

How are we? Are we good? If you have your Bibles, let's go to Matthew, chapter 5. If you're a guest with us this morning and don't have a Bible with you, there should be a hardback black one somewhere around you. If you don't own a Bible outright, that's our gift to you. If you just leave yours in the car all the time, leave that one here. We don't want to add to your pile. But if you need a Bible, we would love to get that to you.

Just FYI as we get started, we're in a very difficult text today, so I know the text we are in will hard press some of us. My hope is that by the end, you'll see it as a really beautiful text. Although, I'm telling you that as we work our way through this, some of it's going to get difficult, and it will affect more of us than it doesn't affect. So I want to just very quickly, from the beginning, say we have some work to do today, and some of it will not be pleasant for some of us.

When all is said and done, what God does (and who God is) is he brings truth into situations that lead to joy, and so at times we have to walk through the tough situations to get to that joy. So there'll be quite a bit of that today. So I wanted to just kind of upfront warn you to prepare yourselves, and then, if you try to leave, I'll call you out. I'll be like, "Where are you going?" So just FYI, you've been warned, even Denton and Dallas... I'll know. All right? I'll know.

One of the things that really stands out about God, if you're paying attention as you read the Bible... Now I said it that way because I think you can read the Bible and not pay attention, but if you're really paying attention, one of the attributes of God that just continually shows up and has always kind of moved my soul is the aspect of God that I'll just kind of put out there as *covenant faithfulness*. One of the things that really stands out about God as you watch God interact with his people, is he is ferociously faithful to a people who rarely share that reciprocity. Are you tracking with me?

What I mean by that is starting with God's promise to Abraham in Genesis, chapter 12, where he says, "Through you, in you, with you, I'm going to make a people, a nation, that will bless all the nations on earth, and you'll outnumber the stars in the sky and the sands on the beaches," and then God continues to bestow upon them his delight, his love, his forgiveness, and his pursuit, despite the fact that they chase other gods, they think they're smarter than him, they take things into their own hands, and they believe when all is said and done, they are smarter than and more prepared for life on earth than the God who designed and created all things.

Yet in their nearly constant rebellion, God never just washes his hands of them. He does discipline them, but he never abandons them, and he actually *pursues* them even when they're at their most wicked. He does that in the Old Testament through the prophets. So the prophets would work in one of two ways: one is the primary way that they would work and two is kind of the secondary, the lesser, way they would work. Primarily, prophets would just proclaim, "Thus sayeth the LORD..." So we're not in that place anymore. There's no more, "Thus sayeth the LORD..." outside of the Word of God. So if someone... "Thus sayeth the LORD..." and disagrees with the Scriptures, then they're lying.

So they would go, "Thus sayeth the LORD..." and then on top of that they had just instances here and there, where they would be in obedience to God, live out what is called a *symbolic act*, which means God wanted to create a physical, visible, picture of what was occurring in the spiritual realm. So often God would come to a prophet and ask them to live in a certain way or do a certain thing in order to communicate to Israel what was actually happening in their relationship with God.

Probably the most gut wrenching and yet simultaneously beautiful picture we get of this is found in the book of Hosea. I'll just read for you Hosea, chapter 1, verse 2, and you'll see what I mean. **"When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, 'Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD.'"** Now if you had told me 20 years ago that I was going to stand in front of a ton of people and use the word *whoredom* repeatedly, I would have said, "No way," but here we are just four minutes into my sermon, and I've said *whoredom* five times. So just to paint the picture of what is going on, here's what just happened.

God says, "Hosea, I want you to marry a prostitute and I want you to have children with this prostitute," and he puts in Hosea's heart...you have to hear this...a love for Gomer. This is not just a, "I hate this woman, but I'll marry her because you've commanded me to," God put it into Hosea's heart to love, pursue, and be ferociously committed to Gomer, the prostitute. Despite his love, despite his romance, despite his care, despite him trying to help her flourish, Gomer repeatedly cheated on him, whored herself out to other men, and at one point in the book actually becomes the property of another man. Hosea sells some of his possessions, and...follow me...buys his wife and the mother of his children back from another man. That's gut wrenching.

