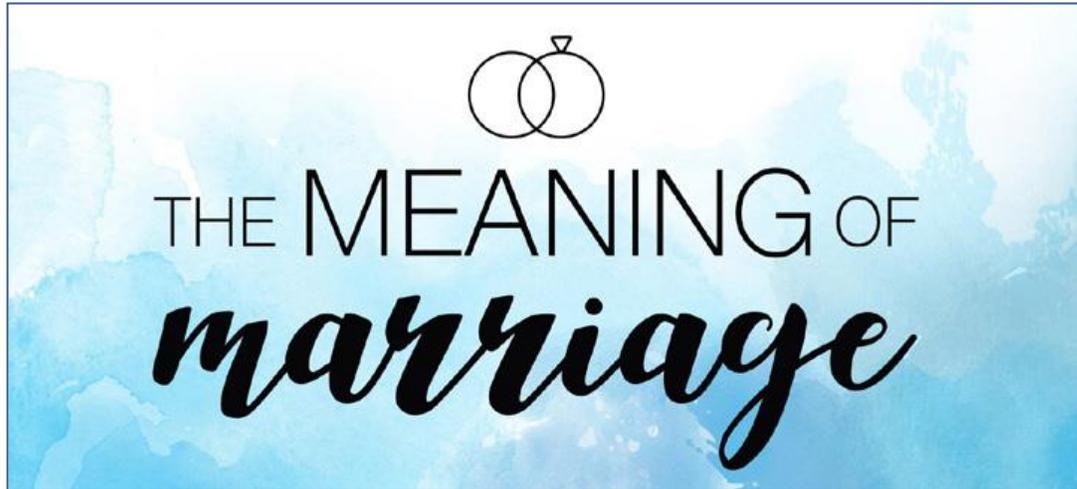


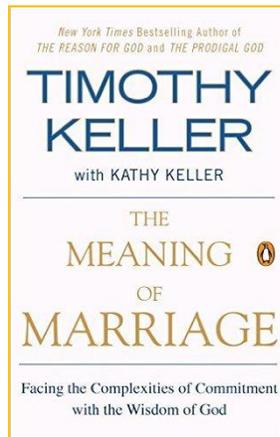
***HOPE: Seeing the Great Horizon***

January-February Sermon Series  
Kenwood Baptist Church  
Pastor David Palmer  
February 11, 2018

**TEXT: Ephesians 5:15-33**



This Sunday we conclude our series on the *Meaning of Marriage* based on this glorious text in Ephesians 5 as we look at *HOPE: Seeing the Great Horizon*. As many of you know, or should



know, we have been hearing this passage and learning together in conversation with Tim and Kathy Keller's book *The Meaning of Marriage*. We look at the end this morning, the last piece, of looking into the future. It is a blessing in the body of Christ to have godly people around you. I love having a whole plethora of Christian grandparents, for example, for our children. I love having Christian uncles and aunts, and sometimes, especially with topics like marriage or singleness, we need godly examples, and one of the blessings of the body of Christ is to have those in people you can see; you can also have that in people that you read. Tim and Kathy have certainly been a blessing in our marriage this

January, and I trust for you as well. I spoke to someone last night who has been listening to the sermon series in a different part of the country. If you are just joining us, it's not too late. Discipleship is cumulative, so you can join in wherever you are. I want remind you that this book, this set of topics, the structure of it was born out of a very urban context in New York City, largely speaking to a church that was predominately single.

This morning's topic and text will address both the singles among us and also those who are

married. Tim and Kathy state that they hoped to give a realistic, yet glorious vision, of what marriage is and can be. We need this. We need instruction in God's Word because, just as Paul wrote in Ephesians and we mentioned many times at the beginning, there is a counterfeit paradigm. There is a way of living that you learn from the culture around, a way of living that emerges from our own fallen heart, and Paul says in Ephesians 5:15 that it is unwise, and that we are to seek a wise way of living or walking. In Ephesians 5:17, it is a little bit more in our face, and he says that it is also foolish. So there is a foolish way, and we need to understand God's will. Then, in Ephesians 5:18, it is that we shouldn't be drunk with wine. We shouldn't look to any substance or activity for joy, but we need a life that is empowered and filled by the Holy Spirit. This counterfeit picture affects every aspect of our lives, and so it is with marriage and singleness.

