

SELECTED PROVERBS

[SCRIPTURE READING]

9:10: *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.*

5:18–19: *Rejoice in the wife of your youth... be intoxicated always in her love.*

12:4: *An excellent wife is the crown of her husband.*

17:14: *The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so quit before the quarrel breaks out.*

18:22: *He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD.*

19:13: *A wife's quarreling is a continual dripping of rain.*

21:19: *Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and nagging wife (NIV).*

26:21: *As charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife.*

31:11: *The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.*

31:29: *Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.*

Eph 5:25: *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*

[PRELIMINARY REMARKS]

- We're in a series called *Foolproof: God's Wisdom for Your Life*.
 - Biblical wisdom shows us how real life can work really well.
 - And it all begins with God: With reverence and awe for who he is and what he's done for us in the gospel.
- Parents, a quick heads up that next week is on **Wisdom & Sex**.
 - We **need to talk** about this: It's one of God's good gifts, Proverbs speaks about it plainly, and if the church is silent—our culture will do the teaching.
 - But we're also mindful that we have **little ears in worship**.
 - If you're not sure your kids are ready for this one, I'd invite you to come at 9:30 while they're in children's ministry.
 - Once you've heard it, you can decide whether you'd like them to listen to it later as a conversation starter at home.
 - **Whatever you decide**, please keep talking with your kids about it: The world is discipling our children, and not in a healthy direction.
 - To help, on Wednesday, October 28, we're hosting an event: *Partnering with Parents: Talking to Kids About Sex*.
 - Melissa Haun, a nurse practitioner with Hope Resource Center—one of our local mission partners—will offer practical, age-appropriate ways to have these conversations at home.
 - Childcare is available—and you can find the details at cspc.net/news.

[Transition]: Before we get to that, this week we've got **Wisdom & Marriage**. We've read the Proverbs already—so let me pray, then we'll get into it.

[INTRODUCTION]: What is your marital status?

- I've always thought the options on those forms are a little simplistic.
 - Here in our church family we have **singles**—and a wide variety of them:
 - Some are single and happily so.
 - Some are single but long for marriage.
 - Some are single again—through divorce or through death.
 - Then we have **engaged couples**:
 - Some are ready for the big day.
 - Most have no idea what they're getting themselves into!
 - And of course we have **married couples**:
 - Some are happily married.
 - Some are struggling profoundly.
 - The form should have seventeen boxes, or maybe just one that says: **It's Complicated.**
- Whatever you are, I **honor you**: Each of us brings a story that makes our church family richer.
- And I hope this sermon will be **helpful for us all**.
 - If you're married, the applications will be obvious.
 - If you're not, this still matters:
 - We all need to understand God's beautiful vision for marriage—especially in a culture that's confused about it.
 - We all have married friends and family members who need our encouragement and counsel.
 - You may get married one day—it's good to think about this beforehand.
 - And by the end of this sermon, I hope we'll see that the greatest marriage in the Bible includes us all.

[Transition]: So, let's get our arms around Proverbs' teaching using the same headings we've used in this series—starting with:

THE POWER OF MARRIAGE

- Marriage has tremendous power.
- And this power cuts both ways.

1. Marriage has tremendous power for HARM.

[State]

- Proverbs is remarkably honest about this: **21:19: Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and nagging wife (NIV).**
- Now men, before you nudge your wife; or before we all fear the Bible is sexist:

- Remember Proverbs is written as a father speaking to his son—that’s why the warning is phrased this way.
- But the same father gives the son the same warning about himself: **26:21: As charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife.**
 - The Hebrew word for “quarrelsome” is the same in both verses.¹
 - Being difficult, unkind, contentious—this isn’t a husband problem or a wife problem.
 - It’s a human problem—either of us can bring it home.
- And the damage can be devastating.
 - **19:13: A wife’s quarreling is a continual dripping of rain**—the same is true of a husband’s.
 - **17:14: The beginning of strife is like letting out water...**

[Illustrate]

- Have you ever had a leak?
 - One time, our water heater leaked—it was in the basement.
 - Which means what?
 - We didn’t see it till there was water everywhere.
 - By the time we found it, the accumulation of small drips left us needing huge repair.
- Water can bring life—or it can do incredible damage.
- Marriage is the same.

[Apply]

- It’s not usually one big blowup that destroys everything—it’s the steady drip:
 - The sarcastic edge or eyeroll.
 - The correction in front of friends.
 - The silent keeping of score.
- Drip by drip, we tear each other down.
- Am I the drip in my home?

Marriage has tremendous power for HARM.

2. Marriage has tremendous power for GOOD.

[State]

- **12:4: An excellent wife is the crown of her husband...**
- **18:22: He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD.**
 - Your spouse is God’s gift to you...
 - And you are God’s gift to them.
- And in his economy, you have an incredible capacity to bless each other.
 - You can be each other’s comfort and strength.
 - The hand that holds, the voice that steadies, the friend who laughs.

