

Mars & Venus in the Beginning

Making Love Last a Lifetime:

Genesis 2::18, 21-25

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It was 1977. I was just out of college and Diane was still in nursing school. We were 21 and couldn't wait to be together. I still had three years of seminary to go through, and we had little money. We both were working to support our education, and on the night before our wedding, I found our recently purchased car was running on three cylinders. On the honeymoon the muffler fell off. That was just the beginning of the difficulties, surprises and unmet expectations we would face. There are temptations, tragedies and trials that test marriage; yet God has kept us together and has been teaching us about one another and the nature of love.

I have a lot more to learn, and I'm looking forward to exploring with you over eight Sundays insight from surveys of thousands of singles and married couples, the testimony of long-term married couples, of counselors and authors, and most importantly the revelation God has give us in the Scriptures. In the series *Making Love Last a Lifetime*, I believe the insights will help us married people grow more healthy and successful marriages; and also equip you singles adults, 90% of whom desire to be married. Even the singles, who don't desire to marry, will find the insights helpful in their families and friendships. Finally, we all need our eyes opened to God's Word regarding marriage, love and sexuality.

You see... **God cares about love, marriage and sexuality.** It is so important to God that it thematic through the Bible. The Bible starts with a wedding of a man and woman in its account of creation. Moses teaches on marriage and sexuality. The prophets call Israel the bride of God. Jesus performed his first miracle at a wedding, devoted much of his teaching to the

subject and likened himself to a bridegroom. Paul speaks of marriage as a great mystery in our relationship with God; and the Bible closes with us as the bride of Christ.

Reading the Scriptures, you discover that this marriage thing is God's idea. It is not an accident. It is a design. The Bible is filled with God's wisdom on how this idea can work in the most broken people. Unfortunately, so many of us turn to other ideas of how it can work. Who is your tutor or model for marriage? For most of us, it is our parents. We may not consciously choose their example, but their successes and failures affect us. In many cases, we find that we are tutored by our errors. The problem is that so many of our attitudes and actions are errant and leave scars. We find ourselves continually putting out fires or keeping a safe distance rather than growing a healthy relationship. Have you noticed how Hollywood affects our dress, our speech and even our community's vision of relationships? Is there any question that Hollywood also influences our quest for fulfillment and our understanding of marriage?

One reason we are so influenced by Hollywood is that **living in an effective marriage or relationship is hard**. Some 43 percent of all marriages end before the 15th anniversary. The divorce rate climbs higher for subsequent marriages. Indeed, the age of people marrying rose dramatically this past decade. People fear marriage. Accordingly, the number of people who chose to live together rather than marry rose 72 percent in the 1990s. Clearly, it is challenge to make love last a lifetime.

There are two reasons. First, men and women are different. Second, we suffer from the human condition of sinfulness.

Adam Hamilton has done some great work on marriage, and he pastors a large United Methodist Church. He surveyed his church staff on what frustrates them about the opposite sex. The women said:

The Top Ten Things that Men Do that Frustrate Women

10. Men think they know everything and treat women as if they don't know anything.
9. Sports!
8. Men lack creativity buying gifts. They need to be given hints; and then they don't get the hints!
7. Men never clean up after themselves.
6. Men don't follow instructions.
5. Men are always "ready for action."
4. Men don't notice when things need to be done.
3. Men can never find anything, even when it's right in front of their face.
2. Men belch and then smile as if it were a great treat for all those around them.
1. MEN DON'T LISTEN!

Hamilton found that most of his male staff refused to respond to the survey. While 70 women gave their opinions, only 16 men offered theirs. One male staffer wrote, "Nothing frustrates me about women," and then went on to list several things that would frustrate him if anything did frustrate him. Of the men who responded, most were careful to say that none of the following were true of their wives or significant others. Here is what they said:

The Top Ten Things that Women Do that Frustrate Men

10. Women need to talk about everything!
9. Women think they know what you're thinking.
8. Women think you should know what they're thinking!
7. Women focus on minutia and miss the big picture.
6. Shoes!
5. Women are utterly indecisive.
4. Women are terrible drivers.
3. Women say, "This sale saved us so much money," when, had there not been a sale, they wouldn't have spent any money!
2. Gossip, gossip, gossip!
1. The assumptions and stereotypes woman have about men.

