

EPHESIANS 5:15-33

[PRELIMINARY REMARKS]

- Today we continue *Interpersonal: Growing Stronger in Our Closest Relationships*.
- Last week: We began with friendship, today we turn to marriage.

[SERIES SETUP]: Two important reminders as we get going.

1. This sermon is for everyone.

- You might be single, dating, married, widowed, divorced—or something else!
- It's good for us all to know what God has to say about marriage.
 - So we can think about it well—without idolizing it or downplaying it.
 - But also so we can help each other out—sometimes we need the perspective of someone who's in a different season.

2. There's a sense in which we're covering a silly amount of ground today.

- You could preach a hundred sermons on marriage!
 - We're not trying to say everything.
 - Instead—like we did with friendship last week—we're asking one thing:
**What is the endgame of marriage—
and how does that end shape the way we love each other now?**
- Before we get into it—let's **pray**.

[INTRODUCTION]

- Do you want to see something funny?
 - Here's me and Rosie on our wedding day.
 - Fantastic, right???
- Statistics around marriage can be tricky, but:
 - Historically, about [90%](#) of Americans get married.
 - And among young adults, marriage remains highly desirable: roughly [one-third](#) are currently married, while about [70%](#) of those who haven't married still say they would like to.
- So, the desire for committed love remains strong—and yet, we also know that the divorce statistics are sobering.
 - About [40%](#) of first marriages will end in divorce.
 - And these aren't just statistics—they're parents, children, friends, our own marriages that didn't work out the way anyone hoped.

- So how do we take this common, healthy, human desire for marriage, and work it out with health and joy?
 - As believers, we turn to God’s word.
 - Let’s see the endgame of marriage—and how that end can shape the way we love each other now.

[Transition]

- Like last week, we’re going to do two things.
 - First, we’ll zoom out and consider the endgame of marriage.
 - Then we’ll come back down to earth to see how that end can help us love each other now.
- Let’s start, then, with the endgame...

[THE ENDGAME OF MARRIAGE]

- One of the mistakes we make when we think about marriage is treating it in isolation—as if it’s separate from the larger story of our lives.
- But biblically, marriage sits inside a much longer story that God is telling:
 - One that begins before we’re born and stretches beyond our death.
 - Marriage isn’t the whole race; it’s just one leg of it.
- That’s why I like to think about *life*—and marriage within it—like a relay race.
- And the race doesn’t begin at the altar; instead the race begins in...

ETERNITY PAST: God set his love upon you.

- Did you know that God loved you before you were born?
 - We say life begins at conception—but in another sense, life begins before it.
 - When God, in his divine imagination, dreamt you up—and loved you.
 - You’ve mattered to him since before you were matter.
- In case that sounds overly sentimental, let’s go to **Eph 1**:
 - **V4:** he [that’s God] chose us in him [that’s Jesus] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.
 - **V5:** In love, he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ.
- Long before you were born—before you had achieved or failed at anything—God loved you.
- And his love had a plan—to adopt us as his children that we might live forever—holy and blameless before him.

[Transition]: But to get there, we had to be born—and so the baton was passed from eternity to your family.

FAMILY: God placed you in a family.

- None of us come into this world alone.
 - God doesn't just drop us into the world and leave us to figure it out!
 - Instead, he placed us in families—with parents, caregivers, and others who love us as he did before we were born.
- We all know this can be complicated.
 - Every family—even the best—has its dysfunctions.
 - For some of us, that's been a source of real grief and pain—and there's space for that here.
- But here's how it's meant to be:
 - Parents—a mom and a dad—make it their mission and their passion—their job and their joy—to help us become all God intends.
 - They do this through the ordinary rhythms of life:
 - Bath times and bedtime stories.
 - First steps and first words.
 - Family prayers and church services.
 - Swimming lessons and your first day at school.
 - Driving lessons and your first date.
 - Through it all—God is at work:
 - Teaching us to grow—to love and trust, cry and laugh, work and rest.
 - And shaping us into maturity—to listen and speak, apologize and forgive, be tender and resilient.

