

## **Sacred Marriage- Gary Thomas**

### **Notes-**

#### **The Greatest Challenge in the World**

- What if God designed marriage to make us holy more than to make us happy?
- The concept of “romantic love” is a relatively recent idea. Good marriages work to preserve a sense of romance, but the idea that marriage can survive on romance or romantic feelings alone has wrecked many relationships.
- Romantic love has no elasticity to it. It can never be stretched; it simply shatters. Good marriages require mature love. Mature love doesn't run from the challenges of marriage, it faces them head-on.

#### **Finding God in Marriage**

- Marriage can be a holy place. Marriage can be the site of a relationship that proclaims God's love to this world.
- More than seeing marriage as a mutual comfort, we must see it as a word picture of the most important news humans have ever received – that there is a divine relationship between God and his people. In both the Old and New Testaments, marriage is viewed as an analogy of the covenant and union of God with his people.
- The first purpose in marriage is to please God. I have no other choice as a Christian. I owe it to Jesus to live for him and make him my consuming passion.
- If my marriage contradicts my message, I have sabotaged to goal of my life: to be pleasing to Christ and to faithfully fulfill the ministry of reconciliation, proclaiming to the world the good news that we can be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.
- If my “driving force” is proclaiming the good news, I will work to construct a marriage that enhances the ministry of reconciliation by building a relationship on forgiveness, selfless love, and sacrifice. How can I tell my children that God's promise of reconciliation is secure when they see that my own promises don't mean a thing?
- Strong Christian marriages will still be struck by lightning – temptations, communication problems, frustrations, unrealized expectations – but if the

marriage is heavily watered by an unwavering commitment to please God above everything else, the conditions won't be ripe for a devastating fire to follow the lightning strike.

### **Learning to Love**

- Marriage creates a climate where love is put to the greatest test. Christian love must be chased after, aspired to, and practiced. The man who says, "I've never loved you" is a man who is essentially saying, "I've never acted like a Christian."
- Allow your marriage relationship to stretch your love and to enlarge your capacity for love – to teach you to be a Christian. Use marriage as a practice court, where you learn to accept another person and serve him or her. Don't limit your "love" to only spiritual things like praying and exhorting – part of love is delighting in the "earthly" things as well.
- On a very practical level, a husband who plots how to make his wife laugh every now and then is serving God. A wife who plans an unforgettable sexual experience for her husband is serving God. A husband who makes sacrifices so his wife can get the recreational time she needs is loving God.
- There are no lessons to be learned when a husband dominates his wife. There are no inspiring examples to emulate when a wife manipulates a husband. But love unlocks the spiritual secrets of the universe. Love blows open eternity and showers its raindrops on us. The beauty of Christianity is learning to love.

### **Holy Honor**

- While many people fight to *receive* respect, Christian marriage calls us to focus our efforts on *giving* respect. We are called to honor someone even when we know only too well their deepest character flaws. We are called to stretch ourselves, to find out *how* we can learn to respect this person with whom we've become so familiar. We are urged to "have contempt for contempt."
- Contempt creeps in when differences become familiar. As our partners and their weaknesses become more familiar to us, respect often becomes harder to give. But this failure to show respect is a sign of spiritual immaturity more than an inevitable pathway of marriage.

- We can cultivate thankfulness for our fellow sinners when we spent more time looking for “evidence of grace” than we do finding fault. If my wife is more aware of where she falls short in my eyes than she is of how I am witnessing evidences of God’s grace and sanctification, then I am a legalistic husband, akin to a Pharisee.
- The fact that my wife is made in the image of God calls me to a far more noble response than simply refraining from being condescending to her. Not acting with disdain is a far cry from what her creation in the image of God really calls me to do, namely, honor her.
- If my respect slips into contempt, it’s because *I’m* weak, not because my spouse is failing. If I were really mature, I would have the same compassion for her weaknesses as Christ does. Respect is a spiritual discipline, an obligation I owe my wife.
- When I am thankful for my spouse, the control that the familiarity of contempt has on me is broken. Contempt is conceived with expectations. Respect is conceived with expressions of gratitude.

