

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

ADVENTURES IN DATING AND MARRIAGE | SACRED INTIMACY

KYLE RILEY | FEBRUARY 11, 2024

Alright. Traders Point, how are we doing today? Good. Good. Good to be with you all. I want to take time to welcome everybody from all of our campuses and everybody tuning online. It's so good to be with you.

If you have a Bible, go ahead and turn to Genesis, chapter 2. Genesis, chapter 2 is where we are going to start today.

If you missed out last week we started a series called Adventures in Dating and Marriage. And, man, what a word to use to describe both of those things. Right? What better word could describe the process of two perfect, unflawed people entering into and sustaining a relationship?

Man, adventure is something I would definitely use to describe my own marriage. My wife and I, in total, both dating and marriage, we've been together for 17 years now. I know I don't look that young—I don't look that young. Usually when I throw that number out, it elicits a response something like, "Wow."

And that wow means two different things for two different camps of people it's like, "Wow, that's impressive." For the older crowd though, it's like, "That's nothing. I have underwear that is older than you and your marriage." To which I would respond, "Why? And why?"

We've got some time in. We've been through some things.

There was a trend on Instagram recently that was encouraging people to post a 21-year-old picture of themselves. I didn't participate then, but I'll participate now in front of thousands of people. This will live on the internet forever so it counts.

This is us in our early 20s—babies. Yeah, man. No kids, navigating the hardships of life, which was mainly school exams and no money, which meant lots and lots of cheap dates.

And years later here we are—all of the kids. Yeah, navigating and helping them, we're now helping them with school exams and still lots of cheap dates.

It's been such an adventure. It has been an adventure of joy and excitement and celebrations. But it's also been an adventure with twists and turns and heavy cargo—things that we've been carrying with us that have made the adventure difficult at times. The adventure has included some detours and road bumps and even some road blocks. But can I just say this? It has been the adventure of a lifetime with the best travel buddy that anybody could ever ask for. I'm so grateful.

In this series we've just been acknowledging that relationships are difficult, and they are challenging, and they are incredibly complicated. So when it comes to navigating them, where do we turn? What makes them work? And at the end of the day what makes them worth fighting for?



We feel that God's Word has a lot to say about that. And if you missed out last week, our anchor verse comes from Philippians, chapter 2, verse 5. Maybe you want to write this verse down. The apostle Paul says:

"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus." (NIV)

Last week Aaron said that any relationship for better or for worse is the result of the mindset that two people bring into that relationship. So, if we want to have a better relationship, then it requires a better mindset. And if you want to have a better mindset, then model it after the mindset of Jesus.

And church, I just want to take the time to interrogate that today. If that is true, if we are to have the mindset of Jesus in our relationships, then what is the mindset that He had for relationships, specifically toward marriage.

So, all throughout Scripture we just kind of see this word that is used to describe marriage, and that word is:

SACRED

Sacred—the word sacred just means something that is set apart, that is distinct, for a specific purpose to God or to worship God. So, in saying that marriage is sacred we're going to say this thing is set apart for a specific purpose as an act of worship.

And I want to bring down three elements of a sacred marriage that we'll kind of walk through:

SIGNIFICANCE

SYMBOL

SACRIFICE

And those three elements are the significance of marriage, the symbol of marriage and the sacrifice of marriage.

The significance of marriage. We'll take a look at the origin of marriage and what purpose it has. The symbol of marriage—what does it symbolize? What view should we have of marriage as we're living it out? And the sacrifice of marriage. How do we take this mindset and fully live it out? How do we apply it to our lives?

Before we jump into that, I just want to acknowledge that I know that at every one of our campuses or those tuning in online, not everybody is married. There are a number of people who are single and divorced and widowed.

My prayer is that you wouldn't tune out, but you would know that God's Word is living and active and that He has a word for you. And that there is a way that you can take something that is said today and apply it to your life or maybe in the future as you are discipling somebody else.

I also know that there are a number of people in our church who are walking through a significantly painful experience in relationships right now. Maybe a recent divorce or a separation. And this may brush up against some wounds that haven't fully healed yet. I want you to know that I've already begun to pray for you, praying that God would heal what has been broken, and that you would also know that God is with you as you walk through the pain. He is a master of redemption and He is a master of restoration. So, lean into Him.



As we look at that, the first thing that we want to explore is the significance of marriage. And that is where Genesis, chapter 2, comes into play. We're going to start in verse 18. And this is what it says. It says:

"Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone.'"

