

“Till Death Do Us Part”

4: “Friendship Love”

May 31, 2015

We're really glad you're here! Now some of you guys are here because of graduation. That's cool. Well, here's the part you're going to have to endure this morning. You caught us in the middle of a short series on doing marriage God's way. And that's where I'm going to go this morning. I think it will be profoundly relevant. Now a couple of weeks ago I started out with three caveats. Let me restate them.

- **Caveat #1:** This study is not just for the married folk in the room. It's also for those who aren't married yet. And it's also for those who used to be married, and may again be some day. And it's even for those who have no interest in ever getting married – since you probably hang out with married folk, and they may need your help. So even if you are not married right now, you still need to listen in.
- **Caveat #2:** Doing a study on marriage is really hard for those whose marriages are struggling, or broken. And that includes quite a few of you. I'm going to say some things that are hard, and they'll probably hurt. Well here's what we're about: We're about God's truth, and God's grace. We'll never lower the bar. We'll try to be straight about what God's wants to see in our marriages. But all of us mess up a lot. And if you are struggling, God still loves you, and he still wants the best for you ... And we do too. Truth, and grace.
- **Caveat #3:** Some of you guys aren't Jesus followers, yet. So some of what we're going to say is going to sound weird to you. That's OK. We think this stuff is right, and we think God's way works better – even for those who aren't sure about him yet. So, listen in, and if you want to give some of this a try, that's cool.

Okay, last week I started out down here, describing what happens in a typical wedding. I said that the groom comes in from my left, and stands about here. And then the bridesmaids line up over here. And then the bride comes down the center, escorted usually by her dad. She stands over on dad's left, and the twit who wants to steal her is on dad's right. And then I ask the groom this question – while dad is right by his side: “Will you have this woman (this man's little girl) to be your wife, to live together in the holy covenant of marriage? Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health, and, forsaking all others,

will you be faithful to her so long as you both shall live?” And dad is thinking – “You’d better, you little twit! This is my little girl. And you will love her, and you will honor her – for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health – or I will death do you part.” Now you dads that have done it, is that about right? Those thoughts crossed my mind. But unfortunately our legal system restricts a dad’s options. Dads, don’t you think the world would be a better place if we had the legal right the crush the twit whenever he hurts our little girl? I don’t care how big he is; he’s got to sleep sometime. And then after the groom and the bride make their promises to God – remember, this part down here is about a vertical promise, they are making a promise to God, the dad gives his daughter away. And the groom cleaves to his bride, and the bride cleaves to her groom ...

But there is something else going on in that ceremony that we Jesus followers understand. There is at least one other dad in the room with a vested interested in these kids. And this is kind of weird: you see we understand that the bride and the groom are both ... God’s kids. That’s how God thinks of us – we’re his kids, and he wants the very best for every one of us. So “Dad” listens as the groom makes a promise to his little girl. The groom says, “I Will you love your little girl, I will comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health, and, forsaking all others, I will be faithful to my little girl so long as we both shall live?” And Dad is thinking: “You’d better, that’s my little girl, and some day there will be a reckoning.” And then he listens as the bride makes the same promise to his boy: “I will love your boy, your son; I will comfort him, honor and keep him, in sickness and in health, and, forsaking all others, I will be faithful to your son so long as you both shall live?” And Dad is thinking: “You’d better – because that’s my kid you are promising to love and honor, and some day there will be a reckoning.”

And here’s a huge difference between what’s going on with the biological dad and the God dad. The groom leaves his biological parents and he cleaves to his wife. The bride leaves her biological parents and she cleaves to her husband. And someday this cleaving will come to an end when death do they part. And at that time, the groom will hand God’s little girl back to her Dad – to God; and a bride will hand God’s precious boy back to his Dad – to God. And here’s the question; here’s the big question: Guys ... will she be a better woman when you “give her back” to

her Dad? Ladies ... will he be a better man when you “give him back” to his Dad? What will you have done to help him or her become what God made them to be? What will you have done to help him or her do what God made them to do? Will you have nudged them closer to God, or will you have pulled them further away from God? And guys, the answer to those questions will determine whether yours has been a good marriage. We’ll get back to that.

