

A New Marriage
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We are in a series entitled All Things New. Since Valentine's Day is this week, I'm preaching on A New Marriage.

Some of you hear that and think – “Yes Pastor Joe, I need a new spouse!” But I'm not talking about changing spouses! I'm talking about renewing the marriage that you have.

If you're not married – don't think that this message doesn't apply to you. You may be married someday, and you'll need to know this truth. Plus - you know people who are married, and you need to encourage them with this truth.

By the way – I know some of you are divorced. Just know there is no condemnation from us today. We don't view divorce as the unpardonable sin. However – we all need to learn God's wisdom regarding relationships so we don't end up in the same situation again.

Some of our relationships need a fresh start!
 Your marriage may be on the brink, but you can still lengthen it!
 You may have a weak marriage – but you can strengthen it!
 Your marriage may be strong – but it can become even stronger!
 How do I know that? Because God tells us how.

1- Family is God's Idea

Family is the building block of society.
 When families fall apart – everything falls apart.
 When families break down – everything breaks down.

Conversely – when families are strong – a nation is strong. That's why we need to build stronger families. Stronger families build stronger churches, stronger churches and nations.

Marriage is such a good idea, only God could have thought of it.
 That makes marriage more than a good thing – it's a God thing!!
 Regardless of how much the media may mock it!
 Regardless of how many books may belittle it!
 Regardless of how many marriages end in divorce!
 Regardless of how many families are dysfunctional!
 No matter how many people say it's outdated, old-school or irrelevant - marriage is a God-thing and that makes marriage a good thing.

Marriage and family have a divine origin.

God created them, God designed them, and God defined them. We find that all the way back at the beginning of creation in Genesis 1:27-28

God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Genesis 2:18-24

The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." 21 So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, He took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and He brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

From these passages, we see God's plan and purposes for family. We see that God created it and everything God created – He called good! God created man and woman to rule and reign in life together. But many of us feel life is ruling over us rather than us ruling in life. But to have a life God blesses - we must live life God's way.

2- To have a family God blesses, you must do it God's way.

The sad fact is that many marriages end in divorce these days. The sadder fact is that many of these divorces could be prevented. I truly believe most people want a good marriage; they just don't know how to make it happen.

Most of us did not have good role models for family. Let me say, all of us were raised in dysfunctional families. There are no perfect homes. But we can learn from the way we were raised how to or how not to make our family work.

If you want to know how something should work – you go to the person who created it. So, in order to learn what makes family work – you go to God since He's the one who created family and He knows how to make it work.

Marriage and family will not work unless we open the owner's manual that God gave us – called the Bible – and do it His way. Psalm 127:1 says:

Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain.

It's hard to build a strong family apart from God. In fact, it's impossible! We have an enemy who does everything to try to separate us. That's why for marriage to really work, we need God's miraculous power.

That's why I believe Jesus performed His first miracle at a wedding. The hosts ran out of wine and Jesus turned water into wine. This shows the importance of having Him in our lives.

Listen closely - in every marriage and in every family there will come times of crisis - when we run out of wine - when we can't go on in our own strength - when we say, "This isn't what I signed up for," but Jesus can take the mess you have left and turn it into something good.

So, when your family seems like it's falling apart - turn to Jesus!
When you're at the end of your rope and you have no hope - turn to Jesus!
When it's hard to live with nothing left to give - turn to Jesus!

Let Him turn your water into wine. If you turn to Him, He will turn to you and He will see you through. To build stronger families we must do it God's way. But knowing about God's principles and God's power are not enough.

3- For a marriage to work, you must make it work.

Strong families and healthy homes don't just happen--they take work! It's a law of nature - the second law of thermodynamics - Things left to themselves degenerate to disorder. Nothing gets better by neglect.

Your yard - don't mow, water, weed, or feed - see what happens!
Your car - don't change oil, tires, tune up - see what happens!

People are always amazed when they find out Deb and I have been married 45 years. "Wow, you're lucky. "I'm on my 3rd marriage and I hope this one works." I want to say, "It won't." It won't work by itself; you must make it work.

Too many people buy into the Hollywood view of romance and the worldly view that if you're married to the right person, the marriage will just work effortlessly on its own. Wrong!