Highlight that; underline it, because that is important.

"I will make a helper who is just right for him.' So the Lord God formed from the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and the man chose a name for each one. Genesis 2:18-19 (NLT)

So here God is continuing to create. Up to this point He has created so many things. He created the land and the sea, the heavens and the earth, the sun, and the moon. And at the apex of His creation is humanity.

Actually, in the original language the word is Adám, which means human. That's where Adam gets his name. So, God creates Adam. He gives him this sense of purpose. He gives him a responsibility to be a farmer, to cultivate what God has created.

But that's not enough. God said, "He needs something else. He needs a helper. He needs somebody, something, a companion. So, God's like, "I've got it. Animals." Wouldn't have been my first choice, but I'm not God. He gives him animals and He gives him the responsibility to name the animals.

We see here that even in that, it didn't meet the relational significance that God wanted for Adam. So, we read on in verse 20. It says:

"He," talking about Adam, "gave names to all the livestock, all the birds of the sky, and all the wild animals." Look at this, "But still there was no helper just right for him.

"So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the Lord God took out one of the man's ribs and closed up the opening. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to the man." Genesis 2:20-22 (NLT)

You know, there is something that has always intrigued me about this, God created all of these things and they were all good and He placed Adam in the garden, a perfect place, and God and Adam were in a relationship with one another. And God gave Adam responsibility and He gave him a purpose. And it seems like everything was going great but it wasn't fully sufficient. Even though Adam had God, there was still this void.

If I could put it this way, it was as if God said to Adam, "Adam, I alone am not enough for you. You need people." That's true for all of us. We can't do life alone. We need community. We were never meant to live as islands to ourselves.

And regarding marriage, this means that a significant part of marriage—what we see here—is this word right here that I just want to throw out there:

Companionship

Companionship, which is friendship. Adam was alone and God said, "I want you to have someone that you can build a friendship with, something vital to marriage."

Last week Pastor Aaron touched on this a little bit. And he encouraged us, as married couples, to focus on nurturing our friendship. Nurturing our friendship. Why? Because friendship is essential to a healthy relationship. It's the essence of a healthy relationship.



There is a book called *The Meaning of Marriage* by the late Tim Keller. If there is any book that I can recommend, whether you are single or dating or married or what have you, it would be this book. He speaks on this very thing in his book. He says this: When God brought the first man his spouse, he brought him not just a lover but the friend his heart had been seeking... in individualistic Western societies, romance, and great sex matter far more than anything else. The Bible, however, without ignoring the importance of romance, puts great emphasis on marriage as companionship. You know, Brie and I will often be out at a grocery store or a restaurant or a hybrid of the two—we call it Costco. And we go to the food court like all good people should do when they are at Costco. And we will often see an older couple there who are sitting down and sharing a meal together.

Maybe they'll be in their 70s or 80s. They are sharing one bowl of ice cream. He's taking a scoop and then she's taking a scoop. And we'll sit down and we'll look at them and sometimes we'll say to ourselves, "I hope that's us one day. How cute is that?"

Sometimes we'll engage in conversation. Usually it's one of our kids who gets their attention and sparks a conversation. We'll begin to talk with them. And one thing will lead to another.

At some point I'll ask the question, "Hey, what's the secret? It looks like you have longevity in your marriage. What is the secret to making it last." And usually the man will give some kind of sarcastic response like, "Whatever she says goes." He's not fully wrong.

But then the woman will say, "Friendship."

Friendship is important. It's important for you to have this element of friendship, this companionship before you have anything else.

In the Song of Solomon, chapter 5, the woman echoes this concept that we see in Genesis about her husband. And she says:

"...This is my beloved, this is my friend." Song of Solomon 5:16 (NIV)

So, I just want to throw out a question to all of the married people in the room at all of our campuses. Married people, how's your friendship? How is your companionship? If part of the significance of marriage is to horizontally express the vertical relationship we have with our heavenly Father, how are we doing in that?

And there are a lot of aspects to friendship that we could go on for days about, but two that I just want to quickly highlight.

One is joy and laughter. You know laughter tells you a lot about a relationship. Being able to laugh with somebody.

It's one of the things that I love about my wife. We'll find things to laugh about. We'll reminisce about some of the things we used to do, talk about silly things that we do now.