Yet what is going on in Hosea is God communicating to his covenant community, to his people, to those of us who have said, "Yes, Jesus, I'm yours," that God's covenant love is unwavering, even in the face of whoredom. So some of you might be going, "Are you calling me a whore?" Yes, yes I am. Actually, the text

is. Not me. The text. So you get this picture of how serious God is about his delight in us, his love for us, his care for us. That you get this picture of even when we are *unfaithful*, he is *faithful*.

Now I want to be clear that you understand me. This isn't for everyone. God's covenant love is not for everyone, only for those who belong to the covenant community of faith, only to those who have said, "Yes, Jesus, I'm yours," only those who have said, "Reign and rule in my heart." There's not some universal-type covenant commitment. This is a ferocious commitment bound by the blood of Christ for those who have put their faith and trust in him.

God is a covenant-keeping God, and he consistently reveals it in Scripture as he loves, pursues, and delights in people who don't show a lot of reciprocity toward that love, pursuit, and care. Just like Gomer, they're prone to run to other gods. Just like Gomer, they're prone to run to other husbands. They're prone to run to other ways. They trust in their own strength, despite the fact that their own strength creates train wrecks for them constantly. This is the God we serve.

Now since our God is a covenant-keeping God, God's expectation on us as salt and light to the world is that we be a covenant-keeping people. Now what that means, *covenant* is just a big word for promise, but bigger than how we promise. Kind of an oath, kind of like a binding legal covenant, "I'm *in*." That's *covenant*. So since God is a God of covenant, one of the ways we are salt and light to the world around us, one of the ways that we are a preservative in our culture and we reflect the wisdom and knowledge of God to the world around us, is that we are people of covenants.

So I'm speaking now particularly to Christians, so let me tell you how this kind of plays itself out. We reflect the wisdom and knowledge of God, and we work as salt, a preservative, in our culture by being ferociously committed to our covenant to the Lord. Now he is the author and perfecter of that covenant. We've already established that what you bring to that relationship is whoredom. Look right at me, because this is what makes God's love so spectacular. What you bring to the relationship is consistent betrayal. That's your addition to the relationship.

Do you see how God owns this, drives this, and is the author and perfecter of this? What you bring into the relationship is betrayal and a lack of faithfulness, but God sustains the covenant by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God sustains the covenant by his love, by his sacrifice, by paying the price, by extending grace. That's how God keeps the covenant. So we are people of covenant; we take this relationship with God seriously. It's not a moral code for us. It's not, "I do this; I don't do this." It's not a moral code; it is the lens by which we see the world. It affects everything from how we see church, to how we see friends, to how we see family, to how we deal with money.

The gospel is the lens by which we see all of life. It is not sequestered to Sundays. It dictates, drives, and defines all of the believer's life, or we don't understand it. So if it has been sequestered to Sunday, I would question your salvation, and I'd wonder if you actually understand what it is we believe as Christians. Okay? Now some of you are like, "Well, that's pretty tough. You're calling me an unbeliever." I'm telling you, if Jesus' only impact in your life happens for two hours on the weekend, you're not a believer.

You can email me; just make sure you include verses. All right? You're not a believer if all Jesus is for you is two hours on the weekend and has made no impact in any other area of your life. We are people of covenant. But it's not just our covenant with God that reveals this; it's also our covenant with one another as Christians. All right? God has not just saved us to himself, but he's saved us unto one another because you have gifts, I have gifts, and those gifts kind of collide and make all of us better.

So the second place that our covenant works itself out is with one another. Here at The Village Church we do covenant membership. The guys that came up and did the announcements have already announced we're serious about this covenant that we have entered in. If you've had a chance to look at our covenant, the first part of our covenant is what you can expect from me and from the elders of this church. Clearly lined out, here's what the Bible commands me to be if I'm going to be in this position, which means I'm to walk in lowliness, humility. I am to serve you. I am to pour out my life with my gifts to make sure God is doing all that God wants to do in you and in me, and I am not to give preferential treatment outside of honor due a teacher.

I'm here as a servant of yours, not to be overly honored by you. In fact, the Bible uses much more aggressive language than that, "I am a slave to all, so that some might believe." It starts with the elders. Why? Because you need to be able to hold us accountable. If we're not lined up with what the Word of God says we're supposed to be lined up with, then we need to be held to an account; we're outside the bounds of Scripture. So in our covenant, clearly, right at the beginning here's what you can expect of your elders and pastors.

