



What God Has Joined Together

Mark 10:1-12

David Sunday February 16, 2020

It's such a joy to hear you singing about this hope and to be led so wonderfully by this music team. Praise the Lord for what we just sang and now for what we're going to hear from His Word. Please turn in your Bibles to Mark 10.

I want to say how much I appreciate the men who have preached these last three weeks—Brandon, Patrick and Joe. I've been nourished by their ministry. I'm also grateful to hear stories of salvation and God's work in marriages and families here in our church. His Spirit is at work and it's all by Him and for His glory.

Today's sermon is about God's precious gift of marriage and the painful tragedy of divorce. As we come to a subject like this, we need to remember what the Bible says about itself. The Bible says, "*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness*" (2 Timothy 3:16 ESV).

As we come to a portion like this that can be difficult to hear and chew on, we believe God has good for us in this passage. So let's trust Him for that as we hear His Word together, beginning at Mark 10:1:

¹ [Jesus] set out from there and went to the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Then crowds converged on him again, and as was his custom he taught them again.

² Some Pharisees came to test him, asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"

³ He replied to them, "What did Moses command you?"

⁴ They said, "Moses permitted us to write divorce papers and send her away."

⁵ But Jesus told them, "He wrote this command for you because of the hardness of your hearts. ⁶ But from the beginning of creation God made them male and female. ⁷ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother [some manuscripts add "and be joined to his wife"] ⁸ and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

¹⁰ When they were in the house again, the disciples questioned him about this matter. ¹¹ He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. ¹² Also, if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of our God abides forever (Isaiah 40:8). Let's pray.

Lord, we know a spiritual war is going on whenever we hear Your Word. Lord, we know our own hearts are prone to wander and there's a tendency in all our hearts to harden. We live in a world of broken promises, failed marriages and disappointed hopes. So Lord, we need Your help today as we hear this message. We thank You that You are with us, Jesus, to heal and call us to repentance. You are with us to comfort us. You are with us to strengthen us. You are with us to mend what is broken. We thank You that You are going to take this Word and we pray You would cause it to bear fruit 30, 60 or 100-fold to Your glory, in Your name. Amen.

I love the story of Muriel and her husband Robertson McQuilken. They were engaged on Valentine's Day 1948 and were married later that year. They served for about 20 years as missionaries in places like Japan. Then in 1968, he was called to serve as the president of Columbia Bible College and Muriel developed quite a ministry there of her own. Things were going great until around 1978 when they started realizing their lives were changing dramatically.

They were having a great time at a party with some friends and Muriel told a story. Her husband Robertson looked at her and said, "Honey, you just told that story five minutes ago." She said, "Hmm. I don't remember." They laughed and the party went on. But that started happening more and more, until Muriel was diagnosed with Alzheimer's at a relatively young age. Robertson watched helplessly as his wife lost her mental faculties and then she began to be terrified every time he left her presence.

One day he was in his office at the college and she was trying to find him. She came walking to him and he realized her feet were hurting. He took off her shoes and saw that her feet were bloody from the journey. He knew then that something needed to change. He explained to the constituency of the college why he felt it was time for him to resign as president.

The decision was made, in a way, 42 years ago when I promised to care for Muriel "in sickness and in health...till death do us part." So, as I told the students and faculty, as a man of my word, integrity has something to do with it. But so does fairness. She has cared for me fully and sacrificially all these years; if I cared for her over the next 40 years I would not be out of her debt.

Duty, however, can be grim and stoic. But there is more: I love Muriel. She is a delight to me... I don't have to care for her. I get to! It is a high honor to care for so wonderful a person.

When Muriel died a decade later, Robertson wrote this to his friends:

For 55 years Muriel was flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone. So it's like a ripping of my flesh and deeper—my very bones. But there is also profound gratitude. For ten years I've delighted in recalling happy memories. I still do. No regrets. I'm grateful.