We are going to take on two misperceptions about marriage as we look to the hope of the future and the question: *What is marriage really for?* There is the traditional answer to this question: Marriage is for improving my social status or financial security. The traditional culture's approach to marriage is: I marry someone so that I move up in the world and I have stability. The modern answer to the question *What is marriage for?* is that marriage is for romance and sexual intimacy. What is marriage for in the Bible? The Bible calls us into a direction where we see that marriage is a spiritual friendship that leads to Christ-likeness. Let's try to build towards that together.

The Bible's answer to *what is marriage for* starts with the image that marriage is a friendship. In Genesis 2:18, after God makes the world, speaks it by His word of power, He says seven times in Genesis 1, "This is good!" If you look at light, for example, for just a second and imagine, "Wow, is this a particle? Is it a wave? Whatever it is, it's traveling at 186,000 miles per second. That's pretty awesome." God's first view of that, after creating it, said, "That's good." If you made something that went 186,000 miles per second and was life-giving to the universe, bare minimum, you're going to say, "Ha, that's pretty good!" Seven times, God acts, speaks, and says, "That's good." His works are good. Then we turn in Genesis 2:18, and it is jarring in the Bible to read that the Lord said, "It is not good!" Something is not good; it is not good for man to be alone. And here in the midst of the paradise of God, the Garden of Eden, we see that we are created for relationship, and that we seek and desire love to be given and experienced. This confirms our own intuition that relationships are a greater blessing than anything that we can seek to provide, as a paradise of our own design. We try to provide that with wealth, with status, and yet deep down, it's the relationship that we long for the most. The solution in Genesis is for God to make a companion for Adam. We mentioned this a couple of weeks ago, that God caused a deep sleep to fall upon man, and while he slept, God took one of the ribs from his side, and the image is that Eve is made to correspond to him. The image is that she is

like-opposite him: she is different, but yet like him, and they come together in the architectural imagery of holding the house up together, side-by-side, husband and wife, companion, friend, standing together, needing one another for the house to be sustained as a place for God's presence. The Bible celebrates the intimacy and joy between husband and wife. We looked at that last week in the celebration of intimacy in the Song of Songs. In the Song of Songs 5:16, we see this imagery of the spouse as a friend set forth in full color. The bride says:

*“His mouth is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.”*

A friend or companion is the heartbeat of a flourishing marriage. The Christian vision of marriage is not that we marry for social status or security. It is not that we marriage is primarily for romance or intimacy. The Christian vision is that our married lives are lived out of friendship. I love to talk to couples who are preparing to be married that over 80% of your life together is lived out of the space of friendship.

What's the character friendship in Scripture? There are three characteristics of friendship. The first this **constancy**. Proverbs 17:17 says:

*“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.”*

A friend loves when things are going well and things are going poorly. A fair-weather friend is really an oxymoron; it's really a contradiction, because the nature of friendship is anything but fair-weather. Friends love at all times. There's a constancy to friendship, and this is exciting. We all crave this and long for this.

A second quality of friendship is **transparency**. This is a little bit scary, but it's a life-giving quality of friendship. Proverbs 27:6 says:

*“Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.”*

The image of this verse is that someone who is profuse in their flattery or compliments and tells you just how wonderful you are all the time is really of the characteristic practice of someone, who in the Hebrew text says, who hates you. Someone who is always flattering you and pouring you with kisses, according to Proverbs 27, hates you. The contrast is of a friend, one the Hebrew actually says is the one who loves you. The one who loves you will tell you the truth and will speak truth into your life. This was the question from week two of our series: “Will you tell me the truth?” A friend will care enough to tell you the truth. I remember when Christine and I were courting and a mutual friend, Jay Sklar, was the first one I ever told: “Wow, this woman, godly, intelligent, beautiful, native Greek speaker, Old Testament scholar,” just going down the list. He was the first one I ever told about Christine, but I remember a moment in my friendship with Jay. He is a very intelligent guy, gifted, a TA at the school, and yet in his

giftedness, he had a way of discouraging people because he often pointed out only what they did wrong. I remember talking to him one time. It was a brief conversation, maybe a five minute conversation, and I just said, "Jay, you have got to mix encouragement into that conversation." It wasn't anything dramatic, there were no sound effects that came with it, and we stayed friends for over 20 years. But, he constantly goes back to those five minutes, and he said, "David, you know, those five minutes really changed my life," and he always quotes Proverbs 27:6: "*Faithful are the wounds of a friend.*" "You cared enough to tell me the truth."