Then the second part of our covenant is what is expected of members as you come in. That's why you can't just walk down an aisle, shake a hand, and become a member. You're going to have to go through a class where we go, "This is what we believe. This is how we operate. These are our expectations of you; those same expectations are on us," and then we'll agree together that in this season, in this time, we're together for God's mission, on God's mission, for the purposes of becoming mature in Jesus Christ and seeing disciples made of all nations.

So in the next couple of months, we're going to do covenant renewal. It has nothing to do with policing, has nothing to do with control; it has everything to do with care and everything to do with shepherding. I

don't know what your church background is, but it's very very possible to have membership rolls of 10,000-15,000 and have an attendance of 900. That will not happen here. The book of Hebrews says my fellow elders and I will be held accountable for those who are under our care.

Now not everyone is under our care. If you're not a member of this church, you're not under our care. All right? You attend here, but you don't belong here. Biblically speaking, those who have entered into covenant relationship with us are whom our elders and I will be responsible for on that day. Don't think I'm trying to build up our rolls with that statement. I just told you I'm trying to shrink our rolls. So my hope is that you'd land somewhere. If you land here, praise God, but you need to land somewhere because that's what God has called you to. But this idea of covenant and us honoring covenant plays out in a lot of other areas also, so let's look at Matthew 5. We'll pick it up starting in verse 31.

"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery." See what I mean? See why I started my message with, "Look some of this is going to get hard"? I mean, right now, don't you want me to kind of step in here and tell you why that doesn't mean what it says it means?

I can't. He wants it to feel impossible. The Bible wants this topic to feel impossible, and let me try to explain why? Later on, in Matthew, chapter 19, a group of Pharisees walk up to Jesus, and one of them asks this question, "Is there any reason by which we can divorce our wives?" Now isn't that a horrible question? Right? Did you hear it? "I want to be godly. I want to look godly, so give me the godly reason to dump this fool, to get away from this woman. How do I get out?" That's the question. "How do I get out of this?" That's what is asked of Jesus, and Jesus responds in Matthew 19 with a long bit of Scripture, that actually we pull some of what Jesus responds and put it in our vows.

The phrase, **"What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."** You know that? That's Jesus' response to that question. But then the Pharisees, experts in the law, said, "Well if that's true, if you're not supposed to be divorced, why does Moses allow us to give a certificate of divorce?" So Jesus answers with this verse. Matthew 19, starting in verse 8, says this, **"Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives..."** Listen to this. **"...but from the beginning it was not so."** Did you hear it? God's design for marriage, God's plan, God's design is that two would become one flesh, and that would create an unbreakable bond, a ferocious commitment to one another that is going to (we're going to get to this) mirror God's covenant with his people.

In Ephesians, chapter 5, you have this long text about marital relationships. You have this long text where Paul takes a stick to men. He literally says, "Men love your wives like Christ loved the church in that he gave himself up for her." Now those are pretty big shoes, right? Men, you want to know how to love your wife? You love your wife like Christ loved the church in that he gave himself up for her. You wash her in the water of the Word.

Now how did Jesus love the church? Well, he instigated the relationship. He brought all the forgiveness to the table, brought grace, brought patience, brought love, brought delight, brought romance...he brought all of that to his bride. Then later in the text he does address women and he said, "Women, respect and submit to your husband," and then on the back end of Ephesians 5, as he's transitioning out of marriage and into children, he has this verse.

Ephesians 5:32, **"This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."** So let's talk about marriage, kind of high-level marriage. God, desiring to paint on the canvas of creation what his covenant love looks like, puts it in the heart of the man to pursue the woman. So you have the day of epiphany (that's what I call it), you put little boys and little girls together, little boys are not interested in little girls, are they? "They're gross." Then all of a sudden, maybe sixth grade, maybe eighth grade, depending on your game, something switches in your head and you go from, "That's nasty," to, "I have to get one of those!" Right? Day of epiphany.

