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Marriage Matters

Family Matters Series

Ephesians 5:22-33

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Last week we made the case that family matters. Family is where you formulate your view of God. It probably even more dramatically affects how you live out your Christian life than any other factor. But families are complicated. You have lots of relationships and they really get complicated. At the center of all that is marriage. If the marriage is functioning and healthy, then the family tends to be functioning and healthy. But if the marriage is dysfunctional, if the marriage is unhealthy, guaranteed it's going to mess up the rest of the family. So if family matters, then marriage matters, and that's what we want to talk about this morning.

Last week from Genesis 1 and 2—and I'm not going to go back and revisit all those texts, so if you want to open to that and follow along, you can—I want to take the same basic verses and just advance the thinking a little bit. We talked about in Genesis 1 that we as people are made in the image of God. There is this three-part statement: That we were created by God—that goes to design (we'll talk about that in just a minute). We're made in the image of God; we're made with the ability and responsibility to image God to the world. That's what sets us apart from all other creation. And then thirdly it says "...male and female, in the image of God". So we have an introduction to our sexuality and at least a hint that it has something to do with the image, or the most intimate expression of that image.

If you go into Genesis 2 you have this very unique description of how Adam was created and how Eve was created. We talked at length about the difference and what that represents—that ultimately Eve was created out of Adam as a picture that we as people, made in the image of God, were created out of God. Therefore you have this design element that creates this picture of the relationship between God and His people. So the text says, "And for this reason... (in other words, because you're designed this way)...then man and woman shall leave father and mother and the two of them shall be joined together and they shall become one flesh." And of course that's the recipe for marriage and, "Be fruitful and multiply," extends that out to family.

One of the things we have to wrestle with is in Genesis 2:24—in the midst of this discussion—there is a strong emphasis on the sexual union within the context of marriage. The words *joined together* and also *the two shall become one flesh* both have strong sexual overtones. As a matter of fact, if you don't think that's true, you just have to look at how Paul uses that verse in 1 Corinthians, Chapter 6 and, clearly, he affirms that is the case. So one of the things we have to wrestle with is, "Why did God make us this way?" If you're talking about the fact that we just randomly, by chance, kind of evolved and became who we are, that would be a different discussion. But if we believe God is involved in the process and God has made us in His image, then one of the things we have to wrestle with is, "Why has He made us this way? Why has He made us as sexual beings and why do we have this strong sexual drive that seems to be so obvious and so prevalent and in many ways so destructive in our culture?" There's a tendency to think that somehow this sexual side of us just kind of came out of nowhere. It caught God off guard and He's embarrassed by it and so we shouldn't talk about it and we just don't know what to do with it.

It's a huge mistake that churches are unwilling to talk about this. We're sexual beings because God made us that way and there's a purpose to it and there's a strong theological purpose to it that's really important that we understand. So why did God make us this way? The text is basically saying that God created a man and a woman to come together in marriage to be the laboratory where we learn and experience and understand what it means to know God. And the most intimate expression of that would be the sexual expression that, in essence, is kind of at the core of marriage—that I get some sense of the intimacy that God wants to share with me.

Now one of the ways you see this is in the Old Testament, the word *know*. To "know" God is exactly the same Hebrew word used for a husband to "know" his wife sexually. Now if you have a King James Bible you see that in Genesis, Chapter 4. The beginning of the chapter says, "Adam *knew* Eve." That's exactly the same word that's used throughout the Old Testament for God knowing His people. Now if you have a more modern translation, it usually says something like "had relations with" which, in my opinion, is unfortunate because you lose the sense—the double meaning of the word. You get into the New Testament and the Greek word for knowing God is exactly the same Greek word for a husband knowing his wife sexually. So it's true both in the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament. The language is saying this is the correlation—to understand that that's just a taste of ultimately what we experience with God.

