



Video... 'Love Words' ... Where was that guy when I was writing in my Valentine card? Actually... I took the words from the video... and wrote them in Kathy's card... because they only scratched the surface of how fortunate I feel to share life and love with her... and to have walked as friends/partners for the last 32 years together. It has nothing to do with the fact that I want to sit on the couch and watch football all day today (I can't because the Super Bowl was last week). I know that speaking about marriage in a morning service for some may be hard because of the situations you have walked through or the loss of the one you deeply loved... but we felt this was important so we could renew the hope of some and challenge those who are married to take their marriage to a deeper and more healthy/happy level.

Kathy... Good morning. It is great to be up here this morning and I am excited about our topic for today. I must admit thought that when Dave first asked me what I wanted to do for Valentine's Day.....sharing the pulpit with him was not on the top of my list. But I must admit that marriage – fostering a good marriage – my own – and nurturing or encouraging others in their marriage relationship is on the top of my list.

As Dave has already said - and he got it right – some points for you - we have been married this year for 33 years. It has not always been easy – marriage even at the best of times, can be difficult but we both were determined that it would also give us joy in the midst of whatever we were experiencing.

We are not experts, yet we have developed some groundwork over the past 33 years which has helped us in our marriage and we would just like to simply share this with you this morning.

As we look at some myths of marriage there is a book by Dr.s Les and Leslie Parrott – “Saving your Marriage before it Starts” – which has been very helpful to us.

1. Myth ..My spouse and I expect the same things from our marriage.

It is true that couples spend more time preparing for their wedding than for their marriage. The trend has been fall in love, marry and hope for the best. If you have been married for months or for years – you probably still have some expectation about what you desire from your marriage – but is it the same as your spouse? Does your spouse even know what your expectations are in this very unique one of a kind relationship – because there is no other relationship, on earth, like marriage?

I can not even remember what I expected – but I did not expect it to be hard work. We had dated for three and a half years before our 6 month engagement. I thought I knew Dave and he thought he knew me and yet we were often surprised at the other's expectations - sometimes pleasantly surprised and at other times not so pleasantly surprised.

Here are some – what I refer to as foundational ingredients - for a thriving marriage relationship which may help each partner to embrace the incongruent expectations because I do feel they also need to be embraced

- Healthy expectations – take time to each look through the other persons lens for life – what do they see? How do they express their expectations and why. Going into our marriage both of us had unspoken rules and expectations most of which neither of us were even fully aware of. It has been said that: "Expectations are the mother of resentments." That's pretty deep but when our spouse does not live up to our unspoken expectations, we can feel frustrated and irritated, and often we don't even know why we're upset because we don't know what's wrong. So first, have an expectation check up together. Awareness of these expectations can only bring you closer as you set vision and dreams in life for your marriage.

- A realistic concept of love – somewhere between the two guys in the video.

But if we were all asked today right now – we would all have a different definition of what love really is. In the Greek language there are a number of words with distinct meanings translated by the one English word "love". Has it been a conversation in your marriage – do you know how your partner defines love? And – it is cheating to get it off of a Hallmark card.

In our relationship – believe it or not – I was the first to say 'I love you' to Dave. For me that meant I was committed to growing the relationship. But for Dave because of what he heard from a Prof at school saying 'I love' meant you need to also have the ring to give to her. I didn't get that – after all it was a very good first date.

What about the:

- Ability to communicate feelings – in my family of origin we did not say 'I love you' we did not say 'I am sorry' and I did not hear those phrases often from my parents. I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt they loved me – but it was not spoken. I thought that was the norm. It was the exact opposite to the way Dave's family communicates feelings.

Not a great expectation to bring in to a marriage – Yet the positive is that Dave was able to grow me in the area and teach me to communicate my feelings to him.

- (This is my favourite one) Understand gender differences; (I feel I have mastered this one.) It does not matter that I have introduced Dave to the meat department at Safeway – he needs to go hunting and kill something – this hobby saves his life and often our marriage. Expect that both of you will have interests outside of the marriage relationship.