Minding your own business. "Forget the girls, I'm with the guys," and then all of a sudden...Jennifer Aniston movies. You're flowers. You're romance. You have to get one. It's called the day of epiphany. What the Bible just told us is what is happening in that moment is God is painting on the canvas of creation his pursuit, love, and delight for his bride. Then when the woman responds to that pursuit with reciprocity, "Yes," then you have a picture of God's covenant love for his people.

So marriage is much, much, much, much bigger than just a man and a woman getting together because they like one another. It is like Hosea's symbolic act, our reflection of God's covenant-keeping promise. So he's going to move from here into the heart of the matter, starting in verse 33. It's going to go after our hearts here. **"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.'"**

So this is referencing an Old Testament law that said, "Don't make promises to God you don't keep." You swear to God in the Old Testament and don't follow through on that swear, they would kill you. All right? In my house, I swore to God, I got soap in my mouth. I didn't get pelted with rocks. Maybe just got a whipping. So he's saying don't make promises to God you don't intend to keep. But on the straight, if we

were talking, most of us don't swear to God anymore. Not like this. Not a heartfelt, "I swear to God Almighty that I'll..." We don't do that anymore, it's rare.

We'll say, "Swear to God..." but it doesn't have the weight that it would back then. But look what he says in verse 34, **"But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King."** Now all he did there is say, "Hey let's not play games."

What they were doing is they were saying, "If I swear or make this promise or make this oath and it wasn't to God, then I'm able to break this oath because it was just an oath to me, or it was just an oath on my mother's grave, or...wasn't an oath to God. But what Jesus is saying is that God is so big that regardless of what you swear by, you're swearing unto God, even if you're not swearing to God. Are you tracking with me?

So how he unpacked it is like this: "If you swear to heaven, God owns the heavens. If you swear by the earth, that's his footstool. If you swear by Jerusalem, that's his city. There's nothing you could promise by, that ultimately God doesn't own outright," and then he goes on from God's bigness to your smallness. Verse 36. **"And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black."** I know some of you are like, "Oh yeah, 37."

"Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil." So you go from how big God is to how small you are. So why we just say "Yes" or why we just say "No" is because to promise more than that, to swear more than that, would be a promise to God, whether we like it or not. If we just try to promise by our own power, we're promising by something that is *hopelessly* fragile.

I want to continually lay things before you that are kind of scary, and so here's my little scary line for the day. There is no one in this room that can't have the whole trajectory of their life changed today by your cell phone ringing. There's no one in this room who is outside the plausibility of starting to feel sick today and never being strong again. You tracking with me? We are far more fragile than we think we are.

So James 4 goes so far as to say, "Don't even say tomorrow I'll go to this city or tomorrow I'll go to this place, but say, 'If the Lord wills.'" You can't promise by yourself, because you can't make anything happen. You have no idea what tomorrow holds, no idea what tonight holds, no idea what two weeks from now holds. Do you know how different your life can look in a day? So he's saying here, "Don't make any oath at all, just say, 'Yes,' if your answer is yes, say, 'No,' if your answer is no."

In fact, he's alluding to something that is the dishonesty of heart that needs to be repented of. Do you have a dishonest heart? It has been my experience the more grandiose the promises, the more apt that person is to just be a liar. "I swear by my mother's eyes," well, poor mom. Because if you're trustworthy, can't you just say it, and then people have confidence that you just said it? "He said he'll do it; he'll do it."

Now don't apply this universally to every little aspect of your life. All right? "Well, you know, I was going to go to dinner, and then I just didn't feel well, so I said, 'No' and I didn't go," and then you're like, "So maybe the gospel hadn't taken root?" No, no, no, this has everything to do with your commitment to the covenant community, your commitment to the Lord, your commitment to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, and...look right at me...your commitment to the one you made a vow to God to protect, guide, love, for better or for worse.

So let me ask a couple of questions here, and then I want to show you a video. If you are single or you are a college student, your covenant relationship right now, if you're not married, should be fleshing itself out in your commitment to your brothers and sisters in Christ in the church community. Is the church all about you? Does The Village exist because preferentially it's what you like, or are you here to serve and love your brothers and sisters?