I would define the sexual drive this way: The sexual drive is the soul's longing to be intimate with God. If you were to ask the question, "Why did God make us this way?" the answer is, "Because just like hunger and just like thirst, there's something within us that longs to have this need satisfied." So God created this environment where we would experience intimacy and, at the most intense part of that, is a taste of the ultimate intimacy that God wants to experience with people made in His image.

When I experience that with Patty, it's a very meaningful thing but she cannot fully satisfy me. This is really important to understand. If Patty was God, she could fully satisfy me but she's not. She gives me a taste, but I find myself wanting more. More is not found in more with her. More is found in my relationship with God. God says, "I'll give you a taste but she's not God. She's not a substitute for Me. She just gives you enough to say, 'That was really meaningful, but I want more'". *More* then is found in my relationship with God. So if you think of the cycle of marriage, it basically goes like this: I get my love from God. Out of that love the overflow goes to Patty. We experience intimacy that is very meaningful but it makes me hunger for more. More is found in my relationship with God which gives me more overflow, which gives me more intimacy, which causes me to want more, which is found in God, and that's the cycle that should define a marriage. That's how God has designed us.

One of the places where this is really important to understand is with singles. Whether you're talking about adult singles or teenagers, it's very hard to live sexually pure in a sexually-contaminated culture. If you understand that what's going on—what that drive is—is actually my soul's longing to be intimate with God, you can actually give your soul what it wants. And the more you give your soul what it wants, the more equipped you are to live pure in a very contaminated culture. Parents that tell their teenagers, "You need to wait until you're married in order to have sex," but do not teach them how to pursue intimacy with God, do them a great disservice. You're setting the standard but you're not equipping them, and chances are they will not make it. This is a very difficult culture to remain pure. The only way people are going

to remain pure is if they learn to give their soul what it wants. And once the soul is satisfied in God, it equips me. It gives me what I need to remain pure in a very contaminated culture.

You have this beautiful design by God that sexuality is meant to be kind of this taste of the intimacy my soul ultimately wants with God. The key to understanding this whole concept is to understand (we talked about it last week) that we as people are made in the image of God. And the image of God is really the distinguishing mark for us versus the animal kingdom. God has made us in such a way that we experience our sexuality in a lifelong one-flesh relationship, celebrating relationship that only people made in the image of God can celebrate. That's very different from the animal kingdom that basically just procreates.

When you think about what the culture is inviting us into—the culture of the world of Hollywood—basically they try to present themselves as being sophisticated, as being liberated, as really experiencing freedom. But what they're actually saying is, "We're inviting you to take the image of God— to trash it, to discard it, to act like the animals, to take the relational bond out of it and simply act the same as the barnyard animals." There's nothing sophisticated about that. There's nothing free about that. As a matter of fact, almost every survey out there would say that's the route to bondage and heartache and despair.

The reason God protects sexuality is because it's so valuable. God is not some sort of a prude. God is the one that invented it. God is the one who is the source of pleasure; God is the author of pleasure. He gets it; He made us this way. But He also says, "This is so special, it's so powerful, it's so valuable that it needs to be guarded and protected." We basically trash and misuse those things we devalue. We tend to protect and take care of those things that we value. Sexuality is no different.

Now for years we've been saying theologically, psychologically and emotionally that sex outside of marriage is disastrous. What's interesting is, in the last ten years, there has been tremendous advances in the neurosciences—actually trying to figure out what goes on in the human brain—so now we'll add one more category. We can discuss this from the standpoint of neurology. Interestingly enough, because God has designed us according to Genesis 2:24 ..."the two shall become one flesh". He's actually installed software in our brains to make that happen. Now I'm not a scientist and I'm going to try and distill this down and grossly oversimplify it, but I want to mention three very interesting discoveries. The first one is they found that when people enter into a sexual relationship, they release a chemical called dopamine. The main thing to understand about that is that it's the same chemical that's released when you have a drug addiction. It's an addicting chemical. The idea is it finds me longing for more. It's exactly what we've said for years theologically—that my brain actually says, "That was really nice but I want more". There's an addictive side to that. As we talked about before, *more* is found in a relationship with God. I'm basically hardwired not to be satisfied but to find that I still long for something more, which then again drives me to my relationship with God.

