

**EXCELLING STILL MORE: MARRIAGE**  
**1 PETER 3:1-7**

The couple that stands before their friends and family and in front of the preacher in a gleaming white dress and an immaculate tux, with flutters in their hearts and beaming smiles on their faces (and maybe tears in their eyes) can never imagine the time when they won't feel overwhelmed by love. But as Tim Keller has recounted, the changes in their feelings for their mates often come with dramatic speed:

As a pastor, I've listened to hundreds of plaintive accounts of difficult relationships and lost love. Typical is the case of Jeff and Sue. Jeff was tall and handsome, the kind of mate Sue had always pictured in her mind. He was talkative and she was shy and quiet in public, so she loved how he took the lead in social gatherings and directed the conversation. Sue was also decisive and future oriented, while Jeff tended to "live in the present." Their differences seemed to complement each other perfectly. Secretly Sue was shocked someone this good-looking would fall for her, while Jeff, who many women found to be too unambitious, was glad to find a girl who was so adoring. Just a year after getting married, however, Jeff's talkativeness looked to Sue like self-absorption and an inability to listen. His lack of career orientation was a bitter disappointment to her. Meanwhile, Sue's quietness looked to Jeff like a lack of transparency, and her soft-spoken shyness masked what he now saw to be a domineering personality. The marriage quickly spiraled down and ended in a speedy divorce.

Disenchantment, the "end of the honeymoon," is common and has been for centuries. It is normal, even inescapable. But the depth of the disillusionment people experience in our time is something new, as is the speed with which marriages collapse. In our day, something has intensified this natural experience and turned it toxic. It is the illusion that if we find our one true soul mate, everything wrong with us will be healed; but that makes the lover into God, and no human being can live up to that. [*The Meaning of Marriage*, 33-34.]

He also says...

I'm tired of listening to sentimental talks on marriage. At weddings, in church, and in Sunday school, much of what I've heard on the subject has as much depth as a Hallmark card. While marriage is many things, it is anything but sentimental. Marriage is glorious but hard. It's a burning joy and strength, and yet it is also blood, sweat, and tears, humbling defeats and exhausting victories. No marriage I know more than a few weeks old could be described as a fairy tale come true. Therefore, it is not surprising that the only phrase in Paul's famous discourse on marriage in Ephesians 5 that many couples can relate to is verse 32....Sometimes you fall into bed, after a long, hard day of trying to understand each other, and you can only sigh: "This is all a profound mystery!" At times, your marriage seems to be an unsolvable puzzle, a maze in which you feel lost. I believe all this, and yet there's no relationship between human beings that is greater or more important than marriage. [13]

Marriage, when two people are walking with Christ is gloriously wonderful, but too often it can degrade into a horror of two enemies co-existing in the same foxhole, battling ruthlessly for supremacy.

I've seen it too often. In seminary, Raye Jeanne and I lived in school housing. I think there were 24 apartments. With most of the couples we had only a passing acquaintance. I've kept up with almost none of them, but I personally know of at least three divorces among those couples — one within just 3-5 years of leaving school, and one of whom was one of my two closest friends at school.

And you and I have seen it with family members and neighbors and co-workers and church friends. Marriage is supposed to be gloriously satisfying and too often it just ends up as another battlefield and is deeply unsatisfying.

Is there any hope? There is.

This year we are focusing on **Excelling Still More** in loving and caring for one another. If we are going to do that well in the church body, we need to start in our homes — and that is the topic for this morning; today (the day before Valentine's Day) we consider the realities of the world and marriage, and the hope of Christ amid those realities. We consider the provision of God for difficult marriages that provides so much more than flowers and chocolate.

**WHEN MARRIAGE GOES WRONG, EXCEL IN LOVING MORE**

**BY REMEMBERING WHAT GOD HAS PROVIDED SO YOU MAY LIVE RIGHT.**

I used to find it something of a curiosity that Peter, in a letter that is predominantly about suffering, has an extended section in it on marriage? Why all this talk about marriage in a book on suffering, Peter? Because there is much suffering in marriage. Life after the wedding was not what the planners promised. Here, then, is Peter's antidote and four provisions for marital difficulty and suffering.

