

7 Foundations of Lasting Love

Introduction. Tonight, we get to delve into one of the most sacred and profound institutions established by God. Marriage is vastly more than a social contract or a mere partnership; it's a divine covenant, a reflection of God's love and faithfulness (Matthew 19:4-6). In the hustle and bustle, it's easy to lose sight of the spiritual significance of marriage.

When a man and woman pledge their love for life, God's the witness every time — whether invited or not. In today's world, where the sanctity of marriage is often challenged and misunderstood, it's crucial for us to return to the biblical foundations that will nurture and strengthen this sacred bond.

God has a lot to say about marriage, both directly and indirectly. What can we learn from His wisdom? Let's learn seven foundations of lasting love — enduring strength of a marriage rooted in Him.

I. The Christ Must Be Central

- A. Colossians 3:1-4 is the grand key to marriage. As Christians we are already married to Him (Romans 7:4).
- B. However, when Christ is the center of our marriage, He graces our marital love. This is not some mystical event or feeling. We are conformed to His image, and that's going to loom large in the future of our relationships (Romans 8:29).

II. The Cross Must Be Focal

- A. Marriage is about dying because that's what Christ did for His bride (Ephesians 5:23, 25). The marital union mirrors the intimate relationship between Christ and His church — a relationship characterized by unconditional love, sacrificial giving, and unwavering commitment.
- B. In marriage a single man and a single woman die to self and the two become one. Thus, one plus one equals one.
- C. But, the ceremony is only the beginning of death. A Christian marriage is a lifelong practice of death — of giving over all that you are. This means being thoughtful, courteous, and vulnerable with your spouse.
 - 1. It's interesting that as Jesus was arrested, tried, and crucified, He was all three of these.
 - 2. He was vulnerable as He cried to God to take the cup from Him (Luke 22:44; Hebrews 5:7). He was courteous as He faced Jewish and Romans authorities (Luke 23:3, 9-11). He was courteous as He forgave His enemies and provided for His mother (Luke 23:34; John 19:25-27).

III. The Covenant Must Be Priority

- A. Marriage involves a covenant before God, according to Malachi 2:14, "Yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant" (cp. Proverbs 2:17; Ezekiel 16:8-14). Marriage is a lifelong commitment sealed with an oath or vows before God.

- B. This is a promise that you make. You'll love, honor, and cherish for better or for worse, in sickness and in health. God doesn't want us going back on our promises.
- C. Every marriage enjoys two substantial benefits: security and growth. Security implies dependence. You can always count on each other. Growth implies advancing beyond the status quo. From a gospel perspective, it involves a godly couple growing in faith, hope, and love.

IV. The Commitment Must Be Powerful

- A. Commitment is an outgrowth of covenant. Commitment is a powerful word and principle, and should never be taken lightly (cp. Hebrews 13:4).
- B. The truth is, marriages which only depend on being "in love" fall apart too frequently. Why? Because love's an emotion that moves in waves over the long haul. However, those who build their relationship on commitment will make it and "put on" love (Colossians 3:14).
- C. Commitment means being bonded with someone who's a consistent safe and secure home base that'll be there for you in the face of any adversities. Every marriage has low points, and you'll likely have to brace yourself and ride out the low points. But the highs vastly outweigh the lows if you keep working at it.

V. The Character Must Be Penetrating

- A. Christ was committed to the church to the point of death (Ephesians 5:25). That's character. Character is who we are, and a marriage of a loving man and loving women that work to maintain godly character will be blessed in this life and for eternity.
- B. Maybe the simplest advice I can give for a couple is to be Christians. Act like Christ directs (Colossians 3:17).
 - 1. A husband that treats his wife well while loving, respecting, and caring for her will be blessed.
 - 2. A loving wife who graces our world with beauty, tenderness, and kindness is a rich blessing.
- C. Try to consistently show your spouse that you love them. Communicate and be honest and negotiate disagreeable spots in your relationship like mature adults, instead of like children. Using your words to hurt the other person is just silly. If you think someone has to "win," you aren't ready for marriage. Furthermore, if you go on auto-pilot, you're going to have problems.

VI. The Cooperation Must Be Consistent

- A. Cooperation in marriage helps couples work together to achieve their goals, resolve conflicts, and feel more involved in each other's lives. With cooperation, couples feel less alone and more hopeful for the future.
- B. Someone once described marriage like climbing a mountain. When one of you starts to slip, the other grabs their hand and pulls them back up. Instead of constantly criticizing and picking each other apart in private or in public, always be there for each other.

- C. When a married couple is headed in the same spiritual direction, serving the same Lord, and abiding by the same standard of moral conduct, they'll aid each other in reaching heaven as their eternal home. They will be "heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:7).
- D. Remember that to some people, respect is just as important or possibly more so than love. But you can't learn or fake respect, so if you don't have it for each other, don't get married.

VII. The Caring Must Be Bountiful

- A. The time-honored phrase, "the two shall become one flesh" is descriptive of oneness (Ephesians 5:28-31).
- B. If flesh is ever torn it causes pain, and when two are united and have difficulties, pain occurs. Your spouse is human and allowed to make (reasonable) mistakes. Give grace because this is what God does. And who knows, one day you may make a mistake and need their support.
- C. A deep sense of empathy and caring, and the regular practicing of them strengthens marriage and sweetens the relationship.

Conclusion. Thankfully, the divorce rate started a downward trend in the 1980s and continues that way until now. What has helped over the last few decades?

Marriage and family therapists report that counseling has become more normalized, roles in marriages have become more flexible, and people are more used to talking openly about how they want their marriages to work.

However, another big change has been the way people enter marriages. There has been a gradual shift from the "romantic marriage" to the "companionate marriage," meaning that people are increasingly choosing spouses at the outset who are more like best friends. This is a lot more likely to promote long-term stability and satisfaction.

All that I'm advocating in this lesson is that couples take the next — and arguably most important step — and make the Bible is their guide in faith and practice. When they do this, life is much better and eternity is much brighter.

I am deeply indebted to Mark N. Posey for the use of his material.