Have you entered into community? Are you pouring yourself out to the church who you've covenanted yourself in with to see God grow us all into the maturity he has for us, or is this all about you? Do we exist to scratch your itches, to do what you like to accomplish? I've said since day one and we've modeled this (we'll model it all the more in the next couple of years), I'm going to eventually ask you to leave. All right? I'm eventually going to ask you to help with church plants in the metroplex.

I'm eventually going to ask you to head overseas and help us with work over there. I'm eventually going to ask for these things from you, and they're going to grate against your preferences. Right? I'm guessing you're here because something about what we do plays into your preferences. Either, "I like that style of worship. I like the way you communicate," or "I kind of like..." We are drawn to places because of our preferences, but the gospel and the mission of God should always transcend our preferences. We should always be eager and willing to lay them aside for the kingdom of God.

So if you're single, if you are a college student, if you're not married, how are you at covenant keeping in your relationship with God and in your relationship with his bride? Then for those of you who are married... One of the things I've noticed about marriage is that people have certain gifts that are intrinsic, like there are things that come to them easily. Right? Some of us that was math. Others of us that's art. Some of us that's music. Others of us that's construction... Sure you might work hard, but you had an intrinsic gift from day one on that.

So my wife, as far back as... She can pick up music. She can paint. She can write. She's a bit of a freak. She has a whole bunch of those things. I have one thing. I have one intrinsic thing. I can kind of see a finish line and try to gather people to get there. I was doing that before I was saved. God redeemed it and just focused it and made it eternal, instead of something that was temporary.

Used to be trying to score a touchdown, and now it's, "All right let's try to get into glory in a mature way." That's all I got. I mean, as soon as that's over, I'm done. Can't build anything. Can't paint. Can't play an instrument. But there are certain things that are very intrinsic to me; there are things I can just feel, and you have some of those. Some of you are natural athletes. Some of you are great at business. It's just easy.

It's not that you don't work hard, because you probably work hard in what is intrinsic to you. What happens so often is we come into our relationships because of all the trash our culture pours on us, and we begin to believe relationships, deep intimate relationships, should be intrinsic and shouldn't be work. Well that's absurd. If you want to get deep, you're going to have to dig. That means sometimes there are going to be calluses, not always, but sometimes; and sometimes you're going to have a sore back.

The only people who think marriage can't be difficult at times are people who are not married. Engaged folks are the worst. Like I know some of you right now, holding hands, "Nah, baby, this will never be work." I know. I know. We'll see you in counseling here in another six months. All right? So marriage can be difficult. You're two sinners living under the same roof. Have you brought the idea of covenantal faithfulness into your marriage relationship?

When two people submit to the gospel of Jesus Christ, reconciliation and a growing gladness in the relationship is always possible. Now listen, a couple of things. I know some of you hate that you're here this morning. If you had known the topic, you wouldn't have shown up. Two, I know you think you're the one couple that has an asterisk in Matthew 5. We look at the asterisk down at the bottom, there's a page number behind the maps, and then we turn that, and it's your clause. It's the clause that says that text was true except for you. So what I've done is try to put together a video that very lovingly takes from you the, "This can't be true for me." So I want you to watch this. I'll be back in around nine minutes.

[Video]

Christina Jelinek: I'm Christina, and this is John. We're the Jelineks, and in 2010 the Lord restored us first to himself and then to one another, and here's proof.

Philip Bennett: My name is Philip and this is my wife Lea. In 2005, God restored our marriage.

Kevin Laws: Hi I'm Kevin Laws, and this is my wife Chaille. Two years ago, the Lord exposed adultery in me, and has now reconciled me to himself, and then also reconciled Chaille and I to one another.

Jim Chamblee: Hi we're the Chamblees, and God has restored our marriage over the past few years by exposing some sin in our life, showing us some idols we've held onto, and stripped some things away that were tough for us, and I think, showing us we need to put our worth in the Lord.

Leslie Chamblee: And our hope.

Curt Millward: My name is Curt and this is Michelle. We're here to tell you our story. I guess the best way to start off is we've been married for about six months now, and previously to that we were married for 11 years. In between then we were separated/divorced for about a year and a half or two years. When we were married, in about the eleventh year, life was just going on and Christ was not really in our lives and there were the everyday temptations and a lot of struggles for me started surfacing.

I was really struggling with identity and trying to really search out who I was and whether that was in athletics, whether that was in my job or career, and a lot of the struggles started to surface through then, and really struggling with anger... There was a lot of temptation, and I wasn't faithful in our covenant, in our marriage, to Michelle. I actually think Christ was actually graceful enough to actually allow me to go through that because when I reached that point, the things that I wanted and I tried to achieve, I found no comfort in them whatsoever.

Michelle Millward: I think for me during that time, I thought we had a great marriage. So what God revealed to me was just my role in our marriage, and what that looked like and what that didn't look like. It definitely did not look the way the Lord intended for me as a wife. Just that he really didn't have my heart, and he needed my heart in order to walk me through just the devastation of a marriage ending.

Curt: It was very similar for me too. I mean, deep down, I was struggling, and everything I justified. I had a justification for everything, and you couldn't convince me that my situation was special. I really had some anger and issues deep down. I remember the night (all day long Michelle was on my heart) just like that, God just decided at that moment just to remove the blinders I was looking through, and for the first time I realized what I did.

The anger I had and all the sleepless nights Michelle must have had, all the struggles she must have gone through, and my kids... Everything I had a justification for... I saw the truth. After that night, God had plans

for me, and God just continued to set up circumstances and put people in my life. There was one point where I reached out to Michelle and all I wanted to do was just meet with her and just tell her how sorry I was. That was all I wanted to do. That was on my heart.

So we met at a park, and we ended up at the park... I just kind of told her what I realized, and all the things I felt, for the first time, and I just spilled that out to her how sorry I was and asked for her forgiveness. God just started to woo us back together and put us back together at particular points. That was all part of God's plan. I couldn't have done that. This point where we started dating again... That was very awkward because we found ourselves many times kind of like, "This is my ex-wife/girlfriend..." We found ourselves in that point and dating again.

One thing I was not good at before was honoring my wife, and I was, a lot of times, really laid back in our life, where she did a lot of the planning. She took care of a lot of issues. So one thing I really wanted to show her and God revealed to me to show her is that I *am* capable of this and I *do* care and I *do* honor her. So without her even knowing about it, I planned our whole engagement and wedding. She had no clue about it.

It was real quick because it was an engagement and a wedding in one day. Basically when we were dating we joined a home group and got real close with our home group and gospel community, and I just felt like God was really laying that on my heart, "That's what this is all about." I wanted our home group to be part of that, and we just got remarried.

Michelle: It was amazing. It was very neat to walk in and just have so many people who had walked with us through this, and just... We're so excited and we're so blessed to start over. We really realize that was God's gift to us. It's not a gift I would wish on anybody to go through, but it's definitely something I see as just a huge gift and a huge blessing that he just saw where we were and knew he didn't want us there. He brought us out into the light and really took what we had broken and pieced it back together. We still have struggles. I mean, we're married and we're just like everybody else, but...

Curt: It's completely different.

Michelle: ...it's so different when it's really just pieced together with a good foundation and that only comes through Christ.

Steve Lagerstrom: We're the Lagerstroms. I'm Steve and this is my wife, Marianne.

Marianne Lagerstrom: Several years ago, God revealed hidden sin, and he restored our marriage in places where we didn't even know it was broken.

Steve: He made it stronger than it was before and gave us a platform to speak hope into other couples.

Aaron Young: We're the Youngs. In 2009, God stripped away everything in our marriage so he could become our everything.

Randy Froese: We're Randy and Cindy Froese. In 2005, God restored our marriage.

Mike Ponds: Hi, we're Mike and Keri Ponds. We were divorced in 2007 due to adultery and various idolatry and selfishness and sin. God graciously restored our marriage. Last year, we got remarried. He continues to sanctify us day by day.

[End of video]

Yeah. Absolutely. So I want to tell you a bit about how we put things together. On Tuesday mornings, I have what we call a service-planning meeting. So the worship pastors from all our campuses and our campus pastors, we sit down and I basically walk them through general premise of the sermons four weeks out, three weeks out, two weeks out, and one week out. Special components like a video are shown. So four weeks ago, we saw just their story in the middle. But I know us well enough to know that some of you would look at that one isolated story and think, "That's the outlier." What you're dealing with, what you're walking in, that's normative. *This* isn't normative, what *you're* walking in is normative.