1. We Live in a World Where **THINGS** Go Wrong (2:11-20)
2. We Live in a World Where **MARRIAGES** Go Wrong (3:1-7)
3. One Short Phrase to Guide Our Thinking (3:1, 7)
4. When Marriage Goes Wrong, Remember...

WHEN MARRIAGE GOES WRONG, EXCEL IN LOVING MORE

BY REMEMBERING WHAT GOD HAS PROVIDED SO YOU MAY LIVE RIGHT.

## 1. We Live in a World Where THINGS Go Wrong (2:11-20)

### • There are FLESHLY temptations (2:11)

- ✓ We might be tempted to think (and I've heard it said) that, "Once you become a Christian, all the troubles and temptations of life go away..." They don't.
- ✓ We live in a perverse and wicked and fleshly world that is at odds with what we are in Christ and we fight daily against many different kinds of temptations.
- ✓ Jesus said in His High Priestly prayer, "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil *one*." (John 17:14-15) Every day we live with the reality that we are surrounded by temptations both outward and inward.
- ✓ And every day, at some level, we live with the consequences of what happens when we succumb to those temptations. Sometimes those consequences are minimal (because of confession & repentance), and sometimes they are not (in spite of confession & repentance).

### • Believers are SLANDERED and persecuted (2:12)

- ✓ Again, it would be nice to think that when we are Christians because of our transformed character people would only say good about us and treat us well. But that's not what happens.
- ✓ Unbelievers (*Gentiles*) still **slander** believers and say that they are actually **evildoers**. This is the very thing that they did to Christ —

"Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus, and He healed him, so that the mute man spoke and saw. All the crowds were amazed, and were saying, 'This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?' But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, 'This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons.'" (Matt 12:22-24)

- ✓ And Jesus promised that if they said these kinds of things about him and persecuted him, then we can expect nothing else —

"If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you..." (John 15:18-21 NAS95)

- ✓ We do not need to be surprised by suffering and persecution (cf. 1 Pt. 4:12-14). In fact, 1 Peter is written to encourage and strengthen those who are being persecuted (1:1).

- There really are **IGNORANT** and foolish men (2:15)

- ✓ Things that are right and true and obvious to the believer are unknown and undiscerned by unbelievers. But unbelievers continue on in **ignorance** and **foolishness** and live lives that carry out all the consequences of that foolishness.
- ✓ E.g., Eph. 4:17-19 — noetic effect of sin.

- Authorities are sometimes **UNREASONABLE** (2:18)

- ✓ There are masters — “bosses,” husbands, church leaders, governmental authorities — who are good and gentle in the way they treat those entrusted to them. They are magnanimous and reasonable. They are merciful.
- ✓ And there are others who are **unreasonable**. They are crooked (the word is *skoliois*, the word from which we get “scoliosis”); they are perverted, unfair, harsh, ungracious, and unchanging.
- ✓ You’ve known people like that and maybe had to work for them. It’s hard.

- There really is **UNJUST** suffering (2:19-20)

- ✓ There are at least three kinds of suffering in this world:
  - Suffering that comes from living in a fallen world — car accidents, cancer, and colds.
  - Suffering that comes as a result of our own sin — difficult consequences of sin.
  - Suffering that comes as the result of others sins against us — slanderous words, manipulation, anger, hatred, persecution... (**harsh treatment**, v. 20). These are sorrows that are **unjust**.
- ✓ It may not be right that we experience them, but that’s the way it is in this world.

- That’s our world — full of temptation, slander, ignorance and foolishness, unreasonableness, and injustice. Nobody is making travel brochures about this place! But we live there every day.
- And in that world, it would be nice to have a sanctuary — a safe place where those things don’t happen. Where we can be happy and safe. And many people enter into marriage believing that marriage should be a sanctuary (and it should) and finding that it isn’t always their experience.