The second discovery was that when a man and a woman enter into a sexual relationship, both of them release chemicals in their brain. For the man and the woman they are different chemicals, but both of them basically facilitate the brain saying, "This is the person I want to bond with." In other words when you ask the question, "How do two become one?" it's probably a complicated discussion but, neurologically speaking, the brain releases a chemical and says, "Okay, that's it. That's the one I'm going to bond with," and it facilitates

this process in the brain that creates this emotional bond that just becomes stronger and stronger and stronger over time.

Now here's the problem: Every time you have a sexual relationship with a different partner, it confuses the brain because immediately the brain says, "Whoa…wait a minute. That's not the person I bonded with. That's somebody different. Now I'm confused. I don't know what to do. I have to bond with that person." And each time that happens, it creates more confusion. And what they've found neurologically is, it begins to diminish the brain's ability to bond in a healthy, intimate relationship and there is no evidence that there is any corrective. In other words, each time that happens, the brain's ability to connect and maintain a healthy relationship gets less and less and less. The brain doesn't know the difference between, "This is my lifelong partner and this is a one-night affair." It just throws the brain into confusion from which it does not recover.

Thirdly is very similar. When you enter into that sexual relationship, the brain actually creates a pathway through the brain to connect with that person. Basically again, God hardwired us in such a way to facilitate that *two shall become one*. All that lines up perfectly with Genesis 2:24. The longer that I'm with that person, the more efficient that pathway becomes—which means the more fulfilling that relationship becomes.

Now every survey that I've ever seen would be counterintuitive to what we hear from the culture. Every survey says that the most deeply satisfying and meaningful sexual relationship is found in marriage and the least satisfying is found in some sort of overnight affair. Now what neuroscience tells us is the reason for that is because the brain is connecting with a one-flesh partner and creating a more and more and more efficient route, which creates more satisfaction and more pleasure in the experience. Now here again is the problem: Every time you have a sexual relationship with someone who is not that one-flesh partner, it also creates a pathway and again begins to confuse the brain and begins to diminish the other pathways.

The best way to explain it is to imagine a garden hose hooked to the faucet and, at the end of that hose, is a sprinkler. When that hose runs straight to the sprinkler, the sprinkler has the maximum amount of flow. If you save yourself for marriage and pour yourself into your one-flesh partner, that's the maximum you could ever have. That's as good as it gets right there. But each time you have a sexual relationship with someone else, it's like taking a nail and poking a hole in that hose. It creates an alternate pathway that begins to diminish the amount of water that flows to the end of the sprinkler. Each one of those diminishes the flow and neuroscience would say, "There's no repair for that". You just diminished what you ultimately could have experienced with a lifelong one-flesh partner. This is so important to understand in a culture where we're promoting things like a "hook-up" culture or "friends with benefits" or "friends with privileges". There's this whole philosophy out there that you can have your sexual relationship—no harm/no foul—and eventually, when you get married, you can narrow it down to one partner and it will all work out fine. Neuroscience is saying your brain won't work that way. Every time you have a sexual relationship you're poking a hole in that hose and you're diminishing your ultimate capacity.

The sobering reality is, "If you've had multiple sexual relationships, can you be forgiven by God?" "Absolutely you can!" "Can you still experience a deeply satisfying marriage relationship?" "Yes, you can." "Can you experience everything in terms of the depth of intimacy with your one-flesh partner that you could have experienced had you have waited?"