[Transition]: In time we stand on our own two feet—and that's when, for many of us, the baton is passed again.

- Here's how the Bible describes it: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”
- The baton moves from family into marriage...

MARRIAGE: God unites us with a spouse.

- A boy meets a girl. There's a leaving. A cleaving. A becoming one.
 - Now it becomes your mission and passion—your job and joy—to do for each other what your parents once did for you...
 - Help each other become all God intends.
- For most of us, it's the longest leg of the race.
 - Shared meals and beds.
 - Morning routines and long workdays.
 - Celebrations and disappointments.
 - Unspeakable intimacy and perplexing loneliness.
 - The one who completes you and sometimes makes no sense to you.

- Through the ordinary rhythms of married life—God is at work.
 - Teaching us—to love like him, be loved in return, and live like his son.
 - And preparing us—for that day when the baton will pass again...

[Transition]

- Eventually:
 - Our pace slows, the hair grays, the wrinkles form...
 - Until at last, the baton is passed a final time—as one of us lays the other into God’s arms.
- The final leg of the race...

ETERNITY FUTURE: You give each other back to God.

- This is the part we rarely think about—but it is the endgame and the crowning beauty of marriage.
 - We vowed “*till death do us part,*” and death will indeed come.
 - But in God’s hands, it is not an ending—it is a triumph.
- One day, one of you will place the other into God’s arms:
 - Not in defeat, but in hope—not in loss, but in gain.
 - The God who loved you before you were born.
 - The God who shaped you through family.
 - The God who formed you through marriage.
 - Will be the God who welcomes you home, where, as he planned from the beginning, we will live forever—holy and blameless before him.
 - That’s the endgame of marriage: We give each other back to God.
 - Not as who we once were—but more whole, more like God intended—because we shared this life together.
 - In that moment, the race is complete—not lost, but gloriously finished.
- God, let me make it to that day!
 - Where in eternity, Rosie and I will say, “We made it!”
 - And help me love her well now, so that on that day she’ll say, “It was good for me to have been married to you.”

[Transition]

- If that’s the endgame—we give each other back to God, blessed bc we were together—how do we love in light of that end now?
- Let me suggest a few ways—I think we need to do all of these things, but see if one stands out for the season you’re in.

[PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS]

1. Play the long game.

Remember the endgame. Remember eternity. And live in light of that destination now. Consider how practical this is. Amazing things happen when you extend the timeline of your marriage.

- For example, ask yourself: *How important is this fight on the scale of eternity?*
 - Socks on the floor or the thermostat wars—one wants the frozen tundra, the other thinks it should feel tropical.
 - In the moment, these things can feel big. But when you see them as part of a journey that stretches decades—and ultimately, into eternity—they shrink.
- Or ask yourself: *How do I want to love this person on the scale of eternity?*
 - Those things you don't feel like doing—washing dishes, folding the laundry.
 - Those small acts of love matter in the long game.
- Or even the harder moments...
 - Where you're frustrated and hurt, when words are sharp, when you're both far from your best...
 - Even then, the bigger picture helps. With the eternal perspective in mind, you stop fighting each other and start to fight for each other.

Agree together: We're going to do this marriage *now* in a way we'll be proud of *then*.

2. Love unconditionally.

We vowed to finish our leg of the race: "*Till death do us part.*" So, let's decide, with feisty determination, to keep that promise.

To do that—to make it to that holy moment when one of us lays the other into God's arms—we have to agree on this: our love is unconditional. Why? Because life will give us plenty of reasons to quit. Plenty of conditions that could break us apart.

I'm not talking about staying in an abusive situation, but about the normal challenges of marriage and refusing to give up.

We must decide on the front end: We're going to fulfill this vow, no matter what.

