

# A Godly Marriage: Covenant, Not Casual Connection

Joel | The Resting Place Apostolic Family | Matthew 5:31-32

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## MARRIAGE IS THE WORLD'S FIRST AND OLDEST INSTITUTION

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The main point for today is that a godly marriage demands that we reject casual connection and embrace covenant relationship. It is my honor to declare that a fresh new wave of reverence and respect is returning to the institution of marriage at The Resting Place, starting right now.

Marriage is the world's first and oldest institution. Man has created endless institutions on the earth, from trade organizations to kingdoms to governments. But not marriage. Marriage stands alone as the one institution designed and created by God in the Garden of Eden, with one man and one woman.

A contract protects the self-interest of the one who enters it. It guarantees what I will get out of the partnership. A covenant is entered to ensure the benefit of the other participating person. You enter a covenant not asking, "What am I going to get out of this?" You enter a covenant asking, "How much can I give to this?"

As you all know, we have been in the Sermon on the Mount. Because we are still in our Sabbath year, we return to the book of Matthew, chapter 5. This has been the anchor verse that we have been preaching from for weeks and weeks and weeks, and every time we came to it, I sensed the Holy Spirit tug that we had to talk about marriage. It is in Matthew 5:31-32.

*"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her a victim of adultery."*

# THE CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE

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There was a whole lot of things that were punishable by death in the Old Covenant. Adultery was one of them. Marriage is a death covenant. When a marriage occurs, two individuals come to the altar to die, and one new entity emerges. Moses enabled Israel to give a certificate, a piece of paper, a way out. Over the years, people turned that exit into a shrug. Marriage in the days of Jesus had become casual, disposable, something you could file your way out of on a Friday afternoon.

There were two schools of thought at that time fighting over this subject. The school of Shammai taught that divorce was only for something very serious, like sexual immorality. But the school of Hillel, the much more popular school of the day, taught that you could divorce for any reason. There was even a text from the Hillel school stating that if your wife burned your dinner, you could write her a certificate of divorce.

My first year of marriage, I would go to Aldi, get steaks from the little cup-sized packages, and put them in a George Foreman grill. I am so glad my wife did not practice the teachings of the Hillel school, because if I messed up dinner, it would have been over.

The religious leaders even tested Jesus on this exact question: is it lawful to divorce for any cause? Jesus did not pick the Hillel teaching or the Shammai teaching. He responded, "The certificate was only allowed because of the hardness of your hearts. You are only asking me for a way out of this marriage because your hearts are hard. You have lost tenderness for one another." It has never been God's design for marriage to be casual.

Who is Jesus to command us on our marriage relationships? He is the designer of marriage itself. He is the architect of human connection. I want to share a few things I have learned over the years, after thirteen years of marriage, three kids, and a mortgage, things I have learned through bumps and bruises along the way, so that you can benefit from my mistakes.

# MARRIAGE IS THE FOUNDATION OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN COMING TO THE EARTH

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The first question I ask and propose is: what is the foundation of the kingdom? Why does God guard marriage so fiercely? Because marriage is the foundation of the kingdom of heaven coming to the earth. When God established the garden, He needed a vehicle to carry out His kingdom on the earth. He did not plant a nonprofit ministry. He did not plant a government building with senators and bylaws. When God, in His infinite wisdom, imagined the perfect vehicle to establish His rule on the earth, He planted a marriage, a husband and a wife.

God's action plan to redeem the earth is, first, foremost, and always has been and always will be, family. A husband and a wife, a mother and a father.

*Genesis 2:24: "Therefore man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."*

Here is the part that wrecks me. This current chapter of human existence started with a marriage, and this age of human existence will end with a marriage, the great marriage supper of the Lamb.

*Revelation 19:7: "Let us rejoice, exalt, and give Him the glory, for the marriage supper of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready."*

*Revelation 21:2: "And I saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."*

From a garden to a city, from the first marriage to the final marriage, the whole story of God is held together by a wedding.

*Revelation 22:17: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.'"*

The Spirit and the bride sing the same duet: come, Lord Jesus. The end-time church will be the most mature church of all time. Some of you have been in church a long time, and because of our immaturity you have borne what we call church hurt. But I would tell you the days of the immature church globally are coming to an end, and the most mature church in human existence will come

forth. Her primary identity will not be the army of God. Her primary identity will not even be the children of God. The great ascending revelation, the great identity that the church will walk in from this portion of existence into eternity, will be the bride of Christ. She will know herself as the beloved bride, and Yeshua as her beloved bridegroom.

So here is the gift: we get to experience a little of that maturity and growth right now, in our own marriages. You could say that your marriage is training ground for eternity. And here you thought it was all about your feelings. This is bigger than just how you feel.

## THE BEST TEACHER ON MARRIAGE

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Who is the best teacher on marriage? Not Joel. I can tell you that right now. God is the best teacher on marriage, because He is the architect. He is the architect of human connection.