Finally – but not least.

- Learn how to make decisions together and settle arguments early rather than after the fact. We all have unspoken rules which we have inherited without awareness which we do not even know exists until we hit a stalemate. We talk a lot about this in our pre-marital counselling and the mantra sums this up nicely ready - 'any problem given time gets bigger'.

2. Myth.. Everything good in our relationship will get better and everything bad in my life will disappear.

Many years ago I worked and stayed home with three kids while Dave went back to school for his Doctorate. It was for him, but it was also for us as couple. It was a good thing but it was not always easy? It was for him – I knew he needed to do that, but it was also for us as couple for our future together. Now, Dave has been the greatest of support to me while I have been in school – he has done more around the house – cooked more meals - and no one has ended up in emergency not even the dog – he has not shrunk any of my sweaters while doing laundry – lately - and my whites have never been whiter. These were good things – which got better – but not without a cost to both of us and our kids at times.

Throughout life marriage is a continual sifting of two separate life's plans into one. But that is an exciting part of marriage – because it draws us closer to each other and to oneness.

I will say though that even though marriage does contribute to our health – it does not erase pain – issues of trust do not disappear magically just because we are now married.

Trust – this was a huge issue for me/us in our marriage. Because of some things that I brought into our marriage surrounding trust Dave and I discovered early in our marriage that he needed to help me trust him. It was almost not fair to him because he did not deserve my distrust – it was one of my inherited problems. But again anyone who has taken our pre-marriage workshop knows that my problems – Dave's problems – are really our problems together.

Although some things may improve not everything good in our relationship gets better and some things become more difficult. The 'bad' of life does not disappear but I believe that the best part of - good - in a marriage comes when each spouse accepts the other as a flawed and fallen human being. It is only in this reality that God is able foster the intimacy of marriage allowing each to be, and sacredly hold, the vulnerabilities of another human being

3. Myth... A good Wedding Ceremony produces a great Marriage

I will never understand how people who put so much time/money/ preparation into their wedding service and reception expect that their marriage will become great with no work at all. And then when things get difficult they aren't willing to roll up their sleeves in order to do what it takes to make their marriage healthy again. I have also found that when our marriage goes through one of those harder times (it happens in ever marriage) that sometimes going back in our mind and remembering how our marriage began... remembering what we promised... has a way to re-ignite that flame that seem to be flickering a little. Guys do you remember turning around and seeing your sweetie walking down the aisle? Ladies, do you remember that look in his eyes as he saw you in that beautiful wedding dress for the first time? Do you remember holding hands ... looking into each others eyes and with tears running down you checks as you repeated words that made promises to love... cherish... and walk together in gentle love

for the rest of your life? Then... to your amazement they responded with an identical promise to love you... support you ... through all that life would bring your way. When they made those promises to you... they were giving you a gift that was truly amazing... they were giving you a gift that no one else in the world had ever giving you... they gave you the gift of their love and their life. They placed their future, and the most precious gift anyone can give... they placed their love in your hands... and promised that whatever may come in life, that they weren't going anywhere. What an astounding gift! Here is my question... how well have you cared for that gift? Have you taken it for granted...or have you treated gently... passionately... in a way that would show them how you understood the enormity of that gift you have been given. Can I ask... how well have you kept your promise to love... cherish... support... encourage them?

This is the kind of question Solomon had in mind in Prov. 6:15, 17, 18 – While he is reminding us that marriage is designed by God to be for life ... he was also calling us to think back... and to recall again how we began and the promises we made >> which were not just to be faithful... not just to be together for life >> but to do whatever it takes to cherish the love that other person has placed in your hands; to gently, keep your promise to love them with all our heart. But that is the promise we made isn't it! That is a promise that is worth fighting to keep...

