

Wisdom for Relationships – Marriage
Gen. 2:24 - 25; Proverbs 18:22, 19:14, 27:15-16, 5:15-19
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I want to give you a word about today's message and three reasons why children should stay, and one reason why they might leave you ready.

Number one, they need to know that marriage in our culture today is often viewed as a contract and that's not the way God views it. They need to stay and hear about marriage as a covenant.

Number two, they need to stay and hear about God's plan for marriage from the beginning in the Garden of Eden.

Number three, we're going to talk a little bit about the romantic or physical side. I will be discreet, but they'd better get out of here for that. So now the votes 2 to 1.

Finally, the gift of a good spouse is one of God's great gifts. We need to have them stay for that. So the votes 3 to 1.

If you can't decide if the children are leaving or not use your discretion. I gave you a fair warning about a tiny bit of polite talk about the romantic side of marriage. I also want to make sure that everybody here who's single knows this sermon is for you, because everything the Bible says about relationships applies to every other relationship, right? That's the wonderful quality of God's word and we are going to have in about, some weeks, 8 or 9 weeks, September, Saeyoung Park our singles ministry pastor is going to give us a theology of singleness on a Sunday night.

Hear God's Word as I read it to you as we hear what God has to say about marriage.

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. The man and his wife are both naked, and we're not ashamed.

That's the foundation. And then, since we're finishing our very short three-part series on relationships in Proverbs, I read you from Proverbs.

He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord.

House and wealth are inherited from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the Lord.

A continual dripping on a rainy day, and a quarrelsome wife are alike. To restrain her is to restrain the wind, or to grasp oil in one's right hand.

Drink water from your own cistern, in flowing water from your own well. Should your springs be scattered abroad, your streams of water in the streets? Let them be for yourself alone and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed and rejoice in the wife of your youth. A lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breast satisfy you always. May you ever be intoxicated by her love.

You may be seated. And I'll pray for one moment.

Lord, give us ears to hear all that you're saying to us about the beauty of marriage as you designed it. And Lord, help us to heed, to know the signs of the times so we know the way in which our culture currently battles your view of marriage and your practice. We pray in Jesus name, Amen.

So I'm, a man who's been married for a little while. My wife has been married for a while, too. And, we agree on some basic things. We agree that I love her, and we agreed that I could probably say it a tiny bit more often. And so with, with that in mind, one day she gazed at me relatively just a few weeks ago, and she said to me, I know that you love me, and I love you. Pause, pause. See, I didn't ask. That is to say, I wish you said it more often, but right now I decided to say it first.

And that's a tiny little reminder that our marriage is very happy, but a little bit imperfect. She wishes I said, I love you a little bit more than I do. We aren't perfectly synchronized in the question how often should people say I love you? We are also not perfectly synchronized in questions like what constitutes a good movie? Or exactly when should we eat supper at night? I tend to think about 20 minutes later than she does. And we also disagree about sports. I think sports are very interesting and important and are a window on life, and she likes to pretend that she agrees with me, but I see through her ways. She smiles and nods and she doesn't mean it. We disagree. We love each other. No marriage is perfect. That's what Proverbs is saying when it says, on the one hand, your spouse is a gift and on the other hand, you can end up with a quarrelsome wife. And those little tiny differences can become sore points until it's like the constant dripping on a rainy day. There are actually three proverbs that say the same thing as if we need to make sure we hear that and go, don't, don't go down that path.

Book of Proverbs often uses a command. The command is listen, listen, my son. Listen to the Lord's instruction. Heed his word and listen to my instruction. Don't talk all the time. Listen. Watch, observe. See what's happening in the world around us. And one of the things we see in the world around us is attacks on marriage. And another thing we may need to listen to is our own spouse.

Sometimes when people are newly married or newly in a relationship, they'll come up to me or another pastor and they'll say something like a pastor. I just don't understand women. And I say, your job is not to understand women as a subspecies of humanity. Your job is to study one woman. You are a scientist with a narrow field of inquiry.

One woman you do not have to understand women, understand your wife, listen to her. Love her. On the other hand, the world is giving us other voices or cultures giving us other voices, and they can lead us astray. I need to talk about that, because so much of Proverbs is a warning against being led astray. Young man, do not fall in with the wrong crowd.

