

Marriage – (Graham & Sheila)

When 2 people decide to marry at whatever age, it is a joyous occasion - but **especially so**, when they are nearly 80! And having experienced all **the joys and heartaches** of matrimony before.

But as CS Lewis said: "You are never too old to set a new goal or dream a new dream."

We are blessed to have both Sheila & Graham as part of our spiritual family here at CBC.

And I **think** we have just about recovered from that Sunday morning a few weeks back when Graham proposed to Sheila from this very spot, here at the front of the Church.

I'm sure everyone present will never forget the shock and surprise on Sheila's face when he asked her to marry him, and understandably so, as **he had not** given **any indication** of his intention to do so beforehand - in fact just the opposite! The last time anybody spoke to Graham on this score - he wasn't keen on the idea of marriage at all!

Those anxious seconds waiting for Sheila's response to Graham's proposal seemed like an eternity! - Until she finally said, to the relief of us all, a resounding **YES!** Followed by a crescendo of applause.

The journey they have both been on to get to this point has been a long, challenging and adventurous one. There is no doubt their faith in God has sustained them along the way,

If you speak to Graham for any length of time you will notice before long - **thankfulness** will flow from his lips! **He takes literally** this statement from the apostle Paul in the book of Thessalonians "*Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus*".

On Grahams part – that is **thankfulness to God** that He had brought Sheila into his life, for his family and friends, but most of all thankfulness **'that he is still here at all'**! After all, there have been 5 Strokes & a multitude of near misses (usually involving vehicles!) along the way.

I suppose the most incredible incident was back in 1987. Graham was then working as a long distance lorry driver, on one of his journeys back from Europe to get **the cross channel ferry** he had a tyre blow out! - A puncture that stopped him boarding the ferry.

Not so dramatic you would say, a tyre blow out can happen to anyone! It just so happened that ferry he was boarding was the '**Herald of Free Enterprise**'! which capsized moments after leaving the Belgian port of Zeebrugge , killing 193 passengers and crew.

Graham lost 2 of his friends that night, **but he was** miraculously spared by a tyre puncture! - The truth of Gods care and protection for those who are His - became a reality to him - like Psalm 139:16

"**All the days ordained for me** were written in Your book before one of them came to be" Henry Martyn said "**You are immortal** until God's purpose for you is complete."

Jesus put it this way in the gospel of Matthew Chapter 10:29: "*Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground*" — (meaning, die) — "*apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of much more value than the sparrows*"

Graham found out - when you have a relationship with God your times and the length of your days - are in His hands.

As you know Graham & Sheila were both married before – both caring for and losing their partners - **Jean & Alan** within a couple of months of each other in 2021.

Both couples had been friends for many years and when Jean & Alan were alive they would often enjoy caravanning trips together. Happy days – touring around places like Ireland & Scotland.

Graham was particularly devastated when he lost Jean his wife of 35 years in such difficult circumstances. So deep was the sorrow and the depression afterwards that he would say later, with absolute conviction, that '**Sheila literally saved his life**' after she had called him up and visited him after Jean's death.

He was suicidal but **the Lord had other plans for both their lives.** As Jeremiah 29:11 so aptly describes.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future".

Sheila has her own story, a trained nurse and a dedicated wife and mother; she has come through some difficult relationships and had overcome many obstacles along the way.

I don't know about you? But I can't think of a more perfectly suited couple to come together in marriage, in what we could say is the 'autumn of their lives'.

They told me recently 'they have never had a cross word since they met' and when I asked them to give me an amusing story since their time together they couldn't think of '**any particular one**' because they had laughed so much together.'

In this fallen world however, **there are no guarantees** that marriage, for all its capacity to be beautiful and enriching, will be a lifelong series of increasing joys.

In reality, a healthy marriage will have its ups and downs, joys and heartaches, and if you were to look to the Bible for help and guidance you would perhaps draw more on **the Sermon on the Mount** than on the Song of Solomon.

The 'Sermon on the Mount' (you can find it Chapters 5-7 in the Gospel of Matthew) contains **the essence** of the teaching of Jesus,

If I was to sum it up in one sentence it is; 'How to live a life that is dedicated to and pleasing to God, free from hypocrisy, a life full of love and grace and wisdom and discernment'.

The standard of love and selflessness that Jesus Himself set when He died on the cross for our sins.

So I want to look at a number of things Jesus said from the Sermon on the Mount this morning as there not only applicable to marriage but relevant to us all.

Firstly - 'Take care what you build your home upon'

Jesus says this in (Matthew 7:24)

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock."

In this story Jesus paints a crystal clear picture of two kinds of homes: one built upon sand and the other on rock. What He's saying is; that lives (and marriages) built on sand and weak foundations will fall. But lives (and marriages) built on rock and firm foundations will stand:

So what does it mean to build our lives and marriages on the rock? For the Christian it means to build them on obedience to Jesus and His words the Bible.

In the 'nitty gritty' detail of marriage and everyday life - are we more committed to obeying Jesus than getting our own way? **Do His words or our feelings** consistently take precedent and win the day?

