

Faith, Family, and Freedom - the Cultural Mandate

“Marriage”

Hebrews 13:4 ESV

What comes *after* us? What are we really leaving behind? When we look back at our life, will our kids remember what matters most or just everything else? What does matter most? It's not money, not the house, the car, or all the stuff. It's so much more than that. Scripture says, *"One generation will commend your works to another. They will tell of your mighty acts."* It's the *faith* that holds us, the *family* that shapes us, and the *freedom* that calls us to live for more. That's what we want them to remember. It's the family that shapes us, because families do shape us for the better, and sometimes, family's complicated, but it is *important*.

Marriage is hard. *Relationships* are hard - whether we're married or single, we have relationships with people - with friends or family. It's hard to navigate life - really hard. That's why we need Jesus to help us navigate. We want to know God's will, God's ways, and also God's Word on things, especially this thing called *marriage* - but not just marriage. Even if we're *not* married, these are relational dynamics - they're impacted by the Word.

Isaiah 62:5 ESV

"For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you. And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you."

Isn't that beautiful? - that God rejoices over us just as we rejoice over the wife of our youth, the wife of our adulthood, the wife of our *later* years.

Hebrews 13:4 ESV

"Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous."

That first part is really the emphasis of this verse and it's this, *"Let marriage be held in honor among all."* We're in a culture right now that has not held marriage in honor at all. In fact, there's been an outright attack on marriages and on relationships. And why would that be? Why would it be that the enemy would attack marriages and relationships? Because marriage is the picture of Christ and the Church. That's what a *husband and wife* is, the picture of Christ and the Church.

God honors us as married men and women. He honors us, and we need to honor *him*, and we need to honor one another in that. Honor is a massive piece of this, and *marriage* is a large piece of who we are as the Church. This is our DNA - that we have stepped into the space of wanting to engage culture with the gospel of Jesus Christ - not so we can turn it from “red” to “blue,” or so we can kick the wild *lefties* out, because all that talk needs to go away. What we're trying to do is advance the kingdom of God in our time. It's a-political, not *political*.

But politics only shows up because *they* came to our front door. We have to deal with what comes our way. But the real issue here is not *politics*. It's not about the flag or *not the flag*. The issue is the kingdom of God being advanced, and us being very vocal in the public square about the kingdom of God. It's also about Truth - about *righteousness* - and *godly justice*. All of those are critically important. And *marriage* is God's design to change a community. He brought marriage into the world - the relationship in the Garden of Eden that we see in Genesis.

It was by design to reflect the relationship that God wanted to highlight - that he wanted to put on display like a trophy - a trophy of grace, not perfection. At first, things were looking good there in the Garden - things were *happening*. Marriage is God's design to change a community, to turn a state, and to restore a nation to the foot of the cross. This is about turning culture back to him. That's what our marriages are supposed to do. But what *has* happened?

Marriages have been so disparaged in culture by media, entertainment, legacy and mainstream media news, to where now it's *us*. There's a season now where we're coming out of it, but there *was* a season where we almost felt like we had to *apologize* for being married. It was a running joke in sitcoms the way they disparaged marriage - “*Oh, there's that old-ball-and-chain. Oh, yeah. it's that dripping faucet thing.*” They've totally emasculated men in the media and in sitcoms.

We used to laugh at it but then realized, “*Oh my gosh, the wife and the family are putting down and decimating the men.*” They were great actors and comedians and the lines were hilarious, and to some degree we could relate to the in-laws and all that, but then we began thinking, “*Wait, we're watching a man being destroyed and emasculated, and we're doing it for entertainment.*” And we had to shift gears on how we were watching things because the Bible says that marriage is the only human institution that God created which he spoke a blessing over.

Genesis 1:28, 31 ESV

“And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’ ...And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.”

So as God was landing the plane on creation after he spent six days putting everything into place - the firmament in the sky, the earth that we live on - putting all the natural resources into the earth, putting the galaxies and the universe together - he said it was “*very good*.” But what also was included in that was he made man and woman - male and female - one man and one woman, and he pronounced this blessing over them. Some have even postulated that it was almost poetic in nature - that he sang this blessing.

From God's heart he instituted marriage and he blessed it, whether our marriage is where we want it to be right now or not, because we're all a work-in-progress. We're not perfect yet. We've all lived the human experience in all its beauty and its ugliness, but at the end of the day, Jesus is Lord. “*But God*.” God is a God who redeems, who restores original intent. He's all about that. He brings us back to the Eden moment. He brings us back to our marriage altar. He brings us back to our vows from whatever has been broken or decimated.

There's a demonic attack on every marriage and relationship in this room. The enemy hates what we have, and he comes after marriages and relationships because God created us first and foremost for *relationship*. That was our very reason for being created. It was the very reason that God started this whole spinning ball called planet earth and mankind. So does it not stand to reason that the enemy and his demonic hordes - Satan himself - would come after marriages and relationships?

Ephesians 5:33 ESV

“However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

There is such an innate desire in women to be loved and appreciated and adored because God says that we're *his* beloved, and if we're his beloved, that means *we want to be loved*. Only God can give us the ultimate love, but on this earth we desire love from one another, and especially from our spouses.

The statistical percentage of people who divorce is anywhere from about 50 to 60%. But for a second marriage, that goes up to 60 to 70%. In other words, when you step into another marriage, you're bringing the brokenness that happened in the first, which means it creates a lot more opportunity for the enemy to get in and destroy, because that's what he does. John 10:10 says the enemy comes to steal, kill, and destroy, and that's his m.o. for us. Some of us are in a struggling season, where things are not clicking, and we're not on the same page - we feel like we've drifted away or it's not happening like we want it to happen.