Proverbs says over and over again, do not fall in with those who are interested in power and wealth, and grasping and abusing and taking advantage of people. Do not listen to. Do not fall in with the wayward woman whose words are as smooth as oil. She's a flatterer. She perfumes herself. She would lead you astray. Now there's individual acts that lead us astray.

And also corporate realities in our country as a whole. And they touch the concept of marriage, and they also touch the beginning of marriage and the relationship of marriage and family. Let me talk first a little bit about the concept of marriage that are in our nation today. Most people today view marriage as a contract, an arrangement quasi legal, something that we devised for ourselves.

Two people, a man and a woman trying to create for themselves. Apart from God's plan, a mutually fulfilling life. They have romantic goals. They have financial goals. They have travel goals. A Christian thinker named Wendell Berry said it this way-- a marriage is now an intimate relationship, involving ideally two successful careerists who happen to live in the same bed. They construct their own private political system in which rights and interests must constantly be asserted and defended. The couple settles on its financial plans, its the division of task, its plans for progeny. Consideration of benefits has always been there in marriage, but now we adjudicate it. I mean adjudicated largely without reference to God's plans or purposes. Several people have noticed, including Christians a man named Andrew Cherlin, for example, that the timing of marriage is changed.

You probably have noticed that people get married later than they used to. And 50, 60 years ago and even 40 years ago, people tend to get married first marriage anyway, around the age of 22 or 23, maybe even 19, maybe 24. Now the average person gets married around the age of 31 or 32. Why is that? It's because marriage used to be a foundation for life.

That is to say, two people would marry each other and grow up together, become vibrant adults. Together, they would finish their training, their degrees, or their work in the workplace, their internships. They would finish it together. They would have children when they were young and buy a house together. Now, by and large, people who get married have already finished their training, have already gotten well-established in their career, have some money in the bank, probably bought a house or could anyway, and they want to meet somebody just like them.

Now, what that means in measure is that more and more people who don't have a successful career path and don't save their money and don't have full training, never get married. 40% of all adults never get married in America today because they they've come to the idea that they don't have what's required to make a good contract with the people around them.

So marriage was a foundational event, and now it's a capstone event which people say, I have done very well till the age of 30. Now I can look for a spouse. You can even tell how much things have changed. By the way people talk about living together apart from marriage. The first time I heard about it, the term was shacking up.

Now that tells you everything you need to know about how people viewed it. When two people live together and we don't say that anymore, we now say cohabiting, which is a studiously neutral word. No negativity implied. People are just are just living together. And this comes from an assumption now, an assumption is something that you believe without even thinking about it.

The assumption today, contrary to the Bible, which is marriage, is a gift that God gave to structure of the world. The assumption today is that marriage is dangerous, and it's a choice because people who marry her so likely to get a divorce. In fact, people who are around 38 to 50 are sometimes called the divorced generation because not only did their parents probably get a divorce or at least 50/50, they got a divorce.

They also think I'm never going to get a divorce. And the easiest way to never get a divorce is to never get married. And so instead, they cohabit. And again, they assume that marriage is dangerous, and they assume that marriage is a man-made social structure. That's not imperative in any way. And when I say assume, I mean something like this.

When you walk into a house that's a home, you assume there will be a refrigerator or you don't even think about it. An enormous number of people don't even think about what God has to say about marriage. And so, they cohabit. They miss what God says, which is he who finds a wife, finds a good thing. Proverbs 18:22 and finds favor from the Lord. It's a discovery that God put in our path, a discovery of something God laid before us in his providence. It's from him. A little bit later, in 19:14. I read it a few minutes ago. It says houses and wealth are inherited from fathers. That is to say, mom and dad can set up house, land and give you an inheritance that can be planned. But a good wife is from the Lord. A prudent wife is from the Lord. That is to say, you can't calculate that out. That's God's gift. Because as people sometimes say, Christians sometimes say you always marry the wrong person because the person who marries a sinner, you're a sinner too. You always marry the wrong person. If, by the way you happen to marry the right person, they will become the wrong person eventually.