Many people today shop for relationships the way my wife shops for clothes. She usually doesn't like trying on clothes in a store - so she buys it - takes it home - and tries it on. If it does not fit, she returns it for something else.

Many people try that with relationships. I'll live with this person - it's just a test drive to see if it works - and when it doesn't they are relieved they found out and they move on to the next one. And the next one.

Listen - test drives do not work with people! Statistics show that people who live together before marriage have a higher divorce rate than those who don't! People are not clothes to be tried on. They are not cars to be test driven. They are people with feelings. They are people created in the image of God. And relationships work only when we make them work - and if you're going to make it work, you must do it God's way.

As James 2:17 says *Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

Marriage won't work all by itself; you must make it work. But how? I'm going to show you by focusing on one simple verse—Genesis 2:24—

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother, be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh.

This verse is the foundational verse for marriage. What God spoke here in Genesis, it is repeated by Jesus in Matthew and by Paul in Ephesians. From this verse we will learn that marriage is designed by God to operate according to three fundamental principles.

The Bible says God created marriage and family – and then it says - for this reason – because God created it – we are to do three things: leave our parents – be united to each other - and become one flesh.

The KJV puts it like this: *Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.*

I want to give you three words to help you remember these three principles today: LEAVE – CLEAVE – AND WEAVE.

4. For Marriage to Work, You Must Leave

If your marriage is going to be what it ought to be– THERE HAS TO BE A LEAVING! *For this reason a man will leave his father and mother.*

Now, the Bible is not teaching us to abandon or forsake our parents. We know from other Scriptures that we must always honor them.

But this verse is teaching us that to establish your family – you must leave everything else behind – in the sense that that everything else is now a lesser priority. Where the parent/child relationship was the priority – the husband/wife relationship is now the priority.

The Bible is using the example of parents here because before we marry they are the most important people in the world to us. They feed us, clothe us, teach us, love us, comfort us – we are totally dependant upon them.

The principle of leaving is this.... NOTHING, ABSOLUTELY NOTHING ON EARTH, IS TO TAKE PRECEDENCE OVER YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR SPOUSE.

And when it does, you are in clear violation of the first fundamental priority of marriage. Some of you need to leave some things behind today.

What things?

Anything that's coming between you and your spouse! Any person, any job, any hobby, ANYTHING at all that is coming between you – LEAVE IT!

I've counseled people who were on the brink of an affair with someone at work and I told them "Quit your job! Leave that workplace!" They say, "I can't afford to leave my job," so I ask, "Can you afford a divorce?"

I'm serious about this! Outside of your relationship with Jesus Christ, nothing should be more important to you than your family. If anything is... LEAVE IT NOW!

That leads us to the second principle...

5- For Marriage to Work, You Must Cleave

If your marriage is going to succeed, there must be a cleaving!

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife.

Now, I want to make it absolutely clear that this has nothing to do with a meat cleaver. The word "cleave" has nothing to do with slicing and dicing. It's an old word that means "to cling or glue to something. To keep close to something, to cling to it and to not let go, to remain bonded to it."

At the very inception of marriage, God said: THIS THING IS FOR LIFE! The marital bond is a permanent, lasting, never-to-be-severed bond! When you got married - whether it was in a beautiful house of worship or a justice of the peace - you were actually standing before the Lord.

And when you said, "I take you to be my spouse, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish until death do us part," you were making a covenant with God. Malachi 2:14 says:

She is your companion and the wife of your covenant (made by your marriage vows).

That's why Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 says: *Two are better than one and a cord of three strands is not easily broken.*

The three strands are a marriage covenant with God as well as each other. God always operates by a covenant. Unfortunately - in our contract-oriented society, few people really understand covenant. We like contracts because they have loopholes and bail-out options.

But marriage in an unconditional covenant with an imperfect person! It is fine to live by contract, but we must love by covenant. People might negotiate out of contracts, but not out of a covenant - there is no escape clause.

The modern approach to marriage focuses on personal rights and needs:

- "I deserve to be happy."
- "I'm entitled to have my needs met."
- "If this relationship stops giving me what I want, or if it gets tough or real boring, I can walk away. After all, marriage is a contract, and contracts are made to be broken."