So, we want constancy as a characteristic of friendship. Transparency is a characteristic of friendship, and a third characteristic is **sympathy**. *Sympathy* literally means a shared passion: *sym-pathos*, a shared commitment, something together that you both delight in. C.S. Lewis said that "the essence of friendship is the exclamation: 'You too?'" The image of lovers is people looking at each other. But the image of a friend is both of you looking out and seeing the same thing and taking great joy and delight in it. Lewis calls this "the 'secret thread of friendship,' something that deeply moves us both, and when this exists, there is a possibility of real friendship." This can be true for shared interest in Harley-Davidson motorcycles, for example. It can be true if you are interested in marking out the movement of the stars or heavenly bodies at night. It could be true for you if you are coupon collector. There are all kinds of things you can share with someone that gives you the preconditions of friendship. Just recently we had a service for Dot Maddox. Dot was an incredible coupon collector, and for the first time in my life, I learned that the family had simply put coupons in the casket. It is so sweet. Those things can tie you together to create the preconditions for friendship, but the character of Christian friendship is actually deeper. For believers in Christ, despite huge differences between us in class, temperament, culture, personal history, there is something more powerful than all of these things that we share. It is not so much a secret thread, but as Tim and Kathy say, it's "an indestructible steel cable that pulls you together." They go on to say:

"Christians have experienced the grace of God in the gospel of Jesus. We have all had our identity changed at the root, so now God's calling and love are more foundational to who we are than any other thing."

This creates the conditions for a deep and lasting friendship, and not only that, "We have the same future, the same journey toward a future horizon, what the Bible calls the 'new creation,'" and that is why it's so critical, and such wise counsel, that marriage should be between believers. The question that you must share faith in Christ is essential as you think forward into being married.

If friendship is the key, if Christian friendship has this unique feature, what does it mean then to have our spouse as our best friend? It means that this is the person who stands side-by-side.

Even the imagery in Genesis of husband and wife is: side-by-side, unique access to you, close proximity, knowing your weakness, vulnerability, the one who knows you, and not only knows you, but shapes you. Proverbs 2 is a beautiful description of a father to his son about pursuing wisdom. The chapter begins with an earnest plea to seek wisdom, and then with a commitment to wisdom, Solomon says that “wisdom will come in your heart, knowledge will be pleasant, discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you,” and having godly wisdom will protect you or deliver you. The first deliverance in Proverbs 2:12 is:

*“delivering you from the way of evil, from men of [deceitful] speech,”*

When we have wisdom, we can recognize the phony as we walk out into the world. It protects us, delivers us from the way of evil. The second deliverance, in Proverbs 2:16b-17, is delivering you from the strange woman, Solomon says:

*“. . . from the adulteress with her smooth words, who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God;”*

Tucked right into this beautiful passage on wisdom and living wisely is one of the most explicit statements in the Bible about what it means to be married. Look at this closely with me. It’s actually beautiful. This was my moment of exegetical euphoria. Look at this closely. Tucked right in here is this description that God’s wisdom and walking in His way delivers us from the *strange* woman. That doesn’t mean the *weird* woman. It means the *unknown* woman. *Strange* in some translations say *foreign*. It doesn’t mean that God is against international relationships. It’s the unknown, and that’s contrasted with the *known one*. Proverbs 2:17 says:

*“. . . who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God.”*

The New American Standard says, *“that leaves the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant she made before God.”* That image, *companion of her youth*, in Hebrew is *aleph*. You all know this word, I promise you. It’s not *aloof*, like distant. It’s from *aleph*, where we get one of the few words in English that comes from Hebrew. The first two letters in the Hebrew alphabet are *aleph* and *bet*, and that’s where we get *alpha-bet*. This companion is described as your *aleph*, as your letter A, as the one who teaches you and knows you in the most basic parts of you. That’s the image. It’s really a striking image, and it’s only in this passage that our spouses are described in this way. This is the opposite of the stranger; the opposite is the *aleph*, the one who knows you and also teaches you. You can look at your spouse and you can apply this sidebar and say, “You are my letter A. You are the one who knows me from the beginning and gives me an orientation to this world of who I am. You know me, and I know you, and we’re in this covenant bond together.” Isn’t that a beautiful image?