But that person is also a gift because we're believers. We're also redeemed by the Lord. And that's why when Adam and Eve and we can still say it today, we should say it today. When Adam and Eve, you know, he'd been naming all the animals and there were two of all the animals, and there was only one of him. And when he met Eve, he said, now at last, bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh. Finally the one I've been looking for. Finally a companion measured for me and given to me by God's good providence given to us. Now God also has a structure for marriage. Secular people have a strict structure. I'll talk about that in a minute.

But God's structure is described in Genesis one and Genesis two. In Genesis one, it describes the way in which a husband and wife are shoulder to shoulder or side by side in the world that says, be fruitful, you'll have children. You're still married if you never have children, but generally have children. Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and exercise dominion over it.

That's a lot of work. And so we work together in the world. God gave us a man and a woman, Adam and Eve, not Adam. Steve, not polygamy, not same sex marriage, not Adam, Eve and Genevieve. One man, one woman to live together. Facing the world. Governing the world. But also face to face. Now at last. Bone in my bones. Flesh of my flesh. We love each other. We have enthusiasm. We delight in each other. As Scripture says. I read it a moment ago. We leave Father, mother, I'm not trying to be political. Marriage trumps all other relationships. It's more important than any relationship anybody has on this earth.

Any human relationship. Leave father, mother your children leave to and they're supposed to. It's easy to get that wrong number one relationship in marriage. You know, in a wedding ceremony, the dad takes his daughter's hand and puts it in the hand of her husband. That's not just a photo opportunity. That's a symbol of the fact that we have left one family and gone to another.

In many cultures, especially in Asia, there is a temptation for a married couple to love and honor parents more than husband or wife. That's a mistake. In America and in the West, in various places, we are tempted to love our children more than our spouse, especially when a marriage gets a little bit difficult. A man or woman will turn to their children because children are such a beautiful gift.

You know they want to snuggle with you and they smile at you and they laugh at you. And they don't make demands, especially verbal demands. When they're 11 years old, 11 months old and they can't

speak, they cry. Yes. You know, they touch their face to your face. They say, mama, dad, they, they crawl into bed with you when you're, you know, asleep.

And they're three and so they're so loving. And you turn there and when your marriage is a little bit rough, you invest in your children. That's a mistake. Husband and wife leave every other relationship and be united, be glued. It could be translated to your spouse because you are one. You are one flesh. You are one mind and you're also as much as possible.

You're also one flesh. There is a physical connection between a husband and a wife, so that physical intimacy seals a marriage, but it also rekindles a marriage. When couples drift apart, we express and deepen our love through our physical connection. We are one flesh. We love our children. We love our children. We love our parents, but we love our spouse more.

And when we're tempted, we see it in ourselves. We devote ourselves to the one God has given us. The Bible says husband and wife. Adam and Eve were naked and no shame. That's physical at the time, certainly. And it's also emotional because, you know, in life we have thoughts that we wish we didn't have. We have foolish fears.

We get worked up about things we shouldn't get worked up about. We don't want to tell anybody about the thoughts that are in our mind, but somehow we've got to tell somebody. Now, sometimes we tell our best friend, but generally speaking, we tell our spouse and we're not ashamed because we know our spouse loves us. We know that our spouse will not mock us or laugh at our fears. We know that we are together, unashamed. That's marriage. That's the beauty of marriage. Now our society has a different idea, and that different idea does come up in cohabitation. The logic of cohabitation is marriage is dangerous, and it's a human social construct is not devised by God. And if it's not devised by God, we don't have to do it. And if we want to avoid divorce, which we do, we can come up with something that gives us intimacy and cost sharing and a partner on our vacations and a physical partner. And we don't have to get married and have all the traps of marriage. And so people cohabit and they cohabit in a variety of ways.