Obviously, men are different from women. John Gray expressed it well in his best-selling book: *Men are from Mars; Women are from Venus*. They speak different languages, don't they? However, we struggle with more than differences.

We suffer from selfishness, pettiness, hard-heartedness, and bitterness. We struggle with temptations and corrupt desires. We have been defiled spiritually, and no self-improvement course can change our heart. That is why it is important to approach marriage with more than education on relationship principles. No relationship, no matter how good it is, will become what is meant to be until there is spiritual renewal and spiritual development authored by Christ. The words of the Bible can lead us into the renewal of the soul and all our relationships.

In the Bible is God's big idea of marriage. In the creation story God made the male first. However, God observed a hunger in the man that could not even be filled by God's own presence. It was not good for the man to be alone... even with God there and sin not there! God's answer to that hole was not another man. God created a woman. I think the New Living Translation, our pew Bibles, translates it well:

"At last!" Adam exclaimed. "She is part of my own flesh and bone!" (Genesis 2:23, NLT)

The two embraced, became one flesh, and marriage is born. Naked, they felt no shame.

God could have made us to reproduce asexually. There are species that do that. We could have been made so that every family was made up of Tom, Dick and Harry; every meal was bratwurst and pizza, every human being loved to make funny noises and were clueless about their feelings. Instead, God chose to make us anatomically, biologically, emotionally and even socially different. God designed us that way to complete us... even if we are not married. He made us to live in a community of male and female relationships, beginning as children. (Do you see the social implications, and why what is being debated in St. Paul and Washington are relevant?)

There are four lessons from that first wedding. *First, God created men and women to be different.* Our differences are gifts to be appreciated. They are not mistakes to be overcome. I

don't apologize for being a man. I hope you don't apologize for being a woman. Our differences are essential to God's plan for humanity. *Second, men and women need each other.* By saying that, I don't mean that we all need to be married. In the New Testament, the preferred and highest calling in Christian service involves singleness so that one can be fully devoted to advancing the kingdom of God. Many singles have that gift and calling. However, all singles and all people need the blessings that relationships with the opposite sex bring. The full orb of who we are and what we are meant to be doesn't come with out the input of men and women who play a significant role in our lives. *Third, sex and sexuality were meant to be beautiful.* They were designed by God as a good part of creation and are not a result of sin. *Fourth, marriage is God's solution to a problem.* The first human was alone and needed companionship. He was unable to live as God intended without a female partner. Adam and Eve were created to be helpers and companions for each other, so that they both could live as God intended. That leads us to the most important point and the basic idea behind this sermon series.

Marriage is a calling from God! God designed marriage as a way to meet the basic needs of human beings – needs for companionship and help. The divine call of marriage involves giving, serving and sacrificing for another. Choosing to marry is choosing to answer God's call toward the person you are marrying. You are helping that one become what God desires. To the degree you remain focused on that, you'll find joy and meaning in your marriage.

I love being your pastor. It is a call from God. However, there are days when I'm in way over my head. Despite all the preparation, all the continuing education, there are days when being a pastor is simply obedience and faithfulness to God. Yet, God still is at work in me. In marriage we have such a high, even higher calling. We have a redeemer whose Spirit transforms. You can have a great marriage, no matter what water has already passed under the

bridge. Christ is a redeemer and restorer and reconciler. When you see how your work in your call affects another life, it will be food to you. It will energize you. Like Jesus, who was no longer hungry after God touched a Samaritan woman through his ministry, you'll experience fulfillment and be awed by God's work with you.

As we move on in the rest of this series to acquire God's wisdom in fulfilling our call, let's begin with prayer.