

# The Power of Faithfulness

## *Making Love Last a Lifetime:*

1 Timothy 4:4-5; Hebrews 13:4

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Have you ever met someone who is problem-free? I haven't. Even little children, with no responsibility, fall, get hurt or sick. We do not live long before our mettle is tested. The term *mettle* is related to the word m-e-t-a-l. It speaks of the substance of which we are made. What kind of persons are we? When tested, how do we act? When stripped of all facades and crutches, including friends, what are we like? When really tested, do we still trust and obey?

Saul didn't. He was the first king of Israel. When all seemed lost, he lost his confidence in the word of God; and eventually he lost his kingdom. On the other hand, Joseph kept true through betrayal, enslavement, slander, imprisonment and disappointment. Moses acted faithfully and humbly even when his people were ready to kill him and his family opposed him. David risked everything at every stage of his life on the word and goodness of God. The impact or power of the faithfulness of these men shaped both nations and generations.

Can you imagine what happens when that kind of faithfulness is seen in our homes and families? The family is the womb of life for every culture. So much of our mettle is forged in this womb. I have lived long enough to see how family life forges the ethics, habits and even models or pictures of what is appropriate or possible. I know that we blame Hollywood for much of our ethical problems and family issues today. Certainly, Hollywood has proved to be more of a stumbling block than a stepping stone to relational health. However, what happens in our marriages affects Hollywood. It is a two-way street. Movie and TV writers have to find their material somewhere. I'm convinced that the character of our marriages have more effect on

the culture than Hollywood. In fact, did you know that marriage made God's Top Ten list of concerns for the entire community?

All of the Ten Commandments, except one, apply to every single person. All people are to worship God above all others. All people are to avoid idols. All people are to honor God's name, remember the Sabbath and honor their parents... even if they were abandoned by them. All are not to kill, steal, lie or covet. However, you must be married to have the seventh commandment apply to you: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." God put this commandment on stones for everyone to see, learn and respond to. Why?

Why is adultery a community matter? Why is it a community and congregational matter? Healthy marriages are vital in forming healthy families and healthy people. Broken trust hurts people, and hurting people hurt people. Even if you touch them gently, they wince with pain and are liable to lash out. Did you know that most of our crime statistics, not all but most, can be traced to people hurting from marital brokenness? What happens in a marriage is a community matter because it matters to the community. It impacts the community.

In the Bible, Titus 2:1-10, Paul outlined to Titus instructions for four specific groups in the congregations where Titus was ordaining elders or pastors. *Older men*, who included the married, divorced, bachelors and widowers, were instructed to act worthy of respect, literally modeling a pure life for the rest of the community. *Older women*, who included singles, widows, divorcees and the married, were instructed to invest, especially in younger married women, helping them grow in their marital call. The *younger men and women* were to grow from this kind of investment. Instructions on marriage were a congregational matter.

As we have talked in this series, *Making Love Last a Lifetime*, and especially in last week's message on physical intimacy, this whole idea of marriage is God's idea. God created us

male and female, and equipped us for physical intimacy, for partnership in creating humanity and for bonding and growth in marital love. However, our sinful condition produces such pain. The Apostle Paul found Christians whose attitude about marriage was so negative that they were advising people against marriage. To this he responded:

***Since everything God created is good, we should not reject any of it. We may receive it gladly, with thankful hearts. For we know it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.*** (1 Timothy 4:4-5, NLT)

Paul was telling Timothy that we can live God's idea. It is not a farfetched, unattainable ideal. Two tools are in our hands to help us fully experience God's idea. One is the word of God. The Scriptures have been given so that we may apply them and benefit. They correct attitudes that are destructive, and they give us sign posts that show the path of life. The second tool is prayer. There is grace that is received only as we pray. These tools are in our hands as congregations and as individual believers to be used. When they are used, we begin to experience the very holy gift God created.

