

People just love self help. The best selling self help book of all time, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen R. Covey sold something like 15 million copies. Maybe one's at your house. Yet it's interesting it wasn't 8 habits or 9; couldn't be less like 5 or 6. Or take abs workouts, like 10 minute abs. Search the internet or video store and you can find each step from 10 minutes to 1 minute. Apparently each time a lesser one came out someone thought they could do better.

One topic frequently found in the self help aisle is marriage help books. According to census figures for 2008, around 50% of people in the U.S. were married. How many of those were unhappy or those that didn't want to be married anymore not listed. Those once married but now divorced was listed at around 10%. People are looking for help with their marriages, and it's out there. Thousands of self help books promise a better marriage in 10 key steps or 5 easy steps. But how many of those books miss the point entirely. Like the Pharisees missed the point in the gospel today. They were even at the right source, but asking the wrong question. Jesus shares with them and with us it only takes two...

Two steps to a happy marriage
Recognize God unites the couple
Recognize God remains with the couple

Man and woman see each other. Sparks fly. