

3 Portraits of Love Selected Texts

Introduction

An episode of Everybody Loves Raymond – involves Raymond trying to sell Robert on the idea of marriage

Ray Barone : ‘Ok, Robert, you want to know the advantages of marriage? Fine... There's... Uh... OK! Here! Got it! You know when you fall asleep and you stop breathing? When you're married, there's always somebody there to nudge you back to life.... not a good example. Ok...

Robert responds : ‘Ray...’

Ray Barone : No! I got this! Look, you want to know what marriage is really like? Fine. You wake up- she's there. You come back from work- she's there. You fall asleep- she's there. You eat dinner- she's there. You know? I mean, I know that sounds like a bad thing. But, it's not.'

Frank Barone : I'd like a minute for rebuttal.

Actor Will Ferrell gives this marriage advice

Will Ferrell: "Before you marry a person, you should first make them use a computer with slow internet to see who they really are."

Comedian Rita Rudner defines marriage:

Rita Rudner: 'Marriage is finding that special someone you want to annoy for the rest of your life.'

What is this thing called marriage? / and why do we do it?

It was Valentine's Day this week - - of course a day when we celebrate romantic love / dating and marriage

Ray's sales pitch for marriage - - - may not convince everyone - - - but we do find that there are numerous reasons why people should still bother with getting married

Author Maggie Gallagher – writes in an article titled – ‘Why marriage is good for you’

Maggie Gallagher: 'Marriage is a powerful creator and sustainer of human and social capital for adults as well as children, about as important as education when it comes to promoting the health, wealth, and well-being of adults and communities. For most Americans, this is news . . . Quietly, with little fanfare, a broad and deep

body of scientific literature has been accumulating that affirms what *Genesis* teaches: it is not good for man to be alone.'

She cites various statistics that show that married couples have psychological benefits from living with a partner – their children benefit emotionally. Married people tend to be more faithful to one another / live longer / etc.

Maggie Gallagher: 'Marriage increases sexual fidelity. Cohabiting men are four times more likely to cheat than husbands, and cohabiting women are eight times more likely to cheat than wives. Marriage is also the only realistic promise of permanence in a romantic relationship. Just one out of ten cohabiting couples are still cohabiting after five years.'

This morning – I'd like to take the opportunity to highlight a few principles about biblical love and marriage

We'll call them 3 portraits of biblical love: commitment in marriage / seeking first His kingdom / gratitude in all things

I. Love is a Commitment - Matthew 19:1-6

Jesus is approached by some Pharisees about the topic of marriage - - - and divorce

Mark tells us that they came *testing* Him

This means that they aren't really interested in what Jesus has to say – they are hoping to entrap Him in a statement that will get Him in trouble with one faction or the other

Jesus takes them back to *Genesis* to show them the original intent of God for marriage

Gen. 2:18 - 'Then the Lord God said, "it is not good for the man to be alone; I will make a make a helper suitable for him."

Genesis 2:24 - 'For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.'

There we see the origins of the marriage relationship – Adam and Eve

Then Jesus adds:

Matthew 19:6 - 'What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.'

We see there – the design and intent of God – man and woman / partners for life which means that in marital love – there must be this element of commitment

We recognize: Marriage is a challenge in our fallen world – because it is the union not of two angels but of two sinners

So – we see divorce / etc.

Zsa Zsa Gabor – married 9 times – one of them lasted just 2 days

Zsa Zsa Gabor: 'Women are forever asking me why I have had so many husbands. They don't seem to understand that you fall in love - but you also fall out of love. When you fall out of love - it is better to change partners and remain friends than to stay together and grow to hate each other.'

You fall in love – you fall out of love

Love is just this whimsical / fleeting / fickle emotion

Love strikes – then departs – we can do nothing about it – time to change partners

We must ask – is that the truth?

As with most things in life - - - there is God's way and there is man's way

Jesus points us to God's way – here in his answer to the Pharisees

Marriage and love require this element of commitment

Chuck Swindoll: 'Commitment is a biblical mandate for marriage. And like all biblical mandates, it requires faith to see beyond the immediate and offers unseen rewards when obeyed.'

Yes – there will be challenging days - - - there will be disagreements

Ruth Graham: 'When two people agree on everything, one of them is unnecessary.'

But - when you endure the challenges and stay the course - - - you reap the benefits of faithfulness

Commitment – is woven into the very nature of the marriage vows

'Do you take this person to be your lawfully wedded spouse for better or worse / in sickness and in health / for richer for poorer – as you long as you both shall live?'

I remember I was once asked by a fellow to marry he and his bride [he attended our church once in a blue moon] - - - they were in a toot to get married [small little ceremony] - - - already living together -- they wanted to legitimize everything

I said - - all right - - - but let's meet and go over a few things about marriage

I asked – have you ever been married before?

