

## ***Family Matters Week 1: Marriage on a Mission*** **David & BG Bawks - Pathway Community Church (Sept 5, 2021)**

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Good morning everyone and welcome to our family matters series! We're so glad you're here.

**David:** Before we dive into our message this morning, I have a special highlight. As we continue to pray for the situation in Afghanistan, we have an opportunity to partner with a local Afghan American church here in Fremont to support refugees who are seeking to settle here. There are several ways to help. We sent this out by email on Thursday, and there's a link to this information on our website homepage.

1. CARE - We are putting together care letters for the Afghan community. We are going to include a gift card, the book of Psalms in their language and a letter in their language expressing our care for them and our support.
2. AMAZON WISH LIST - There is an Amazon wishlist to begin gathering items that we will be donating to families as they move into homes. You can buy directly from this list.
3. ENGLISH CLASSES –You can also volunteer to teach English classes or connect with people one-on-one. The classes are planned for the end of September and will happen 2 days a week. There is a link to a Google form to sign up.
4. HOUSING –if you own a townhouse or other kind of property and would be willing to rent to new immigrants, it would go a long way in helping settle new families. You can also rent out an extra room in your house, an in-law unit or an Airbnb at a lower cost. Another way to support is to cosign a lease for a new family who doesn't qualify on their own.
5. DONATIONS – You can give financial donations through Pathway by writing a check designated to Afghan immigrant support.

There will be more initiatives in the future, especially as more families arrive. So stay tuned for how to continue to support the Afghan community and this important ministry. If you'd like more information, please visit our website or talk to me after the service.

I am excited to be preaching today's message with my wife BG and I'll invite her to come back up here. Please help me welcome her.

BG – Hello again! This month we'll be looking to Scripture to learn how to navigate different family dynamics particularly in marriage and parenting. We'll begin today by looking at the purpose of marriage and how to align our relationships and marriages with God's will for our lives. **BG's story** – Like most girls where I grew up, I was brought up to aspire towards marriage. In fact, I had a grand life plan – go to school, get a degree, get married by 26, get a masters, then a couple of babies all by the time I was 30! Marriage was basically part of all the accomplishments I wanted to achieve in my life. I remember when I was younger, my grandma would say, just focus on your books and go as far as you can with your studies. Go ahead and get a PhD even! I think she had taken it for granted that marriage would happen somewhere along the way of pursuing my studies. Then when I was doing my Masters,

she started saying, “you know education is not everything. You need to also think about a family so you don’t end up a lonely educated woman.” Our society assumes that marriage is a given for everyone and so did I; getting married was just another rung on the life ladder. Unfortunately, a husband was not forthcoming as quickly as I wanted and I spent a lot of time praying for one. I knew exactly what I wanted in a husband because I had made a very long and precise list (something else I’d learned from my Bible study groups). I know some people might see marriage as a personal decision that has nothing to do with God but I believe that God is concerned with every area of my life and especially with something as permanent as marriage. I didn’t want to take any chances so I prayed long and hard! Eventually, I became so obsessed with the idea of getting married that marriage became an idol. It got so bad that God eventually asked me to tear my list and never refer to it again in my prayers. At some point I remember telling God, hey, you seem kind of busy with the world and all that so what if I take this burden off your hands? You don’t have to worry about leading me to the right person, I’ll just take it from here and work things out. And I remember God asking me, “oh yeah? And how much exactly do you know about your future to help you make such a choice on your own?”

Another difficult thing I had to do was ask myself, “what if I don’t end up getting married? What does that mean for my identity as a woman? Or as a Christian?” I saw marriage as a way of completing me as a person and affirming my God’s love for me as a Christian.

**David’s story** – I grew up in a Christian family. We would go to church regularly. My family was close when I was growing up, and we would do a lot together as the four of us, go on holidays and trips together and play games together. I appreciated the model of marriage that my parents provided for me, and the love and stability that we had in our home. I’ve realized that is not the case for everyone.

