



Marriage: the two shall become one flesh

Ephesians 5: 21-33

Intro

On December 3, 1993, I picked up my phone, dialed a number, and said, hello is Laurel there? This is her. Laurel, my name is David Hanke. I saw you at the meeting tonight but I didn't get a chance to introduce myself. I've been dying to meet you. We talked for 45 minutes and I was head over heels in love. Over the next four years we dated, we broke up 2 or 3 times, I moved to Texas and she finished college. I started InterVarsity fellowships, she spent a summer in India on a mission trip. We saw each other 14 days in a 17 month period. In Dec 1995, we got engaged. In August 1996, we canceled the wedding. In January 1997 we planned a different wedding in a different place. On May 31, 1997, we finally got married. 30 months later, in the fall of 1999, my immaturity and selfishness collided with Laurel's immaturity and selfishness in a way that we almost separated and threw in the towel. Instead, I took an 8 month leave of absence from my job. We stepped up the intensity of our marriage counseling. We got lots of prayer and engaged in hours of gut-wrenching conversation. Towards the end of 2000, we knew we were going to make it. We decided to do our part and see if we could have kids. The name we chose for a boy was 'son of grace', a picture of what God had done between us, in Welsh it is pronounced Macrae.

Marriage is hard. If you are married you probably have a similar story or you will. We have spent a lot of the last 15 years in counseling, our most recent appt was back in August. We see our weakness every day yet we are so thankful for our companionship as we live life together.

I wanted you to know a bit of my story because, we are going to spend the next 2 Sundays digging into the back end of Eph 5. We are a diverse community with strongly-held convictions about the institution in general and even this passage in particular. Regardless of your marital demographic label-- married, never married, used to be married, married again-- we all need to think Biblically and rightly about what marriage is. So don't check out, this content is for everybody.

2 weeks is not enough time to unpack the riches of this passage alone, much less articulate a full Biblical theology of marriage-- it's just a metaphor for the entire way Christ relates to the church... So I will focus on 2 things: What does it mean that a husband and wife are one flesh? What are the roles/ instructions for wives and husbands. This week we will talk about the implications of cleaving of becoming one flesh. In two weeks we will talk about submission, authority, love, and respect.

As I said before, Nothing I say today is original to me-- Paul was first and lots of preachers after him have done a great job making these truths come alive. I am particularly grateful to Tim Keller, Bill Hybels, and Kyle Miller for today's message.



What is marriage?

Marriage is a public covenant between a man and a woman to be bound to each other legally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually until they die for the purpose of sanctification. Our Anglican Marriage service says, “the bond and covenant of marriage was established by God in creation... It signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his church, and Holy Scripture commends it to be honored among all people....

So in the garden, after God had made everything and doxologically cried out it is good, it is good, check this out, it is good. He looked at man alone, the singular Adam and said-- not good. I will make a helper fit for him. God goes to work, furiously making aardvarks, cockroaches, orangutans, squirrels and zebras and thankfully, none of them were a helper fit. So then God put Adam to sleep and took part of him and crafted a woman. When Adam saw her, he said, at last, this is my bone, this is my flesh, this is the helper fit for me, the one that corresponds to me. This is the one who could complete me.

Cleave

What's interesting is they didn't start a business, they didn't divide up labor in the garden-- who was going to do what, they didn't divide up assets and say you can use those resources and I'll use these. They didn't pursue efficiency. They became one flesh. They cleaved. They held fast to each other. Two separate entities become a third-- one.

At its core, marriage is cleaving. That's why Jesus responds to the question-- is divorce legal-- Moses might have created a structure that allows you to legally separate, but you can't undo what God ordained in creation-- they are no longer 2, but one. It is indivisible. In marriage something happens that can't be undone.

What is it? What happens when we cleave? The word is only used twice in the NT-- both as quotations of Gen 2.24. Used about 15x in the OT Israel is told to cleave to their tribe's inheritance, cleave to the Lord, to not let things that are devoted to the Lord cleave to their hand... An element of 'sticking', but also an intangible desperateness-- as if you are holding on for dear life.

What is the purpose of marriage?

Why? The reason is found in the purpose of marriage-- which is not an aggregation of labor to accomplish a task, not a business contract. **The purpose is a covenant of companionship/friendship that gets you ready to meet God.** Paul illustrates it by talking about the relationship between Jesus and the church.