I knew he had been married before - - - but her answer kind of stunned me

She said – that's none of your business!

Ok – moving along here

So – I married them - - - he comes back to me about a month later - - - and says - - - we split up - - - and then he says – you know – I found out that she's been married six times before me

I said – I guess I did put my finger on something there - - - he said: 'you sure did!'

Marriage is a serious commitment - - - we would encourage anyone taking the marriage plunge to seek God's will / seek His wisdom

Man is a sinner who is constantly tempted to go against God's ways – he rejects God's order – tries to set up his own order

God's design is for there to be commitment in marriage - - - because many aspects of human emotions / feelings fluctuate - - - people can be terribly fickle / impulsive

What commitment does for a marriage is it brings in stability – by anchoring the relationship to ones covenantal promise before God

A marital commitment is in fact a pledge of future ongoing love

Timothy Keller: 'Wedding vows are not a declaration of present love but a mutually binding promise of future love.'

Till death do us part

The marriage covenant - - - takes into account that love is actually a choice / an act of the will

C.S. Lewis: 'People get from books the idea that if you have married the right person you may expect to go on 'being in love' forever. As a result, when they

find they are not, they think this proves they have made a mistake and are entitled to a change – not realizing that, when they have changed, the glamour will presently go out of the new love just as it went out of the old one.'

The solution is the biblical exhortation to husbands and wives to love one another / forgive one another / be patient with one another

Love is a choice – an exercise of the will - - - which we make in obedience to God and His Word - - - [Eph. 5:25]

God's way works / man's way does not

Dr. Laura shared the story of a man who was dating a woman - - - and he said they had become very close - - - physically and all. But now - - - she found out that she has lupus -- and this is going to involve a lot of doctor visits and treatments and he ponders that it might be best if he move on

Dr. Laura says to him - - - 'What do you want me to tell you? - - - that it's ok to abandon her at this point. You've already referred to a level of commitment and to the physical nature of your relationship - - - yet now - - - the moment the seas get rough - - - you want to jump ship?

That's not much of a commitment – is it? [no]

Then she finished her advice - - - maybe you should go - - - and let her go on with her life with people who will support her and stick close to her

That's a failure of manhood right there

I Corinthians 13:7 - 'Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.'

Love can only endure – when that love has the element of genuine commitment behind it

II. Love Seeks First the Kingdom - Matthew 6:33

At first – this may sound like a strange verse to throw into a marriage / love equation - - - but it is actually utterly essential for a number of reasons

Adam and Eve started out in paradise - - - and ended up in our world filled with thorns and thistles / sin / death and suffering - - - all the brokenness of the Fall

What happened? They put something ahead of God - - - and chose to disobey His Word

When they put something ahead of God - - - namely their own self-will - - - life and marriage became much more difficult

People are still doing that today - - - they put their careers / their money / their hobbies / their sports / their sexual deviancies / their drugs / alcohol / cars / vacations - - - anything and everything comes before God - - - and lo and behold the marriage suffers

Paul Tripp: 'It is only when God is in His rightful place in my heart that people and things are in their appropriate place in my thoughts, desires, and actions.'

The pillar and stability of the marriage relationship is a sincere commitment not just to one's spouse but to God Himself

That's why Christianity is the key to every problem that can arise within a marriage

If you have two people who are seeking first the kingdom of God - - - no matter what problem arises in their relationship - - - it can be resolved given those conditions

John MacArthur always gave this advice to single people who were seeking a mate

John MacArthur: 'If you want to find the right person - be the right person.'

Don't spend all your time looking for Mr. or Miss wonderful

Spend your time putting God first in your life - - - and He will lead you to the person He has for you - and then continue to seek first His kingdom all thru life

The best way to love one's spouse is to love God first

All Christian ethics begin there

Matthew 22:37-38 - 'And He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the great and foremost commandment.'

What does that mean?

It means that before we can properly love on the horizontal plane - - - we need to learn to love on the vertical plane

MLJ: 'Put God, His glory and the coming of His kingdom, and your relationship to Him, your nearness to Him, and your holiness in the central position, and you have the pledged word of God Himself through the lips of His Son, that all these other things, as they are necessary for your well-being in this life and world, shall be added unto you.'

God says - - - you put me first - - - and I will take care of your other needs [married or single]

One of the best things you can do for your marriage is to seek first His kingdom - - - grow spiritually in your walk with God

The fruits of the Spirit are: love / joy / peace

Who would have a hard time being married to someone who is always bubbling over with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control?