That, friends, is a picture of what discipleship in marriage looks like. This is just a faint reflection of the kind of love Jesus has for us, His bride. Here's the main point of this morning's sermon:

**Because we are loved as the Bride of Christ,
followers of Jesus are determined
to preserve and prosper marriage
at great cost to ourselves.**

Now, if we're going to be the kind of people who preserve and prosper marriage at great cost to ourselves, we're going to have to deal with some "defeater beliefs" that rise up in our hearts and try to choke the good seed the Word God wants to plant in us today. I'm thinking first of all of those of you who are listening to the words of Jesus through the lens of your own marital failures—and you're feeling condemned. You're not hearing the word of a loving, gracious Savior, but the word of an accuser.

Then there are those of you who have come into church today, knowing this is going to be the message, and you're hurting. Maybe you've been abandoned by your spouse; you feel humiliated and isolated. Or maybe your parents split up and you're feeling torn and disoriented.

If the very mention of divorce opens up a raw wound, I want you to know my heart goes out to you this morning. I've been praying for you and I want to ask those in our congregation who are burdened to pray right now for those who are struggling to receive the word Jesus has for us today. Pray for those who are feeling condemned, who are listening with broken hearts. Pray for your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Then I know some of us might feel a little bit cynical at the start of this message. I've often heard how the church can so emphasize marriage that it makes people who aren't married feel like second-class citizens. I want you to know that all of us, whether single or married, can play a vital role in encouraging, supporting and preserving the marriages of this church. If you're unmarried,

through your joy and satisfaction in Christ you can demonstrate the beautiful reality of what all marriages are pointing toward.

I also think of the young adults in our church and I'm grateful you are people who love to hear the whole counsel of God preached. You want to know what God's Word has to say about marriage. You do so because you understand this is about the gospel. Paul Tripp said it really well:

There's not a gospel for the single, and a gospel for the married, and a gospel for the young, and a gospel for the old; there is really only one gospel; and when I learn the will of God for one area of life, I learn applications that bleed over to other areas of life.

So whether you're married or not, please stay engaged with what God's Word has to say to us today.

There are a couple other defeater beliefs I want to address directly. I'm thinking right now of those of you who may be walking in rebellion—or contemplating a path of rebellion against God's Word. You may be thinking, “Hmm, I know what the Bible says. I've heard the words of Jesus, but I'm not sure I want to obey or follow them. I believe the path laid out in God's Word doesn't look like a path of blessing. It looks more like a path of pain.”

Or maybe you're thinking there's a better life to be found on another way than the path of righteousness Jesus lays out for us here. I am pleading with God to arrest rebellion today, bringing His people—each of us—to repentance. For some, we may need to repent of self-righteousness. That's another defeater belief that chokes out the Word. We may be sitting here thinking, “Well, I have a great marriage. I'm doing pretty well.” You may be looking down on others, feeling smug and superior.

Wherever you're at, Jesus is here now to meet us and help us preserve and prosper marriage at great cost to ourselves. So let's dive into God's good Word here. The first thing we need to recognize is the context that's described in Mark 10:1-2.

This is a trap.

The setting for this passage is clear: this is a trap. Jesus was down in the region of Judea, across the Jordan. Who else ministered down by the Jordan River? John the Baptist. Remember what happened to John? King Herod, the Roman tetrarch who ruled over that region, gave orders to arrest John and chain him in prison. Why? Because Herod had married Herodias, who was his brother Philip's wife.

Here's the scene. Herodias was married to the brother of King Herod, but the King and his sister-in-law developed an attraction to one another that resulted in her getting a divorce from her

husband and entering into remarriage with her brother-in-law, the king. John the Baptist wasn't about to turn a blind eye to this. Instead, he kept telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." You know the rest of the story: John the Baptist ended up a headless corpse. [I'm hoping to come out of here today with my head still intact.]

