

MESSAGE: "A WISE GUY OR GAL" *PROVERBS 19:14*

Central to our human relationships is that of marriage. In fact, it is the 2nd relationship established by God in Genesis 2. On this relationship rests social order. That is why the Bible takes it so importantly.

It is probably why marriage above all other relationships is the most damaged by humanity's fall.

In Genesis 2, God intends a husband and wife to trust each other fully; to cooperate in the building of His creation; to use their abilities to bless one another and fulfill God's purpose.



What is relationship?

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What is the perfect marriage?

This last July, Terry and I past 40 years together. That is surprising even among my generation that came of age in the during the era of Woodstock, Aquarius and the Sexual Revolution. Few people from my generation remain committed to their marriage.

I was listening to a young man who though not quite my son's age, would not be many years ahead of him. He spoke about the reality that his friends thought his home was strange because his parents were still married to each other and were friends.

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What is the perfect marriage?

In the generation prior to the "Baby Boom" generation long committed marriages were common. They often showed their wear and it was clear that both spouses had toughed through some rough patches. But they did not expect from their marriage "a magic carpet ride" of unending ecstasy, meaning, solicitude and equal outcomes.

They didn't even expect to always like one another. Their marriages were partnerships for good and ill. What changed things?

PROVERBS 19:14

Houses and riches *are* an inheritance from fathers, But a prudent wife *is* from the LORD.

The word “prudent” is a very interesting word in Hebrew “sakal”, it has a wide variety of meaning depending on its context. It is used 74 times in the OT. It is translated variously by: wise, prosper, insight, instruction or teaching, it is often best translated by the word “prudence”. It is used as a synonym for the Hebrew word that means “insight” [bena]. But adds a nuance to this idea, giving it a practical spin meaning: “insight applied in real circumstances” or simply “prudence”.

A derivative of this word means “poem”. A “miskil” literally “from prudence”.

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Professor Diane Vaughn
– her study for NASA of
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Many years ago I had a painful experience as a pastor. I was approached by a lady in my church requesting I help a couple she knew with their marriage. She had met the wife through a support group for immigrant wives [this was common in the community]. The husband was an elderly man who was well off and had traveled outside of the country on various occasions. On one of these trips he had met this woman who was middle aged and she had convinced him to marry her. Her intent was to get into the USA, while his intent was pretty evident as well. To me, as a pastor, it was clear from our first meeting that I was not likely to convince them to remain married. It also became clear to me that once the woman had attained legal residence she had every intention of divorcing her husband.

What I watched, over several months of trying to help them, was a carefully crafted plan that was designed to obtain from her husband as many resources as possible by feinting a desire to work out differences in return for concessions that her lawyer made sure were precedence for the final divorce settlement.

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I warned both of them to get their own lawyers, but the husband chose to use her lawyer. I found myself by the end of the process heartily disliking both. Yet, I felt guilty because I had not processed what was happening and was being used by both parties to reinforce their positions. Their manipulation of me and their friends left me feeling incapable and ill prepared for ministry.

As a result, I made 3 decisions about my approach to marriages as a pastor. 1st, I rediscovered an article on divorce, I had read early in my ministry. As I read it with renewed eyes, I suddenly saw clearly the pattern I had just watched play out. Most of the Christian literature on marriage conflict was focused on communication & commitment. Most of the secular material I was reading focused on “conflict management”.

The author of this article was Diane Vaughn a sociology professor at Columbia. I had read this article very early in my pastoral experience and filed it away as “interesting”. But now when my regular sources of insight were not corresponding to reality I read this article again.

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Stages of Divorce

Condensed from: Diane Vaughan, "The Long Goodbye" *Psychology Today*, July 1987

Steps in the process of divorce: [page 1]

- There are two parties to a broken relationship – the "Initiator" and the "Partner". The "Initiator" desires and plans the divorce while the "Partner" passively cooperates in the process though ignorant to some extent of the process [codependence model].
- When the relationship begins to breakdown "short hand" statements of assurance are used by the Initiator to obscure his/her unhappiness in the relationship. The Partner, though sensing problems, accepts these assurances at face value.
- The Initiator broods, keeps silent and sets up a "cost/benefit" table for exiting the relationship. **This is the best time to intervene in order to salvage the relationship.**
- The Partner ignores the warning signs and collaborates in public secrecy. This is the reason that this optimal moment is lost for restoring the relationship.
- The Initiator begins choosing outside confidants and collaborators as he/she plans the "escape" (often an affair begins) and some public light is shown on the subject.