We'll crack jokes on one another, crack jokes on other people. We'll sing and we'll dance to old 90s R & B music—just have fun. You know? We try to cultivate this element of laughter and joy. And let me tell you, you have to fight for that. It doesn't come naturally.



The other thing I would say is transparency. Transparency is being vulnerable with one another and forging this deep connection and getting the layers beneath the layers and creating this aspect of your relationship where you can be your full self in front of the other person, where you can say, "This is who I am. This is where I'm walking. This is what I'm walking through. This is what I need."

And what you do in those moments is important. As somebody is sharing something with you, sharing hurt or pain or navigating something very significant as a partner, what you do in that moment is important.

Guys, we don't have to go into fix it mode. Sometimes she just wants us to be present. Right? Not to problem solve.

I've had to learn this myself. There are times when my wife was saying something and a phrase I've tried to adopt over time with her, but also with my kids is, "Tell me more. Tell me more about that. Tell me how that made you feel."

My natural disposition is to say, "Okay, this is what you can do to no longer feel that way or to overcome the problem." No, I'm trying to practice presence with, not solve a problem.

So how are we doing being vulnerable? But also fostering a space where vulnerability can take place emotionally and mentally. That is one of the keys of friendship.

Adam and Eve were friends before they were anything else.

In marriage, before we are mom and dad, we are husband and wife. And before we are husband and wife, we are friends. We have to fight for that. We have to cultivate it. We need to fight for this companionship because it's something significant that God has created.

But friendship in and of itself isn't the entire purpose of marriage. God has chosen to use friendship within marriage as a significant fixture of the overall relationship that He has with us.

The image of marriage points to something so much bigger. And that's what takes us to the next point, which is the symbol of marriage.

In verse 23 we see Adam's response to God bringing this woman to him. He says: "At last!... This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called 'woman,' because she was taken from 'man.' This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife," then look at this, "and the two are united into one. Genesis 2:23-24 (NLT)

So, Adam sees this person who God has created while he was asleep. This person is like him but is not like him at the very same time. This person is fully equal but is also different. He responds with two phrases. He says, "At last."

And then he also says, "Wo man." Some of you will get that later. I'm a dad of three kids. I've got jokes that are corny and cheesy.

But we see that this union happened and the two are united into one. And that signifies two things. Pastor Aaron talked about this last week, one of the significant aspects of marriage is commitment and he distinctly contrasted a covenant versus a contract.



But this also signifies unity. And that's where I want us to focus today. The joining of lives. And not just physically, but the joining of lives emotionally and mentally and spiritually and financially.

And church, so often we want the benefit of physical union while trying to keep the other aspects separate. We want to say, "Hey, you can bring your body into this marriage but you keep your emotions over there."

We say, "Hey, it's great that you love Jesus and follow Jesus, but I'm not on that path so don't bring that stuff into this house. Finances, we'll keep that separate too."

We try to do all of these things separately except for the physical portion. And God says, "No, you are two people becoming one in all areas of your life, not just physically because this symbolizes a union, a joining together, a uniting."

So, what does it symbolize?

When God says the two are united into one, what does He mean? Well, I think we can use this illustration of a concept that we believe in Christianity called the Trinity. And within the Trinity we have God the Father, we have God the Son, and we have God the Holy Spirit. All are God. God is one. He's not three different God's, these are all one God, but distinct in personhood—different roles and functions.

So, God the Father is not God the Son. God the Son is not the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit did not die for us on the cross, Jesus did. And when we believe in what Jesus did for us then the Holy Spirit comes and indwells us and lives within us and helps us to live out the faith that we have. He seals our salvation. What we see in the Trinity is this beautiful expression of diversity, but also unity at the same time.

Marriage is also unity and diversity. So we could use this similar image where God is at the top, He is at the apex of our marriage. He doesn't change. He's staying up there but then we have this diversity in husband and wife. And we are diverse but we are also united in one another.

We're symbolizing the image of God in the way that we live, in the way that we move. That's why marriage can never be minimized just to a piece of paper. No, you are actually imaging the very person of God in your marriage. This symbolizes the union with one another but also with God.

I want to acknowledge though that there are people in our church and as you see an image like that you maybe asking yourself or saying to yourself, "Kyle, I don't necessarily fall perfectly into that triangle."

Maybe you are in this calling on your life where you've said, "I actually feel called to singleness for life." Can I just say this? That is a noble gift. We see people throughout the Bible who were unmarried who made a significant impact in the lives of other people. You are not half a person just because you are not married. You can make a whole impact. So, embrace that gift.