### **The Soul’s Embrace**

- Prayer pushes eternity back into our lives, making God ever more relevant to the way we live our lives. The Christian who fails to pray will fail to grow as they should and be trapped in perpetual spiritual adolescence.
- When you understand the centrality of prayer in Christianity, few verses are more astounding than 1 Peter 3:7. Peter directly connects our attitude towards our spouses with *the* fundamental Christian discipline. We should improve our marriages so that we can improve our prayer lives. Instead of prayer being the “tool” that refines marriage, Peter tells us that marriage is to the tool that refines prayer.
- If you want an unimpeded prayer life, we should have regular sex with our spouse (1 Corinthians 7:5) and resolve our conflicts with our spouse (Matthew 5:23-24).

### **The Cleansing of Marriage**

- Marriage has its challenges, but when these are faced head-on, our marriage can nurture our devotional lives in enriching ways. One of the ways is by unmasking our sin and our hurtful attitudes and thus leading us into the spirit of humility.

- Loving something and purifying something go hand in hand (Ephesians 5:27). A husband who truly loves his wife will want to see her grow in purity. A wife who truly loves her husband will want to see him grow in godliness. Both will put grow in godliness above affluence, public opinion, or personal ease.
- Marriage holds a mirror up to your sin. It forces you to face yourself honestly and consider your character flaws, selfishness, anti-Christian attitudes, encouraging me to be sanctified and cleansed and grow in godliness.
- A theory: behind virtually every case of marital dissatisfaction lies unrepentant sin. Couples don't fall out of love so much as they fall out of repentance. Sin, wrong attitudes, and personal failures that are not dealt with slowly erode the relationship, assaulting and eventually erasing the once lofty promises made in the throes of earlier passion.
- Don't give in to the temptation to resent your partner as your own weaknesses are revealed. Correspondingly, give them the freedom and acceptance they need in order to face their own weaknesses as well. In this way, we can use marriage as a piercing spiritual mirror designed for our sanctification and growth in holiness.
- The times when we are likely to be the happiest and most fulfilled in marriage are the times when we are intent on drawing meaning and fulfillment from becoming a better person rather than demanding a "better" spouse.

## Sacred History

- The righteousness God seeks is a *persistent* righteousness, a commitment to continue making the right decisions even when you feel pulled in the opposite direction. Holiness is far more than an *inclination* toward occasional acts of kindness and charity. It is a commitment to persistent surrender before God.
- Christian endurance is based on the idea that there is another life which is for eternity and for which this world is a preparation. It is worth making sacrifices now to receive glory, honor, and immortality there. Your marriage will ultimately reveal which world your life is centered around.
- If we are serious about pursuing spiritual growth through marriage, we must convince ourselves to refrain from asking the spiritually dangerous question: "Did I marry the 'right' person?"

## **Sacred Struggle**

- Struggles in marriage can create relationships of beauty. Beauty is often birthed in struggle. These points of impact may not be “fun” – in fact, they can make us feel like we’re being ripped apart – but the process can make us stronger, build our character, and deepen our faith.
- If your marriage is tough, get down on your knees and thank God that he has given you an opportunity for unparalleled spiritual growth. You have the prime potential to excel in Christian character and obedience.
- If there’s one thing young engaged couples need to hear, it’s that a good marriage is not something you find. It’s something you work for. It takes struggle. You must crucify your selfishness. You must at times confront, and at other times confess. The practice of forgiveness is essential.
- A difficult marriage in and of itself may not cause us to grow. We have to apply ourselves to understanding, love, and patience – we must commit ourselves to a pursuit of virtue. We cannot control how our spouse will act – but we can control how we will act and respond.
- Look at your marriage through the lens of – *What am I learning? How is this causing me to grow? What is this doing for me from an eternal perspective?*