Now, one of the things we require before we marry a couple here at Capital City is some pre-marital counseling. Youngsters in love rarely listen, but we’ve got to try. And one of the things a counselor might probe is this: What do you want out of marriage? What do you want your mate to be for you, what do you want your mate to do for you? And typically their answers will be different. These are the kinds of things that you expect from a guy (although guys rarely use these words):

- #1: The guy says, I want her to be my lover. I’m looking forward to the sex... He’s a guy.
- Or he says, I’d like her to be a trophy wife. He wouldn’t use those words, but he’s thinking, I want a woman who makes me proud. A good looker, maybe; smart; a great personality. Someone who will make me look good.
- Or, the guy says, I want her to be my lover. I’m looking forward to the sex... He’s a guy.
- Or he says, I want a good mother for my children. I want kids, and I want a wife who wants kids, and who will be a really good mom.
- Or he says, I want a woman who can keep a great home. My house will be neat, our meals will be good, and on time. She will be gracious to my friends when they’re over.
- Or he says, I want a woman who will carry her end of the load. We’ll both work, and together we will get a good house, and good cars, and season tickets for the Cats, and a good set of golf clubs.
- Or he says, I want her to be my lover. I’m looking forward to the sex. After all, that is really high on just about every guy’s list.

For the ladies, we counselors expect their list to be a bit different.

- #1: She says, I want him to be my lover. I’m looking forward to the sex. I’m just kidding. That’s just what a guy wants to find on the top of her list.

- Or she says, I want a good provider. I want someone who can help us maintain a solid standard of living. Which is usually measured by the standard of living of her parents. A lot of kids want at least the lifestyle of their parents, and they want it now.
- Or she says, I want a protector. I want someone who will be there for me, and take my side.
- Or she says, I want a good father for my children. I want kids, and I want a husband who wants to be more than a sperm donor; I want a man who will be a great dad.
- Or she says, I want a partner, someone who will pitch in and help around the house, or whatever else we could tackle together.

Now, it would be interesting, wouldn't it, to examine the list a dad might make for his son, or his daughter. You parents, what kind of a husband do you want for you little girl? What kind of a wife do you want for your boy? Just keeping their vows would be pretty good, for most parents. I want a man who will love her, comfort her, honor and keep her; I want a woman who will be there for him in better or worse, richer or poorer, sickness and in health – till death. We'd probably love a son-in-law, or a daughter-in-law, who would simply keep their vows.

But ... what do you suppose our God dad wants for his kids in a marriage? What kind of a husband does he want for his little girl? What kind of a wife does he want for his precious boy? What kind of a list would he make? And would any part of his list make ours?

You see, it was God who invented marriage, right there at the beginning. It's really an amazing scene. In Genesis chapter one God starts creating, and he keeps calling his creation good. He creates the heavens and the earth, and he says, "That's good!" The seas and the dry land, the trees and the plants, and he says, "That's good!" He stocks the seas with fish, he stocks the land with animals, he creates us, and he says, "That's good!" In fact, seven times he says, "It's good, it's really good!"

So it's kind of jarring when in chapter 2 God says, "It is 'not good' that the man should be alone." (2.18) Something is still not right. In fact it's the first 'not-good' thing. And here's the deal: man has this perfect world, he's surrounded by critters of every kind, he's got pretty much a one on one life with God, and God says, "It's still not good." Why? Because in some way

he's still alone." Really?! He's got a perfect world, he's got God, and he still needs something more? ... So we really shouldn't be surprised to discover that all the money, all the comforts, all the pleasures of our world can't fill this hole inside us. In fact, God says, (and this is mind-boggling) "The man needs something besides me." Really?! God created in us a need for a relationship with some person in addition to him? Apparently.

So God says, "I will make an 'ezer' for him." That's the Hebrew word. It's kind of hard to translate. Some Bibles translate it "helper." "I'll make man a helper." Which doesn't mean what you think it means. People think God made man a servant, an assistant, a subordinate. But the Bible also calls God our helper (and he's no subordinate). He's our helper because there are some things we just can't do alone. So maybe it is better to think of an 'ezer' as a companion, a partner, a friend – who is by your side, and who's got your back – who makes you stronger, and better. Guys, that's counter-cultural. That's not how people viewed a wife in Bible times. They viewed a wife as property, as servant. That was never God's intent. He made an ezer for his boy; and the man became the ezer for the girl. To help each other ... do what? ...