Are we ready to take the hard, costly path He calls us to of putting the **other first** in our relationships? —**again -Is our house built on rock or on sand?**

The marriage vows say; 'for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health' — in other words, **whatever may come our way.**

Jesus says "*The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock*" (Matthew 7:25).

Can I ask you today who & what do you turn to when things go wrong, when the bottom falls out of your world, when everything is on top of you and you can't cope?,

It's in these places we find out whether our house is built on rock or sand? The world is precarious place at the moment and it's only going to get more so.

Scripture tells us however: "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever."

So Firstly in this troubled world make sure your house is built on the rock of Christ and His word.

Secondly 'do not judge' (Matthew 7:1-2)

"Do not judge or you too will be judged. ² For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you".

The Marriage relationship is perhaps the most revealing **of our own character**— perhaps more revealing than any other human relationship.

For 2 distinct reasons - **firstly** a husband and wife see more of each other's faults and wrongdoings than anyone else, and **secondly** a marriage ties us uncomfortably close for a lifetime, faults and all.

We see the worst & best in each other and yet have nowhere to go. It's where the 'rubber hits the road' regarding our own reactions and character, the question is; how we will handle that burden and privilege? Jesus tells us how later on in the Sermon on the Mount:

"Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?"

Or how can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. (Matthew 7:3-5)

Jesus is not giving us just a 'blanket statement' here about 'do not judge' an 'anything goes' sort of mentality', what He is saying is: *'first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye'*

In other words when you have resolved the issues in your own life, when you are in a place where you yourself are clear of wrongdoing and not being hypocritical, then maybe - and only then, you can see clearly enough to judge the other person.

In most situations, we must be very slow to judge, exercising great care and restraint. Our sinful flesh has a 'hair-trigger' in readiness to judge others.

We must have a healthy suspicion of our own pride, and keep Jesus' words ringing in our ears: "Judge not, that you be not judged" (Matt 7:1) We should believe the best about each other until evidence (beyond all doubt) to the contrary comes to the surface.

Thirdly 'never let the sun go down on your anger' – again Jesus words from the Sermon on the Mount.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. (Matthew 5:9)

We may assume that sexual immorality has ended more marriages than any other thing — and it surely has crushed and demolished many. I wonder, however, if unchecked anger and unresolved conflicts has ended more?

Jesus makes no room for unrighteous anger; he elevates it alongside murder. And yet how often have we made room for it in our homes? How often have we felt justified while our hurt feelings have burned within us?

Proverbs 15:1 "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger"

So fourthly guard against anger, and when it breaks out, don't leave it unaddressed. Never go to bed at night with unresolved conflicts.

Fifthly and this is the heart of Christianity and all relationships; Be quick to forgive. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" (Matthew 5:7)

Because every marriage is a union between sinners, forgiveness will be our constant guest and companion within our home. Many things will come and go but the need for forgiveness will remain.

So will forgiveness be a welcome and celebrated guest in your home or an unwelcome and resented one?

Jesus warns us all “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ^{but} if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:14–15).

Any relationship tests our willingness to forgive especially marriage—and also our desire to persevere in forgiveness - Jesus says an unwillingness to forgive is spiritually fatal and at the end of the day it is usually the one who can't forgive that suffers the most!

Mercy, on the other hand, breeds security and joy: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” **So fifthly get into the habit of keeping short accounts and constant forgiveness.**

Finally cover your marriage with prayer.

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. (Matthew 7:7)

Prayer is powerful and important at anytime and in any situation. But if we are married, nothing will help form successful marriages more than these words, “Can we stop and pray about that,”
When we are able pray together, it is saying; I can't do it God! I need your help.

How many marriages suffer unnecessarily because we refuse to take advantage of the fact that God is only a prayer - a cry for help away? Are our problems really too hard, or in fact is any situation beyond His ability? To help and change?

“Everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened” (Matthew 7:7–8).

Do you want the real secret to a healthy and happy marriage? Or indeed a happy life, whether at year seven or year seventy or not married at all - it is to pursue **something** before and above marriage

To pursue **someone** before and above your spouse it is to **'pursue His Kingdom and His righteousness'** and **all these things will be given to you as well.** (Matthew 6:33)

Can I say finally? It doesn't matter if you're married or single - happy or sad, have riches or you are poor - there is a place in each of us only Jesus can fill.

The truth is a we were never meant **to be alone – you can be alone if you're married, you can be alone if your single, you can be alone if you have multitudes of friends - its loneliness of the heart I'm talking about**

If you're living your life without Jesus it's not the natural condition for mankind. They say loneliness kills people.

Proverbs 18:24 "A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."

The hymn we sung earlier says 'what a friend' we have in Jesus'. And 'God with us' means we are never alone.

We have a banner in the car park (you can't miss it really its 16 ft long) with these words from Jesus; '*Come to Me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest*' I can't think of a better invitation to anyone.

Come to Jesus - He is waiting for each of us to give up our striving and the burdens we carry around every day, the loneliness, and find rest - rest from our endless round of self seeking, the preoccupation with ourselves and the pursuit of things that do not last or have any eternal value.

Jesus says "*Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with Me*" (Revelation 3:20) the first step for us all is - making the choice to open that door and let Him in.

If you want to do just that then please speak to someone this morning.

Amen

Tony Troy

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