## 2. We Live in a World Where MARRIAGES Go Wrong (3:1-7)

- In seminary a professor told us that he was in ministry for 25 years before he had to deal with the issue of divorce. We joked that it would be 25 minutes for us. In reality, it was about 25 days for me — it came up in the first 4-6 weeks. So what happens in marriage that mimics the world?

### • There are DISOBEDIENT husbands (3:1)

- ✓ Peter is careful to say the problem is not that they are disobedient to their wives, but that they are **disobedient** to the **Word** of God. The implication is that they know what the Scriptures teach about a given issue, and they are willing to ignore and disobey it.
- ✓ They hear what the Word of God says and then read the consequences and they shrug their shoulders and say, “Oh well, I guess I’ll deal with that when it happens...” “Aren’t you concerned about facing eternal condemnation?” “Yes — but not enough to change what I’m doing now...” *They are deliberate and persistent in their disobedience.*
- ✓ The way Peter writes this also means that there is a certainty to it. We might translate it, “*Since* some of them...” An unbelieving husband is a reality in marriage.

### • Wives are tempted to be concerned with EXTERNALS more than INTERNALS (3:3-4)

- ✓ It has always been the case that people are more concerned about external appearances than inward character, so God said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God *sees* not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” (1 Sam 16:7)
- ✓ Here, one temptation for a woman to win her disobedient husband back is to focus on the externals — to go to the gym and lose ten pounds to fit into his favorite outfit and to go to the beauty salon and get the latest haircut.
- ✓ It’s not a sin to look attractive, but Peter is warning against putting a pretty package around dead bones. Just as a man might be deluded into thinking disobedience is irrelevant, a woman might be deluded into thinking that as long as the package is pretty that she can have snake’s venom for a tongue.

### • Wives are tempted to be FEARFUL about doing what is right (3:6)

- ✓ While we like to think that doing the right thing is encouraged and applauded, sometimes doing the right thing leaves us in a precarious position (2:12).
- ✓ That is true for a woman in marriage as well. She might know the right thing to do in relation to her unbelieving husband. But she believes that if she does that, he will respond in anger or resentment or that he might file for divorce and leave her and the children financially destitute.

- ✓ The fears that a woman faces in marriage are various — **any fear**. It can be a fear about divorce or finances or the influence of the world on the children or who will love her or the children or loneliness or her reputation. Or anything else.
- ✓ And when these fears intrude on a marriage, it goes wrong.

- Husbands are tempted to be **UNDISCERNING** of the needs of their wives (3:7a)

- ✓ Husbands should be **understanding** of their wives. They should have knowledge about them personally and particularly, as well as generally. They should understand their delicate nature of their wives and the precarious position of their wives.
- ✓ They should particularly understand their wives need to submit (v. 1), and that they need to submit to *them* and their (at times) unwise and foolish leadership. And that makes life hard for her.
- ✓ They should understand that their wives can't be treated like the guys at the lumberyard or in the bar — you have to treat them differently if you expect them to thrive.
- ✓ Peter tells them this because it is the natural inclination of a man *not* to treat his wife this way.
- ✓ The result is that in his self-centeredness he becomes uncompassionate, uncaring, and disinterested. He not only is undiscerning, he doesn't even care that he's failed.

- Husbands are tempted to **OVERESTIMATE** their spiritual authority (3:7b)

- ✓ It is absolutely true that the husband is the head of the home. He is the spiritual leader. He is the one who is ultimately responsible for the spiritual welfare of the home.
- ✓ But he should never be deluded into thinking that his wife's position is inconsequential. She is **a fellow heir of the grace of life**. She is just as much in the church of God as he is. She is as much a recipient of the blood of Christ, grace of God, and power of the Spirit as he is. They have differing responsibilities before God, but they are completely equal in their standing before God — they are linked arm-in-arm as fellow heirs. They get the same-sized piece of pie on the day of inheritance. They are one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28).
- ✓ And sometimes a husband will forget that reality and will overstep his authority and step on his wife and demean her personally and positionally. And that marriage will quickly go wrong.