"No." There are consequences to our choices and there are consequences to believing the lie. Every experience diminishes what you ultimately could have experienced. What neuroscience is teaching us is that God actually knew what He was talking about. Genesis 2:24 is right. God intended for this very special gift to be used with a lifelong one-flesh partner and not treated as if it's some sort of extracurricular activity. The whole understanding of how God has made us and wired us is really important to understand.

Now I'm going to move off this subject and talk more about the larger picture of marriage, but I want to say one final thing for people that are still sorting out, "Who has it right, God or the culture?" The 60's kind of started this sexual revolution and what we were promised *was* a revolution. We were promised a freedom. We were promised pleasure. We were promised that it would be so much more. And God and the Bible and Christians were painted as rather uptight—kind of puritanical, prudish, and certainly experiencing less. So here we are in the 21st century. As enlightened as we are, one of the biggest problems today around the world is that little girls are being kidnapped, stolen away and sold into the sex trafficking industry so they can be used and abused and discarded. Does that sound like freedom? Does that sound like liberation? That is the natural consequence to what the culture believes. And around the world there is one group of people that are rising up and saying, "This must stop!" Those are the people of God who value sexuality, as God intended it. So *you* answer the question: "Who do you think has it right—the culture or God?"

We want to talk more about marriage beyond that. If you have a Bible, turn to Ephesians, Chapter 5. Obviously marriage is far more than just the sexual relationship, but I would say this: I do think it's a healthy barometer. In other words I think, for a husband and a wife, if you have problems in the bedroom, I guarantee you that you have problems outside of the bedroom. And that's just a wakeup call that, "We have problems we need to address." If you have a very strong, safe, intimate, meaningful relationship in the bedroom, it's probably safe to say you have a good healthy marriage. So it is a bit of a barometer of saying how we are doing.

We talked last week about the fact that the picture is meant to be a picture of God and His people. You see that throughout the Old Testament. God is the husband; His people are the wife and that imagery is used consistently. When you get into the New Testament it's Christ and His church—but it's the same imagery—which then goes to the assigned roles: the role of the husband and the role of the wife. This is an area where there's a tremendous amount of confusion and, in many circles, a tremendous amount of hostility. What did God actually intend? We want to pick it up in Ephesians 5, starting in verse 22. Listen for how consistent this discussion is with what we talked about last week from Genesis 1 and 2:

> **Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their own husbands in everything.** (*NASB, Ephesians 5:22-24)

What you hear there, if you look for it, is the imagery that we found in Genesis 1 and 2—that there are assigned roles and they're meant to be a picture of God and His people, Christ and His church. In other words, God has created marriage to be this drama that lives out the reality of this relationship that God wants to have with people made in His image. That's the point of the roles. When you see, for example, **Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord**, there's a tendency, for example, for a husband to say, "You don't really emphasize that part. You know, you

need to obey me like you'd obey God Himself." And it's kind of used as this authority thing and that really is missing the point. It's saying to the wife that you need to respond to your husband and rightly picture what it looks like for us to respond to the Lord. In other words it's saying, "That's what you're picturing," —same thing with the husbands. You are to represent Christ as head of the church and Savior of the body. So what does that mean? Well, let's see if we can figure it out here. Verse 25:

> **Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.** (Vs. 25-27)

It is interesting that in that part of the text the focus is still by far more on Christ than the husband. It's still ultimately saying Christ is the one that is exalted. The husband is just supposed to represent that. So the husbands are to represent Christ as the head of the church. So what does that mean? There's a lot of discussion about what ***head*** means. Some want to promote a view basically that says there are no roles—that that just simply means *source*—that the woman came out of the man. Now I don't think that's correct for a couple of reasons. One is there's just simply no evidence that this Greek word ever meant that. So that's a pretty good reason right there. But beyond that, even if they could make their case—if you go back to our discussion last week—it is true that the woman came out of the man, just as we came out of God as his creation, you still end up in the same place: that the reason God created that way was to make a point. There are assigned roles, so it really doesn't change anything.

