

## **Ten Values That Build Strong Families: Marriages Built to Last**

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Grace and peace... If you were to see an "off" ramp sign on the freeway that says "do not enter" would you resent it or would you appreciate it? If you were trying to find your way on to the freeway and you didn't know if it were an on-ramp or an off-ramp you would appreciate the fact that somebody put up a sign that said "this ain't it."

God has given us Ten Commandments in His word that we've been looking at the past seven weeks. Whenever God says a negative He always has a positive purpose behind it. He always has a reason. It is not to cause you pain. It is for your protection. God says when you play by the rules you win. **Exodus 20:14** -- our seventh commandment -- *"You shall not commit adultery."*

The purpose of today's message is not to resurrect your past. If you have confessed a sin to God and you've been forgiven God has forgiven it and forgotten it and you need to, too. Today we're going to focus on the future. God wants to protect your relationships...

It's easier to get married than it is to stay married. In today's world where there are permissive values that basically say anything goes, and an entertainment organization obsessed with sex, and sex is used to sell everything from cars to bananas and there are more women in the work place, and there is birth control and constant bombardment by the media, you don't stand much of a chance of remaining pure unless you establish some guidelines for your life. Readers Digest did a study and said fifty percent of all husbands and probably 35% of all wives have committed adultery. This is happening even among Christians.

In **Matthew 5:27-28** Jesus says, *"You have heard that the Law of Moses says, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust in his eye has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* Jesus reinterprets this commandment which the Pharisees were trying to use to justify divorce to Jesus, quoting Moses. But Jesus says, we fail at this commandment every day – lusting in our heart; dreaming about how things could be better with someone else; adultery is everything that leads up to an affair – not resolving conflict, harboring grudges, not becoming vulnerable with each other. Divorce is the culmination of adultery – everything that led to the demise of the relationship. So while the Pharisees again wanted to use the law to say they were OK in God's sight, Jesus reminds us, that we cannot keep this commandment. **WE HAVE ALL FAILED!** Instead, we need to turn to Christ for forgiveness and in humility with our spouse, say to one another, I forgive you, let's live for God's purpose, and even though we will fail at times, we'll put God first in this marriage.

So today I want to invite you to look at ways that we can begin to take back this area of our Christian lives that has been so difficult. Let's look at four principles that can strengthen your marriage now and in the future.

**1. MAKE A COMMITMENT TO GOD'S STANDARDS.** Regardless of your past, regardless of your failures say today, I'm going to make a commitment to maintain God's standards. That means you agree with God about what He says about sex. God's standards have never, ever changed. The Bible says that sex is for marriage only -- not before marriage, not outside of marriage.

**Ps. 119:9** "How can a person keep his way pure?" The answer is "by living according to..." culture. No! Instead "by living according to Your word." God's standard is very clear in His word. Adultery is never an option, under no circumstances is it OK; there is no justification for it, no matter what your background is. Joseph in the Old Testament was seduced by Potiphar's wife. He had every reason in the world to give in to that temptation -- I'm young, I've viral, I'm single, I'm in a foreign country, it's an acceptable practice in this society, she wants it, my desires want it, I've been abused, my brothers hated me and sold me into slavery -- he had a terrible family life, he was deprived of love. Instead he said, "I will not sin against my God." The Bible says when he was tempted he turned and ran. Maybe that's what you need to do, too.

I want to suggest to you that you need to publicly affirm God's standard. That's the first step if you want to protect your marriage. You need to first say to your mate, I have decided that by God's grace regardless of what you do, the decisions you make, the choices you make, or what happens in our marriage, I will never be unfaithful to you. It's my choice. It's my decision.

Then I think you need to affirm that same thing to your friends, your relatives, and the people you work with so that there is no doubt about where you stand on this issue with the people around you. You need to say to those you work with "I intend to be faithful to my husband/wife."

Most of you know I am hopelessly in love with my wife. It wasn't always that way. We've been married 23 years, 20 wonderful years. The first few years were difficult. But Marlys' mother was a saint. She told Marlys in no uncertain terms that we needed to work **through** these problems in our marriage – not just work **on** them. And now, I am hopelessly in love with her. I want there to be no doubt where I stand and I want you to say to the people around you, "I'm not available." There have been numerous times in my life where I have blown it, in terms of interpersonal relationships with women, sent the wrong messages, been mistaken for someone who was available. By God's grace I have remained faithful and I know Marlys has too. We need to be clearer in the messages we send and the standards we keep at all times and places.

**2. MAGNIFY THE CONSEQUENCES** - Remind yourself of the devastation and destruction that is caused by sexual sin. **Prov. 6;32** "The one who commits

*adultery is an utter fool for he destroys his own soul."* Remember Esau who was hungry in the Old Testament and he sold his birthright, his inheritance, for a bowl of porridge. I know people today who are selling their life away for one moment of pleasure.

