

# A Thriving Marriage

Ephesians 5:21-33

## Preface

### Recognize couples from young married Sunday School class.

Illus: Have you ever been awakened by a bad dream; one so real that you were all upset when you woke up?

This past Wednesday morning I awoke from such a dream. Like most dreams it was a little fuzzy and not all of it made perfect sense. In the dream, Pam and I were divorced and Pam had remarried this other man (a real wimpy goober). There was a party at their house and I was invited. As I watched Pam entertain guests, I became uncomfortable and went outside. I was standing outside looking back into the home through a large window. Inside I could see John Rohm talking to a bunch of people telling one of his stories. In front of him was Mickey Wilson grazing at the food table. They both looked up and saw me outside and could tell I was hurting.

Suddenly, Pam came outside and walked up to talk to me. I began to tell her how much I missed her and I loved her with all my heart. She responded by saying she loved me as well. We talked about how much we had together and how foolish it was that we ever got a divorce. We both agreed we longed to be together again. We cried together and then hugged each other. But in the end, she said she could not leave her new husband as it would not be fair to him and she went back inside.

I proceeded to leave their home and was walking down a long gravel driveway when Pam's new husband (can't remember his name) came running up to me. He informed me that he knew his new wife still had feelings for me and that he wanted me to stay away from their home and away from her. I was standing there contemplating what I should say in response to him when I woke up from the dream.

My heart felt like it weighed 100 pounds. As I lay there in bed, tears began to form in my eyes as I reflected on my dream. The tears came from the realization that after 28 years of marriage, I love this woman more than ever.

The truth is **many marriages end up in divorces unnecessarily**. Very often we lose sight of the good we have together and focus on the petty disputes.

God desires for us to have lasting marriages. Marriage is not just a physical union. Marriage is to be a **spiritual union of oneness** that God can strengthen and grow.

In Ephesians 5:22 God's word gives us very specific instructions for making a marriage not just work but thrive and grow.

## Scripture Text

*<sup>21</sup>Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. <sup>22</sup>Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. <sup>23</sup>For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. <sup>24</sup>Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.*

*<sup>25</sup>Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her <sup>26</sup>to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, <sup>27</sup>and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. <sup>28</sup>In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. <sup>29</sup>After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church— <sup>30</sup>for we are members of his body.*

*<sup>31</sup>“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”*

*<sup>32</sup>This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. <sup>33</sup>However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. Ephesians 5:22-33 NIV*

## Introduction

Marriage is not easy. **If anyone tells you it is easy they are either lying or they are just plain nuts.**

Quote: “A honeymoon is a short pause between I Do and You Better.”

Quote: “Love is a dream. Marriage is the alarm clock!”

Quote: “Marriage is when you agree to spend the rest of your life sleeping in a room that’s too warm, beside someone who’s sleeping in a room that’s too cold.”

Making a marriage work is not easy. No marriage works on auto-pilot. Often we find ourselves fighting and arguing with emotions running through the roof.

When I meet with married couples, I often ask; “What are the areas in which you are having problems?” They may say it a little differently but the answers are almost always the same. The conflicts are usually in the areas of Money, Sex, Household Responsibilities and Dealing with children.

One thing couples need to understand is that your problems are not unique. Most couples have the same issues.

If you think about the things that annoy you the most about your spouse today, chances are they are some of the very things that you once found attractive about your spouse. Perhaps your spouse’s strong and stubborn personality was the strength and stability that attracted you when dating.

Perhaps the way your spouse was always running late when you were dating was a cute free spirit that you once admired but now find rather frustrating.

The point is that these are not really the issues. The issues are usually not the little things we argue about but rather the underlying problems of communication respect and trust.

More and more people are taking the world’s answer by getting divorced only to find out divorce just creates a completely new set of problems and hardships.

Children all over this country are suffering because of divorce and the trauma of separated parents. Kids just have one question, “Why can’t mommy and daddy love one another.”

How can we make our marriages thrive?

## 1. Put your Marriage Before Yourself

We live in a day when society puts no more value in marriage than the purchase of a new automobile. When the new wears off, it is time to start pondering your next move. In this day and time, sex is nothing more than a thing of personal pleasure with no regard to commitment or the other person’s expectations, let alone any regard to the one who created us.

We have lost sight of the idea that Marriage and Romance were created by God for man and woman. **There is purpose behind marriage, lofty, honorable and meaningful purpose; ordained by God himself.**

Jesus said; “*Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. Matt 19:8 NIV*”

Divorce is not the answer. It is selfishness and hardness of the heart towards God’s law that ends marriages and families. **Divorce is the hurt that keeps on giving year after year.**

I challenge you today to commit to yourself and your spouse that divorce is not an option. Decide together that you are committed to making your marriage thrive. **Agree that you will put your marriage relationship above your own selfish desires.**

The Bible makes it clear that in marriage the husband and wife become “one flesh.” Therefore, **whatever one does to the other, they do to themselves.**

Outside of your relationship with God, your marriage is the most important relationship in your life. It is the relationship that deserves your very best or effort and attention every single day, no every single moment.