There also may be a number of people who say, "Kyle, what about me? I am same sex attracted. What does that mean for me?" Well, before I say anything else, can I just say this? God loves you. We love you. And you are welcome here.



I've had the chance to sit down with people who are same sex attracted and oftentimes in those settings I ask more questions than I have answers. And I just listen. I listen to the stories of people. Sometimes... Oftentimes I'll deal with hurt and with pain and mistrust.

I've also heard stories, though, that are full of redemption where somebody will let me know, "Hey, I'm still figuring this thing out and it's messy and it's hard, but I've chosen to follow Jesus.

And following Jesus, I've surrendered my sexuality to Him. I've come to realize that the gospel isn't that I get married, but the gospel is that I get Jesus. And I've chosen to follow Jesus above everything else." And I look that person dead in the eyes and I say, "Man, I admire you. There is a lot I can learn from you."

As a church we have our convictions. Pastor Aaron has spoken on LBGTQ in the past. Those messages are online if you ever want to go and look at them.

But more anything, church, what I want us to embrace is the fact that we don't merely stand on issues, we walk with people, we come around people so that they don't feel lonely and hurt.

And we will let them know, "Hey, you are part of a community of people. We are all in process. We are all sinful. And we are all in the process of being made into the image of God. So, let's do so together."

Regardless of your relationship status, I want you to know that you are in a church that wants to come around you and we have pastors at every campus who would love to talk with you if you need to.

tpcc.org/care

You can go onto our website where there are a number of resources or even if you just want to reach out and say, "Hey, I want somebody to come around me and talk with me."

I also want to add that there is a significant part of the symbolism that involves this word called sanctification. It's a fancy word that just means to be in process of coming to look more and more like Jesus as we go.

Marriage not only unifies us but it sanctifies us, which means as we live out this union that God created for us to be in we are helping one another to look like Jesus.

So to speak, we are on each side of these triangles and I am pushing the other person to look more and more like Jesus, up the side of the triangle.

Not to be God, because we can never be God, but to embrace His character to look more like Him. And as that happens, man, there is this natural joining together. We become closer as we draw closer to God.

Tim Keller, in that same book speaks on this. And I love what he says. He says:

Within this Christian vision of marriage, here's what it means to fall in love. It is to look at another person and get a glimpse of what God is creating, and to say, "I see who God is making you, and it excites me! I want to be part of that. I want to partner with you and God in the journey you are taking to his throne. And when we get there, I will look at your magnificence and say, 'I always knew you could be like this. I got glimpses of it on earth, but now look at you!'"

Marriage helps sanctify us, church. It engages us in this process of becoming more like Jesus: moment by moment, bit by bit, day by day. It sounds beautiful because it is.

But can I just name reality for a second? Yeah, this ain't pretty. Not at all. It's actually complex and it's messy and it's hard and it forces us to see some of the ugly and sinful parts of our character that marriage brings out.

Things that you all wrestle with: anger and jealousy, pride, and impatience. It involves giving your partner permission to lovingly call those things out in you and to hold you accountable to surrendering them to Jesus.

Church, it involves hard conversations and disagreements and forgiveness and tears and apologies and empathy, and forgiveness and patience, and pain and grace. And did I mention forgiveness?

It is extremely challenging and there will be times when you ask yourself, "What kind of an adventure is this?" Can I just lovingly say this? There may be people right here, right now and you are in the midst of a very difficult time in your marriage and you're asking yourself that question. Can I just let you know that it is worth it?

I'm not talking about if you're being subjected to any kind of abuse. I'm not saying that you just endure that. What I am saying is that and you're navigating some road bumps right now and you trust that it is worth it, that it has a purpose, that it's helping to sanctify you, that God is with you as you endure. And there is a greater cause—just trust the process.

So if marriage is significant and if marriage symbolizes the union that we have with each other but ultimately this union that we have with God, then the question becomes, practically, how do we live that out?

In order to do that I'm going to take a look at Ephesians, chapter 5. And we're going to start in verse 21. And we're going to unpack that a little bit. But before we do this, two things are critical that I just want to acknowledge and I want to call out.