The Bible says that we're to come boldly before the throne of grace in Hebrews chapter four, and some of us need to get *bold* with God *now* - not because we're so amazing or so strong, but because we're so *weak*. We need to boldly go into God's presence and before the throne of grace. And here's the promise from Scripture, "*You will find mercy and grace to help in your time of need.*" We're *all* trying to figure this out and we're navigating the complexities of a culture that is set against us.

John Eldridge said that there's "an assignment on our heart." The enemy wants us to lose heart in everything we do, because when we lose heart, we can't go to God's throne *boldly*. We can't come with *confidence*. And so, there's an assignment on us, but it's really not just on our heart, it's purpose is to decimate *all* of our relationships - *including our marriage*. God set up marriage up as a *covenant* relationship, which is much deeper than any mere contract. It's long-lasting, and it comes with both blessings *and* cursings.

Deuteronomy lists fourteen blessings (in chapter 28) if we heed his Word, and fourteen curses (in chapter 27) if we *don't*. There are people in this room right now that are operating under a *curse*, which is simply "*an empowerment to fail,*" as opposed to a *blessing* which is "*an empowerment to succeed.*" That's all it is. Blessings and cursings. Scripture is very clear about this. It says, "*These things will be yours if you align with my way, my will, my heart, my word. If you'll do what I told you, if you will honor me by aligning with me, I will bless you. [but if you don't, there will be cursings that follow.]*" Some of us might say, "*But we're in the New Covenant now.*" *Covenant is covenant*. It doesn't get *changed*. It doesn't get *shifted*.

God wants to make us whole so that we can be good *together*, and if one of us is broken it won't work. If *both* of us are broken it *really* won't work - but if we're both *whole* we can have an *amazing* marriage - not perfect, because we still live in this world. It's hard to navigate this world without Christ. We can't do it. We just can't do it. We *have* to have Christ to navigate the world.

Core values for successful marriage

1] Keep pursuing the heart of the other. It's so easy to think we *won* as though getting married is the touchdown, but it's really just the coin toss before the game. It's not even the *kickoff*, but we treat it like it's the goal line. And when we do that, we stop courting one another. We stop pursuing one another. We stop doing the work that we did up until the wedding. We *get* that way because once we get married, *life* starts happening.

2] Never stop flirting. Be and stay playful and keep flirting. Keep it fun and keep it light. There will be bad days and moments, but there should be more *good* days with good stuff that happens as life happens.

3] No secrets - no leverage. God instills this in us. He doesn't want us to have secrets. Nothing is really in secret to God anyway, but we need to make a decision, that no matter what, We let each other in on everything - everything that has gone on in our past. God can get us through those things, so we need to stay as transparent as we can. Nothing is ever wasted with God. Maybe we've experienced a divorce, so now we can understand people that have been through a divorce and we can help them through it. We can help them see that there is life after divorce and that they can be happy again - that it's a matter of becoming whole as we keep God in the center of our life going forward, no matter *what's* in the past.

4] Put God first. Two people who love God can have a *great* marriage but two people who *don't* love God *can't*. We *have* to put God *first*. He has to be the one we obey - before we obey our spouse. It's all about him. And we should come into an agreement to obey and walk in his Word. And when we do, it's a no-fail situation. Stocks will fail, but our marriage will *not* fail if we put God at the center - *Period*.

5] Radical forgiveness. Not *just* forgiveness, radical forgiveness is taking it to the next level. It's what Jesus did on the cross when he said, "*Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing [or they know not what they say.]*" It's critical that we learn, in terms of love and respect, to die to ourselves and forgive *often and much - over the top - radically*. We ask God to forgive us and he *is* going to forgive us, because his mercies are new every day, and many people have an easy time forgiving *others*, but they can't forgive *themselves*. The number one thing we need to do first is to forgive *ourselves*.

Ephesians 4:31-32 ESV

“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

We need to forgive ourself. It's hard to give away something we have not internalized and received for *ourself*. If we have ought against anyone, we're actually supposed to leave our offering there at the altar *first*, and then go and be reconciled. Reconciliation takes two people, but *freedom* only takes *one*. That means we *can be free*. There are times when it's not appropriate to go to someone else - there's been massive trauma or horrible things done - it doesn't do any good. That's casting pearls before swine, so to speak. The Holy Spirit will tell us. He'll guide us and order our steps if we're willing. But more than likely, we need to start with *ourself* right now.

Scripture says that *“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but will have everlasting life.”* There's a belief here that we have to have, and the basis of *belief* is trust. We can't have faith without trust - they work hand-in-glove. So we have to take this step of faith and believe and trust that God loves us so much in spite of what we've done, in spite of what we've said, in spite of actions, past mistakes, missteps, mishaps, or poor decisions. And we have to receive his love, his mercy, his grace, and his forgiveness for ourself.

Once we do that, it's amazing how easy it is to then turn and forgive others. But we have to receive it for *ourself* first. When we say, *“Lord, thank you for forgiving me,”* as an act of faith, and as an act of our will, we now position ourself to forgive any and everyone who has ever done anything against us, because of Christ, and because of what he did. That's why we do this. It's why we *can*. We are *blessed* ...and we're empowered to succeed in this.

Prayer

Father, thank you that You now empower us to succeed, in terms of forgiving others and stepping out into places that we've been afraid to step into before. Give us grace to live out what we've just heard. We trust You in everything that You're doing in our lives. Father, Here's our stuff. Here's our mess. Lord, You are good all the time and we trust You to take care of everything. We love You and honor You in it. In Jesus' name. Amen