Many of you are in difficult marriages. You're struggling and having a tough time. It's not satisfying and you're looking around. While the cost of maintaining and restoring and repairing your marriage and making it work are high, the cost of adultery is always higher. Adultery is ultimately selfishness. It's not love, it's selfishness. It's saying "I'm going to put my needs and what I think is right, my pleasure ahead of everything else -- ahead of what God says, ahead of what it will do to my husband or wife, ahead of what it will do to my family, ahead of what it will do to her or his family, ahead of what it will do to his/her wife/husband." It's basically saying forget the world, I'm doing what I want to do. That is selfishness. That is not love.

I'm worried about America. If they taught drug education today in our schools the way they do sex education they'd be passing out needles and showing kids how to shoot up. They're saying we know you're going to do this anyway so let me show you how to do it safely. Kids aren't that smart. They need to be informed of the consequences of their choices. And so do we who are adults.

**3. MAINTAIN YOUR MARRIAGE - *I Cor. 7:3*** *"A man should fulfill his duty as a husband, a wife should fulfill her duty as a wife and each should satisfy the other's needs."* What kind of needs are we talking about? Dr. Willard Harley, a counselor in Minnesota, wrote a fantastic book *His Needs, Her Needs*. He has identified through thousands of couples what he thinks are the top 5 needs of most men and the top 5 needs of most women. See if you see any similarities between these two lists:

**The top five needs of most men:**

1. Sexual fulfillment
2. Recreational companionship
3. An attractive spouse
4. Domestic support
5. Admiration

**The top five needs of most women:**

1. Affection
2. Conversation
3. Honesty and openness
4. Financial support
5. Family commitment

Did you see any similarities between those two lists? No. No wonder we have so much trouble adjusting in marriage. Men come in to marriage thinking for some strange reason they've married someone very much like themselves so they set about trying to meet the needs they have in their wife and feeling very, very frustrated when she does not respond the same way he does. Most women come into marriage thinking they've married someone very much like themselves. They set about to meet the needs that they have in a man and cannot understand why he does not respond the same way she does.

In order to maintain our marriage, we must work on listening to each others' needs. The best way I have understood that is through **conflict resolution**. Let me share the steps with you briefly:

- A) **Stop and cool off.** Many couples get into trouble when they are offended and hurt back while they're still angry. You can solve problems when you are highly emotional. Take time to cool off, and then come back to it when you've had time to think.
- B) **Listen, then speak.** Notice the order of these. Seek first to understand, then to be understood. Tell each other what you feel with "I" statements rather than "you" statements. Feedback to each other what you're hearing...
- C) **Brainstorm solutions.** Every problem has multiple answers to it. If we look at many solutions, we can come up with one that all of us agree on. You can only do this after step #2. Until we've been heard, we're not ready to work together.
- D) **Choose an answer you can agree on; set a plan.** Follow through on your decisions. When you fail, forgive each other, look at the plan again and recommit; if it needs to be tweaked do that.

Marlys and I have fights pretty regularly. Why? Because we're human and sinners in need of God's grace. I'm pretty sure that no one knows Marlys' weaknesses like I do. And no one knows mine like she does. But we have learned that having grace with each other is what gives us hope for our lives. The goal we have in our marriage is to be best friends. Why? I heard Mary Alda, the wife of Alan Alda, the actor, one time say, "It's real easy to leave your spouse. It's not easy to leave your best friend." Marlys and I are best friends because we want to stay together the rest of our lives. And how do you build a friendship? Time! You cannot be best friends with someone you don't spend time with, that you don't see very often, that you don't talk and tell your heart to.

- 4. **MANAGE MY MIND:** People don't just fall into immorality. There is really no such thing as a one-night stand. It seems that way, but you are not a moral, upright person today and by tomorrow you fall into immorality. I need to accept that there are sinful thoughts in my mind. The battle for any temptation in your life begins in your mind. What you think about, you'll eventually feel and what you feel you'll eventually act on. You become what you think about. If you think about positive, good, happy, loving, kind things, that's the way you will act. If you think lustful, dirty, trashy, obscene thoughts, that's the kind of person you will become.

I read this week that most of us have garbage disposals in our kitchens and garbage dispensers in our living rooms -- the TV. The TV is one of the biggest

dispensers of garbage that we allow into our homes. It's really naive of us to allow our whole moral lives to be shaped by someone else – other than ourselves and God. Yet we do it each day.

Most affairs start out emotional rather than physical...People say, "She/He is just a good friend... But we are great in deceiving ourselves. **Jeremiah 17:9** *"The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. Who can know it?"* So we must guard against the deception that says, "I need this person as a friend" and "if it's love it won't hurt me or anyone." You can convince yourself that anything is OK given the circumstances. So we need to manage our minds to know that God has a plan for us that is based on his Word, not on fantasies that are dreamed up on Television, in the movies, or in our own mind.

Let's close with three steps to refocus your marriage: **1) Admit your sin** – if anything here today has convicted you, recognize that we are unable to keep this commandment as sinners. Tell God that you have had sinful thoughts, and ignored the circumstances, broken this command which protects; **2) Ask God to forgive you** through the power of Christ – simply say, God forgive me, make me new. Help me to battle for my marriage and for purity in my sexual life; and **3) Appeal to God for strength** – say "through grace and hope, set me on a new path knowing that I'll have setbacks. Through the power of Christ, renew my life and my marriage."

Let's pray...