One, I want to acknowledge that throughout the history of the big church, not necessarily this church, so to speak, but the universal church, there are verses within this passage that have been weaponized and used in ways that God never intended. I also want to say that there might be things that you read as we go through this passage that you might disagree with, you might be confused by, or you might even have questions about. It might make you bristle at some things.

I want to encourage us to suspend judgment and to read through this with an open mind and an open heart. So, starting in verse 21, the apostle Paul, writing to the churches in Ephesus, says:

"And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

That is important.

"For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of his body, the church. As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything.

“For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God’s word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault.

“In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. For a man who loves his wife actually shows love for himself. No one hates his own body but feeds and cares for it, just as Christ cares for the church. And we are members of his body.

“As the Scriptures say, ‘A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.’”

There it is again.

“This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one. So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.” Ephesians 5:21-33 (NLT)

First, context is very important. You have to remember that this is a letter. It’s a letter written to real people, a real church, with people who have real relationships.

There was a dominant culture within this city of Ephesus. It included a lot of things. The dominant religion at the time in the city of Ephesus was about the goddess Artemis. And she was the goddess of fertility. So a lot of these women were subscribing to this theory and worshipping this goddess that said childbirth is everything.

So what do you think they were submitting to? That ideology. I’m going to have a family. I’m going to have a healthy child. I’m glad I’m able to bear children. That is the utmost important thing. I am submitting to that.

At the very same time you have all of these men who were being influenced by the dominant Roman culture that said, “You are a man. You are strong. You can do what you want. You can marry who you want and still sleep with who you want, there is nothing that is above you.”

You have these two groups of people who have come to know Jesus and they are bringing all of these things into the church. And Paul was writing to them reminding them that they had a different way that they were following now.

This is how it used to be. This is what you used to say. This is the way that you used to act, but now you are filled with the Spirit and this is what you replace it with.

So what that means for greed and drunkenness and envy and gossip and all of these different things, then he gets to this verse and he says, “This is what it means in the context of relationships.” And that’s what we just read.

I don’t know if you caught it, but when it comes to relationships, it’s all about saying to submit to one another out of a reverence for Christ. There needs to be this mutual submission as believers with one another and this respect that we have for one another. And then he takes a step further and he says;

For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord...

And we’ll take a brief moment just to provide some clarity on what this means and what it does not mean. Notice that Paul says: wives to husbands, not women to men.

The second thing is that submission does not mean inferiority. It does not mean second class. It doesn't mean silence. It doesn't mean that you were called to just to be a homemaker, that you can't work outside of the home. It certainly doesn't mean that you don't have a voice and it doesn't mean that you don't have an opinion.

In fact, in Jesus' time, Jesus actually elevated the status of women who were considered second class citizens. Jesus had women disciples. Jesus traveled with women and these women would sit at His feet to learn from Him and study Him right along side men. That was counter cultural.

Jesus would have these private conversations with women. Something that was culturally frowned upon at the time as well.

The first people that Jesus revealed Himself to after the resurrection were women. And then He told them, "Go and tell others that I have risen." What does that mean? That means that women preached the first Easter sermon. Hallelujah.

What does that mean? That means that as a wife, as a woman, you speak into, you have the ability to speak up, you have the ability to speak on and you are not silent, you are not second class. You get to do so with this mutual respect, to come along side, to influence. As a couple you work together through mutual sacrifice and mutual submission.

Here's the third thing that I would say. It says, "Submit to your husband as to the Lord." Meaning, a wife who is following Jesus should never do anything for or with her husband that is outside of the will of God. It means that you are not following your husband into sin.

It means you submit to him as unto the Lord, but your husband isn't your god. That's why abuse and narcissism and manipulation are never okay.

Ladies, it is also why it is vitally important that you have your own relationship with Jesus and that you know His voice and you know His Word.

So, what is submission? Well, I like to break it down this way. If you look at the word submission it is sub and mission. Sub means to get under, to get beneath. And then we have mission—the mission that God has given the Christian household, the mission that God has given to the church.

So, for a wife she is saying, "I'm going to put myself under that mission. That mission is more important than my individual desires." She's saying, "I'm not putting myself below my husband, I'm putting myself under the mission that God has given for our marriage." I've talked with a number of women over the years, many who have said that previously, as they wrestled through this text, it rubbed them the wrong way. They couldn't get behind it. And it was very difficult for them. And I heard them.

And then they turned a corner and they said, "Through this process of praying and trying to be humble, the Spirit of God began to do something. He began to change the paradigm that I looked at this verse through. He began to soften me and I began to realize the truth that it's not me rejecting this.