To the level that we receive love from God is the level we are qualified to love like God. God is the source of a thriving marriage because God is love, and the more we receive His love, the more we have plenty of love to give to one another. My wife is amazing. But even as wonderful as Briana is, she is actually not my primary motivation to love her. Yeshua, Jesus, is, because even as wonderful as my wife has been these last thirteen years, she has failed me and I have failed her. At some point, because she is fallible and so am I, we must have an outside source of motivation to love one another. We need gas for this vehicle.

Part of the reason marriages do not work is because we keep looking to one another as motivation to love each other. And yet Jesus commands, "This new command I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you." You can have the nicest, fastest, most amazing car ever, but if it does not have gas, it does not go. And on the flip side, you can have the best possible wedding, all the money, the nicest house, the country club, you can do all the things, and if you do not have the love of God, that marriage is a whitewashed tomb. It is nothing but glorified selfishness.

Even though we have found God, and even though God has found us, let me ask you something. Once you encounter Jesus for the first time, did you just stop talking to Him? We do not stop seeking the thing once we have found it. Do we stop seeking Him? No, we do not. And yet we learn how to love our spouses the way we love God.

I make it a personal goal of mine to continually seek my wife, to knock on the door of her heart often. The beautiful thing about being married to a human is that humans change over time, and so every few years I get to fall in love with someone new.

## THE VEIL TORN IN EVERYDAY MARRIAGE

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Another way God teaches us about marriage is that He shows us the reality of the veil torn in everyday marriage.

*Song of Solomon 4:1,3: "Behold, you are my beautiful, my love. Your eyes are doves behind your veil, and your cheeks are like the halves of pomegranates behind your veil."*

My wife, on the day of her wedding, wore a veil, and it was my greatest honor to remove it. I now have access to her in ways no one else does. And yet, what you in your darkened understanding cannot see is that God Himself tore the veil, so that you can have access, not just once, but for all time. We learn how to love each other because of our relationship with God. It is the divine mystery. We have to allow mystery to return to our relationship with Yeshua. I do not want to have everything figured out. That is so boring.

Just because we have the thing does not mean we stop seeking the thing.

*Proverbs 25:2: "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings to search a matter out."*

## IT IS THE WORK OF KINGS TO SEARCH OUT A MATTER

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It is actually my glory, as the king of my home, to seek out the deep things of my spouse. This is the work of kings, seeking one another out, seeking your spouse, trying to understand who they are beneath the surface. Marriage is a mystery. How many of you have ever felt like, "I do not get this thing"? I have been in this marriage thing and I still do not have it figured out. That is the point. Marriage is a mystery, because it says so in the Bible.

*Ephesians 5:31-32: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying it as it refers to Christ and the church."*

The two becoming one is not just biology. It is the picture of Christ and His church. Why will Briana never stop being a mystery to me? Because there is something eternal about her. I have been in tech my whole life, and as a programmer, I understand what it meant when God says He wrote eternity into the human heart.

*Ecclesiastes 3:11: "He has made everything beautiful, and also has put eternity into man's heart."*

That means there is something eternal about the heart of my spouse. That means I can begin to seek and never find the bottom. You are bored with your spouse because you stopped seeking. It is the work of kings to search out the matter of the heart, the eternal heart of the person sitting next to you.

As the Spirit searches the deep things of God, so I continuously search out the deep things of my spouse, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. And speaking of physically, sex is spiritual warfare.

*1 Corinthians 7:1-5: "Each husband should have sexual intimacy with his wife, and each wife should have sexual intimacy with her husband. Every husband has the responsibility of meeting the sexual needs of his wife, and likewise wives to their husbands. Neither the husband nor the wife have exclusive rights over their own bodies, but those rights are surrendered to the other. Do not continue to refuse your spouse those rights, except perhaps by mutual agreement for a specified time, so that you could be devoted to prayer, and then you should resume your physical pleasure, so that the adversary cannot take advantage of you."*

That sounds like fighting words. You had better resume your physical pleasure, so the adversary cannot take advantage.

*Ephesians 4:27: "Give no opportunity to the devil," or in another translation, "give no foothold."*

A foothold is a military term, a form of warfare where you prevent the enemy from establishing itself in your territory, and sex can help prevent that.

For the kingdom believer who has the Holy Spirit living inside, sexual immorality actually produces death to the soul. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 6 that anyone who commits sexual immorality commits a sin against their own person. It is a direct sin against you. And yet sexual encounter in holy matrimony produces the opposite. It produces life. As a born-again believer, I do not lose my ability to sin. I lost my ability to fully enjoy it. This is why it must be enjoyed in holy matrimony, because it is holy, and it is also a form of warfare.

## REMOVE EVERYTHING THAT HINDERS LOVE

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*Hebrews 12:1: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."*

What if we removed all the hindrances to our marriage? I will tell you what it would do. It would expose what is inside. Let us say for a moment that you removed every kind of hindrance, every kind of perversion, every kind of distraction, all the busyness that keeps our minds focused on other things, every fleeting desire, every vanity. Here is the question: how much love would actually remain?

