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Desperate For Better or Worse **October 16, 2005**

Why is Desperate Housewives such a hit show? Is it because we can relate? There's Susan, the divorced single mom who will go to extraordinary lengths for love, and Lynette, the ex-career woman who's traded the boardroom for boredom. There's Gabrielle, the ex-model with everything she's ever wanted, but still searching for more, never getting enough, and Bree, the Martha Stewart on steroids who interrupted her husband's funeral because she didn't like the tie he was being buried in. And it's not just the housewives who are desperate.

The fact is, marriage is one of the biggest risks anyone ever takes. Listen to a couple other quotes from another desperate household:

In the middle of cooking dinner, Ricky asks Fred "Hey listen, do you know anything about rice?"

Fred "Well, I had it thrown at me on one of the darkest days of my life."

Ricky: After all, if this guy is fortunate enough to still be single—

Lucy: WHAT?

Ricky: I didn't mean it that way. I mean, if he's smart enough to still be single—

Lucy: HOW'S THAT?!

Ricky: There must be some word that describes what I'm trying to say.

Lucy: THE WORD IS STUPID.

Ricky: All right. Stupid. If the guy's stupid enough to still be single, leave him alone.

Lucy: That's better.

Ricky: After all, ignorance is bliss.

Lucy: Husbands make me so mad. They're always promising you they'll do something for you and then they don't do it. (ALL MEN WHO QUALIFY RAISE YOUR HAND!)

Ethel: Well, that's one problem I never have with Fred.

Lucy: You don't?

Ethel: Nope. He never promises to do anything for me in the first place.

Ricky: Listen Fred, I got an awful problem on my hands.

Fred: You should have thought of that before you married her!

Marriage is one of the biggest risks anyone ever takes, no matter how well-acquainted the two might be. To open your heart to another imperfect person, to share with them everything, and to entrust yourself to them is a huge undertaking.

In Florida, an elderly couple married a long time was having company for dinner. After dinner, the wives went into the kitchen, while the husbands were at the table. One gentleman was telling the other of a great restaurant they had been to earlier that week, but he couldn't remember the name of it. He asked his friend, "What's the name of that flower that smells so good?" His friend said "You mean a rose?" And he said "Yeah, that's it. Hey Rose! What was the name of that restaurant?"

The good news is, the Bible has a lot to say about marriage. Marriage is a theological state. In a Godly marriage is

represented the relationship between Jesus Christ and the church. Jesus Christ is the bridegroom who will come and the church is his body on earth, making herself ready for his return. A godly marriage is also a witness to what the love of Christ is like.

Then why all the issues? Why is it so difficult? Why is marriage such a hotbed of problems for people? The Bible passages about marriage point to the very same problems we deal with today. Listen to one of the most famous and most controversial. Ephesians 5:22-33. Paul wrote these words to the believers in Ephesus. Now, he wouldn't write a letter of guidelines if things were peachy. So listen to what his words imply:

Ephesians 5:22-33 “Out of respect for Christ, be courteously reverent to one another.(WHY WERE THEY BEING RUDE?) Wives, understand and support your husbands in ways that show your support for Christ. (WHY NO SUPPORT?) The husband provides leadership to his wife the way Christ does to his church, not by domineering but by cherishing. (THOSE HUSBANDS WHO WERE SHOWING LEADERSHIP WERE DOING IT THE WORLD'S WAY—ALL WRONG). So just as the church submits to Christ as he exercises such leadership, wives should likewise submit to their husbands (THERE IT IS—SUBMISSION! NOT MANY BRIDES PICK THESE PASSAGES TO BE READ AT THEIR WEDDINGS...)