- So that's the *marital* world in which we live — there is disobedience and sin, misplaced motives, fear, lack of discernment and compassion and misunderstanding of purpose. Things go wrong in the world around us and things go wrong in our marriages, in our most intimate relationships. And sometimes, the same kinds of things that go wrong in the world — slander and injustice and ignorance and foolishness and unreasonableness also go wrong in our marriages.
- Now here's the real problem. We live in a world where things go wrong, *but we also live with the expectations that things will not go wrong*. Our expectation is that we shouldn't be persecuted for our faith and that our husbands should lead us exactly as well as Jesus does and that our wives will always follow our leadership and never question anything we do.

- That's not reality. It's a fairy tale. Because both husband and wife are sinners, things *will* go wrong in marriage. It is a certainty for every married couple.

*"I am persuaded that it is more regular than irregular for couples to get married with unrealistic expectations. Again and again I have sat with couples who simply do not seem to be taking seriously the important things the Bible has to say about what every marriage will encounter in the here and now. Unrealistic expectations always lead to disappointment. You know this is true if you have ever looked at a vacation website before traveling there. No vacation site will actually look as nice and function as well as it does on its promotional site on the Internet. You inevitably end up disappointed because you started out with unrealistic expectations. We took our family on a vacation to Disney World. We looked at that beautiful Disney literature. But we weren't told that we would stand under a blazing sun for 90 minutes in 120-degree heat and 200-percent humidity to ride a ride that takes 33 seconds!" [Paul Tripp, What Did You Expect? 16.]*

- If our expectations are skewed, what can we do? The passage also gives us much hope for how we are to direct our thinking and actions, and it starts with one small phrase that Peter writes twice:

### 3. One Short Phrase to Guide Our Thinking (3:1, 7)

- ***In the same way...*** = Now the direct antecedent to the first use of this term in 3:1 is the example of Christ (2:21) and while we rightly assume that refers to His submission to the will of the Father, it also means something else. It means that just as Christ endured His suffering at the cross in a way that glorified God, so believers should endure suffering in marriage in a way that particularly honors God. When your marriage goes wrong, cultivate all of the attitudes that honor Christ when any believer in Christ suffers in any kind of circumstance.
- So, when your marriage goes wrong, ***follow the example*** of Christ —
  - ✓ Though He suffered, it was not because He sinned and deserved the consequence of suffering (22).
  - ✓ He did not reciprocate or retaliate with the same kinds of injustice He had to endure (23).
  - ✓ He entrusted Himself to the care of God who is just and fair (23; cf. Rom. 12:19).
- But notice something else as well; I believe that ***in the same way*** extends past the reference to Christ and goes back at least to 2:11-12 — the way a wife lives with an unbelieving husband and the way a husband lives with his wife — believing or unbelieving — is to be in the same manner as any believer lives in any difficulty. And it's those principles I want to examine now —

#### 4. When Marriage Goes Wrong, Remember...

- Work for the salvation of your spouse by the **EXCELLENCE** of your character (2:12, 3:1)

- ✓ **Keep your behavior excellent** — The word **excellent** is often translated, “good,” as in something done “well” or “beautifully.” So when a believer is treated unjustly the first impulse should be, “is my response indicative of my position in Christ?” “Is my faith being lived well and beautifully?” Notice also that because of Christ, it is possible to live well even when treated poorly by ungodly unbelievers.
- ✓ The great testimony of a wife to her unbelieving husband is her **behavior** (3:1). Certainly her words are important and this doesn’t mean she can’t ever speak the gospel to him. But he knows her better than anyone else knows her, and if he can’t see a changed life, then why would the gospel be attractive to him?
- ✓ This verse holds out hope that the gospel can change spouses and will change some, but it also reminds that for the one speaking the gospel, that message must be accompanied by a behavior that is fitting for the gospel.
- ✓ When a marriage goes wrong and it is evident that one of the spouses is not a believer, there is a desire to saturate that person with gospel words and evangelistic appeals. That’s understandable. Yet, it is also important to also live out the gospel with increasing beauty.