First of all, most people cohabit about 70, 75, 80%. Once you talk to cohabit before they get marriage, before they get married. Today, it has different forms. One form is accidental cohabitation. That's where two people live together, kind of by accident. They just started spending the night and then they said, you know, maybe we should just not rent two places. It's like being a member of two gyms. Who needs two gyms, who need who needs two rental properties. So it's accidental. They fall into it. There's also experimental cohabitation. That's where you think maybe. But you're not sure. Are we compatible? Can we work out our differences? Let's give it a try. The third one is premarital cohabitation. That's when a couple wants to get married, but they want to get married. You know, they're capstone people. And so they want the perfect marriage. Right. And that means you got to have the right venue, but the right venues book for 14 months in advance. And then you also have to get the right band. And you want a mariachi band, but there aren't many mariachi bands here in Birmingham, and so you have to toil to find a mariachi band. And of course, the husband and wife want to do something very special because by now they're 33, so they've decided they're going to go into the wedding reception on his and hers llamas. And it's hard to find two llamas and a mariachi band and the perfect venue for the same day. And so they end up cohabiting for 11 years. They have five kids by the time they get around to it. That's premarital.

And then of course, there's serial. This is the worst serial and uncommitted cohabitation. That's for two people see each other and it's you're good enough to live with for a while, but not good enough to live with till death do us part. And they both feel it. And people who get married after a long period of non-committal serial cohabitation are by far the most likely to divorce because somebody dragged somebody else across the finish line, they resent it, and they're trying to escape, and it's a disaster. It's a manmade disaster. So what do we do? We turn to God's word, don't we? And then the book of Proverbs, chapters one, two, three, four and five, constant wisdom from Solomon to his son.

And that wisdom warns about bad companions and the wrong path over and over again. And one of the wrong paths mentioned repeatedly is that forbidden woman, that that temptress or seductress who's leading astray even as other people lead astray? Her words are smoother than an oil.

So warning, what's the best way to counter the warning about infidelity and adventures? Shall we call them? Well, it's not to turn our back on marriage. Or, if you're a man on women. The positive view of physical attraction and physical unity is going to drive out the false three. We don't just speak against, we speak for, we speak for God's view and God's view, which is going to be up there in a moment from Proverbs chapter five is drink water from your own cistern and flowing water from your own well.

Treasure your water. Now this is a metaphor for sexuality in the ancient world. In Israel, if you go to Israel, what you'll see is cisterns. They're 2000 years old and more, and hold tens of thousands of gallons of rainwater that have been carved with sharp stones from stones that weren't quite as sharp. Imagine how much work it takes to carve out a cistern holds tens of thousands of gallons of water.

Then you put lime in it and you're just right. And that and you put it in the right location away from the sun, and that water will stay fresh for years. That's your precious water. Water is rare and precious. And your sexuality, your union with your spouse, is precious and rare. It gives you springs, the springs that give forth life.

That is to say, children. Furthermore, it says, let your fountain be blessed. Rejoice in the wife if you use a loving dear, a graceful widow. So first of all, rejoice in the wife of your youth. Now, my wife and I got married when we were young. We were 22 and 20 years old, so it's very easy for me to look to my dear, beloved Debbie and say, you're the wife of my youth.

But when I was young, I thought, well, it's so easy to say wife in my youth because I'm 22, 24, 27. And then I realized I was getting older and therefore my wife is getting older. And I'm thinking, how long is she the wife of my youth? The answer is she's always the wife of my youth because I married her in our youth, and we gave our youth and our middle age and our give our later years to each other.

She is the wife of my youth. Even if I am gray and saggy and bald, and she's gray and saggy and not bald. Even more gray and saggy. We can look at each other and say, you're the wife. You're the husband of my youth, and I'm going to stay with you. That's what the loving, doe, the graceful deer.

Those are animals known for their lifelong mating antelopes. Known for that. And then let her breast satisfy you at all times. Will you ever be intoxicated by her? Love is a declaration of God, of morally permissible romantic and physical ecstasy in marriage. Now the Bible never commands eros, but the Bible describes it and commends it and invites it and blesses it.

You don't have to command Eros. God made us with a capacity for that, but we assume it and permit it and promote it and embrace it. That's God's good way. And we can pray for that and seek that.

It says, be intoxicated with her love. Now, we're not in favor of a situation around here. The Bible commends drunk, sorry, condemns drunkenness for that. That's one that needs to be fixed on the table. I said the Bible commends drunkenness and let me be the first to denounce it.

The Bible condemns drunkenness 75 times, but it does not condemn being drunk with love. You know, there are certain things that are that are, all embracing, all consuming activities, right? Maybe you've read a book or you've gone to a movie, and when the movie's over, when the when the book is over, you think, whoa, what time is it?