What’s marriage for then if it’s not for social status and security, if it’s not primarily for

romance, what is it for? It's for spiritual friendship, for knowing the other like no one else does, and the sharing in that friendship this journey toward Christ-likeness. The primary goal of Christian marriage is giving and receiving a love that changes us. Catherine and Kyle just expressed that so beautifully, didn't they? They just got a little ahead of themselves thinking they were already in the new creation on their wedding day, but that is just the beginning of the process that God takes us on through our spouse, and that's the imagery in our text. Ephesians 5:25:

*"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her,"*

It's a sacrificial love, real love put into action. What does the love of Christ do that we are called to emulate? We continue to read in Ephesians 5:26-27:

*"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."*

Christ's love sanctifies, makes us holy, cleanses us, and washes us clean. It presents us to the Lord in splendor on the great day, having no spot or wrinkle. The love of God in Christ is a love that changes us and seeks our ultimate beauty. For Christians, this is the Christian vision of falling in love.

What does the Christian vision of falling love mean? It means that Jesus has a vision of our future glory. Do you believe that? Do you believe that Jesus Christ sees you as you will one day be? I believe that with all my heart. I believe that is true for you; I believe that is true for me; I believe that is true for my marriage; I believe that is true for us if we're called to singleness. Jesus has a vision of the future glory, the person He's making us into. Do you believe then that in His sovereign power, everything He does in your life moves towards that goal, everything? That is the Christian vision for marriage. It is to look at your spouse and get a glimpse of the person that God is creating. It's to look at your spouse and say, "I see who God is making you to be and I'm excited about that and I want to be part of that." It's to look at your spouse, your friend, and to say, "I want to partner with you and God on this journey as we approach together His throne, and when we get there and you are totally, completely transformed, I want to look at you and say, 'I always knew you could be like this. I got glimpses of it on the earth, and now look at you!'" As great as we look on the wedding day with our nice clothes, some of those are rented, aren't they? The ones we keep, we struggle to fit into later. The Christian vision of marriage is that that's not our most beautiful moment; that's just the beginning. The beautiful moment is at the end when we are clothed with splendor and in glory that will never fade, and our marriages are God's instrument for taking us on that journey. A man will leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and they will become one flesh. Marriage is a covenant that creates this familial bond, present before God with no shame. It is a lofty view of marriage,

and this lofty view has implications for us wherever we are.

I want to apply this lofty vision first for those who are single among us. We value you; we love you; You are a vital part of this church. But this vision of Christian marriage has implications for singles. Number one is to ***change your perspective on dating***. If you think of marriage primarily in terms of erotic love, then you are going to be looking for someone that has great sexual chemistry and physical appeal. That is what you are going to be looking for. If you think of marriage primarily as a way of getting improved social status, then compatibility means someone who shares the desired class that you want or common tastes and aspirations. The problem is that these are not durable things. Our physical appearance changes, even if we invest heavily in slowing that down. Wealth can change overnight. You may not be someone that watches the stock market closely, but last week showed that what goes up must come down. That can change dramatically. So, you have got to change your perspective, number one.

Number two is to replace your perspective on dating by ***prioritizing spiritual friendship with shared faith in Christ***. When you're single, you get into this habit that you learn from the world, and you learn from your own heart, and that is to come into a room and scan. I'm familiar with this process. You come into a room and you scan for eligibility. Everybody who does this thinks that no one can tell that they're doing it, and the funny thing is, it's obvious to everyone. You scan with these pseudo-criteria, and you eliminate based on those criteria, but if you prioritize friendship, it changes that process completely.