Well that 'ezer' theme keeps cropping up. In the love song we call the Song of Solomon, this woman says of her guy: "This (man) is my lover, (and ...) this (man) is my friend." (5.16) A lover ... that's about romance, but there is way more – a friend. And the book of Proverbs, written by Solomon, the smartest man in the world back then, calls a husband a bride's 'alluph – her partner, her special confidant, her best friend. (2.17) Hmmm – it looks like God is looking for a spouse to be more than a servant, or a sex toy.

You see, there are different kinds of love. In fact, in the New Testament there are even different words for different kinds of love. There is a romance love, a feeling love, a sensual love. They called it eros – and it's part of marriage, it's one of the marriage loves. And there is agape, a covenant love. That's the kind of love we talked about last week – a love that keeps on giving even when the feelings are gone for a while. It's an action love. That agape love is the foundational love of a God-honoring marriage. And there is a friendship love. They called it phileo love. And phileo love gets right down to the purpose of marriage. It gets right down

to the heart of why God invented marriage – what he wants a man to get from his wife, and a wife to get from her husband.

So we need to unpack this friendship love for a few minutes. Because the Bible tells us what qualities of friendship God expects in a marriage. Here's the first one: constancy. A real friend is always there for you, when you are at your better, and when you are at your worst; when you're richer, and when you are poorer; when you're sick and, and when you're not. Listen to what the Bible says. One Proverb says: "A friend is always loyal." (17.17) The Message puts it like this: "Friends love through all kinds of weather." That's pretty good – a real friend is the opposite of a "fair weather friend." Or here's another translation: "A true friend loves regardless of the situation." That's constancy. Another Proverb says: "There are (so called) 'friends' who destroy each other, but a real friend sticks closer than a brother." (18.24) Here's the deal: Can a husband be that kind of friend to his wife? Can a wife be that kind of friend to her husband? Is that what God wants from the one who marries his little girl, or his boy?

Here's a second quality of friendship in the Bible: Candor. You can be honest with a real friend, and they can be honest with you – because there is a trust there. A friend lets you make them better, and you let a real friend make you better. Listen to there Proverbs: "Wounds from a (real) sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy." (27.6) You see, a real friend is going to challenge you when you are being stupid; but you're going to take it, because you know they want the best for you. Or this one: "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." (27.17) Because real friends make each other better. You can be honest with a real friend, and they can be honest with you. Because you know a real friend wants your best. Now, can a husband or a wife have the kind of trust that lets them be honest with each other – gently, with love? Is that God wants when his kids marry?

One guy put it like this; this is good: A real friend is someone who lets you in, and won't let you down (candor and constancy). But there's more. I mentioned Keller's book to you last week; it's a great book on a God-honoring marriage. He says, there's a third piece to friendship in the Bible that gets to the heart of marriage. He says, it's "sympathy." Well that sounds kind of weird; maybe because it doesn't mean what you think it

means. What 'sympathy' means literally is a "common passion": sym means common, and pathos is passion. So for there to be sympathy, there has to be something you are passionate about together. There has to be something you are pursuing together, building together. You see romantic love is kind of pictured with two people face to face, staring into each other's eyes, or something like that. Friendship love is kind of pictured with two people side by side, loving something together or building something together – they are partners.

I'm telling you guys, this 'sympathy,' this common passion, is one reason a church is such a strange and magical place. There are so many people in this room with whom we have so little in common. There are people in here I wouldn't ordinarily choose to hang out with. A few of you are way older than me (not many, any more), and a whole lot of you are way younger. Some of you are richer, some of you are poorer. Some of you are fitness fanatics (like me), some of you are Kentucky fanatics, some of you are just fanatics. We are different shapes, different colors, we are just different. But there is something so powerful here that makes us family.

Here it is: We are overwhelmed by God and we are captivated with Jesus. We are! We have admitted our sin, and we hunger for grace – and we think we have found it. We want to do life with God, we want to do life for God – we think that's what it's all about. And we want to drag each other to heaven – sometimes kicking and screaming.

And guys, Christ uniting us is way more powerful than anything pulling us apart. So we love God together; we pursue God together; and we want to challenge each other and encourage each other to be what God wants us to be, and to do what God calls us to do. It is so powerful – in fact, it's magical. And that's real church: a fellowship of the ring, a band of brothers.

Now, can a husband and a wife share that kind of friendship – a sympathy friendship, bound by a common passion? Is that one of those things a God-Dad wants these two kids to find in each other? You see, a God-honoring marriage really is this unique blending of these different loves – which is why it is the deepest of all human relationships. It's the one place where God encourages us to fully embrace eros. But it is grounded in an agape love, that doesn't quit even when the eros fades for a time. And

then there is this phileo love. And this phileo love drives right to the purpose of marriage.