When I was little, I really wanted to be grown up and to be independent and have my own house and job. I looked forward to all that. As I got older, I really wanted to be married – I wanted to be with someone and to have a family. I couldn’t wait to make plans with someone, to live life together, to travel and explore together, have someone to talk to and process things with, a constant companion and partner. And I wanted to have sex. I thought it would validate and complete me. While many of my motives were good, and part of God’s plan for marriage, like BG it did become an idol and obsession for me, something I had to sacrifice and to learn to give up trying to make happen.

Growing up I was mostly homeschooled, although for some years I attended a few private schools. But being homeschooled was somewhat limiting for me socially, and when I went away to attend college I was apprehensive about how I would fit in with so many new people, and especially about dating since I had never dated or been in a relationship in high school. We used to have mandatory chapel sessions, with assigned seating, and each semester they would seat us by different criteria. One semester they seated us in the huge auditorium by where we went to high school, and so all of us who were homeschooled in high school sat together. There were some people who asked me to show them the homeschooled section, I guess to see how awkward we all looked? I’m not totally sure.

But I worked very hard to overcome this perception of social inadequacy, and I especially focused on learning the skills of relationships – I read books about marriage and dating and relationships, I would talk to people about it, and I was very intentionally in building the skills to relate to people well. When I did have a brief relationship in college, I poured myself into that relationship and did everything that

I could to make it succeed: I prayed about it, and prayed with her, I made plans for the future, I was very intentional with how we communicated, and when it ended I was very upset. For the next few years, I continued to strive and do all that I could to find someone else, but nothing worked out. I had to get to the place of trusting God to bring the right person into my life at the right time, and realize that I couldn't make it happen.

**BG:** David and I met in grad school in Nairobi, right around the time that God was asking me to tear up my list of qualities for a husband. Good thing too because had I stuck to the things I was looking for, he wouldn't have made the cut. We were friends for about two years before we started dating. We then dated for 2 years, long-distance almost half that time. I had been warned about long-distance relationships and the fact that very few of them lasted. He had just graduated and returned to the U.S and I was completing my thesis back in Kenya. Besides not being able to see each other, there was also the 11-hour time difference which meant that we had to be creative with our communication. And what could have been a great challenge actually turned out to be an awesome relationship-building opportunity for us. We have now been married for 8 years and have grown a lot navigating different transitions and changes in that time.

**David:** That's a brief summary of our story, and for our passage today we're going to look at a passage not usually associated with marriage. Please turn with me to 1 Peter chapter 4. Let's read from verse 7 to verse 11.

1 Peter 4 <sup>7</sup> The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. <sup>8</sup> Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup> Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. <sup>10</sup> Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. <sup>11</sup> If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

**BG:** When you read the story of Jesus and the disciples, one of the main characters that jumps out at you is Peter. He almost always takes center stage of any story that he is in. Peter was the most prominent of the 12 disciples, and also takes the lead in the early story of the church in Acts. This letter was written toward the end of his life, about 30 years after the resurrection and departure of Jesus to heaven, from Rome. At the end of the letter he calls it Babylon but it is almost certainly Rome.

Peter begins his letter with identifying who he is writing to. He says in verse 1 he is writing to God's elect, to exiles scattered throughout the provinces of northern Asia Minor, modern day Turkey. We spent some time in the early days of covid last year looking at the message of hope we find in 1 Peter, and comfort to sustain us during challenging times.

**David:** Some the themes mentioned in these verses, such as love and hospitality, connect well with marriage. God created human beings for relationship and community. The desire to connect deeply with another human being is hardwired in us. Everyone desires to belong somewhere, to be known and seen, to have their full selves loved and appreciated. And marriage is one of the ways we get to experience that kind deep connection with another human being.