- **HONOR** all people — even ungodly mates (2:15-17)

- ✓ There is a temptation when wronged and sinned against to lash out in retribution and anger. There is a tendency to want to demand justice in very loud terms. There is a desire to exercise our **freedoms** and rights (v. 16). Yes, we have been given freedoms. Yes there is justice and it is not wrong to pursue it. But can I use my freedom as a means of demonstrating that I am a **slave** (which is what “bondslave” means) of God (v. 16b)?
- ✓ Do I want my freedom and rights, or would I rather live without freedoms to demonstrate I am in submission to the King and my Master?
- ✓ So Peter further applies this by saying, **Honor all people**. The word **honor** means to treat with respect, to speak rightly and fittingly for the position of another.
  - A child doesn’t need to obey a father who commands him to disobey God and an adult child doesn’t need to obey a father, but they both need to speak respectfully, graciously and kindly to and about their father.
  - So a husband also may have an ungodly wife, but he is always to speak respectfully of her because of her position in his life. And notice the word **all** — there is no exception to this command. If she is an unbeliever, is part of the problem that I have not honored her?



- There is VALUE in patient endurance (2:18-20)

- ✓ For those of us who struggle with impatience, we probably aren't always impatient. If someone is kind to us or we are anticipating something good, we probably aren't impatient (at least not in an ungodly manner). Or, if we are enduring the consequences of our own sin, we are less likely to be impatient — we're just experiencing what it right.
- ✓ But put is in a situation when we think we are owed something better, then impatience rises like a mushroom cloud after an atomic explosion.
- ✓ And not only is anger involved, but the impatient, offended party starts looking like the exit door faster than I do when I am asked to go to Garden Ridge: "I want out."
- ✓ But notice what Peter says — **this finds favor...** (vv. 19, 20). The word **favor** is usually translated, "grace." So when we endure with patience, it is a means of experiencing the grace of God. Or said another way, if we impatiently don't endure and leave, we remove the full experience of God's grace and kindness. We want out of the circumstance so that we can have "relief," but it is only when we are under pressure and in trial that we will experience the surpassing power and grace of God. This is the principle that led Paul to write 2 Cor. 12:7-10.
- ✓ This is Peter's way of saying, "when you are in trials, wait, rest, trust, persevere, continue...and see what kind of grace God will supply for you in the process."
- ✓ Sometimes young people get jobs out of college and they have an unreasonable bosses (or they think they are unreasonable); so they want out — "I'M GOING TO QUIT..." And that's their right and prerogative (it's a liberty). But I will often ask them, "Will you learn more by persevering in this difficulty, or by running from the circumstance; and will this person learn more about Christ from you by watching you joyfully endure what they know is hard and not run?" The same applies to marriage. Because not only will we experience God's grace when we patiently endure, but our endurance may also be the means by which God brings our unbelieving spouses to know the saving grace of Christ in salvation.

- You have been called to SUFFER (2:21)

- ✓ We've already alluded to the truth that suffering is a reality in life. It's nothing unusual (4:12). But here it is also our calling — **we have been called to this purpose...** to follow the example of Christ in His suffering. He suffered with joy for us. We suffer for joy with Him. God has called us to do that.
- ✓ We think that suffering is unusual, unfair, and inappropriate. God says it is our calling.
- ✓ Again, we will learn more about the sufficiency of God when we suffer than when we are at rest.