Husbands, go all out in your love for your wives, exactly as Christ did for the church (IN OTHER WORDS, THE GUYS WEREN'T MAKING MUCH OF AN EFFORT. SO PAUL IS SAYING HUSBANDS, LIVE TO DIE FOR YOUR WIVES. AS HARD AS SUBMISSION IS, TRY THIS ONE!)—a love marked by giving, not getting. (THE SELF-CENTERNESS THING IS NOTHING NEW). Christ's love makes the church whole. (YOU MEAN THERE WERE DIVISIONS IN THE EARLY CHURCH?) Christ's words evoke her beauty. Everything he does and says is designed to bring the best out in her, dressing her in dazzling white silk, radiant with holiness. And that is how husbands ought to love their wives. They're really doing themselves a favor—since they're already “one” in marriage.

No one abuses his own body, does he? No, he feeds and pampers it. That's how Christ treats us, the church, since we are a part of his body. And this is why a man leaves his father and mother and cherishes his wife. No longer two, they become “one flesh.” This is a huge mystery, and I don't pretend to understand it all. What is clearest to me is the way Christ treats the church. And this provides a good picture of how each husband is to treat his wife, loving himself in loving her, and how each wife is to honor her husband.”

Marriage is one of the biggest risks anyone ever takes, no matter how well-acquainted the two might be. To open your heart to another imperfect person, to share with them everything, and to entrust yourself to them is a huge undertaking. You are entering into an earthly expression of the love of God for His people!

No wonder things are so crazy. No wonder we fail! We aren't anywhere near where God would have us be as a couple! Now, those of us who are married, before you look at all the ways your spouse wrecks the whole “Jesus-and-the-church” formula, realize these few things:

- Your spouse is a direct reflection on your capacity to love.
- If you are trying to build intimacy with another person before you have done the hard work of getting whole on your own, all your relationships become an attempt to complete yourself.
- You can't expect a person who is not pursuing a closer relationship with Christ to act like they are. You can't expect them to act “Christian.” That may be you; that may be your spouse.
- If you are married to a non-believer, realize they don't have the spiritual resources to change. But have hope too, because first, God has more invested in them than you do, and second, in 1st Cor. 7:14 “the Christian wife brings holiness to her marriage, and the Christian husband brings holiness to his marriage. Otherwise, your children would not have a godly influence, but now they are set apart for him.” (NLT)

If you are looking to your marriage to make you “whole,” realize that you're looking to the wrong source for your solution. Maybe you've never realized that you can only be whole through the salvation made available through Jesus Christ. Maybe it's time you put your whole trust in him.

The Bible says there's a spiritual element to the mystery of marriage. Christian spirituality is interesting. It is not spirituality in rejection of the physical reality of our world, as it is in many of the other world religions. Our spiritual elements are discovered in really practical ways—water, bread, relationships, knowing God's Word and putting flesh on it. This is because our core belief as Christians is that God came to us "in the flesh" as Christ Jesus of Nazareth. That's Christianity. (Read the Gospel of John, chapter 1—"the Word was with God and the Word was God...and the Word became flesh"). The same applies to marriage. To discover the spiritual element of your marriage, YOU MUST EMPTY YOURSELF of the need to CHANGE the other person and start doing practical things. Here's some more good news: It doesn't matter where you are beginning from, or where your mate is beginning from.

Your goal is to put Christ at the center of your marriage. Let Him be the one you seek to please. When Paul wrote these words, they were even more revolutionary. Instead of demanding that women only exist to meet her husband's needs, she is a person of equal worth and value. Instead of demanding that she live for him, he begins to live for her! Rather than keeping her under, he seeks to lift her up as the rightful object of his love and care. When you argue there is no "winner." Jesus is to be the winner of every fight, and the reason to make up when you're angry. Archie and Margaret Boone (parents of Pat Boone) changed some attitudes when they said "Make your home look like a wagon wheel. Put Christ at the hub. Make him the center of your lives. Then, as you follow the line of the spokes, notice that as they get closer to the hub, they grow closer to one another. This will work for you even if you're opposites in personality." So we're looking at some practical ways to express the mystery of Christian marriage.

First, to discover the Spiritual Element to your marriage, commit. Commit yourself to making your marriage the primary human relationship of your life. 1 Cor 14:1 "Make love your #1 aim." For some of us we need to "Leave and Cleave." Leave behind any other relationships in order to cleave to our spouse. You are no longer a single person. You can no longer think like a single person, but rather two-as-one.