"It's actually saying, 'No, if my husband is following Jesus, if he has fully surrendered his life to Christ and the fruit of the Spirit—that I see that in his life—I have absolutely no

problem submitting myself to him because he's following Jesus, and he's following him by leading my family closer to Jesus."

That is ultimately what Paul is getting at here.

And then he turns the corner and he begins to talk to the guys. Fellas, I don't know if you noticed, but he has significantly more words to say to us than he did to the women. I think that is intentional. There is this great responsibility that comes with spiritual leadership. Paul says:

For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church

Well, how did Christ love the church? That word love that Paul uses here in the original language is agape. And the Greeks had a bunch of different types of words for love.

They had friendly love. And they had erotic love and brotherly love. But agape is this unconditional, sacrificial kind of love. It's a word that denotes less about feelings and more about a decision.

It's the same word that is used in John 3:16 where it says, "For God so loved the world..."

Well, what did that love look like? A decision. "He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever should believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

It is a connection to our love and our choosing. We're choosing to sacrificially love.

We're choosing to lay down our lives. We're choosing to deny ourselves for the sake of loving our wives. This is the same thing that Jesus did for the church.

Well, practically, what does that mean? I want to highlight three things for us men.

The first thing is we've been called to die. And you guys are like, "Is he speaking figuratively or literally?" Yes. Both and. We've been called to die to our flesh, to anything that does not look like Jesus so that we can better serve our wives. And we've been called to put our lives on the line to physically die for them if the case requires it.

We've been called to deny ourselves in order to—here are the words—provide and protect.

And provide is far more than monetary means. You've been called to provide this state of emotional safety for your family, not financial. I've met stay at home dads who are leading families by providing emotional and spiritual safety to their families, to their wives.

You've been called to protect. And that is more than physical. Yes you are called to physically protect your family, but you're also called to protect the peace within your home. Why? Because there is an enemy who is doing everything he can (he's not playing fair) to attack your family and disrupt that peace and to disrupt the unity that God wants you to have.

What does that mean? As that happens, "I'm the one who is standing on the front lines spiritually, on guard and aware of the ways that he is trying to enter into our home. I'm protecting the peace and the unity within my home."

So, husbands, the question that I want to ask is, is your home a place of safety and peace? Are you dying to yourself so that your wife feels safe with you?

Here's the second thing that it means—prioritizing her wellbeing. Her wellbeing. Not the kids. Not time with the guys. Not the football game—happy Super Bowl Sunday everybody. Her.

It doesn't mean that you can't have fun. It doesn't mean that you can't go out with the guys. It means that everything has its place and if she's not well, ain't nothing well. Okay?

It doesn't mean that you say yes to everything that she wants. No, it means learning her. It means knowing her, studying her, and making her feel valued by the way that you are present to her needs.

And the third thing is, caring for her as you care for your own body. This is what Paul gets to here. Fellas, she was created in the very image of God. She is somebody who God created and Jesus died for. So, you treat her and you speak to her as such.

Meaning, you never call her out by a name, you never threaten her or abuse her, whether that's physically, verbally, or emotionally.

Listen. Leadership is not a license to leverage authority. It is a call to lay down your life. To serve. To be humble. To die to yourself.

I know there are a number of us here who are like, "But I never saw that modeled. I never had a marriage to look to and say that's imperfect, but that's a healthy marriage. Kyle, where do I go for that?"

I would encourage you to start with the gospels. Start by seeing how Jesus treated people, how He treated the people that He interacted with, how He engaged with them. And you take that and you ask the Holy Spirit to help you live that out.

Secondly, I would encourage you to get around community, other people who are in process just like you who can encourage you and challenge you at the very same time. Remember, we were not called to live life alone.

So, those two things help us to see how we are to model both submission and also leadership—healthy leadership. And every day is an opportunity to be invited into this kind of love.

You know, one of the privileges I have as a pastor is that I get to do premarital counseling with couples. And I love it because I learn just as much as I pour out. It's a way to keep my own self accountable because I never want to be preaching one thing and going home and living a life that is totally different.

Recently, I was able to begin this process of premarital counseling with a couple. And in the very first session, we usually go through the process of expectations. Let's just get our expectations out onto the table. So, I'll usually ask them to make a list of two to three things, individually, that they are expecting of their partner over the course of the next few weeks.