This is a political trap for Jesus. They're hoping they can get Jesus into the same hot water John the Baptist found himself in. But it was also a religious trap. There was an ongoing debate between different schools of rabbis about what Moses meant when he wrote, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, these words in Deuteronomy 24:1: "*If a man marries a woman, but she becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, he may write her a divorce certificate, hand it to her, and send her away from his house.*"

The debate raged over the meaning of the words "*something indecent.*" There was one school of rabbis who held this has to be referring to something very, very serious—something like sexual immorality. But there was another school that said this could refer to anything a wife does that displeases her husband. If she burns his toast or overcooks his food or comes home with a haircut he finds displeasing to him, then he can send her away. Basically, if a man finds another woman more pleasing to him than his wife, this verse became a pretext for divorce.

But Jesus refuses to take the bait. He will not fall into their trap. Instead of answering their question about divorce, He took them deeper—to God's design for marriage. He gets right to the heart of the matter, because He believes this:

You cannot fathom the tragedy of divorce unless you appreciate the beauty of God's design for marriage.

Jesus wants us to see the beauty of what God has designed. So we read in Mark 10:3 that Jesus answered their question with a question: "*What did Moses command you?*" They thought they could answer that question easily by just going back to Deuteronomy 24. So they replied in verse four, "*Moses permitted us to write divorce papers and send her away.*"

How callous those words are! Just send her away; away into a society where women had very few rights. Send her into a world where she would have to fend for herself without a safety net. Send her away, so we can move on to the next big thing and have whatever our greedy, lustful hearts desire.

Jesus makes it clear that this statement from Moses was a concession, not God's divine intention. Divorce was tolerated, but it was not sanctioned. Look at verse five. Jesus tells them, "*He wrote this command for you because of the hardness of your hearts.*" How is that making them feel?

It was actually for the protection of women from hard-hearted men that God made this concession. Without a formal certificate of divorce, a woman could be exploited. This certificate is what gave her the legal right to remarry and prevented the man who sent her away from deciding some other day, “Yeah, I’d like her to come back now,” walking in and out of the marriage and treating his wife like human chattel.

So Jesus is showing them here that Deuteronomy 24 was in the law, not to make divorce easy and acceptable. It was there to limit the sinfulness of hardhearted men and to control its consequences, especially in a way that would show mercy to the woman.

Then look at Mark 10:6-9. Here Jesus takes them further back before Deuteronomy, all the way back to the very beginning of creation in Genesis 1 and 2. He shows them that God created marriage before the fall of humanity into sin, and that He has a design for marriage which, if embraced, results in human flourishing. Jesus wants them to see God’s beautiful design.

The first thing He points out about God’s design is that **marriage requires one man and one woman**. If you ever wonder if Jesus ever says anything that would have a bearing on same-sex marriage, I think Mark 10:6 is a very important place to look. Jesus affirms here that gender according to God’s design is binary. *“But from the beginning of creation God made them male and female.”* Jesus could have simply quoted from Genesis 2 if He wanted to emphasize the importance of faithfulness in marriage, but He also goes back to Genesis 1 to explicitly state male and female.

Another part of God’s design is that **marriage involves severing all other dependencies**. Look at what Jesus says at the beginning of Mark 10:7: *“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother...”* Now, the bond between a father and mother and their children is the second closest human bond. Until a son or daughter is married, there’s no one who influences their life more than the parents whose very bodies gave them life.

But Jesus is affirming Genesis here when He says that when a man or woman marries, they need to sever that kind of dependency on their parents and redirect all their dependence toward the spouse. They must also set their marriage on a pedestal far above all other human relationships. Remember that when you get married, you’re leaving Mom and Dad and are being joined to your spouse. And parents of adult children, remember that when they get married, there needs to be a change of dependencies.

A third aspect of God’s design for marriage that Jesus affirms is that **marriage demands exclusive loyalty**. He uses the word “cleave” which means a man is to be joined to his wife. I think this is a beautiful expression, as it speaks of covenant union and covenant faithfulness. When a he promises to his wife, and she to him, “Whatever the future holds, we’re going to face it

together,” it means to be bonded tightly, like two pieces of paper stuck together with sticky glue. You can no longer rip them apart without doing damage to both pieces of paper.