- You are in your marriage as a means of GRACE to your spouse (3:1, 7)

- ✓ It is tempting to think of my marriage as being for me. As Paul Tripp has written:

*"When I got married, I did what every other groom does. I repeated vows to my wife that said I would love her sacrificially all the days of my life. Who was I kidding? I look back and see how little I understood what I promised. What I was really thinking, to a large degree, was, 'This is great! I love me and now you are going to love me!' My love was very shallow. It only took a few days of marriage to figure that out! God had plans to use my wife and children to show me just how shallow my love was and to help it deepen as I saw how much I needed to grow." [Lane and Tripp, Relationships: A Mess Worth Making, 151-2.]*

- ✓ If your spouse is an unbeliever, how is he/she going to come to Christ? The Holy Spirit will do the work, but someone has to speak and live the truth to him/her. Who better than you?
- ✓ Your expectation in marriage is that someone will now meet all your needs. God's expectation is that you have been placed in that marriage to meet someone else's needs, regardless of whether that person meets your needs, because God has met and is meeting all your needs.
- ✓ I mentioned earlier that in 3:1 there is a certainty that some husbands will be unbelievers — "since some are disobedient..." But that same certainty extends to their salvation — "since some are disobedient, they will be won without a word..." The wife becomes a means of grace to her husband and he comes to faith in Christ. And likewise in 3:7, the husband becomes a means of grace to his wife. She is different and unique and fragile, and he lives with her, giving up his so-called rights, so that he can serve her in those needs, and she flourishes under his godly leadership.
- ✓ God has put you in your marriage so that you can be an instrument of grace to your mate regardless of what you receive from your mate and so that God can be the instrument of grace to you.

- **YOUR goal is YOUR personal transformation (3:1-3, 7)**

- ✓ The goal of the believing (or "right") spouse in a difficult marriage is to change the other person.
- ✓ "If she changes..." and "If he'd just change..." are common refrains. "Fix my marriage by fixing my spouse...make her listen to me so that she knows I'm right..."
- ✓ God is interested in fixing the marriage. But often that "fixing" starts by changing you. When you have a disobedient husband, it is *your* behavior that needs to be transformed into actions that are pure and respectful. And it is your heart that needs to put on the imperishable qualities of gentleness and quietness.
- ✓ And when you have a wife who is weak and "lagging behind," it is you that must be transformed into one who is compassionate, gentle, tender, and honoring.
- ✓ How do you communicate to someone the need to change? One way God does it is by putting us into difficult circumstances to make us realize, "I'm the problem..."
- ✓ If you are in a difficult marriage or a difficult season, your tendency will be to point to your spouse and say, "He/she is the problem." The better place to start is by asking, "what in my life needs to change to reflect that the grace of God is at work in me?"

- It is possible to be **GODLY** (and **CONTENT**) when your spouse is ungodly (3:2, 7)

- ✓ Your husband does not need to be godly and obedient for you to be pure and respectful.
- ✓ Your wife does not need to be submissive and loving for you to be understanding, gracious, and honoring.
- ✓ It is possible to honor the Lord with your actions even when you are in a hard marriage.
- ✓ How is that possible? ***In the same way...*** In the same way as what? You live in the same way as other believers in other troubling circumstances. And you live in the same way as Christ in the injustice He endured to accomplish our redemption.
- ✓ And maybe when you suffer like Christ, then not only will you be matured, but perhaps also your spouse will be saved and sanctified.

## CONCLUSION:

*"If your dream for your marriage were to crumble, if your marriage were to appear dry and bare, could you still rise and say, 'I am full of joy because the Lord is Lord of my life, and gloriously, in the midst of all the struggle, I have him'?...Here's the reality: God's goodness, love, power, strength, and glory — and his call to you — do not change when your situation seems bleak and empty. He is still there and he still satisfies." [Paul Tripp, "Marriage: Whose Dream?" 15.]*

- Our goal in the church and in marriage is to **excel still more** in loving and caring for one another. This passage tells us that we don't need to live in ideal circumstances to excel in loving our spouses. But we do need to live in Christ and follow His godly example in suffering if we will excel still more.

## BENEDICTION: Ephesians 3:20-21