Where am I? And maybe you've been at work working on a project you really love and at some point in the day, your stomach hurts. You think, why is my stomach hurting? Well, the answer is, is 3:00. And you didn't. You forgot about lunch because you're so immersed in what you did. And we can be immersed in the love of our husband or wife as well.

Now, Thomas Aquinas is one of the great Christian thinkers of all time. had a hard time with this. And he said that, sexuality is always evil because it produces an excess of pleasure which prevents the mind from contemplating God. Now, Aquinas was a monk, and I wonder how he came to this conclusion. Nonetheless, I'm inclined to think he got it right.

There are certain things that we do that are not conducive to contemplation of God. For example, running a 200-yard dash is probably hard to contemplate. God and run a 200-yard dash. And you can think of the errors. But he's made a mistake. He's made a mistake. When he says that sexuality is somehow defective, there's something wrong with it.

It's God's creation. It's God's gift. Helps a couple stay together. Stay together for life. There's a man named John Gottman who, sometimes called the great marriage researcher, the marriage whisperer. They call them different things. And he's researched what allows couples to fall apart and what allows them to stay together. One of the things he found was that when a couple is about ready to divorce, I mean, in the next few days, they're ready to get a divorce. It's the last meeting. We're getting divorced. If he asks them this question, are you willing to give it one more try? Most couples will actually say yes. And if they give it one more try or a half anyway, we'll say yes. And if they do say yes, 75% are ready to get a divorce on Tuesday, recover and stay married for the rest of their lives. And of that number, that 75% that stay married, about 75% will also say two years later, we are happier than ever. Where's that come from? Well, it comes from a sense somehow that something brought us together. There's a there was an affection, there was a spark. There's a reason why we got married. And then, especially with believers, there's this confidence in what Proverbs says that a good spouse is God's gift. God gave this man. God gave this woman to me, and I should not abandon this gift.

And then if it's a believer with real strength, they'll remember their marriage vows. They'll remember that they vow before God. And these witnesses to be faithful to this man or this woman. In other words, they have a sense of covenant. Again, our culture thinks of contracts, but God's Word thinks of covenant. Specifically. God is a covenant making God and he gives us marriage as an echo or a picture of his covenant.

Now here's the way covenants work in the Bible. They start off with history. I'm the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. And then after history, other obligations, you shall have no other gods before me. And the Ten commandments and marriages also have a history. We met. We realized that we were the one.

And there are commandments. There are rules for marriage, faithfulness, love, sacrifice. And then, of course, in any personal relationship, there's a chance that things will go wrong. And in the covenants between God and humanity, God gives us sacrifices in the Old Testament and the sacrifice of His Son in the New Testament to bring us back together. And in marriage.

We also have ways of coming back together. They include things like just spending time together, you know, go for a walk, do something pleasant together. But also, I'm sorry. Please forgive me. That's a way we come back together as well. That's the way it is with God. And it's the way it is in a marriage and a contract.

We quit if things don't work out well in a covenant, we don't quit. Hosea, which is a book of the Bible, talks about God's faithfulness and also reflects on marital faithfulness. As a sign of that, the Lord says, I'll betroth you to me forever. I'll betroth you to me. In righteousness I will betroth you to me in steadfast love and mercy.

God is steadfast when Israel fails, and we should be set fast when each other fail. Now this is all, of course, the way of Jesus. You know what the Bible says? Ephesians chapter five says this about marriage. It says, husbands, love your wives. As Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her with the washing of water with the word.

So he might present the church to himself in splendor. Now you hear two things here the Lord loves us. He loves us. He gave himself for us. He loves us unconditionally. He accepts us as we are. He loved us when we were still sinners. That's accepting love. And so we think of the way Jesus loves us. He accepts us as we are and as we were.

And so we think of our spouse. My spouse has certain flaws and I love him or her as he or she is. There's no perfect human. This is still God's gift. I accept my spouse as he or she is, but also the Lord transforms us, glorifies us, and changes us and makes us more splendid. And so there's alongside the go together alongside accepting love is transforming love.

That is to say, I want you to be a better version of yourself. Today we see the best version of yourself. By the way, this applies to friendships too, and all family relationships. We accept each other as we are, and we also want to transform each other so we can grow. That's the way Jesus loves us. It's the way we love each other.