Cleaving to our spouse means no matter what we feel, no matter what difficulties we face, we will be true to a promise. A man who cleaves to his wife will be attached to her and to her alone. He will be content with her and not go looking somewhere else for fulfillment. He will find his fulfillment in her, not apart from her or against her.

This includes our imagination, in things like pornography. This is also a call for unmarried people to remain faithful to their potential future spouse. Marriage is the boundary God has created for His beautiful gift of sex, when a man and woman cleave to one another.

Finally, Jesus affirms that God’s design for **marriage establishes an unparalleled unity**. Look at that phrase in verse eight: “...and the two will become one flesh.” When a man and woman enter into marriage vows together, God no longer views them as two separate, unrelated individuals. They are united in God’s eyes as one flesh.

One flesh includes the sexual dimension of marriage, but it signifies much more than that. We can create a sexual union, but only God can take two people and make them one, joining them together so that—according to Jesus at the end of verse eight—“...they are no longer two, but one flesh.”

Ray Ortlund writes this: “The new life created by a marriage fuses a man and wife together into one fully shared human experience, prompting mutual care, tenderness and love.” I love that. It’s beautiful—and it’s serious. It’s so serious that God, through the prophet Malachi, says to His people at that time, “I will no longer accept your offerings. I will no longer listen to your prayers.” The reason God would not accept their worship was because men were acting treacherously against the wife of their youth and were breaking the one flesh union God had created.

God speaks ever so seriously about the gravity of this. He says to the man who would callously send her away:

*“If he hates and divorces his wife,” says the Lord God of Israel, “he covers his garment with injustice,” says the Lord of Armies.
Therefore, watch yourselves carefully, and do not act treacherously.*

That’s a better translation than some versions which state that God hates divorce. Actually, this verse is indicting the hatefulness that’s in the heart of a man who acts treacherously against his wife and sends her away. So if you really understand God’s design for marriage, you can’t think casually about divorce. It’s the tearing apart of what God has joined together. It’s the separating of a union God designed to be inseparable. It’s something beautiful that God intended.

That's how Jesus escapes the Pharisees' trap. He's not trying to evade their question; He's just refocusing their question. Instead of, "When is it okay to get a divorce?" the deeper question Jesus says they should be asking is, "What does God intend for marriage?"

Here's what He intends. Look at Genesis: one man, one woman, severing all other dependencies, exclusively loyal to one another in an unparalleled, God-created, one flesh union. Jesus rivets their focus on that. "Look at the beautiful design of God and if you really grasp His original design for marriage, there's only one proper answer to your question."

Look in Mark 10:9. *"Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."* Those are my favorite words in a marriage ceremony: the pronouncement of marriage, the declaration that two have become one, that God has created a new humanity—one flesh, husband and wife, inseparable.

"Get that," Jesus says, "and you'll stop arguing about rules, looking for loopholes, negotiating prenuptial agreements and imagining how your life might be better if someone else was with you because you expected marriage always to feel personally fulfilling. No. Focus on the bright pathway, God's design for marriage, and don't go looking for an exit strategy."

Let's just pause here and do a heart check. Do you appreciate the goodness, generosity and kindness of God's design for marriage? Do you lament the hardness of heart that's in humanity—and in all our own hearts, if God left us to ourselves and didn't soften our hearts by His grace, which He does? Praise the Lord. If He didn't keep our hearts tender by His Spirit we would willfully desecrate God's beautiful design. Appreciate His design and lament the hardness of heart that would desecrate that design. Disciples of Jesus really do want to obey Him, don't we?

His disciples in Mark 10 do not want to trap Jesus; they really want to understand and take in what He is saying. But they had honest questions. After they are alone with Him again, they asked Him, "Did You answer the Pharisees' question?" Here's where Jesus gives them the bottom line. He says to them in verses 11-12, *"Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. Also, if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."*

I want you to observe something here.