The power of faithfulness is seen in reverse when there is marital unfaithfulness. Nothing strikes deeper and nothing tears at the soul more than betrayal at this most intimate level. Sometimes the emotional dynamics of a marriage make physical intimacy difficult or non-existent. That is when partners seem most susceptible to the temptations of adultery. Did you know that God was so concerned about this that the Bible tells marital couples in 1 Corinthians 7 not to withhold themselves from one another, except for mutually agreed upon seasons of prayer? After an exhausting day, Billy and Helen finally get the children all tucked in bed; and then retreating to their bedroom Billy asks, "Was this our agreed upon season of prayer, honey?"

Adam Hamilton shares the painful story of a pastor-friend of his who committed adultery. The pastor found a woman from his parish attractive and her words very affirming. He began to

fantasize about a relationship with her. He did not envision all the dynamics such a relationship would cause. He was living in a world of fantasy. He and the woman began having coffee together, and they talked warmly to one another. Finally, the woman said to him, “I told my husband last night that if I had an affair, it would be with you.” That is all it took until three months later when the woman’s husband confronted the pastor. The pastor eventually reconciled fully with his own wife, but it was an extremely painful course.

Statistics on adultery vary so widely that they don’t seem reliable. Conventional belief is that 1 out of 5 wives and 1 out of 3 husbands have committed adultery in America. A recent article in *Christianity Today* magazine reports that 5 percent of the pastors and 14 percent of lay people are guilty of this sin.

The lower statistic among committed believers is understandable because the *first thing* couple can do to “affair-proof” their marriage is to *agree* with the Bible that *adultery is always, always, always wrong*. A *second thing is to stop fantasizing*. Jesus sees these fantasies as sin and calls it adultery of the heart in his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:27-30). He is quite brutal about the whole thing. He says if you are going blame the eye then get rid of the eye. If you’re going to blame the hand then get rid of the hand. Jesus’ brother James sees sin growing in embryonic form in our fantasies until we are enticed and dragged away by it, so that the fantasy gives birth to the sinful action (James 1:14). Stop fantasizing outside your marriage. *Third, invite your mate to help*. We men know men pretty well, and we can read them. You women know women very well, and can often see what they’re up to long before we men have a clue. Your mate can see what’s coming from a member of the opposite sex. You singles, encourage your married friends to take this stuff to their mates. *Fourth, married people need to avoid long periods alone with the opposite sex*. *Fifth, we married people need to avoid*

*emotionally intimate conversations with the opposite sex*, including emails. Email is luring a lot of folks down the wrong path. *Sixth*, as much as it is good to be honest, it is even better to be discreet. *Do not voice your feelings to the one you are attracted to*. That is all it took for Adam Hamilton's pastor-friend to become unfaithful. He was enticed by those words, "I told my husband if I were to have an affair, it would be with you." Your feelings need only to be shared with your mate or a close friend of the same sex who encourages you in a healthy marriage.

Many people have embraced these boundaries and are making such a positive impact with their faithfulness. Thousands upon thousands of Christian leaders and believers have been impacted by the faithfulness of Billy Graham and his decision to never be alone with a woman other than his wife Ruth. He makes no exceptions. Even more recently in a lunch with Hilary Clinton, he requested that an associate be with him because of his lifelong commitment. So many of us are blessed by his example!

There is a truth about faithfulness. It can be renewed. No one fell harder than David when he fantasized about Bathsheba. He and his family suffered greatly for that sin in many ways including the death of a child, yet God did forgive and bless both David and Bathsheba. Their second son Solomon would become the wisest and most famous of kings. That happened because David in faith turned back to God.

I cannot minimize the consequences of sin. Sin by definition is harm. However, God's grace is greater than sin. God has given me the privilege of seeing marriages and lives torn by adultery healed. There is grace that is up to every problem and challenge in life... and in death; for nothing surpasses the impact and power of God's faithfulness in Christ Jesus.