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Steps in the process of divorce: [page 2]

- The Partner having become alarmed may force counseling on the Initiator at this point, but it is rarely successful. Instead, the Initiator becomes more careful in planning and the Partner in desperation becomes more collaborative in the secrecy.
- The Initiator has completed his/her plan and the cost/benefit ratio tips in favor of breaking the relationship. The Initiator has created a "secure niche" outside and intentionally creates an incident to establish precedence for a final break; this often catches the Partner by surprise. **[This process usually takes more than a year with several reversals along the way.]**

Ephesians 5:21-33

EPHESIANS 5:21

...submitting to one another in the fear of God.

The word “submit” in Greek is a term used in the Roman military reflecting a soldier who takes an oath of submission to a Roman commander voluntarily. For Paul partnerships whether military, business, social, church, family or marriage needed structure. Someone ultimately needed to be responsible for the final decisions. What we know in all relationships is that unless one person ultimately makes a final decision and others submit to that decision, in spite of their personal views, chaos ensues. What redeems Christian submission is the realization that the “leader” is responsible before God for the decision and its consequences. Paul in the rest of this chapter applies this principle to marriage.

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Valentine's day is supposed to be the day Valentine a Christian priest or bishop was executed. Only his name and grave were known. He was martyred sometime around 269. His chapel is first mentioned in the 390s over 100 years following his death.

It appears that his death day was elevated in an attempt to contradict the Lupercal. By 390 Rome was now a "Christian" nation. But the people of Rome especially did not wish to give up the celebration of the Lupercal. The bishops of Rome tried in vein to shame the citizens of Rome into not celebrating it.

Valentine was an obscure martyr who died on February 14, that is why this day came to be celebrated.

Little is known of why Valentine was executed, but medieval martyrologists were happy to fill in the gaps with legend. Matthew 19:10-15



This painting by Jacopo da Ponte sometime in the 1500s represents St. Valentine baptizing St. Lucilla. Skull of Valentine festooned with flowers



MATTHEW 19:10-15

10 His disciples said to Him, “If such is the case of the man with *his* wife, it is better not to marry.”

11 But He said to them, “All cannot accept this saying, but only *those* to whom it has been given: 12 “For there are eunuchs who were born thus from *their* mother’s womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He who is able to accept *it*, let him accept *it*.”

13 Then little children were brought to Him that He might put *His* hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them.

14 But Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

15 And He laid *His* hands on them and departed from there.

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Lupercalia was an ancient Roman fertility celebration. It took place over the days of February 13-15. Its name comes from the Roman word for "wolf" involving rites connected to Romulus and Remus [founders of Rome]. Dogs and goats were sacrificed and their hides cut into strips called "februa" which, after a drunken feast, naked men ran the length of Rome whipping women with these strips of hides to ease childbirth pains or encourage conception. The feast involved drunken orgies. The name Lupercalia may have reflected on "prostitutes" who were often called "wolves" as a pseudonym. Their brothels were called "dens".



This Renaissance drawing represents a Lupercal celebration.

A Roman wolf sculpture. Lupis means "wolf". Lupercalia was "celebration of the wolf"





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What is known is that this celebration was that it was ancient by the time of Christ. It was so engrained that even after Rome became Christian it was celebrated up to the fall of Rome in 455.

In the 1200's the idea of "courtly" love developed. It was usually viewed as a chased but adulterous infatuation of a courtier for the mistress of the manor. This developed into the concept of "romantic love" by the late Middle Ages.

During the Renaissance this reconnected with the Lupercalia and was christened with the name "Valentine's Day". This is when the practice of sending cards started.

1 Peter 3:1-9

1 PETER 3:1-9

1 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, 2 when they observe your chaste conduct *accompanied* by fear. 3 Do not let your adornment be *merely* outward — arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on *fine* apparel — 4 rather *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible *beauty* of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.

5 For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, 6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.

1 PETER 3:1-9

7 Husbands, likewise, dwell with *them* with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as *being* heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

8 Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; 9 not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.

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Rick retired in his mid sixties. Only to discover his wife of over 40 years was in the beginning stages of dementia. A bout of meningitis caused her to quickly deteriorate. Rick made a commitment to care for his wife at home as long as possible. He admitted that it was lonely, difficult and at times heartbreaking when she didn't even know who he was.

What was the most difficult for him was watching her lose the memories of who she was. Yet, he reflects that the experience has made him a better man. Real marriage is a commitment a man and woman make to one another.



This is Rick and Marianne Rayburn in 2017. In 2014 they became the subject of a report on NPR on caregiving spouses. In 2017 their story was updated.

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What is the perfect Christian marriage? There isn't one! Christian couples are committed to Christ and committed to one another.

The choice of a wise spouse and choosing to develop a quality relationship with our spouse is a sign of real wisdom.

In truth "prudence" is the best measure of quality in a husband or wife.

What is the perfect Christian marriage?

Series: Christian Relationships

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