You see, the goal of marriage is not romance – it's not just about the sex. It is a goal of marriage, but it is not the goal. And the goal of marriage is not till death do us part. It's not about just sticking it out no matter how hellish it becomes. God gives us an ezer: a helper, a companion, a partner, a confidant, a best friend. Because we are lonely? Yeah – that's a piece of it. Because we complement each other? Yeah – that's a piece of it too. There are things that I am better at than Julie, and things she is better at than me. And together, we can do a lot of things better than either one of us would be able to do alone.

But it's this sympathy piece... This common passion piece ... You see, there are some things that Julie and I are both passionate about. We're passionate about our kids. We're passionate about our grandkids. Those are bonds between us. We both like steak. We both like Big Bang Theory. Those are bonds between us. But there are so many passions we do not share. I like golf; she doesn't. I like the Cowboys; she doesn't care. She likes chick flicks; I despise them. She likes soaking in a hot-tub; I'd rather not. But all those things – all those things – are little. There's one passion we share; there's one mission we both embrace – bigger than all the rest.

I want to go back one more time to those verses in Ephesians 5 that talk about the kind of love God expects from us in our marriages. It says, "Husbands ... love your wives, just as (with the same kind of love, in the same way) Christ loved the church." That's huge; because he goes on to describe what kind of love he means. It says, "He (Christ) gave up his life for her (why?) to make her holy (he sacrificed himself to make her holy; to make her) and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. (There was a purpose to his sacrificial love.) He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish... (He did it to make her better, and he did it to drag her to heaven.) In the same way, (with that kind of love) husbands ought to love their wives." (Eph 5.25-28) So it's my job to make Julie better and to drag her to heaven. And it's Julie's job to make me better and to drag me to heaven. Really?

Listen to it in the Message: “Husbands, go all out in your love for your wives...” And you can flip it around: “Wives, you go all out in your love for your husbands – this is marriage love. “Exactly as Christ did for the church—a love marked by giving, not getting.” And then he tells us what this love is for – this is the purpose: “Christ’s love makes the church whole. His words evoke her beauty. Everything he does and says is designed to bring the best out of her, dressing her in dazzling white silk, radiant with holiness. And that is how husbands ought to love their wives.”

Do you get it? My mission in marriage is to hand my bride back to God better than she was when I married her. Julie’s mission is to hand me back to God better than I was when she married me. My job is to help her become the woman God made her to be, and to help her do whatever God calls her to do. And that’s Julie’s mission in our marriage. Her job is to help me become the man God made me to be, and to help me do whatever God calls me to do. And she’s done it. Did you know that her one request before we married was that I would never make her be a minister’s wife? I told her that I’d never do that to her. But God had other ideas, I think, and we both said, “Yes sir.” Because, the most important mission both of us have in marriage is to drag each other to heaven.

You parents understand this kind of love, I hope. As a parent, what do you want for your kids more than anything else? As Jesus followers, we want them to be happy. As Jesus followers, we want them to be successful. As Jesus followers, we want them to be healthy? But as Jesus followers, if our kids are happy, and healthy, and successful ... and distant from God – we grieve. More than anything else, we want them right with God ... forever.

Shouldn’t it be the same, or even deeper with our husband or wife? What do you want for your spouse, more than anything else? Guys, more than anything else, I want Julie right with God ... forever. So when death does us part – and it will, and when she passes from my care (kind of) to his – will she be a better woman because of her journey with me? Ladies – will he be a better man because of his journey with you. And I’m talking about a better man or a better woman by our standards, I’m talking about a better man or a better woman by His standards.

So ... how are you doing? If you are married, what have you done to help him or her become what God made them to be? What have you done to help him or her do what God made them to do? What have you done to nudge them closer to God, or have you pulled them further away from God? And guys, the answer to those questions will determine whether yours is a good, God-honoring marriage.

For those of you who aren't married yet -- What will you do to help him or her become what God made them to be? What will you do to help him or her do what God made them to do? What will you do to nudge them closer to God? And guys, the answer to those questions will determine whether yours will be a good marriage.

And for those of us who haven't done so well, here's the cool thing: with God we get these start overs. Wherever you have been in the past, whatever you've done in the past – God will give you a start over today if you are willing.