There's a tendency for certain circles to define *headship* basically as, "The husband is the one in charge. He is the one who has the authority. He is the one who calls the shots. He's the one who runs the show." And there are certain circles where that's really prevalent. But we need to be careful with that because that really isn't what the text says. Nowhere does the text say that, as the husband, I assume all of the roles of Jesus, where I now basically am Jesus in every way. A husband may say, "Well of course I'm in charge. Isn't Jesus in charge of the church?" And I would say, "Well that's true but He also walked on the water. You know you're not doing everything that Jesus did." We need to look at the text and say the text is very specific. What is the attribute of Jesus that you're supposed to portray in the marriage? And the answer is, "You are to portray the love of Christ." And how is that defined? It's defined that He willingly gave Himself up in order to redeem her back, to become everything God ever created us to be.

There's this beautiful picture here that ultimately Jesus will present His bride back to Himself in all of her glory and what a magnificent day that will be! So what the text is saying is: Husbands, your job very specifically is to rightly represent the love of Christ, which is *not* defined in the text as being in charge, as being the authority, as being the boss, whenever there's a disagreement, the husband finally gets his way. There's nothing in the text that says that. What it *does* say is you must die to yourself and give yourself away in order to provide an environment where your wife can flourish and become the person God created her to be.

Now you have to go back to what we talked about last week. The very essence of the life of the Trinity was that God the Father, the Son and the Spirit, each of them gave themselves away to the others. That's the very essence of life. That's the very essence of love. And the whole creation of those made in His image was for creation to join in that. Theologians refer to that as the *Dance of God*—in essence we are invited into the dance. It has to be understood that life is not found in

being selfish. Life is not found in saying, "What about me?" Life is found in giving myself away. It's counterintuitive. That's why Jesus said, "If you're going to find life, you have to die to yourself and you have to give yourself away." He wasn't saying, "If you follow me, why don't you experience less?" He was saying, "This is the way you find life." That's exactly then what the text is saying. If you're going to be like Christ, then your assignment as a husband is to love your wife, and you do that by dying to yourself and giving yourself away to create an environment where she can flourish as the person God has created her to be. Now as a husband you might find yourself saying, "Yeah, but what about me?" Verse 28:

> **So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body. FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.** Okay, Paul is quoting Genesis 2:24. Then he says in verse 32: **This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.** (Vs. 28-32)

Very interesting. Paul quotes Genesis 2:24 and then says, "Oh, by the way, that's the picture of Christ and His church," again connecting that's the imagery that's always been intended.

> **This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.** (Vs. 32-33)

What the text is saying is that when I die to myself, in order to give myself away to create an environment where my wife can flourish, I create an environment where I will flourish. That's the argument he makes because now the two of us are one. So if I create an environment where she will flourish, I will flourish. If I create an environment where I love her, it's an environment where I will be loved. It's in essence saying everybody wins. There are no losers in this. And then he quotes the Genesis 2:24 and then he comes to the end and summarizes. So I think the role of the husband, to rightly represent Jesus in the marriage, is to die to himself, to give himself away in order to create an environment where his wife can flourish and become everything that God intended her to be. That would be to rightly represent Jesus in this drama.

So what is the role of the wife? This is where it gets just a little bit touchy. Verse 22:

> **Wives, be subject to your own husbands...**

Now we're all familiar with the language, "Wives, submit to your husbands," but the first thing I want you to notice is the word *subject* is in italics. The reason it's in italics is because the verb isn't actually in the text. They have to draw it down from verse 21. I find this fascinating. God penned this part of Ephesians in such a way that you literally could not interpret verse 22 without verse 21. You have no verb. You have to go back to the preceding verse and find the verb and bring it in. It's as if God is saying, "Don't talk to wives about their role until you've talked about verse 21." Verse 21 is the concluding verse of the previous section that summarizes by saying, "As members of the body of Christ we are all submissive to one another." That's a really important teaching to understand going into marriage—that as members of the body of Christ we all submit to one another. We all have strengths and weaknesses and so we submit ourselves to one another. Nobody has the whole package.