[Illustrate]

- Tim Keller once made the point that if the whole world thinks you're awesome but your spouse thinks you're a loser—you feel like a loser. But if the whole world thinks you're a loser and your spouse thinks you're awesome—you feel awesome.²
- We have a disproportionate influence over each other.
- God has designed it that way.

[Apply]

- Again, it's not normally one grand moment or one huge romantic gesture.
 - It's the smile when they walk in the room.
 - It's the word of encouragement when they're down.
 - It's being willing to let the small things go.
- Little by little we build each other up.
- Am I a source of life in my home?

Marriage has tremendous power for GOOD.

[Transition]

- If marriage has the potential for harm or for good—how do we make sure ours is working for good?
- That takes us to our second point: 1) The Power of Marriage; and now...

THE BEST MARRIAGES—What a wise marriage looks like

- Let me give you three marks that stand out in Proverbs.
- And we'll see they're not just a list, but a movement...

1. First, the best marriages are built on COMMITMENT.

[State]

- The Bible's word for this is **covenant**.
 - In **Mal 2:14** a wife is called **your companion and your wife by covenant**.
 - While in **Pro 2:17** the unfaithful spouse **forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God**.
- A covenant is a binding promise that's made before God.
 - It's not a **contract**: *I'll stay as long as you hold up your end*.
 - It's a **commitment**: *I'll stay—for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do us part*.
 - It's an always-and-forever kind of promise.
 - Where we agree to stick together no matter what.

[Illustrate]: And this kind of **commitment** is essential if any marriage is going to make it.

- Why? Because life gives us plenty of opportunities to come apart.
 - Sometimes it's our **circumstances**: Losing a child, financial pressures, work stress.
 - Sometimes it's our own **stuff**: Selfishness, discontent, sin.

- And sometimes it's just the journey of **life**:
 - I'm married to my fourth woman—but all of them have been Rosie.
 - Over the years we've grown and changed so much, it's like we're both new people—and it takes work not to drift apart.
- Here's the point:
 - Circumstances change. Feelings fluctuate.
 - But **commitment** holds you together while they do.

[Apply]

- Two careful words here:
 - If you're in a marriage where you're not safe, commitment does not mean staying in danger. Please talk to one of our pastors this week.
 - If your marriage has ended:
 - There are biblical grounds for divorce (again, reach out to us if you need to talk).
 - And if you're the one who failed—there's grace.
- But for most of us—in the normal ups and downs of marriage—we need the highest level of commitment.
 - A feisty determination, a dose of gospel defiance.
 - To say: *We're going to make this thing work.*
- Do you need that reminder today?
 - Has your commitment begun to wobble—are you tempted by someone online or by the guy at work?
 - Or maybe it's subtler than that:
 - You're in the house, but your heart's checking out.
 - Or you're tired—and not pursuing your spouse like you once did.
- Let's all commit to commitment:
 - To fighting for our marriage instead of fighting each other.
 - To investing in our marriage and doing the work.
 - To choosing each other—and never giving up.

The best marriages are built on commitment.

[Transition]

- And inside that **commitment**, something deeper can grow.
- Built on commitment...

2. The best marriages grow in INTIMACY.

[State]

- The Bible's word for this is **companionship**.
 - In **2:17**, a husband is called his wife's **companion**—the same word Proverbs uses for your closest friend.³
 - And in **31:11**, a wife is the one her husband **trusts** with all his heart.
- The happy idea here is that marriage is meant to be more than commitment.
 - The point isn't merely to stay together.

- It's to develop close friendship. Deep trust. That's intimacy.
 - Your spouse is the person who knows you best.
 - Your spouse is the person you're safest with.
 - Your spouse is your person.

[Illustrate]: Many marriages start this way, but again—life has a way of pulling us apart.

- Things get **busy**, and you end up living like roommates.
- Or **kids** come along, and you end up living like business partners:
 - The calendars are synced, the carpool is covered, the bills are paid.
 - But you can't remember the last time you played like friends.

[Apply]

- Don't neglect your relationship.
 - After your relationship with God, your marriage needs to come first.
 - Even before your kids.
- That might sound backwards but we all know it's one of the best things we can do for our children:
 - Kids feel secure when they see mum and dad laughing together, hugging in the kitchen, and even walking out the door for date night.
 - Of course they complain about all these things, but it does them good.
- Commit to connecting:
 - Get past the logistical conversations to find out what's going on in each other's hearts.
 - Take ten minutes every day without phones where you look each other in the eye and hold hands.
 - Prioritize date night—whether that's going for dinner or just going for a walk.
- Don't just manage life together. Share this life together.

The best marriages grow in intimacy.

[Transition]: Commitment, intimacy—and because of them, point 3...