It is the way forward. Now in that context, then it's easiest -I'm going to read those verses again- to see our spouse as a blessed discovery. He who finds a wife finds a good thing - that is to say, you can't arrange it, you can't plant it. You can go on to your marriage finder apps and swipe left and swipe right and give the child metric geographic polygraph data about your life.

And it may help you, and it may not, because you got to find a wife. Now, of course, as Christians, we say it's God's gift. Now, Proverbs 19:13 and 14 say this with a little one of those little tensions they have

between two proverbs. Proverbs 19:13, the back half of it says, A wife's quarreling is like a continual dripping of rain.

Would you just rain, please, and pour it down? Who likes a drip, drip, drip and a quarreling wife that is like a drippy roof? That's 19:13, 19:14 says house and wealth are inherited from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the Lord. God works it out. God sends that spouse. What he's saying is, it's easy to come up with enough wealth to create a career and enough wisdom to create hard work and get a degree and find the right mentor.

You can find your way to wealth. You can do it. But marriage is a different matter. No one can calculate it out enough. Marriages can fall into nag fests like a drippy rain. I mean, I'd be a little bit stereotypical for a minute. I'm going to ask you to participate with me. This is my professorial side. Participate with me.

I want you to vote. Who is more likely to go out to dinner with their spouse, the man or the woman and have a glob of mayonnaise on their left lip for an extended period of time? The man or the woman? If you think the man is more likely to have a glob of mayo on his lip for 15 minutes, raise your hand.

Who thinks the woman is more likely to have a glob a mayonnaise for 15 minutes? Okay, the vote is 422 to 7, so it's the man, number one. Number two, who is likely to carp about how frequently you have globs of mayonnaise on your lip. Raise your hand if you think it's the man is more likely to carp

No one who thinks it's the woman is more likely to talk about mayonnaise. Flaws. All right, so we agree there are tendencies men mess up and their wives tell them about it. That's the, you know, the division of labor. It can become naggy and the man can nag back about how she criticizes.

Bible says better a piece of bread and quiet than a feast was strife. It's true. But Proverbs doesn't end with that. Proverbs ends with a beautiful wife, not beautiful, physically beautiful, beautiful and character in the course of her life says in Proverbs 31 verse 11, the heart of her husband trusts her. In verse 15 it says she provides food for her household. Let's pause there.

If your husband or your wife, or if you're not married, your friend is a gift. Can you spend a few minutes remembering the gift? Share it with each other? Maybe afterward. I knew I was preaching the sermon today, and so it was on my mind to think of my wife's traits that I'm thankful for the way she's a gift.

And we were eating supper, and we were having frozen pizzas. It's a thrill, isn't it? Frozen pizza. It was pretty good. It was above average frozen pizza, but my wife, who is a gift from the Lord sauteed some up some, onions just right. And that slightly better than average frozen pizza became a festal event. Those onions were perfect. It set it off perfectly. I thank my wife. There are others. There's a longer list than that. But I'm thankful she provides food for her household. She has external gifts. She didn't stay at home all the time. She considers a field and buys it. She dresses herself with strength and we might focus on the word dress, but I focus on the word strength. She's strong. She's so strong and so good that her husband is known in the city gates because of her. She's an excellent woman. She's the crown of her husband and wives I hope you can also say my husband is my crown. This is God's gift to us. God's good and sovereign gift. And it's always, always a picture of God's love for us.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I'm the foremost not. I was the foremost. Paul says. I am the foremost. And so Jesus loves us with that accepting love that we need to extend to each other when we fall short. And that applies again to friendships and to relationships between work

partners and to relationships between parents and their children. We accept each other. We're thankful for each other, and we transform each other as God transforms us by his grace. Not nagging, just wanting the best. That's our desire. That's our prayer. That's God's good plan. Let's pray that He gives us the grace to live in it.

Let's pray together. Father, I thank you for all of your graces and all your gifts, and I pray that we would receive those gifts and improve those gifts, and see the way in which our culture would take us another way and come closer and closer to walking in your ways as the Book of Proverbs so often says, we pray in Jesus name, Amen.