Do you know that it's easier in the U.S. to walk away from a marriage than from a contract to buy a used car? Marriage has been called the "least binding of all contracts."

Perhaps the wedding vows should be changed to:

- "I promise to love, honor, and quit whenever I want to."
- "I promise to love you as long as you make me happy."
- "I'm committed as long as you meet my needs."
- "I'm committed to you until something better comes along."

Listen carefully - God never intended for marriage to be a convenience-based contract that we could easily get out of but a character-based covenant that we would be committed to for life.

Every family will experience tough times and it takes commitment to stick it out and work through them.

Commitment to: God / His Word / His principles
 Marriage
 Spouse – their best/ success

Commitment is not 50/50, its 100/100
 In reality, its 80/20, sometimes 60/40, sometime 100/0
 You must be willing to give all, not give yourself an out.

In the 45 years Deb and I have been married we've had many tough times – but the words "I want a divorce" have never been uttered by either of us. The thought never crosses our minds. What crosses our minds is we need to seek God and make this work. For marriage to work – you must leave and cleave.

6- For Marriage to Work, You must Weave:

Now – I'm not talking about sewing a rug or getting hair extensions! The Bible says that we leave, cleave and "become one flesh." And becoming one is a process– not an instantaneous event. In other words, a couple must weave themselves into each other's life.

"One flesh" doesn't happen just because the preacher says, "I now pronounce you husband and wife"; it doesn't happen when you sign the legal documents; it

doesn't happen in a motel ten miles down the road. It is a life long process of two people giving themselves to one another until their lives are woven together into one. That takes time. That takes work. That takes faith. That takes prayer.

I remember counseling a couple years ago. We didn't seem to be making much progress. Then one week they came in and I asked them how they were doing. They said, "We had one of the best weeks ever." I was getting a big head thinking how much good I was doing when I discovered the reason their week was so good was because the husband had been out of town all week.

It's like Rodney Dangerfield once said, "We sleep in separate rooms, we have dinner apart, we take separate vacations— we're doing everything we can to keep our marriage together." That's not weaving! That's not becoming one. Are you on your way to oneness? Let's close with two powerful suggestions.....

First, you must accept the fact that your marriage will never be perfect. The only ideal marriage in history was Adam and Eve's and even they blew it. Even the best of marriages experience times of doubt, disillusionment, and conflict. But that reality doesn't mean that the marriage cannot work.

Secondly, you must realize that success in marriage is not so much as finding the right spouse, as it is in being the right spouse. The truth is, even if you think you did marry the wrong person, you can treat them like the right person and make that marriage work!

The God who created marriage and family says that for them to work we must LEAVE lesser priorities behind. We must CLEAVE to each other. And we must WEAVE our lives together as we become one.

My favorite story of commitment is the true story of Hernando Cortez. He was a 16th century explorer who had a vision to lead an expedition from Spain to capture the vast riches of Mexico. He traveled to Mexico with 11 ships and 700 men. However, Cortez did not reveal his entire strategy. He knew this the expedition would take years. He needed to be sure his men were committed for the long haul.

After months of travel, they arrived in Vera Cruz, Mexico in the Spring of 1519. As soon as the men had the ships totally unloaded, Cortez instituted the rest of his plan. He gave the order, BURN THE SHIPS!

What? That's our only way out of here.

Exactly! Burn the ships and there's no way out, no going back.

This mission called for total commitment and devotion to the task.

Marriage takes that kind of radical, no-excuse, no-turning-back commitment. Some of you need to burn some ships today!

If you have a plan of escape from your marriage – BURN THAT SHIP!

If you are setting aside money in case this marriage doesn't work – BURN THAT SHIP!

If you're flirting around with someone other than your spouse – BURN THAT SHIP!

If you're keeping in touch with old flames just in case the fire goes out in your marriage – BURN THAT SHIP!

If you're holding back from total commitment to your spouse in any way at all – BURN THAT SHIP!

If you leave yourself an out, you'll probably take it.

And that lack of commitment may be the very reason the relationship doesn't work.

So, burn the ship!

You can have a new marriage if you Leave, Cleave and Weave!