

LOVE FOR A LIFETIME
Matthew 19:3-6

Relationship Sermon Series
January 13, 2013
Pastor Nathan J. Thompson

We're focusing these Sundays on how to strengthen all your relationships—and how to fireproof your marriage. If you are single or are widowed I encourage you to take good notes. You may be able to use this information to encourage a friend or family member you know who is married; or if you, or a friend/family member, are planning to become married.

Please look at the passage Matthew 19:3-6 as it is projected. One time Jesus was asked about marriage and this was his response: *“Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.’”*

“Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” This is the challenge that most every pastor shares in a wedding—we do it at Messiah when we pronounce them husband and wife. The couple has first proclaimed their vows and exchanged rings. They are beaming; they're going to live happily ever after—right?

The truth, of course, is that every married couple, and every relationship, goes through seasons. No one gets a cakewalk; that's just how life works. Most experts agree that there are four pretty predictable seasons in a marriage—one following the next.

The first season is the Romance or Honeymoon Season. When two people meet and fall in love, it is like they have a perfect relationship. There is something special between them—like Romeo & Juliet. They both call it a match made in heaven—it was meant to be.

In the Romance Season it is magic every time they are together, and misery every moment they are apart. There is an amazing chemistry between them. During this romance time all is right with the world. It is the season that most love songs are written. (Annie's Song)

Now psychologists tell us that this romance or honeymoon season will wear off anywhere between six months and 2 ½ years. It is that time when those romantic feelings of infatuation wear off, and one or both partners realize that the honeymoon is over.

What you're left with then is the second season—the Reality Season. Suddenly they realize that the object of their pursuit, the person of their dreams, is now here to stay. Some say marriage is a romance story in which the hero and heroine die in the first chapter.

When reality sets in both parties begin to feel a growing pain from the flipside of character traits they once thought were so appealing. He says, “When we first started dating I saw her as such a neat person; her hair and makeup were just right. Now, however, I see her as over compulsive, obsessed with details; she even irons my underwear.”

She says, “While we were dating he was always the life of the party. He would do crazy things and light up a room. I was so proud to be with him. And yet now I see how he never thinks before acting. He often says and does such outrageous things that I’m embarrassed to be with him. And sometimes I am hurt by his insensitivity to my feelings.”

What happens is that shortly after the Season of Reality enters a relationship, somewhere close behind it is the Season of Resentment. Yes, every marriage faces this. She says, “Who switched husbands on me. I went to bed with the man of my dreams and woke up with the opposite.”

He says, “I thought I was marrying a beautiful princess, now she has become Brunhilde. I thought I was marrying Julia Roberts, now I wish she were the runaway bride.” During the resentment phase the one who was the object of our affections now becomes the target of our frustration. (Story of the elevator)

In the resentment season it is easy to blame one’s spouse for all the evils in the world even though they are barely connected to the problem. If there are financial stresses it’s all her fault because she spends too much. Or it’s his fault because he doesn’t make more money.

When there’s friction the problem is that he started it or she is way too sensitive. If there’s blame to cast, **you** need to look in the mirror because it’s certainly not my fault. Caleb in the Fireproof movie we will see on Friday, Feb.8, says, “I’m not a perfect person but better than most. And if my marriage is failing it is definitely not my fault.”

It is during this resentment season when one’s character is tested and when the need for real love—not romantic or infatuation love—when real love comes for the first time. It is a love that is expressed so beautifully by the Apostle Paul in Colossians 3:12-14:

“Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if you have any grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all in perfect unity.”

If that kind of love is present—that God-like agape love; that love that focuses on you and your needs not me and mine—then the relationship can enter into the fourth season of marriage. It is called the Season of Rebuilding. It is a Springtime of new life and new possibilities.

And yet, my friends, if that kind of love does not get practiced then the marriage never makes it through all the seasons. It either gets stuck in the perpetual wintertime of resentment or it dies in a ceremony we call divorce. To live in the Season of Resentment, which many marriages are doing, is a very unhappy life. There are countless numbers of unhappy marriages today.

Now it has been said that there are three great skills needed if you want to be life-long lovers. They are: “Remembering, Asking, Deciding.” The first critical skill in rebuilding and sustaining a marriage (or our relationships) is to remember that we are different and then adapt accordingly.

Author Jim Smith reminds us that we need to remember that there are differences in the way we communicate. For example men tend to talk in generalities; women talk in specifics. Men say their day was fine; women want to know what you did, who you saw, what you ate for lunch.

A second difference is that men tend to be in touch with their thoughts first and then their feelings; women tend to be in touch with their feelings and then their thoughts. Ask a man what he feels and he'll tell you what he thinks. Ask a woman what she thinks and she'll tell you how she feels. We are definitely wired differently.

A third difference is that men and women appreciate sex from different perspectives. Men tend to be physically oriented while women tend to be relationally oriented. Since women need and want love, affection, conversation, and appreciation before the physical, men are often frustrated and confused. The book, *"His Needs, Her Needs"* stresses that we learn each other's needs.

Now in remembering that you are different it is also important that you are asking for and granting forgiveness. Please note that it doesn't take any skill to simply say the words, "I'm sorry," or "Please forgive me." And yet what this really takes is character. It takes being humble enough to admit that you are not perfect; that you are not always right.

The Bible says, *"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ, God forgives you."* This, my friends, is a key to lasting love and joy in a marriage, and any relationship. Asking for forgiveness; finding forgiveness; being healed of hurts is essential for love to flourish.

The third skill and maybe the most important for lifetime of love is deciding; deciding to love and keep on loving. One of the biggest misunderstandings about marriage in our day is that people think that marriage is based on romantic feelings—on feeling loved.

And yet love in its purest sense is not a feeling. It is not a noun—it is a verb, an action word. It is a way of acting, a thing to do. The Bible's most famous passage on love, 1 Corinthians 13, says that love is patient, kind, not envious, not boastful, not proud, not rude, not self-seeking, not easily angered.

It says that love does not keep score—it protects, trusts, hopes and hangs in there. That's God's description of love; God like love; agape love. As you look at this list what part is simply based on feelings or on emotions?—none of it.

It's all based on decision. To love is a decision. To hang in there even when "happily ever after" is not happening is love. The older I get, my friends, rather than running away from difficult times in my marriage or in other relationships I choose to keep and deepen my marriage and friendships. My commitment is a decision, a choice.

Friends, all marriages (and relationships) go through seasons. For most people, rebuilding is a normal process. And the great news is that if we work together sincerely on the rebuilding stage we can come back around to love and romance. Oh, this romance may not be as sizzling as the initial honeymoon season but often it is deeper, more thankful, more fulfilled and more awed by grace.

And yet the key is that we master the skills of communication—that we remember we are different, that we ask for and give forgiveness, and that we choose and decide each day to love and work through our differences. This is a love that is realistic, and lives happily ever after.