3. The best marriages overflow with JOY.

[State]

- Proverbs is pretty clear about this:
 - **5:18: Rejoice in the wife of your youth.**
 - **5:19: Be intoxicated always in her love.**
- Now we're capturing the movement of these points: Marriage is more than shared commitment, and more than shared intimacy—it's shared joy.

[Illustrate]: I'll never forget how one of my mentors disciplined me in this. He used to say:

- ***Your disposition toward your spouse should be one of celebration.***
 - No marriage starts out critical:

- We meet, fall in love—then dream about all the ways we can change each other!
 - *“I take you to be my lawfully wedded spouse, to have and to hold, to change and to critique...”*
- Yet somehow, along the way, that tone can become the norm.
 - Of course we still love each other.
 - But we spend a lot of time trying to modify each other’s behavior.
- Why do we do this?
 - For me, it’s because I’m self-centered.
 - I want things to be convenient for me.
 - But that’s my ugly immaturity.
- The Bible calls us to something so much better:
 - Don’t try to form your spouse into your image.
 - See them as they are—in God’s image—and celebrate who he has made them to be.

[Apply]

- Proverbs makes this super practical by inviting us to speak this celebration over our spouse.
 - Listen to how the husband in **Pro 31** praises his wife.
 - **31:29: Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.**
- Don’t focus on the things you’d change about your spouse—instead, focus on how they excel—then tell them about it.⁴
 - *You’re more beautiful to me now than the day we got married.*
 - *I love how you provide for our family or care for our kids.*
 - *I know we have some struggles but being married to you is a privilege.*
- Is your disposition toward your spouse one of celebration?
 - When you walk in the room, what does your spouse expect?
 - Complaint and critique?
 - Or joy and delight?
- I want to be my wife’s biggest fan.
 - If you asked her: *Who believes in you like no one else? Who thinks you’re the best?*
 - I want her answer to be immediate: *My husband.*
 - And I want that for every marriage in this room.

The best marriages overflow with joy.

[Transition]: Commitment. Intimacy. Joy.

- Where do we get the power to love like that?
- I hope at this point in the series the answer is becoming obvious: 1) The Power of Marriage; 2) The Best Marriages; and finally...

THE GREATEST MARRIAGE

[State]

- We can only love like that because we have been loved like that.
- **Eph 5:25:** Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.
- Every marriage is a small picture of a greater one—that's ours whether we're married or single.

[Illustrate]: Jesus is the perfect embodiment of all three:

- **Commitment:** Though we are faithless, he is faithful—and loves us anyway.
- **Intimacy:** He knows us exactly as we are—and loves us still.
- **Joy:** He endured the cross for the joy of making us his own.

[Apply]

- And it's this gospel that enables us to love the same way in response.
- How **have** you been loved by Jesus? How **are** you loved by Jesus?
 - Not with reluctance or disdain—but with commitment, intimacy, and joy.
 - Now we can love others—including our spouses—the same way.
- **If you're struggling:** Remember it's not too late.
 - Don't throw in the towel and don't lose hope.
 - God, who made you one with himself, can still make you one with each other.

[THE CLOSE]

- Let me invite us all to try something this week: Go out for a meal you can afford—a nice restaurant or Taco Bell.
- And do these three things together:
 - Reaffirm your **commitment**. Tell each other that no matter how things are going, you're in this for the long haul.
 - Deepen your **intimacy**. Find out what's going on in each other's hearts and souls.
 - Speak words of **joy**. Tell your spouse one thing you love about them today.

[CONCLUSION]

- On my deathbed, I want my bride to look back and say that it was good for her to have been married to me.
- What do I need to do **now** so that that will be true **then**?
- Loved by Jesus, we can learn to love each other well.

We can build wise marriages because Christ has made us his bride.

RESOURCES AND ENDNOTES

Resources

This list contains some of the resources that were used to prepare this sermon series. Check them out if you want to dig a little deeper.

- Derek Kidner, *Proverbs*.
- Tim Keller, *Proverbs: True Wisdom for Living*.
- Ray Ortlund, *Proverbs: Wisdom That Works*.
- Logos Bible Software.

Endnotes

¹ Both verses use the same Hebrew noun, *madon* (“strife, quarrel”), in the plural: literally “a woman of quarrels” (21:19) and “a man of quarrels” (26:21). The spelling varies in the manuscript tradition (*midyanim/midonim*), but it is the same word.

² I first heard this idea from Tim Keller, though I can’t recall the specific sermon or talk; the wording here is my own. For his written treatment on the power of marriage, see Timothy and Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*.

³ The Hebrew *alluph* (“companion,” 2:17) is the same word translated “close friends” in 16:28 and 17:9.

⁴ This application is adapted from Ray Ortlund, *Proverbs: Wisdom That Works*, 151.