- First, Jesus is upholding the dignity and responsibility of both women and men. In the mind of Jesus, divorce is not a man's prerogative like it was in that society. Contrary to popular opinion, if you divorced your wife and married another, you weren't only sinning against the husband of the woman you committed adultery with; you were also sinning against your wife. She has dignity and honor. You're committing adultery against her, Jesus says.

- Second, notice that Jesus is ruling out any excuse a man or a woman might make to abandon a marriage because they found a better model somewhere else.
- Finally, Jesus is enforcing the Creator's intention for marriage and the seriousness of rebelling against God's design.

How serious is a wrongful divorce and remarriage? How seriously do we take it when a soldier, fighting in a time of war, commits treason against our nation? Some would say that's punishable by death. John Frame, a theologian, says adultery is so much more serious that that. It's "covenant treason" against the family and in God's economy, the family is even more foundational than the nation. In other words, to cheat on your spouse is to cheat on God. For this reason, discipleship requires determined dedication to your marriage vows: "For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health 'til death do us part."

It's not going to be easy. As long as there is hardness of heart there will be hardship in marriage. As long as there is sin in this world and in our hearts, it will inevitably bring some measure of challenge and pain to our marriages. It will cost you personally to preserve your marriage. You're going to have to patiently bear with and forgive your spouse, just as they're going to have to bear with and forgive you. You do realize this, right? There are some sinful patterns that are slow to change. Have you noticed that in your own life?

Marriage faithfulness requires forbearance and longsuffering, but there is grace for this. When you consider the great cost Jesus our Savior pays to remain faithful to His bride, you will not think lightly about abandoning a marriage.

Let's move now toward application. I've said the main point of this morning's message is that disciples of Jesus are determined to preserve and prosper marriage at great cost to themselves. Some listening to that would say, "Well, that means marriages should be preserved at any cost." That sounds noble. It sounds like the purest commitment. But is that what Jesus is actually teaching here? Is every divorce and remarriage an act of adultery? Must every marriage be preserved at any and all costs? I believe, and the elders of this church agree, that the biblical answer to that question is no.

Disciples of Jesus must preserve marriage at great cost, but not at any cost.

Every church needs to wrestle with this distinction, because there are dear people in every church who have suffered the trauma of divorce and they're hurting. They're wondering, "How do I fit here?" We need to think through how we are to show love, mercy, and grace, welcoming them into our body. How will we be a redemptive community?

One thing we need to remember is that divorce is not an unforgivable sin. Anyone who has wrongly pursued a divorce or caused a divorce to happen can confess that sin to God, repent and receive cleansing and forgiveness from Jesus. We have no right to shun or shame a fellow believer who has repented and received God's forgiveness for a sinful divorce.

But I want to add something to that. Not only is divorce not the unforgivable sin, but also not all divorces are sinful. We need to be clear about this. All divorce is the result of sin. If there was no sin in the world, there would be no divorce. But not everyone who pursues divorce is sinning in doing so. We need to remove that stigma in the church. We need to understand there are situations in which God allows for divorce as a protection for the integrity of marriage as an institution. More importantly, He does this for the protection of individuals in destructive situations.

We need to look again at the context of the conversation in Mark 10. What was going on when Jesus was being asked these questions? The Pharisees were coming to Jesus saying, "Let's just say a man finds another woman who is more desirable than his wife, is it still adultery if he first divorces his wife and then marries the person he wants to sleep with." I believe that's what's underneath the question the Pharisees are asking.

Jesus' answer to that question is an unequivocal: yes, it is adultery! You cannot make your desire to sleep with another woman legitimate by divorcing your present wife and then marrying the other woman. But what I don't believe Jesus is doing is giving us case laws about every situation when divorce or remarriage is right or wrong. We know this isn't everything Jesus has to say about marriage. We could go to Matthew 19 or the Sermon on the Mount or Luke and find that Jesus actually does make an exception. He says in the case of sexual immorality that it is permissible to seek a divorce.