There are things your spouse cannot do for you

Your husband or wife cannot equip you with the spiritual armor

Your husband or wife cannot protect you thru the storms of life

Your husband or wife cannot give you peace of mind or answers to prayer

Your spouse cannot give you the power to overcome temptation

Those things come from God and God alone

When God is not important to you - - - your marriage will suffer - because your own character suffers – and your priorities will be all over the map

Thomas Brooks: 'Your strength to stand and withstand Satan's fiery darts is from your communion with God.' [p. 248]

Put God first – by giving Him the first day of the week – attending a worship service

Churches used to ring a bell – to summon worshipers - - - it was a way of saying – ‘Hey – God’s people are gathering for worship – come join us’ - - - bring your family / kids

Then each person within the sound of that bell made a choice

Do I respond to this call to worship - - - or ignore it?

Is worship important to me and my house – or not

That call to worship is just as real to us today – although Satan would love to get you to think it is not - - - but he’s the evil one – so we don’t listen to him

III. Love is Thankful - I Thessalonians 5:18

Love in marriage grows in the soil of gratitude

I Thessalonians 5:18 - 'In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.'

Single or married - - - gratitude is important to our spiritual lives

The Israelites missed out on the promised land because they chose to grumble and complain instead of being thankful and taking their needs to God

Numbers 11:1 - 'Now the people became like those who complain of adversity in the hearing of the Lord; and when the Lord heard it, His anger was kindled and the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp.'

Of course - - - they were not complaining about their spouses - - - but what?

Food / the desert / etc.

God had provided for them – water from a rock / manna in the wilderness

They complained about God's provision

Numbers 11:5-6 - 'We remember the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers, and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic, but now our appetite is gone. There is nothing at all to look at except this manna.'

Manna was God's provision for their needs

Think of your marriage

God said of Adam – 'I will make a helper suitable for him.'

Your spouse is God's provision

Are you thankful for him / her? - - - or do you complain in your heart?

Timothy Keller: 'Until God has the proper place in my life, I will always be complaining that my spouse is not loving me well enough, not respecting me enough, not supporting me enough.'

You and I will miss out on some of the rich blessings of marriage if we choose to merely grumble and complain about our spouses - - - instead of taking time to thank God for them

Suppose you think - - - well my husband / wife does have a few good qualities – but – boy there is an awful lot of bad too!

Ralph Venning: 'He that blesses God for a little is in the right way to be blessed with more.'

Philippians 4:4 - 'Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!'

Rabbi Harold Kushner: 'Crabby people will find reasons to be crabby about the weather, whatever the day is like . . . they complain not because of what the day is like but because of what they are like. By contrast, grateful people are grateful for the weather whatever it may be.'

Could that be true of marriage as well?

The sinful heart is a complaining heart - - - it will protest - - - well – you don't understand - -
- my situation is really, really bad

God says - - - I know who you are married to – in fact I know them better than you do!

Now – we recognize – there are times when a spouse does truly destroy a marriage by unfaithfulness / or some criminal activity - - - There are times when divorce may be the right thing

But – in the vast majority of situations - - - the faith driven response to relationship challenges - is to be patient with your partners flaws / to forgive - - - recognize they are a work in progress just as you are

Philippians 1:6 - 'For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.'

That's also true of your spouse - - if you married a Christian

God is perfecting them / shaping them

Part of that work of perfecting takes place - - - thru marriage

Peter Kreeft: 'Life in this world is like a divine workshop; the stuff of daily experience - marriage and children, responsibilities and opportunities, interruptions and problems and suffering - are the tools that God uses; the artist is God Himself, who will sculpt the block of marble that we are into something extraordinary.' [Phil. 1:6]

Maybe your marriage is difficult right now – let God do His work in your heart and in the heart of your spouse

Keep seeking first His kingdom - - - Keep your marital vows – and be thankful

Conclusion

Motivation – like commitment - - is often the difference between marriages that crash and burn – and marriages that weather the storms and thrive

If we are motivated to obey God in our relationships or not

There was a man who got off work late at night – and he always walked home after work. One night – the moon was shining bright – he decided to take a shortcut thru the cemetery which would shorten his trip. This seemed to work so well – he got into the habit of taking this route home every night. One night – on his way home – he was unaware that a grave had been dug that day – right in the center of his path. He stepped into the grave and landed with a thud – he began trying to get out of the hole. It soon became apparent that – his best efforts were not good enough – and he would have to sit out the night and wait for help in the morning.

He sat in the corner and was half asleep when a drunk stumbled into the same grave. Of course – this awakened the man – he noticed that the drunk was trying frantically to get himself out of the grave. The man reached out and touched the drunk on the leg and said – ‘friend – you can’t get out of here . . .’ – Before he could finish his sentence – the drunk was out of the grave and running to beat the devil. [Over the Top, p. 97]

Moral of the story: If you are motivated – there are ways!

Satan is the voice you will hear that says - - - it’s hopeless / throw in the towel

God is the One who says: trust Me / put me first / keep your commitment / and be thankful

The ultimate example of love in Scripture is that of our Savior

I John 4:10 - 'In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.'