

Reflections on 40 Years of Marriage - Genesis 2:15-3:7
Argyle - 1/7/18

Introduction to Scripture

Last weekend Kim and I celebrated our 40th wedding anniversary. Our kids put together a little celebration for us in Philadelphia. Here is a picture from our wedding reception ([picture](#)) that was posted on Facebook. Since many of you have come to the church since our kids moved away, we wanted to give you a brief introduction to our family ([Pictures - Rebecca, Crystal, Josh & Elizabeth](#))

Ten years ago, on the occasion of our 30th anniversary, we shared 10 things we had learned over those years. A summary of those ten lessons is copied at the end of the sermon outline insert in your bulletin this morning. (BTW - Kim prepares a sermon outline like this whenever I preach. If that would be helpful to you, you can pick one up by the bulletins.)

Milestones like a 40th wedding anniversary are times for reflection ([Reflections on 40 Years of Marriage](#)) and we have been doing a lot of that over the past several weeks. We would like to share a few of those reflections with you. If you are not married, please don't feel left out of this sermon, ([click](#)) because most of these things are basic life lessons. For us, marriage has been the laboratory in which we have learned them.

To get started, I would like to read Genesis 2:15-3:7 which is the foundational Biblical statement about marriage. It gives us God’s vision for marriage and then an explanation for why we have such a hard time living out that vision. It is essential that we understand both. (Read Genesis 2:15-3:7) (Pray)

The Importance of Having the Right Expectations

As we have reflected on life and marriage, one of the things we have realized is the importance of having the right expectations. (Picture) For our first dance, we chose “Longer” by Dan Fogelberg.

Longer than there've been fishes in the ocean
Higher than any bird ever flew
Longer than there've been stars up in the heavens
I've been in love with you.

Pretty romantic..., but pretty silly when you think about it. “Longer than there’ve been fishes in the ocean and higher than any bird ever flew” – really? In the premarital counseling class that Kim and I do, we read an article on “childish ideas of love and marriage.” Childish ideas like if you find the right person, you’ll live happily ever after or good marriages are easy and don’t have conflict or if we really love each other things we’ll just fall into place or getting married will make us happy. These childish ideas of love and marriage set us up for disappointment and failure.

Our expectations of marriage need to be based on what the Bible says. For instance, God introduces the concept of marriage in the context of his giving

instructions to Adam for how to live in the garden. God observed that it was not good for the man to do this on his own. He needed a “suitable helper,” – a partner to help him follow God’s instructions. This is the theme of Gary Thomas’ book (picture), *Sacred Marriage: What if God Designed Marriage to Make us Holy More Than to Make us Happy?* Many of us don’t realize that one of the fundamental responsibilities God has given our spouse is to help us grow spiritually. We need to understand God’s vision and purpose for our marriages so we have the right expectations.

On the flip side, we need to understand what the Bible says about the depth of our sinful natures and the brokenness of the world we live in so that we will have realistic expectations about how challenging marriage will be. Did you notice the dramatic impact that the first sin had on Adam and Eve’s marriage? Before sin entered the world it said “The man and wife were both naked and they felt no shame.” (Genesis 2:25) After they disobeyed God we read, “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.” (Genesis 3:7) The transparency that is essential for a healthy marriage was gone and we have been fighting to regain it ever since.

The reality is, I am a sinner married to a sinner living in a sinful world. It is going to be bumpy at times, but that should be expected. So, when Kim and I have

struggled in our marriage we've understood that the problem is not our marriage - it's us. The problem is our own pride, selfishness, laziness and other sin that needs to be repented of. Some of the problems we experience are because of the brokenness of the world around us. When that is true it is time for us to lean into our roles as suitable helpers to one another and attack the problem together.

One of the things we have learned in our 40 years is that we need to have the right expectations of one another, of marriage, and of life - or else we will pursue the wrong goals and be caught off guard by the challenges.

Hardship Is Not All Bad

At second thing we have recognized is that hardship is not all bad. Here is the card (picture) Steve gave me last Saturday, the morning of our anniversary. It was perfect. We had spent the last week missing Josh & Crystal on Christmas because of snow, and rearranging all kinds of plans with my siblings because of sickness. Then Bec's kids ended up throwing up all the night before anyway.

Sometimes the wheels just fall off of our plans. I'm not telling you anything you don't already know. An unexpected bill, a lay off, a relationship explosion - life is filled with hardship. But hear what the Bible says about them -

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. James 1:2-4

...we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. Romans 5:3-5

Here's something Crystal's boyfriend told me about on one of our crazy vacation days - trees can't grow without wind. I looked into it and it turns out that stress wood is wood that develops to deal with that wind.