Now, it's important for us to say here that while sexual infidelity does make divorce allowable, it does not make divorce required. Praise God that His grace can soften hard hearts. Praise God that His grace can bring brokenness and repentance to us when we've made a mess of everything. God's grace does that! God's grace brings beauty out of ashes. It makes impossible things like this possible. God's grace can cause a person who has sinned and caused grounds for divorce in their marriage to repent.

God can also work forgiveness, mercy and reconciliation into the heart of the person who's been sinned against. Forgiveness says, "I'm paying the debt you owe me. I'm no longer going to hold that over you." It's costly to forgive. But when we remember how Jesus laid aside His rights and forgave us an infinitely greater debt than anyone will ever owe us—even when we're called to forgive an adulterous spouse—Jesus is not asking us to forgive more than we've been forgiven.

God's grace is so powerful that He has enabled spouses who have every right to divorce to lay aside that right and forgive and be restored in their marriages. When that happens, we as a church celebrate this as a beautiful testimony.

But understand this, friends: repentance always requires forgiveness, but forgiveness does not demand that the marriage be restored in all situations. A person who has been sinned against, even after forgiving, cannot be coerced or manipulated into restoring the marriage. That requires the rebuilding of trust.

Sadly, there are some marriages where repentance doesn't happen and covenant-breaking behavior continues. In those cases, sometimes the most loving thing you can do for a person who keeps on sinning and will not repent is to let that person experience the consequences of his or her sin. One of those tragic consequences sometimes is divorce. Divorce is a sad and tragic but very real consequence of sexual immorality in marriage. It doesn't have to be, but it is grounds for divorce. We believe that when divorce is permitted, remarriage is also permitted. It doesn't mean you should necessarily remarry. Questions of wisdom need to be considered.

There's one more situation in the Bible where divorce and remarriage are permitted, and that's in 1 Corinthians 7 when Paul describes the abandonment of a marriage by the unbelieving spouse. Those are the two grounds for divorce that are made explicit in Scripture.

I want to say that the elders of our church have wrestled with this a lot through the years. We've come to believe that the New Testament does not give us a list of case laws that spell out every situation where divorce is permitted or not permitted.

We're not alone in this. This week we're going to send out links from Bethlehem Baptist Church and Crossway Community Church in Bristol, Wisconsin, plus a paper Wayne Grudem recently wrote for the Evangelical Theological Society, if you want to read more about this. But here's our position in a nutshell. You'll notice as you study Scripture that neither Jesus nor Paul mention all the explicit grounds for divorce. So it's clear that neither Jesus nor Paul was intending to mention all the possible grounds.

We believe there is a larger biblical understanding of marriage, like we've heard this morning about God's design, that needs to inform our decisions about when divorce is permissible. In light of that larger biblical vision, we believe there are some sins that are so destructive they break the marriage covenant and allow for divorce. These are sins like physical violence, patterns of behavior that are mentally or emotionally dehumanizing, or the refusal to provide for your spouse materially or conjugally. These situations all need to be handled with great care, prayer and thoughtful submission to the Word of God on a case-by-case basis.

In these complex and heartbreaking situations, when we're going through things like this, we need the body of Christ. We need godly friends who will come alongside us, pray for us and counsel us with God's Word. They should not just take up an offense on our behalf, but they should help us think through what it looks like to walk in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit when the marriage is breaking or broken. We need tender friends and shepherds who will guide us according to the Word. The church is a grace given by God to guide us through the storm of a strained or shattered marriage. Don't lean on your own understanding (Proverbs 3:5-8). Reach out.

I want to invite you, if you're going through this right now, talk to a friend in the church. Come to an elder in the church. Meet with Karen Aldridge. We want this to be a community where you can bring your brokenness and sin to light and experience forgiveness and liberation from shame. We want to be a church that protects people who are in destructive situations and a church that upholds justice.

One of the ways we do that is through church discipline, where God works to deal with the hardening of heart that happens in us, bringing us to repentance and sometimes restoring us. That's the goal. We want to care for people who are in broken marriages as much as we care for the preservation of marriage. So we say preserve marriage at great cost, but not necessarily at any cost.

