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in•ter•cede: Marriage

Genesis 2:18-25

This was a big weekend for two of our Chapel Hill family. Ryan Palmer, our Director of Student Ministries, was examined by our presbytery to be received as a candidate for pastoral ministry. He was awesome, by the way; absolute mic drop! Ryan is now on track to become a pastor in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. And Ellis White underwent his final examination to become a pastor. He crushed it! On February 12, Ellis will be installed as our first-ever Assistant Pastor for Evangelism. As a matter of fact, Ellis is now in Arizona with team of ten for a one-week evangelistic outreach at Arizona State University. Well done Ellis and Rachel! This is a big day for all of us.

We are in the midst of a series on prayer called in-ter-cede. For months we have been studying prayer as a church. Now, we are doing it! Over the last three weeks we have interceded for the "Big C" Church, for our nation and for our city. Last Sunday we had 100 folks show up downtown to walk around our city and pray. One woman was putting out her garbage, and a group stopped and prayed with her. The owner of Kelly's asked us to pray for her off-season business, and we did. I hope you are interceding with the rest of your church family. Studying about prayer doesn't mean a thing if we won't pray.

This week we are going to intercede for what the Bible teaches is the single most important human relationship: Marriage! Marriage is the foundation of our society. And no surprise—marriage is under attack as never before. Listen to these statistics.

The divorce rate in the United States is about 50%. One Indiana University study suggests that as many as 23% of men and 19% of women cheat on their spouses. A contributing factor is the growth of social media. One study found that a 20 percent increase in Facebook enrollment was associated with an over 4 percent increase in divorce rates. Add to this the Supreme Court's redefinition of marriage and it's not hard to understand why marriage is in trouble in the U.S.

It is no better in Gig Harbor. Are you aware that we have a robust "swingers" group in this community in which couples exchange spouses? This is a tough city to be married in! Not a week passes by without me hearing of another Chapel Hill couple in trouble. This week was no exception. It is heartbreaking.

Here's something even more discouraging. Some say that there is no difference in divorce statistics between Christians and non-Christians. Have you heard that? Well, here's some good news—it's not true. A nationwide study in the American Journal of Sociology determined that the strongest factor in predicting lower divorce rates in a county is the concentration of conservative or evangelical Protestants in that county. Another study finds that Protestant couples who are active in their faith are 35% less likely to get a divorce.

35%. That's a big difference. But what if I could offer you even better odds? Take a guess. What percentage of couples who pray together on a daily basis ends up getting divorced? 1%! According to a 1980's Gallup study, of those couples who pray together on a daily basis, 99% of them stay married! A more recent study by the University of Texas corroborated these findings. The old adage, "The couple that prays together, stays together," apparently is true.

So what percentage of couples would you think do pray together on a daily basis? 4%! So this week I want us to intercede for marriage. I am speaking primarily to those who are married and I will tell you up front, my hope is that you will pray together at least once this week. Even if you've never done it before, don't these odds make it worth trying? We are facing an epidemic of divorce, and we Christians have the cure. The question is, are we willing to take it?

For those who are not married, I ask your forbearance. Surely it is in **all** our interests to strengthen marriage. We all know, and most of us have been a part of, the carnage that results from divorce. Besides, if you are single and wish to be married, what I'm going to say might help you when that day comes. And if you do not intend to get married or like Paul and Jesus, feel called to singleness, I would ask you to pray this week for a specific couple that you know needs your prayer. This is too important! I entreat you—we must intercede for marriage!

My text is Genesis 2: 18-25:

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field.

But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife, and they

shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

This comes from the earliest chapters of the Bible, the story creation. And the opening words of the passage are jarring. For the first time we hear: "It is not good." Up until now things have been good. Six times, God creates something and then declares it is good. And when he is done, he looks at what he has created and declares it is very good. But in chapter 2, we discover something not good. It is not good that man should be alone. Of course, man isn't alone. He has God, and he has all the animals. But that isn't enough. He doesn't have community. He doesn't have another human being. So God gives him this great gift—a wife, created out of his own rib and presented to him. When Adam opens his eyes and sees her standing there in her naked splendor, he exclaims, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." You want to know a better translation? "Wow! Where have you been all my life?"

We have here the first and only perfect marriage. Of course, it won't stay that way long, but let's look at three things that made it perfect: Fit-ness, One-ness and Nakedness.

First, **Fit-ness**. In verse 18, God says, "...I will make a helper "fit" for him." That word "fit" suggests a perfect complement. God didn't make a clone of Adam; He made the complement for Adam—a person who physically, emotionally, spiritually was his perfect complement. There's a line in the movie Jerry McGuire, made more famous by Dr. Evil. Do you remember the line? "You complete me." But in a very deep sense, that is what this word "fit" means. God gave to Adam a person who, with her gifts and personality and spirituality—and yes, with her physicality—was a completion... a perfect complement to him.

My wife Cyndi "fits" me in so many ways. She is more thoughtful than I am. She is quieter than I am. She is more generous than I am. Frankly, I think she is a better disciple than I am. I was very alone until God gave her to me. She makes me a better man in every way.