Eph. 5:25 **Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might**



present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

The goal of Christ is the sanctification of the church-- cleansing it, bringing it to splendor, removing any blemish, refine the dross. Every ounce of His energy is focused on that task. That's what God is doing in you. In the same way, husbands and wives are instructed to see as the goal of their relationship the day they present the other one to God. Think about that white wedding dress. It's not just a beautiful garment for the wedding day. It is a picture/ illustration/ vivid description of the whole point. This is where you begin... In naive, thrilled, anticipatory splendor. But its not just down hill from here. There will be a day when you look Jesus in the face. You will be dressed in his righteousness. You will be praising God for the sanctifying gift of marriage that got you ready to face him. Marriage is the gift God gives you to expose your selfishness, your weakness, to nourish your strengths, to take risks to live out your gifts. God gives you marriage so that the beauty of righteousness, holiness might be formed in you through and through.

To accomplish the purpose, God makes the 2, 1. Cleave

The goal is being presented in splendor. His best idea was to make you cleave. What are the implications of being one flesh? Paul offers 2: priority and access

Priority

- a. The person to whom you are cleaved has a priority that is above everything else: therefore a man shall leave his father and mother... Paul could not say any more clearly that to be married, you must leave your most foundational relationships: *mother and father*. It's your relp with God, your relp with your spouse then everything else is a distant third. Nothing else comes close.
 - i. Your kids are a distant 3rd. (even though it is easier to manipulate your kids to get them to feedback their love and affection, easier to get them to meet your emotional needs than your spouse). Instead, kids need to hear and watch you say, not now, because we are talking. Our marriage is the most important relationship in our life and we are giving it attention right now, not you.
 - ii. Your work is a distant 3rd (even though often quick wins, tangible rewards, people who are obligated to tell you how great you are). So if work is affecting your marriage, you change your work. Travel, missed meals, logging back in after the kids go down. All of us have seasons where we are gone too much and not available. All of us should be willing to leave our job for the sake of our marriage if the season lasts too long.
 - iii. Your friends are a distant 3rd (even though attracted to shared affinity, common interests, we tend to not take them for granted.) If you spend more hours or eat more meals with friends than your spouse in a given week, needs to change.
 - iv. When looking at priority, **Numbers don't lie**. Time and emotional investment needs to be prioritized for your spouse. You can't say this is my top priority



relationship and have 3-4 relationships that get more time and energy. You are fooling yourself and ignoring God's instruction to your peril.

Access

- b. You grant your spouse access. They get to go where no one else has gone before. Two images that illustrate cleaving-- washing and loving your body. Think about how you wash your body. It's very intimate and very private. You trim fingernails, you shave hair, you scrub parts that never see the light of day. If there are body parts you find unsightly, you figure out ways to hide them or change them. You know your body. When you cleave, you give your spouse the same access that you have. Not just physically, but to a much greater extent emotionally, relationally, and spiritually. They get to see all your uncleanness and all your blemishes. But they also get to give you input about what you should change and how you should be different. If you get touchy about this input, along the lines of-- nobody gets to talk to me about that, you don't have a right-- then you are denying what it means to cleave, to be one flesh. On the other hand, if you let them see it all, and trust they will honor their commitment to love you no matter what, then that person whom you dearly love can be the Gospel for you. They can see you as you really are and articulate their commitment, their love. They can pray. They can wash you with the Word, telling you what's true, calling you to repentance, new life, and get you ready to face God-- tenderly, gently, as one washes their own body.
 - i. The result of this access is that your spouse has the capacity and the right to re-program your self-image. Think about the messages that might have been repeated to you all your life-- you're ugly, you're plain, nothing special about you, you're not very bright, you'll never do much. Your spouse can turn over all those verdicts in a single word-- you are smart; you make a difference in my life; you are beautiful-- and you will believe you are smart, that you matter, that you are attractive. At the same time, if you mis-use this. If you say to your spouse you're good for nothing, you're stupid... It will destroy him. When you cleave, become one flesh, you put into the hands of your spouse the ability to make or break you. You are given access to the most private and personal places. You have no idea the power you have. You talk to your spouse the way you do a roommate, your siblings, or a co-worker, you say mean or careless things and think your spouse will take it the same way everyone else does. As tim Keller says, you think you have a bb gun, when in reality you have a howitzer. You think you are giving them a flesh wound, but when you pull the trigger all that is left is a pair of sneakers with smoke coming out of them.
 - ii. If you use your access and your power as a way to build each other up. If you affirm, it becomes easier for your spouse to open up. You create a cradle of security for your moments of vulnerability. Then there is opportunity for transformation.



- iii. If you abuse it, your spouse will quickly realize, they can't trust you. Because they can nail me like no one else has ever been able to nail me, so out of fear, I better close up, separate, protect, guard. One flesh is lost, you are left with a business partnership, a social contract, a parenting coop, not a marriage that cleaves.
- iv. The mystery is that we know it is Jesus who does this, but marriage is just built on that salvation platform. The way Jesus treats his church is the way we are to treat each other. Our spouse has the power to make or break us.

Priority and Access-- the results of becoming one flesh, and the means to being presented in splendor before Christ.

How do we cleave? How do we hold fast to each other?

Relational intimacy has three parts: spiritual, emotional, and physical. A particular relationship concentrates on different aspects. In marriage, as we cleave, God calls us to give energy and attention to all three. We are not just physical or emotional or spiritual beings. We are all three and all three help us 'hold fast' to each other. **What are some practical ways to do this?**

1. **Build on every shred of positive connection you can find.** Every common interest (wine, cooking, UT Football), common goal, common pleasure, common recreational pursuit (running, tris), common ministry involvement. *Think about how much time you would give to build a rep with a new client, or to make a sale, or to satisfy your boss...look for those things. What do you have in common, what do you delight in? Nurture it, love it...*
 - a. One couple in our church made a decision after they got married for each of them to learn the favorite sport of the other one and then to take up a third sport that neither of them was good at or had done before.
2. **Time and Energy.** The numbers don't lie. Every marriage requires vigilant attention and effort. Huge investments of time and energy. Wonderful relps can die out of sheer neglect. This is a no-brainer. Schedule in time and bring your best.
 - a. I recently had a date night that was not my best... I was tired, I didn't want to talk, I was just going through the motions.
 - b. Figure out a way to give *some* of your **best minutes** and best energy of each day to your spouse.
3. **Get help fast.** If your kid gets a fever or starts crying in the night, you come running. You give medicine, you take them to the doctor. You don't ignore the signs (although I am somewhat bad about this... Very tempted by the suck it up method of parenting.) What if, at the first sign of trouble, we said-- oh no. Not here, not in this home or in this relationship. We are not giving up without a lot of work. We are going to admit that we



need help right now, and we are going to get it. I know great counselors. We have great mentors in this church who have been married for lots of years. We have an intercessory team that will pray for you. If you are having a hard time. If you are in a tough spot, then by all means tell someone. Do not gut it out. Do not assume that it will just get better. Do not start spending less time together and avoiding each other. Do not bury it, stuff, it, or ignore it. If your ear hurts, you get antibiotics and get it fixed. If your marriage hurts, do something about it.

How do you know that your marriage hurts?

- i. You have had an argument that keeps re-surfacing.... Didn't we just fight about this last week? Generally, couples argue about sex, kids, and money. If you have fought about this, you are normal. If you can't get a resolution, you are normal. Invite someone into your normal marriage to listen and pray.
- ii. You are spending less time around each other because it feels awkward or you are mad or you can't forgive.
- iii. You have not had sex in the last 30 days.
- iv. You have not had a date in the last 30 days and you can't figure out how to get some time outside the house for just the 2 of you.
- v. You have not prayed together in the last 30 days
- vi. 30 days is not that much time to have not done these things, 30 days is a significant slide into lack of diligence.
- vii. You are hiding anything from your spouse-- receipts for things purchased, porn, inappropriate conversations... If there is ANYthing you don't want your spouse to know.
- viii. These are the reasons to get help fast. To call somebody, to walk in the light, to let somebody in.

Build your spiritual intimacy-- pray together everyday, I encourage men to initiate this. It will always feel awkward, get over it. Ask each other about QTs, dream spiritual dreams, talk about what you are learning about from the Lord.

Build your emotional intimacy: be transparent, walk in the light, listen, learn empathy, ask good questions, text each other abt what you are doing/ feeling, leave notes.

Build your physical intimacy: have regular conversations about love-making. Talk about frequency, time of day you prefer, things that feel loving. Give tons of non-sexual affection-- touch, hugs, kisses that aren't meant to end in sex-- just because. Make love regularly.

Hold fast to each other. Cleave. So that you can get your spouse ready to one day face God.



If you are married, God gave you that gift because it is the very best thing for your discipleship. Companionship, sex, tax bracket are all nice, but for you, this is the primary way God is going to make you look like Christ.

If you are not married, and you hope to be, take a good look at the priority and access you are willing to give.

If you are not married, and that is a source of pain and disappointment, be confident that God Himself is committed to presenting you in splendor and in this season, he has chosen a different means to achieve your sanctification...

Where do you start?

My friends who are married and my friends who aren't: Remember Christ. He's the One who gave Himself up for you. He is your perfect spouse who sees all of your blemishes and wrinkles. He is the One who is fully bought in to the goal of presenting you sanctified, without spot wrinkle or blemish. Remember Christ. He sees more than you want anyone to see. He loves more than you ever hoped anyone might. Hold fast to Him. For your good and His glory.