Couples don’t really “fall out of love.” They fall out of repentance. Their little vices like impatience, disrespect, selfishness, pride and anger pollute a once precious relationship. Instead of marriage drawing us into holiness, we allow it to draw us into bitterness.

People often want out of a marriage not because they no longer love their spouse. The truth is they despise what they themselves have become and want a new start. **Changing partners is not the answer; changing ourselves is the answer.**

Put your marriage above yourself and commit to it completely.

## 2. Put Your Spouse Before Yourself

The essence of our text today is that we are to love our spouse more than ourselves. We are to put the well being and happiness of our spouse before ourselves.

It doesn't matter the translation, it says the same thing. The problem isn't with our understanding God's word. The problem is our accepting it. **We are too selfish to trust God's instructions.**

Whether it is the **wife being submissive to the husband or the husband loving the wife as Christ loves the church, the idea is the same. We must learn to put our spouse above ourselves.**

The entire ministry of Jesus was about teaching us to love others above ourselves. In John 14:14-15, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples to make this point perfectly clear. After washing their feet he said; *"<sup>14</sup>Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup>I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."*

God's word says you are to love God with all our heart soul and mind; and you are to love our neighbor as yourself. Then surely we are to love our spouse above ourselves.

Illus: One man learned this lesson over ice cubes. He pointed out that his wife would never refill the ice trays. He would go to get ice and there would only be two or three cubes left. This really frustrated him. One time when his wife was talking romantically to him, she said she would love him forever. He responded, "I don't need you to love me forever. I need you to love me for seven seconds."

"What are you talking about?" she asked. "Well, I timed how long it takes to fill the ice cube trays and put them in the freezer, and it's only about seven seconds."

The next morning as he was praying, it hit him. If it only takes my wife seven seconds to fill the ice cube trays, it only takes me seven seconds to fill them. **"Is my love so shallow that I would seriously resent my wife putting me out for seven seconds worth of work?" As much as she loves me, am I so spiritually immature that I grow angry at seven seconds of lost time?"**

If you want to be free to serve Jesus, stay single. But if you want to become like Jesus, get married. **Marriage forces you to face personal character issues you would never face otherwise.**

To have a thriving marriage put your spouse before yourself.

## 3. Put God at the Center of Everything

Proverbs 30 contains a number of sayings by a wise man known as Agur. He makes several poetic observations about life. Beginning in verse 18, he cites three things that are amazing to him.

*<sup>18</sup> "There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand: <sup>19</sup> the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a maiden." Proverbs 30:18-19 NIV*

The words are really about the fourth thing. This was the Hebrew way of emphasizing something, or putting it in perspective. Notice the fourth matter of amazement; "the way of a man with a maiden."

**Agur says this is amazing.** Paul describes it in verse 32 as a **profound mystery.** A thriving marriage is a blessing from God.

God wants to be at the center of your marriage. You do not have the strength or will power to put others before your own selfish desires. **But by putting God at the center of your life, you will find the desire to love others above yourself.**

Marriage calls us to a new and selfless life. God also calls us to a new and selfless life. When God is at the center of our life, God uses everything to make us more like Christ.

Illus: Minister went to talk to non-Christian husband. When he asked if he would like to become a Christian, the man said; "This house couldn't stand two people like here." This woman didn't have God at the center of everything.

Illus: A group of children were asked to explain love. Rebecca, age eight, observed, "When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore, so my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too."

Your marriage can thrive if you will trust God's formula and be obedient to His word. Put him at the center of everything.

Your marriage can be an amazing thing, a profound mystery. With your differences and unique personalities, you can love one another for the rest of your life. You can grow old together and your love can grow stronger with each passing year.

**In a sinful world, salvation happens. In a sinful world, marriage can thrive. Both are amazing!**

## **Conclusion**

Marriage involves SACRIFICE & UNSELFISHNESS! Both are things God is trying to teach us anyway.

Marriage is two sinful people sharing strengths, weaknesses, joys and struggles in a lifelong commitment to each other and to God.

If you are not amazed and moved at the miracle of your love for your spouse, you need to do a heart check with God. **The state of your marriage has as much to say about your relationship with God as it does about your relationship with your spouse.**

If your marriage has grown stale, look in the mirror and ask God how he can use it to transform the person looking back at you. **If you have bitterness in your heart, stop praying for your spouse to change and ask God to change you.**

**The musketeers had a saying, “One for all and all for one.”**

**In Marriage it is, “Each for the other, both for the Lord.”**