Tim and Kathy write that we often get into situations where we have someone that we have a great friendship with, but we think, "Well, for this or that reason, I'm not really attracted to them, and you start cultivating a relationship with someone that you feel takes your breath away. But, if you're honest, you have no real friendship with them. Tim and Kathy wisely just call it out: "You're in trouble." You're in trouble because you are going to think to build on that person who takes your breath away but you don't have real friendship with. You're hoping maybe that will kick in later. That's a grave error. Prioritize friendship, screen for friendship, look for someone who understands you better than you do yourself, who makes you a better person just by being around them, someone whose love is characterized by constancy, transparency, and sympathy, and build there.

Lastly, number three is to ***keep the hope of seeing the great horizon in view***. This view, this lofty view of a spousal love, followed by the love we receive in Christ, is what changes us. Don't look for someone who will accept you just the way you are. That's actually the last thing that you need.

Let's look at married people. Number one, I want you to **concede the power of marriage**. This is a powerful thing, and I want you first to concede it, admit it, and to say, "I recognize that." Marriage has the power to set the whole course of our lives. If our marriages are strong, even if all circumstances around us are filled with trouble, we move out into the world with strength. But, if our marriage is weak, even if all the circumstances around us are marked by success and strength, it doesn't really matter, because you move out into the world in weakness.

Marriage is powerful. This means, number two, that you have got to **make marriage a priority**. You really have to do this. When you marry someone, you have gotten into a covenant relationship that was designed and created by God, so if you try to run marriage your own way, you are going to be in trouble. Marriage is God's; He built it a certain way, and it's got to be the most important relationship in your life. It has to have priority. Beware of pseudo-spouses. Sometimes we love our parents or care about their view of us more than our spouse. That's a pseudo-spouse. Sometimes we can love our kids more than our spouse. That's a pseudo-spouse, and that can work in both directions. You can start to seek your primary affection from your kids and lose track of your spouse. You can also be so fearful of having kids and make not having kids an idol because you've made your career an idol. That's a pseudo-spouse. Beware of those and make marriage a priority. Tim and Kathy wisely warn:

*"If your spouse does not feel that you are putting him or her first, then by definition, you aren't. And when that happens, your marriage is dying."*

Number three is the same for marrieds as for singles: to **keep the hope of seeing the great horizon view**. This is the ultimate transformation. We are headed toward Christ-likeness. We are headed towards the ultimate end where the love that we have received in Jesus Christ changes us, and with this in view, I want to invite us this morning to end this series with another question. The questions we've heard along the way have guided us and help us. We have asked: How can I serve you? Will you tell me the truth? How can I help and support you? How can I love and care for you? We've asked: Can we renew our covenant together?

This morning, I want us to all ask: Can we pray together? This is powerful, and I want us to come together in a guided time of prayer, and I want us to give this part of our lives to God, as singles, as marrieds. So, I want to ask you to bow your head with me and just follow as we pray together.

Dear Lord, we come to You. You have allowed us, Lord, in this series to go through sacred ground. You have given marriage as an image of Your love for us. Lord, I want to lift up the singles among us, singles who are young, singles who are divorced, singles who are widows or widowers. I want us to come in our singleness, whether that's by choice or by sorrow. I want us to offer to God our singleness. Say, "Lord Jesus, fill my heart with Your spousal love. You are

more than enough for me. Lord Jesus, I want to consecrate my singleness to You and ask You to stick closer than any friend. Would You help me to prioritize friendship and to move away from a worldly vision so that I can follow You with this most intimate part of me? Would You forgive me, Lord, where I have stumbled or failed? Help me to experience the reality of Your grace even now in this community of grace.”

If you are married, I want to invite you now to grab the hand of your spouse to communicate to them freshly that you want them to be your priority. Lord, we acknowledged to You that marriage is powerful. It affects us so much. We ask for forgiveness, Lord, where we have neglected this primary relationship. We ask that You would renew our marriages, Lord, in our midst. Help us to love You first and then our spouse, and then, Lord, if you have given children to us, we thank You for them. We want to love them next, and, Lord, we want to know that when our kids see us loving each other, it helps them feel loved. Lord, forgive us for pseudo-spouses. Lord, would You renew us powerfully this morning? You say of all of us that we are the bride of Christ, so, Lord, we desire now to stand, to rise as your bride, looking to You, our Bridegroom.

In Jesus’ Name, Amen.