Song of Solomon 8:6-7 – This is a wife speaking to her husband... they are already married... and she makes this request :6 in our modern language she is saying... Tattoo my name on your heart... and on your arm. I desire to see again the passion you once had for me... and I want to know that I am truly yours... and you have a passion to care me... protect me... Love me. She wants to see the love in his heart ... move toward the actions of his arms. She wants to see his love in action. Ill: Men if you were walking down the street and someone stepped out from the shadows and made a grab for your wife... everyone of us would jump to her defense and would do whatever it takes to protect her. Here, this women is saying will you fight to keep the vows you made (the seal was like the signing of the wedding registry)... will you do what it takes to fight for our marriage... not just to make it last... but to keep on making it better.. deeper... more precious?

Ill: I read about a man who came home to find his wife packing her suitcase... getting ready to leave him. When she turned around she was surprised to see that he was packing his suitcase as well. When she asked what he was doing he said. *'If you are leaving... I am going with you... I promised that wherever you go I will go as well'*.

Song of Solomon 8:7 the fire she is comparing their love to is the fire that burned in the temple in Jerusalem – a fire that never went out. She is saying that the love that burns within them should never go out. That both of them must do whatever it takes to fan the fame of their love.

The point I am trying to make is that ... as we compare the love we had in our heart... and the vows we made to each other on our wedding day with what is happening presently in our marriage ... most of us have some room for growth. So why not respond as Solomon did? He decided that after seeing where they were at in the present ... that he wanted to move them back toward the pursuit of the dreams they had when they first began. And so, he decided to treat the gift of his wife's love and life as a precious gift once again. He decided to do things which would fan the flame of their love. Here is the amazement thing ... as I have watched one spouse start romancing and caring for their partner .. it isn't long until the other person begins to respond – and thrive in the warmth of that love. And that, in turns causes the other person to risk trying even more acts of kindness and love... and before long they are experiencing the marriage they always dreamed they would have. And then the fun really starts to

happen and life gets exciting. So, today .. ask yourself what two or three things can I do to make our marriage what WE always dreamed it could be? And, remember... no matter how wonderful your marriage is... it will need work to help it grow into what you dreamed it could become.

4. Myth .. My spouse will make me whole.

Listen to what Dr.'s Les and Leslie Parrott start off each of their lectures on relationships by saying: "If you try to find intimacy with another person before achieving a sense of identity on your own, all your relationships become an attempt to complete yourself."

I believe God designed marriage as an instrument to make us more like Christ. In his book, *Sacred Marriage*, Gary Thomas asks this question, "*What if God designed marriage to make us holy more than to make us happy?*" Is it possible that there is something much more profound in the heart of God than simply to make us happy?

I believe that what is in the heart of God is that he desires each of us to be in relationship with Him and to grow ourselves in Him individually first. John 5:15 says: "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing." Individually allowing the Spirit to flow through me, to spontaneously produce the Spirit's fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and control of self (Galatians 5:22-23) in all I do can only flow over into my marriage. As Dave foster this in his life there is an obvious choice to serve unconditional love to me like Christ serves love to His bride the church, and I will naturally choose to serve unconditional respect to Dave like Christ's bride serves respect to Him. (Ephesians 5:33)

Ecclesiastes 4:12 says: "Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."

The point of Solomon's illustration is clear. When we have two or more people committed to each other, we have greater protection. We will not be so easily or frequently attacked. The wolf goes after the lone sheep. Although Solomon has been speaking of couples, he says in the last phrase, "A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart." The more support the better. This third strand is God. Yes, our ultimate support in marriage comes from God – but initially it comes from how we are growing in Christ in our separate lives first.

When I re-read this I thought - does this sound too simple?

To couples that have been deeply wounded and are hurting, it may feel impossible. And, if we allow ourselves to be in denial of the need to work on marriage, it may all seem like word games.