Second, to discover the Spiritual Element to your marriage, be a Giver not a Taker: Eph. 5:1-2 "Be imitators of God. Live a life of love."

Third, treat your mate as you want to be treated.

- o Guys, If your wife doesn't treat you as she should,...be grateful!!!
- o How do YOU want to be treated in this moment? Live it out for her...or him.
- o I must put myself in your place.
- Give your mate triple A treatment: attention, appreciation, affirmation.
- o Turn the TV off! Make eye contact. Really say thank you, even for the little things. Compliment each other frequently. Can you remember the last compliment you received from your spouse? MARRIAGES DIE FROM WHAT'S NOT SAID.
- SERVE your mate in love. Express it! We don't have to have a reason to show love. Find your mate's love language: touch, time, words, gifts, service.

Fourth, to discover the spiritual element to your marriage, take the time to enjoy and love one another.

- o Even vacations get overbooked! You can come back from your vacation needing a vacation!
- o Cultivate it. (It's sort of like weeding: A little time every day sure makes the garden go better.) And how much more important are the relationships in your life than any hobby or thing. Make time for your relationship a top priority
- o Ask 'em out frequently, especially after you're married! Go on date nights. Be creative. GET A LIFE!
- As I was thinking of what people today are desperate for, I couldn't get away from how people are DESPERATE FOR MARGIN in their lives. Like margin on a page, you and I fill our lives to the point where we leave no room for margin. The words spill off the page, leaving what's left on the page unreadable and confusing. Create some margin in your life. Time for coffee; or a walk; or a change of plans. Your love needs this. If this is you, drop something this week. (As much as I hate to say it) even if it's an extra-curricular church commitment!

Fifth, talk out CONFLICT and work through to a compromise. I admit, I hate compromise. Early on in my own marriage, when Leigh and I would bump up against each other, I wouldn't compromise. I would side step around

her and the issue, and play by a different set of rules. I would leave the issue, and leave Leigh wondering what just happened. I've come to realize the wisdom to be had through compromise. Research shows the single biggest predictor of success in marriage is how a couple manages conflict.

Paul writes to the Roman Christians in 12:18 "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." How many conditions can he preface that will? AKA—"Give it a shot". honest, conflict is inevitable. Karl Jung said "Conflict is like fire—it burns and it sheds light." And II Cor. 5:18-19 reminds us "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation." In conflict, the goal is to understand, not to win. When you both understand the other, you allow Jesus to be the winner of the argument.

What NOT to do: Avoid

1. Criticism—It cuts and damages. And it takes many forms, from complaining to whining.
2. Defensiveness—Someone whoa jellyfish in armor
3. Contempt—when you diagnose the problem (in the other person!) Let me tell you your problem. Contempt is also the "ole eye-roll." (Or in my case, the heavy sigh.) It's dangerous because it belittles.
4. Stonewalling—shut down, withdrawal.

(Some of you are saying "If I can't do any of that in our conflicts, what's left?")

What TO DO:

1. Remember your spouse is never the enemy. There is an enemy who is out to destroy anything that points people to God. Satan loves to destroy marriages, because marriages are supposed to represent the love between Christ and the church. There is an enemy, but it is never your spouse.
2. Short circuit with humility. Jesus himself said "I came not to be served, but to serve."
3. Access the intensity. On a scale of 1-10, are you talking about "I'd rather you didn't," or are you talking "over my dead body?" Access it, and deal with it accordingly.
4. Use "I" messages: In situation X, when you do Y, I feel Z. It really does help!

As I think about my own mistakes, and how I've failed Leigh, I realize most of my mistakes are because I'm not "putting flesh" or expressing the love I do feel. I am loving her only in a general way. However, to be loved in general will never meet the deepest needs of our lives. We must be loved in particular. Jesus, "in the flesh" is to be the center of our marriages, even as we live out his love with our spouses. And may the true desperateness in your household be your desperate longing for Christ to be witnessed in your marriage.