So this couple does that. She makes her list. Writes down a few things. He makes his list. And then I have them share them. She goes first and she says, "What I need from you over the next few weeks is x, y, and z."

And then it's his turn. And he shares his list, "What I need from you over the next few weeks is x, y, and z. This is what it's going to look like for us to live this out over the next few weeks."

And her response, it intrigued me and almost floored me. She said, "It sounds to me like as much as an expectation as this is, this is also an invitation."

And I said, "It sounds to me that you don't need premarital counseling. You've got this whole thing figured out." I love that. This is an invitation.

Husbands, can I gently, pastorally, but challengingly ask you this?

What are you inviting your wife into?

Is it an adventure with Jesus? It is an adventure where you are saying, "Hey, I'm not perfect. I have my baggage. I have trauma. I have things that I am still working out, but I have fully surrendered my life to Jesus and I'm imperfectly following Him.

"I want you to join me on this journey. I want us to walk step in step together, edifying one another, building one another up, helping to sanctify one another.

"We're going to drop the ball. We're going to argue. We're going to have disagreements, but man, the grace of God is going to sustain us and we're going to pick each other up and we're going to encourage each other to look more and more like Him."

Do you know what that requires though? Guys, it's taking the initiative. There is a difference between taking control and taking the initiative. They are two very different things. Taking initiative is what Jesus did.

And a lot of times spiritual leadership, I would say looks like asking the question: who says let's more often? Here's what I mean by that. Who says this? "Honey, let's pray together." "Let's study the Bible together." "Honey, let's get to church on time today." "Let's serve together." "Let's get our finances in order."

That's not taking control. That's saying, "God, where are you leading this family. And I'm going to gently but also reverently follow You and I want to invite my wife into this process. And I want to listen to her.

"And I want to welcome feedback. I'm going to talk through things. And I want her to poke holes in that. What is she hearing from the Lord."

"Let's take this adventure together."

Church, Jesus initiated and Jesus invited. Jesus perfectly lived out all three elements that we talked about. He is the best companion, the best friend that anybody could ever ask for.

Jesus is the symbol of both unity and diversity. He is like us. He's united with us, fully human, experienced everything that we do, yet He is not like us. He is diverse in the fact that He is fully God. He is that symbol.

Jesus submitted Himself to the will of his heavenly Father. He was in the garden the night before His crucifixion saying, "God, if this is possible, if there is any other way for this happen, let this cup pass from Me." But then He says, "Not My will but Your will be done." Submission to His heavenly Father.

And then He sacrificed. Jesus laid down His life. Denied Himself just once for the sake of unity with us, being reconciled to us so that we can spend eternity with Him.

He displayed all of those things beautifully and now in our marriages, our lives, we get to display them to a watching and broken and dying world that is seeing imperfect people following a perfect God and saying, "Man, there is grace, there is redemption, and there is mercy as the gospel is lived out." That's what our marriages get to tell. We get to tell that story.

And now, every week in this series we want to create space for the Holy Spirit to move and to speak. If you need prayer, there is a space that is going to be available for that. Maybe there was something that was said or that you heard and you need to reflect on it, you need to receive prayer over it. This is that time for that.

What I'm going to do is I'm going to pray and then at all of our campuses we're going to open up for a time of response. So, everybody at all of our campuses, go ahead and bow your head. I'd love to pray for us.

Father, we're grateful. We're grateful for who You are. We're grateful that You did not create us to live alone. You created us to be called into relationships, friendships.

Father, would You forgive us for the times that we have minimized what marriage really is. We have relegated it to two people living together, having a family, and failing to see the bigger picture that we are actually symbolizing You to other people.

Father, would You forgive us for the time we have not sacrificially loved the other person. When we allowed our selfishness to get the best of us and we prioritized our own wellbeing over the person who You have called us to live life with.

But, God, in all our repentance we are thankful that You are a God of grace, and mercy. You are a God of forgiveness. And that forgiveness spans as deep as the depths of the ocean that we cannot measure.

God, lastly, I know that there are people here who are walking through pain and hurt. Would You do what only You can do: restore, renew, and revive and heal what has been broken.

And may we all, as a church, be like a city on a hill. We are not perfect, but people are looking at us and we are constantly pointing the light to Jesus over and over and over again, the only One who is worth following in all of our relationships.

We ask this in Your perfect name, Jesus. And the church says: Amen.