How about you? If you are married, I want you to think of one specific way in which your spouse complements you... a unique gift they bring to your marriage. Pull out the insert in your bulletin. Look for line (A). Write down that quality. Fitness.

The second quality of the perfect marriage was "**One-ness**." Verse 24: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

Obviously, this alludes to their sexual union. Sex was God's idea. It was a gift given, within the context of marriage, to bind the couple together in an intimacy known in no other human relationship. The text says that the man should "cleave" to his wife. The Hebrew word for "cleave" comes from metallurgy. When two

metals are melted down and poured together, they become inseparable. When a man and wife are “poured into” each other through the sexual act, it is symbolic of what happens to them spiritually. It is not just a physical act. It is a spiritual and emotional smelting process that makes them one... indivisible.

This is why sex before marriage is so destructive! You give away a part of yourself that you can never get back. And it is why divorce is a sin and so destructive. Because it takes two, who have become one, and tries to make them two again. It never completely works, as all who have experienced divorce would attest. You always leave a part of yourself behind.

So, the ideal marriage had “fit-ness” and “one-ness”. And finally, naked-ness. “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.” Obviously, this refers literally to their being naked. They lived in a state of innocence. But it means something deeper: openness and transparency and vulnerability—nothing withheld, nothing hidden. And this “nakedness” was not just before each other; it was before God. Together, the two of them, were in a state of complete transparency and intimacy with God.

And this is our introduction to prayer. What is prayer if it is not an open, intimate relationship with God? We are told later that God used to walk with them in the cool of the garden every afternoon. But when Eve ate the forbidden fruit—and talked wimpy, passive Adam into doing the same thing—what was the first thing that happened? They were embarrassed and ashamed of their nakedness. They covered up with leaves, and they hid from God. The saddest words in the Bible are found in Genesis 3 when God calls out, “Adam, where are you?” That represents a breaking of relationship—a destruction of their intimacy.

So what does this have to do with prayer? Here it is. When couples pray together, they restore a part of Paradise that was lost! When we pray—when we listen to the prayerful heart of our beloved—when we lift each other before the Lord, we get a renewed glimpse of our “fit-ness” for each other. We are brought into a deeper “one-ness” and we return to a state of “naked-ness”—of honesty and transparency and trust before each other and before the Lord.

Every morning when I awake I pray for Cyndi as she lies next to me. I thank God for his single greatest gift in my life. Give it a try! And when we walk together, we pray as we walk. Whatever we are talking about, we just start praying about it as we keep walking. Give it a try! And at night when we embrace and pray together in bed, it is a precious way to end our day and start our sleep. Give it a try!

I spoke this week with a woman who had never prayed with her husband. But something they heard in church prompted them to try. It was awkward at first, but she said they have not missed a night since. And, it has been—pay attention to these words—“life-changing.” She said, “It has changed the nature of our relationship. When I hear him pray, it gives me a different perspective on who he

is.”

There are all kinds of reasons couples give for not praying together. Time is one, which is bogus. If you have time to watch TV, surely you could make 5 minutes or 2 minutes to pray together every night. For many, though, it is the awkwardness of not knowing how to do it... for guys, especially. Prayer often seems to come easier to women for whom words often seem to come easier. And wives, if you are not patient or if you try to correct us, we shut down. And of course, if either uses prayer as an opportunity to confess the other person’s sins, that’s never going to work to well. You don’t use prayer as a way to preach to your spouse! That’s cheating.

But in this day when marriage is under attack, if you could do something that would up the odds that your marriage would survive and thrive—even if it were awkward at first—isn’t it worth trying? When we pray together, we restore paradise. In that moment, we enter into the intimacy with each other and with God for which we were created, and which we cannot find any other way. So if you are married, here is my challenge this week: pray together—at least one time. Do it tonight in bed before the Doors of Amnesia have wiped away your memory. And to make it simple, here’s how. Pull out your insert. You already filled out line A. Now ask your spouse what one thing you could pray for, right now. Write that down on line B. I will wait. Now take that paper to bed, hold hands and, starting with the husband, read what is written. This is how I am praying for Cyndi while she is away:

“Dear Lord: Thank you so much for Cyndi. I’m grateful for her gift of compassion to our marriage. Please be with her as she delivers the eulogy for her aunt’s funeral. Bind our hearts together in perfect unity and help us to live in shameless honesty before each other and before you. Protect our marriage and bless our children. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Then after the wife takes her turn, both of you pray the Lord’s Prayer out loud together. That’s the challenge. Simple: pray together. Fight back against divorce! Intercede for your marriage this week... at least one time. Who will promise to do this?

And for all of us, married or not, would you pray for marriages this week? I have provided prayer points on the back of the insert. Every one of us knows a couple that is struggling right now. Would you lift them up before the Lord and maybe even let them know that you are doing so? And there are other things on that list to pray for.

When marriages are strong and good, society is strong and good. But marriage is under attack. Our enemy, the Devil, is doing some of his nastiest work in the destruction of marriages. So let’s rumble; let’s go to battle with him this week in prayer.

In closing, I want to do one more thing. As we do the benediction, if you are married, hold hands and lift up your other hand toward each other? As I pronounce the words of the benediction, you to repeat those words to each other. If you are alone, lift your hands and receive these words as if they come from Jesus.