

When your marriage is crumbling... build on a new foundation

Part 2 of "The Greatest Sermon in History"

Message for Sunday, June 5, 2016
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Matthew 5:27-32

Children's Message: from Song of Songs 5:16,
"This is my beloved and this is my friend."

Do you think some day you will get married?
Here's some advice: don't even think about that
until you're a lot older. Now is the time to enjoy
being a friend.

Many years from now, when you do start getting
interested in marriage, here's some more advice:
your husband or wife should be one of your best
friends, someone that you really enjoy being with.
In the Bible, a woman was telling her girlfriends
about her husband. She told how handsome he was,
how strong, but she ended with this: "This is
my beloved and this is my friend."

But like I said, don't worry about that right now.
Just enjoy your friends.

Message "When your marriage is crumbling...
build on a new foundation"

*The Greatest Sermon in History is the message
given by Jesus Christ as recorded in Matthew 5-7.
This series aims to apply Jesus' timeless truths to
the situations that people face today.*

This past week, Jane and I didn't have hardly any
time to talk, and we missed our weekly date. All of
you probably have weeks like that, too. Maybe you
have entire months like that. In fact, maybe it's
been *years* since you took time to really be together
as a couple.

When marriage gets to that point, there's not much
left holding it together. That's when divorce starts
looking attractive. That's when other people start
looking attractive. The purpose of this message is to
strengthen your marriage, so that you don't even
think about going down that path.

1) Marriage is precious... How is yours?

Why is adultery so terrible? Why does Jesus speak
so strongly against it? The simple answer is:
Because God made marriage to be wonderful. And
adultery can destroy a marriage:

Matthew 5:31-32, New International Version:

"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must
give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that
anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital
unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress,
and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits
adultery."

Let's have some background to this. During Jesus'
life, the main cultures in that part of the world were
the Jewish, Greek and Roman. In each one of these
cultures, morals and values had degenerated so far
that society was beginning to fall apart. Marriage
was no longer sacred among any of them — divorce
was easy and common among all three. (Hmmm...
Is this starting to sound familiar?)

Into this condition Jesus re-instituted the sacredness
of marriage. Listen to what he said on another
occasion when people wanted to test him on this
controversial subject:

Matthew 19:3-9, New International Version:

Some Pharisees came to Jesus to test him. They
asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for
any and every reason?"

"Haven't you read," he replied, "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 man
not separate."

"Why then," they asked, "did Moses command
that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and
send her away?"

Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce
your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was
not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone
who divorces his wife, except for marital
unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits
adultery."

Jesus told us that marriage, in its ideal form, is to be
a life-long commitment. It was that way in the
beginning, and it has always been God's plan for

marriage. That's what I want to talk about today — the keys for building a marriage which will last.

Please note that Jesus is giving the *principle* for marriage, *not* a law. Time and again Jesus taught by principles, and despised the Pharisees who sought to make religion a legalistic matter. Sometimes we humans fall short of God's ideals. Even Christians fail in their marriages. My own belief is that this passage is not meant as a *law*, which says that you may never again marry, if you are divorced for any other reason. I say this because the Scriptures also teach about forgiveness and a new life for those who sincerely repent of their sins. I believe there is hope, even for those whose marriages are already beyond the point of recovery.

2) Next Steps: A Firm Foundation for Your Marriage

Since marriage is so precious in God's Word, it stands to reason that we will find guidance to help make marriages work. We are not disappointed. I want to share with you three main keys laid out in the Scriptures for those who wish to build their marriage on a firm foundation. James Dobson in his book *Love for a Lifetime* calls them "The Three C's."

a) Christ-centred home

If both husband and wife are deeply committed to Jesus Christ, they have a rock solid foundation on which to build their marriage. Just think: knowing Jesus Christ changes people's lives. He forgives our sin; he gives meaning and purpose to life; he gives us the power to love, even our enemies. When two people who are both following Jesus Christ come together, they have they have a divine bond holding them together.

Specifically, how do you make a Christ-centred home?

1. Prayer

What an incredible privilege we have, being able to talk directly with God! When things are going well or looking bad, we can take it all to God in prayer. In this day of families falling apart all around us, why would anyone want to attempt to make it on their own? Oh, my friends, I encourage you — I plead with you — make prayer a vital part of your daily life.

Even more, I ask you — if you don't do this already — to pray together as a couple. Joining your hearts and souls together with God is simply the best medicine a marriage can have. And unlike other medicine, it tastes great! Here are a couple of examples:

- You can pray for each other when you have problems. This is like a spiritual back rub, for it is a wonderful experience to hear someone else talk with God on your behalf.
- When you have a disagreement, talking it over with God has a wonderful way of helping you to see things in a new way.

2. Values and priorities

How do you spend your money as a couple? That shows a great deal about your priorities. When you sit down together and plan your budget... [you *do* talk together about your money, and you *do* plan your spending, don't you?...] talk about your values and your faith.

All of this brings me to the second key...

b) Communication

I've just mentioned how vital communication is in a marriage.

Most conversations that couples have are the kind of things they could fax to one another:

"I'll take the car to the garage to get fixed after work today." "I'll take the other car, then, and do the shopping."

This is *not* what I mean by vital communication!

One big problem to communication is that God made men and women differently. Research has shown that females, from the time they are little girls, are much more talkative than males. Secondly, females are more skilled at interpersonal relationships than males. Put these together and you have a recipe for silence, not communication!

This scene is a stereotype, but it's one of the most common complaints that marriage counsellors hear:

Husband and wife come home from work. The wife wants to talk about her day, and to hear how he's feeling, how his day was, what he

thinks about the children, and especially how he feels about her. The husband has spent the whole day talking with customers and colleagues, and all he wants is to read the mail and relax. The last thing he wants is to talk, especially to talk about his feelings.

Let's take this scene a bit further. Suppose this wife, instead of working at an outside job, has stayed home all day to look after their children. By the time evening comes, she will be emotionally starved for an adult relationship.

What we have here is a recipe for frustration.

Women: you should not expect your husbands to meet *all* of your emotional needs. You still need your girlfriends just as much after marriage as before.

Men: We need to talk — *really talk* — with our wives. It's vital for the health of the marriage.

But there's more. In the passage from Matthew 19 quoted earlier, Jesus recalled a description of marriage: “the two shall become one flesh” [Matthew 19:5]. I don't think he meant that marriage is all about sex. When two people marry, they are giving themselves to one another, body and soul. Achieving intimacy in the body is relatively simple. Achieving intimacy in the soul is much more complex.

That's basically what communication is: intimacy in the soul. It is sharing yourselves with one another: telling your secrets, your desires, your dreams, your fears.

To help you in that, I've included in the bulletin a sheet with “35 Conversation Starters for Couples.”

c) Commitment

There have been many versions of the wedding vows, but they always end with these words (or their equivalent): “as long as we both shall live.” That's a long time! Sometimes people wonder how they can make a promise for the rest of their lives. “How do I know what's going to happen 60 years from now?” they ask.

The answer is simple. A lifelong commitment is lived out day by day. You may have no control over

what's going to happen 60 years from now. But you do control your actions for today. Each day you say to yourself [change wording to suit your gender], “Today I am going to be an outstanding husband. I am going to tell my wife how wonderful she is, and that I love her. I will not let anything harm our relationship.”

We can never take this for granted. I consider that Jane and I have a good marriage. We do things together, we like each other, we talk with each other (although this message reminds me I have to pick up the pace a bit). But danger is always lurking just around the corner.

I serve as a volunteer chaplain at the hospital in Belleville. Once a month, I spend part of the day there, visiting patients and families and sometimes staff who have requested spiritual care. One time, after I had finished my rounds of the wards, I was sitting in the chaplain's office, reading. The office is among other offices, but everyone else leaves at 5 pm, so that floor is completely deserted in the evening. A cleaning lady came in to collect the garbage and dust the furniture, and we chatted pleasantly. As she was leaning over to pick the papers out of the blue box, her loose top lay open, and I had a clear view of her entire front (she had a bra on, but just enough to make me curious about the hidden parts).

And curious I was. More than that... I felt myself take a deep breath as I looked. I was attracted, aroused. She was very appealing and, judging by her body language as she lingered over that blue box, very available. It would have been so easy to start flirting with her. There's a comfortable couch in that room. No one else was on that floor. No one would ever know....

I caught myself in time. “Bruce,” I said to myself, “are you crazy? You love Jane, you don't want to hurt her. A few minutes of pleasure isn't worth throwing away your marriage.” So I turned and looked at the paperweight on the desk, which suddenly became fascinating, until she was finished leaning over. As she continued her work we chatted a bit more, but that was all. Whew! That was close.

Jesus clearly spoke about the danger of adultery. But he went even further:

Matthew 5:27-28, New International Version:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

It is not enough to keep our bodies pure. We must also keep our minds and hearts pure. Our eyes are simply windows to what lies within our hearts. If I had kept on gazing at that cleaning woman, I would have been feeding the lust within me, until I would have got to the point of actual adultery. Again: to keep the body pure, we must keep the heart and mind pure. The way to do that is to keep so occupied with pure thoughts and actions, that there is no opportunity for the sin to take root.

Unless you have a dogged determination that nothing — no person, no thing, no circumstance, no lottery, absolutely nothing! — is going to break your marriage, then you can be sure that something will.

3) Marriage by the Book

I will close with this Bible passage. These verses written by Paul have more wisdom than most marriage manuals put together. If couples lived by these words, then most divorces would never happen. If you will put them into practice in your marriage, you will do more than just survive as a statistic; you will have a marriage made in heaven. Here it is:

Philippians 2:3-5, New International Version:

Do nothing from selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Have the same attitude that Jesus Christ did.