For some of you, this is a sad question, because within your marriage you have filled your connection with busyness to overcompensate for the lack of love. That is not a sustainable model. You stayed so busy so that you would not have to feel the truth of how little love is actually left. On the flip side, for some of you, this is a beautiful question, because if you remove all the hindrances, strip away all the busyness, the vanities, the distractions, what you find underneath is nothing but love.

My marriage has been in both positions. There was a time our marriage was hanging on by a thread, and we entertained the question, what if? What if I could be happier with something else, or someone else? That question attacked our marriage. Ninety percent of all affairs have a failure rate, and over twenty-five percent end within the first week. Meanwhile, seventy-two percent of unhappy marriages reported being happily married five years later, and over eighty-three percent of very unhappy marriages reported being happily married five years later.

That means two things. First, do not grow weary in doing good, for in due season you shall reap a harvest of righteousness if you do not give up. Second, love is like a garden. The grass is not greener on the other side. The grass is greener where you water it. It is time to lock back into your marriage, to dial back into this connection, because this connection is not just about you. It is about God's kingdom coming to the earth.

The most important thing I have learned about my whole marriage is that I had to first learn how to be a wife before I could be a husband. I was fifteen years old, asking God for a girlfriend, and He told me not to date for five years. I only ended up giving Him about four, and I failed my part, but He promised that if I waited five years, at the end of the fifth year He would give me my wife. And even though I failed my side, He still gave me my wife.

In those five years, the Lord was teaching me that before He could teach me how to be a husband, He first had to teach me how to be His wife, because you cannot give what you do not have. In the book of Song of Solomon, you have a lover, represented as the man, the initiator, and you have the beloved. Her role, her job, is to be loved.

Marriage is not a contract. It is a covenant. On the night Jesus was to be betrayed, He deepened His covenant with His betrayers, looking at the room of everyone who would abandon Him in just a few hours, and said, "I am giving My body, My blood, and everything to you."

## **COMMUNION: HIS PROPOSAL TO ALL HUMANITY**

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Let's say thank you to Joel for that word. We are going to enter into a time of communion. Because it is the first Sunday of the month, we always begin with this time of remembering Jesus's sacrifice, going to the Lord's table. We want to go to the table of the Lord with this word, not just, "Okay, now it's time for communion," but to actually engage with the Lord out of what we have just received. If you are a devoted follower of Jesus, come and grab the elements.

The passage often read in moments like this is 1 Corinthians 11, and right before it, the passage talks about head coverings, the passage people try to quote online, saying it is not right for a man to have long hair. It is important for today. This is how we should enter the table. Paul is speaking to a Greek audience about men praying in public dressed as women, using the Greek word for a hair trellis, hair extensions. Among the Greeks it was a sign of homosexuality, men saying, "I am single

and ready to mingle with other men." Paul says it is wrong for people acting like that to stand in the assembly and pray. Then he says wives should have their heads covered as well, praying with their heads covered.

The point of this passage, right before the Lord's Supper, is that men need to be men and women need to be women, and they need to pursue each other in marriage covenant. That is the context right before the Lord's Supper. Before we get to the Lord's table, let the husbands and the wives act rightly toward one another, so that you can go to the table together in a proper way.

*1 Corinthians 11:23-26: "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This is My body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same way also He took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."*

In some Jewish traditions, this was a method of proposal, where a groom would bring a cup of wine and offer it to the girl he wanted to marry. If she took it and drank it, she was accepting the marriage, saying yes to becoming his fiancée. Here we have Him saying, men, do not participate in homosexuality, women, cover yourselves rightly, prepare yourselves for one another. This is what I received from the Lord, that on the night of His betrayal, He proposed to the human race. He proposed to all humanity and said, "I'll be yours if you'll be Mine."

Joel said the whole of eternity, the narrative of eternity, is marriage. And even in the middle of the story, the hinge of history is the cross. At that moment He said, let's bring it back. I want to be yours completely, and I want you to be Mine completely. So as we take the bread today, we do this in remembrance of His proposal. He participated in a covenant act of love by laying down His life, by giving His life. He did not say, "I am here for what I can get." He said, "I am here for what I can give," and what He is giving is His body. He said, "This is My body given for you." Would you take the bread and do what He did? Would you break it? Jesus, we thank You for Your body given to us.

Thank You, Lord, that in this way You got down on one knee for all humanity, and You proposed, and You said, "I'll be yours if you'll be Mine." As we say yes again, as we receive You again through this cup, would we stand firmly on the truth of Your word and actually be a light for society. The nuclear family is what preserves morality. Lord, would You strengthen us for the warfare of

marriage, that we would war together and not against one another, that we would be a united front, every marriage in here. To everyone who has been hurt by marriage or hurt in their marriage, we look to Your proposal for our fulfillment. We take the cup of Your proposal and we say yes, and from there we pour ourselves out. Thank You that You wanted it this way, that this was Your plan.

As the corporate bride, can we say, "I do," to King Jesus. We receive Your proposal, in Jesus's name.

The Lord bless you. The Lord keep you. The Lord make His face shine upon you and give you peace, in Jesus's name.

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