Rosie and I will celebrate 25 years of marriage this summer. Honestly? We'd both say it's the hardest and best thing we've ever done. We've had times we didn't know how to move forward—so we moved forward anyway. And I can't tell you how glad I am that we did.

When there's loneliness, hurt, or betrayal—when you don't feel the love—love anyway. Die to yourself. Live for each other. Persevere. Get help. Forgive. Keep going.

Here's the truth: If the only option is to make it work, you'll find a way to make it work—and you'll be eternally grateful that you did.

3. Put each other first.

Our passage calls us to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

The term “submission” is unpopular in our culture; and understandably so, for it has been used to imply that one gender is somehow superior to the other. But Scripture does not teach this. It says: “*Submit to **one another** out of reverence for Christ.*” Submission doesn't belong to one gender—it's for both! Wives submit to husbands; husbands submit to wives. It's mutual.

What does it mean to submit? The term itself is a great one. It means *to take a secondary place or conversely to put the other person first.*

Too often marriage becomes tit-for-tat. You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours. But it's not meant to be transactional—it's love.

Here's the counterintuitive truth: If you want to find life, you must lose it.

When my grandparents were still alive, and my grandma was in the early stages of dementia, one day she snuck out of the house. When my grandfather realized it, he immediately left to go find her. The only problem: he was legally blind. But that's what love does. It puts the other first.

Don't have a list of things you want from your spouse. Instead, focus on how you can put them first. Small acts of service or kindness that will make a difference to their day—even if you're not sure they're doing their part.

And here's the amazing result: If you *both* seek nothing for yourselves, you'll find everything marriage is meant to be *in each other*.

4. Push each other to Jesus.

We've said the ultimate goal of marriage isn't found in the here and now—it's preparation for eternity.

So, let's prepare each other for that eternal marriage with Christ—by encouraging each other toward Jesus now.

Find the small things that work for you both:

- Pray together before bed, share meaningful verses, encourage each other.
- When your spouse is struggling—walk with them, pray with them, gently point them to Christ.

Make it your shared goal to be more like Jesus than you would be without each other.

And here's a surprising result: as you grow closer to Jesus, you grow closer to each other. It's like a triangle: Jesus is the top, and as we grow closer to him, we get closer to each other. Focusing on the ultimate ends up bringing greater intimacy and joy now.

5. Enjoy the ride.

We get one shot at this life—and marriage can be one of God's greatest gifts.

As you prioritize each other, don't forget to have fun together. Remember how this thing got started in the first place.

Reminisce together. Look at old photographs—laugh at how thin you both used to be, or why you ever thought that shirt looked good.

Then build new memories together. Share meals, shows, jokes, and trips. Flirt. Hold hands. Make love. Dream new dreams together. Make plans for the years you have left.

Too often, marriage gets reduced to the necessities—do you need anything from the grocery store, are you picking up the kids, we need to have a budget talk. All those things need to happen, but there's got to be more to it than that. Keep your marriage alive—so you find life together, not somewhere else.

One of our older members told me they've been married 50 years. If you add up the hard times—sickness, struggles, griefs, and trials—she says about 46 of them have been happy. That's pretty good.

Don't forget to enjoy each other as God's gift—make the most of every mile God gives you in this leg of the race.

THE CLOSE

- Which of these things stand out to you?
 - Maybe you've let commitment waver, forgotten to prioritize your spouse, or neglected joy.
 - Why not talk about it with your spouse? Tell them:
 - One thing they're doing well.
 - One area you'd like to grow.
- And whatever you do, don't give up—there's still time—and we can love this way because this is how Jesus loves us.
 - **1:4:** [God] chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.
 - **5:25:** [So] Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶that he might sanctify her... ²⁷so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and blameless.
- Loved by him, may each of us love like him, so all our spouses will say:

“It was good for me to have been married to you.”

- And that is a legacy worth living for.
- That is a marriage worth having.
- That is a race worth running.