Now when you talk about *the body of Christ*, nobody really argues that or disagrees with that. But if you take that thinking into marriage, then you have an understanding that really it's not an environment where I'm in charge and you do as I tell you, that I'm the boss and you're the employee, that if we have a disagreement I'll make the decision. I don't think there's anywhere where the Bible teaches that. What it is saying is we're mutually submissive to one another. If Patty and I disagree on something it comes down to who has the greater strengths in this particular area, and that person probably should be trusted and the other person needs to submit to that. That's verse 21. So then we go down into verse 22 which raises the question: then what specifically is she supposed to be submissive to? I find it helpful to go to the summary verse at the end of the chapter (verse 33) when it says he's supposed to love as Christ and she's supposed to respect her husband. I think the idea there is that she's supposed to respect his role. She's supposed to understand that this is a drama and there's assigned roles in order to communicate the love relationship between Christ and His church. So she needs to respect that she's submitting to—the fact that that's his role—so that she will cooperate with his role.

Think of it like this: Every single wife in this auditorium will basically either be a *completer* or a "*competer*". There's really not much middle ground. Either you're going to partner up with your husband and be part of the team and help him to create an environment where you can flourish or you're going to say, "I don't think he can do that. I don't trust him, so I'm going to create my own environment," which then begins to define the marriage as a competition. You're no longer partners. You're no longer teammates. Now you're competitors to see who can create the environment that's best for me.

One of the ways you know you're going down that path is if you ever hear yourself keeping score. When you start doing things like, "Well, I've done this and this and this; you know the least you can do…" that's a disaster! Whenever you hear that, you know you're on the wrong path. Now it's a competition and now we're deciding who is doing what, and everybody's kind of working for their own turf. The idea is that there is a submission to his role and a cooperation, so that we can work together to create an environment where both partners can flourish.

Next week we're going to talk about parenting, and I think it just spills over. I think mom and dad have to get together to figure out what is the environment necessary for each child to flourish, and each of them will be different in terms of what they need.

If you go back to Genesis, Chapter 3 and God's talking to the woman about the consequences of sin, one of the things He says is, "Your desire will be for your husband, but he will rule over you." There's lots of debate about what that actually means. If you go on into Genesis, Chapter 4, that exact same Hebrew word for *desire*—your desire will be for your husband—in chapter 4 it talks about sin *desiring* to take over Cain. It's the exact same word. Clearly then, the word has this idea that the desire of the woman will be to *take over*. That's a consequence of sin, and the man's response will be to rule over her. In other words it's describing this is now a competition. This is the effect of sin. If she's going to try and take over, he's going to try and squash her. Those aren't the roles. That's the consequence of sin.

Now you think about how consistent that is with Genesis, Chapter 3. We've talked about this often. In Genesis, Chapter 3 t*hee* lust that every single one of us has deep inside is, "I can be my own god; I can do this myself. I can decide for myself what's best for me. I can decide for myself what's

right and wrong." In essence, what is being said in Genesis 3 is a consequence to sin that will make its way into the home, and the wife will say, "I don't trust you to create this environment. I'm going to be my own god and I'm going to do it myself." The theological overtone of that is, "I don't trust what Christ did for me on the cross; I'm going to do it myself." So you can see how consistent all that theology is. So the submissive part, the respectful part, is to say, "I'm not going to do that. We're going to partner up in order to fulfill these God-given roles."

