “Do you think you could take out the ‘until death separates us’ part of the wedding?” Her reasoning was that it was too morbid to think about death on a wedding day. And of course, my answer was, “No!” Marriage involves a life-long commitment, ***“...all the days of your fleeting life.”***

IV. There is one final idea I’d like for us to consider here, and that is: Marriage is our REWARD IN LIFE.

We have already discussed the fact that we are to enjoy marriage, that marriage is intended for our enjoyment. The idea here is similar, but it is also a little different. Marriage is our reward. Or, as other translations might put it, marriage is our allotment, marriage is our portion, marriage is our share in life. The idea is: Marriage is important. Marriage is one of those things that matter. And it is no surprise to us, but the research seems to agree. Over and over again, studies have been done affirming that those who are married generally do better financially. Generally speaking, married couples eat better food, they have better medical care, they have lower rates of alcoholism and drug abuse. Generally speaking, those who are married engage in less risky behaviors. Those who are married have a much more developed sense of meaning in life. As King Solomon says, being married is your ***“reward in life.”***

Conclusion:

As we close our thoughts on this passage, I would encourage all of us who are married or who might be married someday to let this passage sink in. Let us meditate on these words over the coming week, let us memorize this passage, and let us recommit to being the spouse that God would have us to be, ***“Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun.”*** Let us not try to change our spouse, but let us personally do what we need to do to be a blessing to the one we love.

As important as marriage is, it points to something so much greater – it points to being one with God in Christ – the mystery that Paul wrote about in the book of Ephesians. As Christians, we are the bride of Christ, the church. How do we express our love for God? According to John 14:15 (as brother Bill read for us earlier), the Lord himself said, ***“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”*** The Lord has commanded that we repent and be baptized. We see what sin has done, and it causes us to turn away from it, and then we allow ourselves to be buried in water for the forgiveness of our sins. If you have any questions, let us know. If we can pray about something on your behalf, write it down and bring it to the front. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know by coming to the front as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: foullakeschurch@gmail.com