We can, however not ignore what God has to say to us about marriage;

"All things are possible to the couple who believes." (Matthew 9:23) There is a conscious choice to believe and to receive God's word into our marriage as the ultimate foundational ingredient.

(I John 4:16) it would be hard not to experience this kind of God given, and God received love in our marriage without it first touching our individual lives.

It is possible to love and serve your spouse. Not only possible but it is one of the good expectations of marriage because it is God-approved.

Marriage is not therapy for the good and bad in our life, but it is edifying.

Unconditional love, respectful honor, how to forgive and be forgiven. Revealing our shortcomings whether we want to or not - it is worth it.....

5. A few Helpful ideas

When it comes to marriage we need to remember that a *marriage certificate is just a learner's permit*. We all have things to learn... can we give you some ideas that may help your love to grow deeper and make it more fun.

1. Marriages may be made in heaven... but they are lived out on earth. So – choose your spouse well. Remember that you *end up marrying the people you date*. Our hearts can quickly fall in love... so be godly and picky concerning who you date and how you date. For as Prov. 21:9 says *Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife/husband*".
2. Make your marriage a high priority. I knew a lady who said that *'she had been a great mother and a lousy wife for 18 years of her marriage'*. Don't forget that the best thing you can do for your kids is love their mother/father.
3. Communication is Crucial. Dave's hint... remember to try and express your feelings as clearly as possible. I have seen couples where an issue has arisen... and he asks what he did wrong, and her answer is *'You know'*. Actually, ladies if we knew what the issue was wouldn't have to ask you what it was. Don't make us guess ... gently let us know. Kathy's hint... when it comes to doing things that are more romantic sometimes men need a little help. Help them start the process... by saying things like... *It is Valentines weekend... wouldn't it be fun to go for a drive to Banff... and let him work out the details /// This Friday wouldn't it be fun to go to a movie ...why not surprise me and plan the date for us...*
4. Each time period of life has its challenges and opportunities when it comes to making time for each other. For example...
 - a. Newly weds ... both are busy working, trying to save up for a mortgage. This is the time to set a pattern for Romance. Problem – you have more time than money... i.e. A broke couple decided that once a week they would go out for coffee (it is cheaper than a meal) – but they decided that each time they would go to a different coffee place).
 - a. Young babies... problem is that there is no sleep, and you are in survival mode—you can't go anywhere without the kid. So each day we would throw our precious bundles in a stroller/slay and walk them to sleep. It was a great time to talk/get in shape... and enjoy each other
 - b. Kids are Us – MacDonald's – play park – coffee and time to sit together. Swiss Chalet – 2 quarter Chickens – meal for the family (we talked while they made a mess). [hint- your tip is determined by the area needs to be cleaned up by the waitress]

- c. One kid can baby-sit – Walk each night before supper/or couch time- talked about your day... your lives. Fall in love again.
- d. Cell phone time – We sneak away for a supper/coffee – Walk in the snow storms ... our times even more precious.
- e. Freedom 85 – plan things for just the 2 of you.

The point is that your marriage needs care .. you both need time to grow in love together .. so each day keep doing things which will feed your love for each other.

>> Question and Answers ... texted from audience.

Con: Today is Valentines Day... it is a day to celebrate the love we have had... the love we presently have... or the possibilities of love yet to come. Understanding that with the joy of love...comes the need to do what is necessary to make that love flourish and grow.

Did You Know: All of us know about the tradition of carrying the bride across the threshold. Do you know where it came from? It started in Netherlands. It was the idea that when a husband and wife were coming home from their wedding the groom would pick up his bride and carry her across the threshold into their new home. What you may not know is that we've lost a little of the custom over the years. You see, the tradition was that he did not carry her through the front door. Instead, their houses were made with a special door on the side of the house. They would walk to this special door --- he would carry her across the threshold... and then they would lock that door and that door would never open it again until the day her/his body was carried out of the house for their funeral. That locked door served as a reminder that 'we are together need to give all we have to make our marriage flourish.

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