

Devotions with Matt

May 19, 2020

SEEKING THE GOOD OF YOUR SPOUSE

Divorce is not an easy topic to discuss. If the statistics are right, then up to half of all marriages here in America will end in divorce. Maybe half of those reading this devotion are divorced. If you are you know it is no fun. One woman wrote after her divorce, "Our divorce has been the most painful, horrid, ulcer producing, agonizing event you can imagine. . . . I wish I could put on this piece of paper for all the world to see, a picture of what divorce feels like. Maybe my picture would stop people before it's too late."

On the Life Stress Calculator, divorce is the second highest stress causer in our lives right behind death of a spouse or loved one. I won't go into the story of my parent's divorce here, but I can testify that divorce sucks for all who are affected by it.

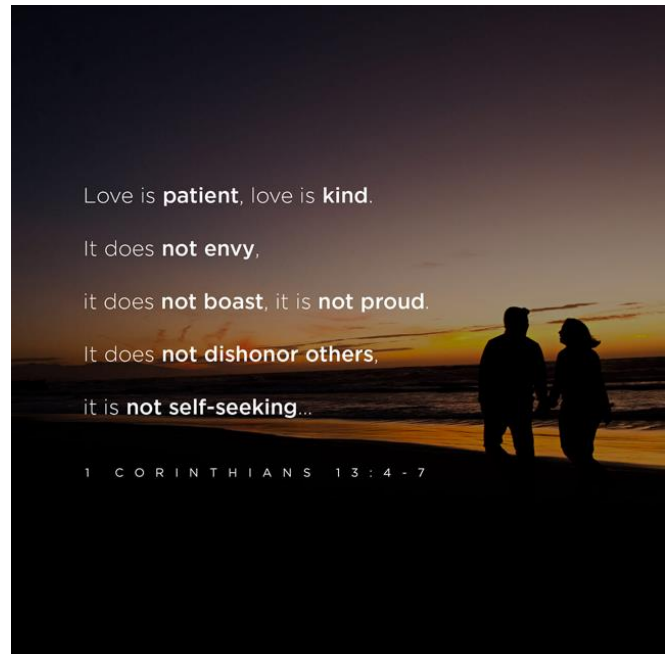
Jesus addresses divorce on the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. He has some pretty harsh words about divorce and the tangled web of sin it weaves and how it complicates our lives. Please feel free to read what He says in verses 31-32 for yourselves. But to really understand what Jesus is talking about we have to dive deeper elsewhere in the Bible. I mentioned last week, in regards to marriage, that whatever God has joined together let no one separate. The vows we make to one another in marriage are vows said before God, whether we involve Him in our ceremonies or not. Marriage is an institution created above and should not be taken lightly here on earth. Marriage is the joining of two (male and female) that then become one. The tearing apart of the one becomes extremely painful.

Many psychologists have concluded that instead of looking at marital breakup in terms of an ethic of obligation to others (spouse, children, community and society), many have begun to see it in terms of an ethic of obligation to the self. Our spouse isn't meeting our needs so we try to go find someone else who will. In the ethic of obligation to self in marriage it becomes more about a contract to make "me" happy rather than about the "us". It becomes more and more about self-gratification than it does about love.

The true definition of love is to desire and seek the good and benefit of another, even above our own feelings and rights. We pour our lives into those we love. We sacrifice whatever is necessary for their well-being and good. In true love this is mutual. It is a sacrifice between two persons for each of their betterment.

This kind of love is the example of Christ. He sacrificed all for us so we could be made whole again. We then accept His love and serve Him for His glory. It is a picture of Christ, our Bridegroom, and the Church, the Bride of Christ. It is a marriage based on great love for each other.

This kind of love is also a picture of The Trinity. "The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit, from eternity to eternity, giving up their personal rights to find greatness in service to each other." (Gene Wilkes). In the image of The Trinity we sacrifice all in love for another. This is most clearly seen In Jesus' sacrifice for us on the cross. The second closest model of the Trinitarian love is seen in marriage. Rather than an ethic of obligation to self, it is an ethic of love for our spouse and their good.



God rarely uses the term hate. It is such a strong word. But, God does declare His hate for sin. Sin is harmful to us and how we treat others. Sin is what separates us from God. God hates sin so much that He came to save us from it. He died in our place so we could escape the power of it. God loved us so much that He sent His Son to take our punishment for it. No matter what you have done in this life- God loves you. He hates our sin. He wants to free and cleanse us from it. That is how much He loves us. God does not hate you or me.

But He wants us to know how much He truly hates sin because of its harmful effects to us all. He doesn't use the word often, but He does use it in Malachi 2:16 where God declares "I hate divorce!" The reason He hates divorce is because it breaks the image we were created in and the ripple effects from it harms so many. But, God never says He hates the one who divorces. Just like in all things with God there is forgiveness. There is redemption. There is love. God hates divorce, but He doesn't hate you. Christ came and died for all of us. He showed His great love for us no matter how wretched we were. In Him there is restoration and the restored ability to love like He loves. In Christ we get to start afresh and anew and we now learn how to love others, including our spouses, like He loves us. We, like our Messiah, can now sacrifice all for the good of another.

Love like that is what marriage is to look like. Are we willing to give up our rights for the good of our spouses so we can have a marriage that reflects The God who created it?

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a

In Christ,

Matt