It is also important to emphasize that marriage is not intended for everyone. For those of you who are single, you are valuable and complete in yourselves, you are not half a person waiting to be filled in. The Apostle Paul was not married, and he wrote to the Corinthian church about the value of staying single, and recommended it! Marriage is and should not be for everyone, but for those who choose to get married, it can be a very powerful tool of discipleship, a way of teaching you about God and shaping your character. Here is our main point for today:

- **Marriage is not just about you; it is about God's mission.**

**BG:** One of the pervasive views of marriage that our society teaches us is that the main function of marriage is to make you happy. This is what we hear in songs, in TV shows, in movies and so much of popular culture. It is a self-focused foundation of marriage. But this is not how the Bible defines marriage. Like David said, marriage is about fulfilling God's mission for your life. Like I mentioned earlier, part of my perspective on marriage was that it was to be a reward for being an awesome Christian, for serving God and for waiting so faithfully. On the second day of our honeymoon, I woke up early to pray and I remember gushing with gratitude for how God had finally fulfilled my desires and how glad I was that I had waited all that time, etc. Then God stopped me in the middle of my gushing and said, this marriage is not about you, it's about me. You didn't get married because you're such a great Christian, or because you prayed so well. You are now married because marriage fits within my purpose for your life and for David's life; it's about what I want to do in and through both of you. Immediately three thoughts went through my mind: one, RUDE! God could have at least waited for me to finish telling him how awesome I thought he was for blessing me with marriage. Secondly, I thought, way to ruin a romantic trip! But third, I thought, whoa!

Today we're going to unpack two aspects of how marriage can achieve God's mission.

### **1. Marriage is an avenue for God's mission for your life.**

**BG:** Scripture is full of references to marriage, references in which God compares his relationship with us with the human marital relationship. In Hosea 2:16 and 19, God talks about the children of Israel calling him husband, instead of master. He wanted them to relate with him out of love and intimacy rather than fear. In Isaiah 62:5, God talks about rejoicing over his people the same way a husband rejoices over his wife. If you're married or in a romantic relationship, think about the first time you looked at your partner and realized that you were in love with them. Perhaps your heart skipped a beat when they walked into a room you were in. Maybe you found yourself with a giant grin on your face at the office from thinking about them. That's the picture God gives us to describe how he feels about us. Jesus referred to himself as a bridegroom and the church as a bride. It is clear that the marriage relationship is a powerful reflection of God's relationship with us.

**David:** The first purpose of marriage we see in scripture is to fulfil God's mission in our lives. Marriage is meant to reveal what God is like and teach us how to become more like him. In his book, *Sacred Marriage*, Gary Thomas asks the question: what if marriage is meant to make us holy more than to make us happy? In many ways, this seems counterintuitive. Who wants to get married for holiness? That's what prayer and Bible reading are for, right?

Certainly, the pursuit of joy and happiness is a key aspect of marriage. No one wants to get married if they know they're going to be unhappy. God knew this too. In fact, in Deuteronomy 24:5, a newly married man was exempt from war and was not to have any other duty laid on him for a full year. Instead, he was to stay home and bring happiness to the wife he had married. A relationship that calls such deep connection and intimacy like marriage should bring us great joy and delight. It's just that happiness cannot be our sole pursuit in marriage. The joy and delight we feel is supposed to point us to something bigger and deeper, something more grounded and permanent. How does God fulfil his mission in our lives through marriage?

a. Care & Connection (BG)

**BG** - God made us for connection and community. Whether married or not, each of us is hardwired for connection, not just with our creator but with fellow human beings. We see this in the Genesis story of the creation of Adam and Eve. In Genesis 2, after God had created everything else, he made man and put him in the garden of Eden. He gives him the task of caring for the rest of creation and Adam gets to enjoy a very unique relationship with God. Everything should have been perfect. Adam was in paradise. But the Bible records that something was missing from Adam's life. His experience of God's presence and the beauty around him were somehow incomplete. And the problem was that he did not have a companion. In Genesis 2:18, God says that it is not good for man to be alone. It is the only time God says that about what he has made. Up until then, each account of creation ended with the words, "And He saw that it was good." And so God created Eve and brought her to Adam. Adam's response was, "this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." Finally, here is someone I can relate with on the same level. It took another human being for Adam to feel complete and connected.