How many of you remember Biosphere 2? (Picture) It was a project lots of really smart scientists set up in the early 90s as a closed system where 8 humans and a bunch of other critters would live, eating the food grown inside the structure. They carefully selected species and spent a fortune outfitting the place.

The only problem is, they were human, not God, and they failed. They did not introduce wind, which after this week might seem smart. But they were wrong. Without wind trees don't develop stress wood that causes them to stand up straight and send down deep roots. (picture) In the end the trees could not survive.

We, too, are not God. We are human and it turns out that we need the winds of life, the hardships of the world, the storms, so that we will grow straight and strong and deeply dependent on God.

This tree (tree picture) started growing next to our garage. You can see that during the early growth it was bent over, much like the trees in Biosphere 2. Fortunately it eventually reached out far enough that the elements began to shape it, its roots went down into the soil, it began to be stronger and to grow up straight. That's what happens to us when we welcome hardships and when we persevere. God works in us to build our character. He gives us hope. We grow deep into dependence on God. We grow straight and strong. We reach out in hope.

Growth Doesn't Happen in a Vacuum

Of course, growth doesn't happen in a vacuum. I figure we've been in Sunday worship with you all about 1426 times. Once I missed worship 6 weeks in a row when the kids were little - they were sick, I had children's church, I got sick. You know how it goes. I felt like I was shriveling up and dying spiritually. Sure I had been in Bible study a time or two with some of you each of those weeks. And I had prayed with a few more groups every week or two or once/month. We talked about these spiritual disciplines 10 years ago. (click) You'll see them referenced as Spiritual Basics in #1 at the end of your Sermon Outline. You all have helped my marriage (click) - as we have grown together as disciples. You've ridden through the storms of life with me and have called me back to God in trusting perseverance.

But even when you have not been there to encourage me, God has ministered to me through His body. Last week we were walking into Calvary Church near Bec and Matt's house. We usually go to church with them at Hilltown, but their kids were sick, and I was tempted to stay home and watch the livestream with them. Steve's wisdom prevailed. As we walked into Calvary Steve said, "I think this is one of the reasons we've made it 40 years." I agree. As we have chosen to be with God, to worship Him (click) no matter what, He has calmed our hearts and ordered our steps. I'm grateful to the congregation at Calvary last week for ushering me into God's presence. I think community is important to personal growth and to marriages, but even when I am worshipping God with complete strangers, He does something to me and in me.

Psalm 22:3 paints a picture of God seated on a throne made up of the praises of His people. The verse before references the hard times of life, and the hopelessness that we often feel when the winds blow. And

the verse after reminds us of God's faithfulness that we can see in the community of faith that has gone on before us.

O my God, I cry during the day, but You do not answer. I cry during the night, but I find no rest. Yet You are holy. The praises Israel gives You are Your throne. Our fathers trusted in You, and You saved them. Psalm 22:2-4

When I choose to worship God, I enter His presence in a way that restores me.

Can't Stop Investing in Our Marriage

One last thing that we have learned is that we can't stop investing in our marriage. In *The Most Important Year in a Man's Life/The Most Important Year in a Woman's Life* - two books in one - the authors use financial investing to make an insightful observation about marriage. Say, for instance, that when I got married, I opened up a retirement savings account. Would it have been better for me to invest \$100 a month for these 40 years - a total of \$48,000, or for me to wait until today and invest the \$48,000 all at once? It is the same amount of money, just different investment strategies. Which would be better? If I went with the small deposits over 40 years invested at a modest 5% rate of return, today I would have \$137, 584.50. If I had waited, I would have just \$48,000. Not a hard choice, is it?

The same principle applies to marriage. Would you like to have a \$137,000 marriage or a \$48,000 marriage? The difference doesn't have to do with who you are married to or the circumstances of your life. It has to do with the investments you are making in your marriage - things like occasional date nights, taking a S.S.

class on marriage, getting counseling to get over an obstacle, reading an article on marriage, honestly facing an issue that is hurting you, participating in *reengage*, enlisting a friend to pray for your marriage... These small regular investments in your marriage don't cost much, but they will pay huge dividends. Sadly, some of you have chosen to have a \$48,000 marriage when you could have a \$137,000 one. Here is one easy thing you can do this week to boost the value of your marriage. Go to the Focus on the Family website and read one article on marriage. It is as simple as that.

By the way, this investing principle applies in our relationship with God. Daily Bible reading and prayer, weekly study and worship and a yearly retreat will result in an amazing faith that will honor God, bless those around you and bring joy and peace to your life.

Conclusion

Although I think the first verse of the song *Longer* is a little silly, the last verse is right on.

Through the years as the fire starts to mellow
Burning lines in the book of our lives
Though the binding cracks
And the pages start to yellow
I'll be in love with you

By the grace of God, the support of friends like you, and the investments we have made in our marriage that has become a reality in our lives.