So I just immediately said, "Okay, here's what I want. On the front end and on the back end of that video, I want other testimonies, so people can see and understand what the gospel does is repair and restore where there's a commitment to Jesus as individuals, and then to one another as our covenant relationship with God and with one another." So what you saw, the people that are before and after this video are a tiny sample size of what we could have done here.

I've been tempted to just throw out to our comm department, let's make this a 45-50 minute documentary because we have dozens and dozens and dozens of these, everything from adultery to abuse. Some that were divorced close to 10 years before they got remarried, others that were like this one, just divorced for six months, seven months, eight months before they were remarried, but this is normative at the Village Church.

So at that meeting they were like, "We have one tiny window to shoot," so what you saw is only Flower Mound Campus, only those at the Flower Mound Campus who could come and be shot after the 11:15 service on Sunday morning. They found out on Tuesday afternoon that we would need them to do that. So we could have made this video as long as this service, with no music and no teaching. That's how often God has done this at The Village Church.

So I want to point something out to you, and then I want to challenge you, whether you're single or married. We as Christians love and delight in God's unfailing, sacrificing, patient love for us. We love it. Like we start talking about the idea that God delights in us despite us, that God gives and grants to us when we cannot give back to him what's due his name... We love it. It makes us sing, makes us lift our hands, makes us feel like a whole person, challenges us in the deep, deep parts of our souls to rejoice in him, and yet this reveals our wickedness. You take that idea and lay it upon other relationships, and it seems absurd.

The one thing we delight in as believers in Christ, when you lay it on other relationships, even well-meaning believers will think it's absurd. That it would be absurd for God to ask you to look at your spouse, to engage your spouse, to look at your church, to look at your home group like Christ looks at you, loves you. Are you going to be able to do that perfectly? I wouldn't even give you a quarter of a percent, but there would be the pursuit. So let me challenge you in a couple of ways. If you're single...

1. *How well are you doing at covenant keeping?* Now the good news on your relationship with God is he's the one holding down the covenant. All right? But are you serious about your relationship with the Lord, or is it an outlier?

2. *How serious are you about the covenant you've made to The Village, if you're a member here?* Are you serious about your home group, or is that, again, just one thing among many? Are you serious about the other believers you're doing life deeply with? That's covenant issue stuff.

Now my married couples. Some of you are in here and you're just in a dry spot, just in a rough patch. I've already said that happens in marriage. Nobody's marriage is always on a scale of 1-10, a 10+ on the romance, giddy, love thing. All right? So maybe you're in just a rough stretch. Maybe you're not connected. Here's what I want to invite you to do. Say it out loud to your spouse, and then come and let us pray for you. Say it out loud, "I just don't feel connected. I just don't feel like we're synced up." If that surprises you, don't go, "Really? Well, I feel completely connected. What's wrong with you?" This doesn't need to turn into security getting involved today. So just say it, and come let us pray for you.

Others of you, it's more serious than that. It's a habitual issue with you and your spouse. You kind of keep circling around to the same arguments over and over and over again... I want to do two things. I want to invite you up, let us pray for you. Then the second thing I want to encourage you to do is I want to encourage you to head towards Recovery, to head toward the Steps studies and to plug in there so God can help at some real deep levels of your heart.

Now if you don't know how to do that, you don't know what I'm talking about. If you go to our webpage, on our webpage front page you're going to see a banner that says "Recovery." Click on that, it'll take you to all that information, show you when you can plug into Steps, when you can plug into this part of our church...

Then there are others of you, it's not just a consistent argument; it's like you're *on fire*, like your marriage is burning to the ground, like you came in here today ready to tap out. Things are already moving forward. It's over! No hope for you. No hope for your marriage. Not even interested in *trying* anymore, and God brought you in here today as kind of a rude intervention. Here's what I would encourage you to do. Come be prayed for, head to Steps, and then at the bottom of that webpage that I referenced to you, there's a link to biblical counselors in and around the metroplex that we would encourage you to sit down with.