Now, Ladies, I would say, as a man, as a husband, there is no way on Planet Earth I could ever create an environment where my wife could flourish without her help. I don't know if you know it or not, but you ladies are complicated! (laughter) You're all but impossible to figure out. As soon as I think I have Patty figured out, she changes. You know, it's like a moving target. It's really hard. And over and over and over again, I have to interact with her and communicate with her and try to figure out, "What do you need at this season of your life to flourish as the person God made you to be?" I could never do that without her cooperating, without her partnering up in order to make that happen. I think that's the submissive, the respectful part of that. When it's done correctly, you have this beautiful picture of Christ and His church. You have this seminary classroom that children grow up in —forming their view of God—and a big part of what they've formed is, "What is this relationship between Christ and His church?" all the way to the point that, when I used to tuck my girls into bed at night, I should be able to say to them, "Girls, if you want to know how Jesus loves you, just watch the way I love your mom." And moms need to be able to tuck their kids in at night and say to their children, "If you want to know how we're supposed to respond to Jesus' love, just watch the way I respond to your dad." If it's done correctly it's very powerful. If kids grow up looking at their parents' marriage and saying, "I think that's what I want," part of what they're saying is, "If that's the relationship between Christ and His church, count me in."

One of the prayers that Patty and I have had down through the years with our children is that they would grow up to love the church. I saw so many pastors' kids that were angry and bitter at the church and I just didn't want that for my kids. Now all three of my kids love the church. There's a reason why Ashley's in Spain planting a church. She loves the church. It's her heartbeat. Part of that is because she had the privilege of growing up in a very special church, and that has spoken volumes into our lives as a family. But Patty and I were also aware that if we want our kids to grow up and love the church, we've got to be very mindful of the picture we put before them every single day. You know, if a husband and a wife could meet every morning before they do anything else and say, "Okay, let's remember the assignment today is we're going to picture Christ and His church and, if we want our kids to grow up and love the church, let's really think about how we portray that in this drama today."

Do you think it's a coincidence that so many people in our culture today that are cynical about the church, that are angry with the church, that throw stones at the church, come out of broken and dysfunctional homes? I don't think it's a coincidence at all. Find people that are angry and cynical toward the church and look at the home they came out of. Isn't it possible that they experienced a very unfortunate picture of the church and they're really not angry at the church? They're really not cynical at the church. They're really not throwing stones at the church. They're mad at their mom and dad for how they conducted themselves and what happened and the hurt and the pain that that's caused them. But deep down in their subconscious they don't really know that, so they throw stones at the church, which is what the picture was supposed to portray.

Now just like last week, what we've talked about this morning is *the ideal*. It's the *design*. Then there's *the reality* and we all have to live in the reality. Some of you probably are ready to walk out the door and say, "Oh, that's it; I blew it." And you could go home and just be depressed and kind of mope around. I really want to encourage you, "That doesn't accomplish anything!" The past is past, water under the bridge. There's no benefit for going back. Here's what you need to do with this message: Number one, all of us need to think about, what was the environment I grew up in? What was it like with my mom and dad and how might that have formulated my view of Jesus, my view of the church, my view of how that relationship works? And do I have to maybe back up and rethink some things? How has that affected my view of God? Second is you just have to look at how that might have affected my partner, how that might have affected my kids. Whatever your reason is, you can't go back and change anything, but where do we go from here?

I mentioned last week the whole point of the family series is to introduce a new ministry to families. We understand that things get messy and they get confusing. This is where you are. What you need to focus on is, "Okay, this is my situation—such as it is—where do we go from here? What would be the right next step? What's the right thing to do?" And that's where we want to come along side of you and say, "Okay, how can we help? The past is past, but where do we go from here?"

We believe, because the family matters, that marriage matters.

Our Father, we're thankful that You love us. As Mike reminded us, You are the ultimate heavenly daddy. LORD, you always do it right and we don't. We mess up so much. LORD, I just pray for each of us that You give us supernatural discernment to view our own story and to see how our story has affected our view of You and Christ in the church. LORD, give us the ability to sort that out and to correct what is not right. LORD, I just pray for each of us that You would help us to understand where we are today and where do we go from here, LORD, that we might take positive steps in the right direction in the days ahead. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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