Marriage is not ultimate. It's a shadow of a much greater reality that's coming soon, when Christ our Bridegroom returns for His bride. There will be better guests at that wedding, a better reception, better wine, a better Bridegroom, a better wedding day and a better dress. That's what all our marriages are pointing toward and that's why disciples of Jesus are determined to preserve and prosper marriages at great cost.

I want to close with just a few words of practical encouragement on how to do that. How do you preserve your marriage at great cost?

1. Take divorce off the table. Don't joke about divorce. Remove that word from your marital lexicon. Don't bring it out as the nuclear option when things are really tense. Don't fantasize about how your life would be so much easier if you weren't married. If you're a Christian, you will be for all eternity on the receiving end of God's covenant love in Christ and your marriage is an opportunity to daily pour out that love, preach that love and minister that love to someone who is one flesh with you.

2. Realize there is enough sin in yourself to destroy even a very good marriage. Here's what I think is the secret to a happy, healthy, lifelong marriage. It's to wake up in the morning, look in the mirror and say, "I'm the greatest threat to this marriage." I'm not talking about those of you who may be in abusive situations. Don't apply this to that. But I am saying that in the normal

hardships of marriage, it's a step of maturity to realize, "I can't change my spouse, but I can deal with my own pride. I can humble myself and acknowledge each day before God that I'm a selfish sinner. If God leaves me to myself, I'm going to quickly ruin everything."

Friends, your marriage is never going to be so strong that you no longer need a Savior. You're still going to need Him to be the Savior of your marriage at your golden wedding anniversary, just as much as you did on day one.

3. Act in love even when you don't feel in love. I love these words that Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote from his prison cell to a couple on their wedding day: "It is not your love that sustains your marriage, but your marriage that sustains your love." You've made a covenant. That's what sustains your love. It's not the ups and downs of your feelings.

Tim and Kathy Keller put it like this: "Actions of love lead to feelings of love, not the other way around." So the essence of marriage is a covenant commitment. It's not just about what you're feeling at the moment; it's a promise of future love that says, "I will love you to the end." Dry spells will come and sometimes it gets scary. You wonder. It feels hard. What do you do then? You act in love. You be and you do what love requires. You say, "I will continue to love you because I've made a promise to you. It's not my love that sustains our marriage; it's our marriage that sustains my love."

You wait in hope, knowing that a perfect Bridegroom is coming. You know that you are loved by Him, not just at great cost to Himself, but at all costs to Himself. He spared no expense and He continues to spare no expense to love those who are His own. "O, the deep, deep love of Jesus, love of every love the best!" So you look to Him and remember, "He acted in love for me when I was feeling no love for Him." You renew your hope in Him, waiting and believing that He will give you the strength to act in love even when you don't feel in love.

As the worship team comes to lead us in the singing of Psalm 130, we're going to use this Psalm as a time to confess our need for God's grace. Let's prepare our hearts to call out to the Lord, saying, "Lord, we need You." Let's ask Him to do a work in our marriages and in our homes that He is so pleased to do. He is with us in the hard times. So let's cry out to Him together in unison.

¹ Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!

² O Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive

to the voice of my pleas for mercy!

³ If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,

O Lord, who could stand?

*⁴ But with you there is forgiveness,
that you may be feared.*

Do you realize what you just said there? If the Lord were to keep track of your sins, it would be so crushing you wouldn't be able to stand before Him. He's a God of forgiveness. Fear Him. Revere Him for that, by confessing your sin to Him now. Take a moment to quietly pray, talking to Him about something He's spoken to you today, thanking Him that there is nothing vile, nothing sinful in you that He is not more than able and willing to cleanse and forgive.

Now let's together affirm our hope in His mercies:

*⁵ I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;*

*⁶ my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.*

*⁷ O [people of God], hope in the LORD!
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.*

*⁸ And he will redeem [his people]
from all [their sins].*

With that hope, let's express our desire for the Lord as we sing this song.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the Christian Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.

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