Now let me tell you what will get in your way today. What will get in your way is pride. Can I point out the idiocy of it? Please quit pretending to be happy and actually pursue a shot at it. See how dumb this game is we get into? We'd rather be like, "Ah, hey, love you," and then really have the whole thing burning down around us. Why would you do that? So click and head that way.

Just so you know, I could be on this video. First few years of my marriage were just an absolute nightmare. In fact, on multiple occasions I laid in bed, stared at my ceiling, and thought to myself, "Is this my life? Is this the next 30-40 years of my life? Is this what it's going to be like?" I would get in these arguments with God, "How can you expect me and how you can you ask me to do these things over here and work this hard over here, and then come home to this? Like this... I will not make it 30-40 years if this is what you have for me," lying right next to another godly Christian woman in our bed at night and just not imagining that I would make it until the end. Listen, just so I don't paint this in a way it couldn't... You don't think she was feeling the same thing?

So can you imagine all the things you might like about me, Lauren might hate about me? Like my passion, my zeal, my quick mouth, my argumentation... How do you think that plays out at home? Do you think Lauren... "Man, I love how quick-witted you are. I just love how you always have an answer." Right? "I love getting in an argument with you, Matt. You're so good at listening, so good at..." Right? I mean, I guarantee, she'd stand up here and say the same thing, that she was lying in bed wondering if this was our life.

So when I'm talking to you about biblical counseling, when I'm talking to you about Steps, when I'm talking to you about being prayed for and being honest about where you are, I'm telling you that's what God used to help me. I'm not pointing you to a program. I'm not saying, "We do this thing; try it out." I'm telling you my wife, now of 13 years, my woman for 15 is my best friend. I love being with her. I love going home. I hate heading to work. I hate getting on airplanes. I love flying home. It was not that way the first three years of our marriage. God can work in the mess.

You might be in here saying, "I'm doing all of that right now, and it's still awful." Okay. A day at a time. A step at a time. That's all God has asked of you. Don't lose heart. Don't give up. Let him work. Don't try to be the Holy Spirit to your spouse; you're crummy at it. You look at your own heart. You take care of your own heart. You press into the Lord for you and let God do the work on your spouse. Adultery, abuse, and all sorts of awful things God can reconcile. You have to trust him.

Now just so you don't take what I just said and run someplace you shouldn't, if you're being abused, I don't think you should stay in that house, don't think you should stay with that man. You have full-on church permission, if you're being abused, to get out of there and contact us. But if you're doing all you know and it still feels like a wash, still feels like it's not moving, I think you have to be patient, day in and day out, press into God on high, and trust that he'll do the work that you cannot.

The more I tried to fix my marriage, the messier it got. Anybody else? The more I tried to make it better, the worse it got. When I finally just went, "I can't make it better; I'm going to work on my own heart and let God work on my girl," God started taking over and doing what he can. Don't walk in pride here today. If you have questions about some of the things I've said, we have a ton of papers on our website that can help you understand other implications involved in marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

If you've been divorced, you don't need to sit under guilt. You need to rest in the grace of God and believe that maybe you can be reconciled. If you've remarried, don't set out to divorce your current spouse to go back to your first one. You're in a covenant relationship now. You can giggle, but I get concerned sometimes.

So the offer is on the table for the reconciling work of Jesus Christ to work in your heart in such a way that genuine transformation in you and reconciliation with others can occur. You just have to believe him for it. So there will be men and women ready to pray with you, ready to pray over you, ready to pray for you and to direct you into next steps; although, I've tried to lay those out as briefly and as easily as I could. You have not been built by God to fight this one alone. Let's pray.

Holy Spirit, I pray that you would do now what only you can do. Some of us are in here and we really are... We're hurt. We're banged up. This conversation is a lot like thinking on a funeral or a loss, and so I pray Holy Spirit that you would minister to us. Many of us really in the fight...couples who have come in here today in their own fire, men who have come in here today without wives, women who have come in here today without husbands. I pray that you would just do a work, that you would minister, that you would stir, that you would draw near, and that you would remind people of your reconciling power.

I pray that you'd bring peace. I pray that you would bring life into marriages that have long lost it, and I pray that today would be just a simple commitment to you and the gospel. Might we be and mirror, men and women of covenant, because you are our covenant God. It's through your beautiful name I pray, amen.

Love you, guys.

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