God's desire is that we would experience his love and care through our different relationships. As we've seen before, the Bible is full of instructions for relationships: love one another, bear with one another; forgive one another. Our human relationships are supposed to be an extension of God's care for us. And marriage in particular provides an opportunity for us to become deeply connected with another human being than any other relationship. It is the one relationship where who we truly are is laid bare, where we can be truly seen and truly known. And in that way, marriage is a sacred endeavor. As I said earlier, there is something so profound about marriage it that God repeatedly uses it as an illustration for his love for us and for the perfect relationship we will enter with Christ at the end of time. Through marriage, we are able to express and find fulfillment for some of our deepest needs and desires. There is just something so beautiful about a marriage that is aligned to God's will. It builds and protects, lifts and transforms us into becoming more than we could ever have become on our own. The deep love we share in marriage really does cover a multitude of sins like the passage we read earlier says.

I recently read a Rabbinic story about how God chose the venue for his temple. According to the story, there were two brothers who lived next to each other. One brother was married with children and the other was not. Both brothers were farmers and during one harvest season, the married brother said to himself, "my brother is single and has no one to take care of him. If something were to happen to him or to his farm, I wouldn't want him to lack food." So he secretly took a bag of grain each night and deposited it into his brother's granary. The single brother on the other hand said to himself, "my brother has a wife and children to take care of. If something was to happen to him or his farm, I

wouldn't want them to go hungry." And so he secretly took a bag of grain each night and deposited it into his brother's granary. One night, they bumped into each other and when they each realized what the other had been doing, they embraced each other in tears. According to the story, God looked down at that moment and said, this is a holy moment. I want my temple built in this place where this moment has taken place.

I thought that story was such a profound picture of how marriage is supposed to work. Each partner is called to care for the other and fulfil their needs above their own. And the beauty of it is that even though each brother was thought he was depleting his grain supply each night, neither of them was actually experiencing any decrease. Both their granaries remained full even though they were each giving away a significant amount. And that's the way it's supposed to be in our marriages too. When we commit to care and provide for each other's needs, neither spouse experiences lack, at least ideally speaking. Because God created us for relationship and connection, he designed marriage to be an avenue for us to receive it in unparalleled fashion.

Here's the thing about connection though: it exposes us. And it quickly reveals our need for the second gift of marriage.

#### b. Compassion (David)

Marriage is a great revealer: the more we relate with our partners, the more we become acquainted and confronted with our real selves, and the real person that our partner is. And one of the things that quickly come to the surface in a marriage is our weaknesses and flaws. In his book *The Meaning of Marriage* Timothy Keller says, "No matter how long you've dated somebody before, marrying him/her means marrying a stranger—because marriage brings out many traits in both you and your partner that, up to that moment, were hidden from everybody." These parts of ourselves are not hidden from our partners deliberately or with the intention to deceive (although there are relationships where one or both partners intentionally hide certain things from each other). It's just that very few other relationships put you in such close proximity with another human being, and there will be certain things that only get a chance to come to the surface in the context of marriage.

Recognizing our own shortcomings should help us become more compassionate with other people's failings and particularly, our spouses. Marriage has been an amazing discipleship tool for me. When I have to deal with parts of BG that I don't like or wish were different, or when I feel like I'm tired of putting up with a particular trait, God reminds me that I'm not the only one putting up with things I don't like. There are things about me BG has to put up with, areas she's had to make compromises to accommodate my personality and a lot of times, my stubbornness. And when I come face to face with some of my inner ugliness, I think of how it must look from God's perspective, compared to God's holiness. And then I think that God continues to love me despite my shortcomings and failures, and I pray for help to love David the same way. Marriage reminds us how much we have been loved and therefore how we are to love.