## **Falling Forward**

- One of the great spiritual challenges for any Christian is to become less self-absorbed. Maintaining an interest in and empathy for someone else is by no means an easy discipline to maintain – but it is a vital one.
- Christian marriage is also about learning to fall forward. Obstacles arise, anger flares, weariness dulls. When this happens, the spiritually immature respond by pulling back from their spouse. Maturity is reached by continuing to move forward past the pain and apathy.
- The opposite of biblical love isn’t hate, it’s apathy. To stop moving towards out spouse is to stop loving him or her. It’s holding back from the very purpose of marriage.
- Ideally, if both spouses surrender their own demands while striving to meet the other’s demands, the end result will be a marvelous and happy couple. It’s usually not this easy, and one spouse begins to give far more than the other – this is where breakdowns often begin. What if the “giving” spouse

found motivation other than through his or her desires? What if they viewed meeting the other partner's demands as part of their own spiritual formation?

- One of marriage's primary purposes is to teach us how to forgive. Marriage breaks down when a pious partner impales his or her spouse on the law.

### **Make me a Servant**

- To be a Christian is to be a self-volunteering servant. It is not sufficient to merely voice our assent to a few doctrines. We are called to put others above ourselves.
- Will I take advantage of my spouse's godliness? Or will I seek to emulate the One who laid his life down for me?
- The beauty of marriage is that it confronts our selfishness. When we are most tired, most worn down, and feeling more sorry for ourselves than we ever have before, we have the opportunity to confront the feelings of self-pity by getting up and serving our mate.
- A true Christian marriage proposal is an *offer*, not a request. Rather than saying in effect, "will you do this for me?" when we propose, the real question should be, "will you accept what I want to give?" If marriage is daily approached from this perspective, there can be no issue of disillusionment on the part of either partner.
- Service includes allowing your spouse to give if they are willing to give. In other words, service not only washes others' feet but it's letting your own feet be washed as well.
- True Christian service is freely given. If my service is stained with resentment, I'm not serving God in it.
- The only sexual life a Christian can legitimately enjoy is the romantic life a spouse chooses to provide. This makes rejection and manipulation ever-present spectators in the marriage bed.
- The spiritual beauty of sexuality is seen in service, lovingly meeting the physical desires and needs of our mate. The spiritual meaning of a Christian's sexuality is found in giving. When we have power over another and we use that power responsibly, appropriately, and benevolently, we grow in Christ, we become more like God, and we reflect the fact that we were made to love God by serving others.
- The true nature of our spiritual character may be best demonstrated during sex. Ask yourself: is sex something I'm giving to my spouse, or withholding? Is sex something I am demanding, or offering? Is sex something I am using

as a tool of manipulation, or as an expression of generous love? If God looked at nothing other than my sexuality, would I be known as a mature Christian or as a near pagan? Use the marriage bed to learn how to serve another and deny yourself.

### **Sexual Saints**

- God doesn't turn his eyes when a married couple goes to bed. We shouldn't turn our eyes from God when we share intimate moments with our spouse.
- While the male sexual organ has multiple functions, the female clitoris has just one – sexual pleasure. By design, God created a bodily organ that has no other purpose than to provide women with sexual ecstasy. This wasn't Satan's idea – it was God's. And God called every bit of creation, "very good" (Genesis 1:31).
- If guilt rather than gratitude casts a shadow over your experience of sex, practicing thanking God for what sex involves. For instance, pray quite explicitly – but in all holiness – thanking God for the physical pleasure surrounding the act of consummation. The reason it feels good is because God designed it so.
- Proverbs calls us to delight in our spouse *only*. Begin praying, "Lord help me to define attractiveness by what I have in my spouse. Shape my desires so that I am attracted only to them."

### **Sacred Presence**

- The family that will enjoy Jesus' presence as a customary part of their union is a family that is joined precisely because husband and wife want to invite Jesus into the deeper parts of their marriage.
- When our hearts grow cold towards God, our relationships suffer. If we sense alienation from, or lack of affection toward, our spouse, the first place we should look is how we're doing with the Lord.

### **Sacred Mission**

- God is not served well if we turn off everyone around us in our selfish pursuit of devotion. A spiritually alive marriage will remain a marriage of two individuals in pursuit of a common vision outside of themselves.

- We allow marriage to point beyond itself when we accept two central missions: becoming the people God created us to be and doing the work God has given us to do.