## 2. Marriage is an avenue to accomplish God's mission for the world. (BG)

The second purpose of marriage draws from what I believe is God's purpose for everyone: **God has put us here to love him and to love others.** Marriage should therefore not be just about the two of

you loving and serving one another, but also reflecting Christ to those around you by serving them. Ultimately, marriage is about what God wants to do in your life and what He wants to do in the world through you.

Even as you make sure that your marriage is strong, you must also make sure that your relationship is inclusive and focused on helping others. As Christians, we can no longer just live our lives for ourselves, and for our own comfort. This requires a **careful balance** – making sure your marriage is doing well internally, and also reaching externally.

**David** - Marriage is one of the greatest ways that we have to **impact the world and serve others**. I can tell you some of the married couples who have been a part of my life and have mentored and supported me. They have had a huge impact on my life, and continue to do so. Being married can help you minister to other people in different ways: helping you to see a new perspective, having someone to encourage and support you in your service, and allowing you to serve as a team.

Verse 9 in our passage says we must offer hospitality to others without grumbling. Hospitality is one huge way of ministering to other people, and being a part of their lives. Hospitality can be a means of mentoring, discipleship, and encouragement. It can make sure that you have people in your life, and a community surrounding you. I have had some friends who got married, and I never saw them again. Other friends got married, but still found ways to include me in their new marriage life, in a healthy way. They still remain my friends today. That is the choice that you have today, those of you who are married, as to what kind of marriage you would like to have. I would encourage you to select your friends carefully, don't keep friends who are negative in your marriage, but be sure to keep some friends and build a community together.

**BG** - And why do we do this, **why do we seek to serve others**? Verse 11 tells us that it is so that in all things God can be praised through Jesus Christ. God is worthy of honor and glory, and all that we do should lead to His glory and praise. Our marriages should be something that inspires those around us. People who do not know God should look at our marriage and say, that is something healthy and powerful, that is something I would desire to have in my life.

Let me also note that what this passage in 1 Peter talks about applies to all of us, not just those who are married. All of us are called to have appropriate boundaries in our lives, and to reach out to serve others through hospitality and the gifts that we have. And that way God will be praised through all of us.

**David**. I know we have just scratched the surface here. Marriage is a complex relationship with many different factors to consider. Our backgrounds, personalities, past experiences all shape our expectations and experience of marriage. The expression of God's mission in our lives and the world around us might look different from one marriage to another. Next week we will talk about love in a time of crisis and delve deeper into specific aspects of building connection and caring for one another through different stages of marriage.

Our goal for today was to get us to reflect on our marriages and ask: "does my marriage fulfil God's mission for me and my spouse? How can God use our marriage to draw us closer to Him as we draw closer to each other? And how can God use our marriage to be a blessing to the world around us?"

Spend some time this week and think about your significant relationships and particularly marriage for those who are married. How can you grow this week in aligning your marriage to God's mission and purpose? It could be in the way you serve one another this week, the way you show care and compassion to your spouse. Or it could be figuring out who or how you can serve together as a couple outside your marriage. Our passage today talked about hospitality as a way of serving others. God could be calling you to host and mentor younger couples. Or open up your home to someone that needs a place to stay.

If you're not married, think about other significant relationships in your life. How are you living out God's mission in those relationships?

**BG - Assignment:**

Here's a fun assignment for married couples this week: go on a date and spend time crafting a mission statement for your marriage. Focus on how the mission relates to you as a couple and also the world around you.

- **Marriage is not just about you; it is also about God's mission.**
- 1. **Marriage is an avenue for God's mission for your life**
  - a. **Connection**
  - b. **Compassion**
- 2. **Marriage is an avenue to accomplish God's mission for the world.**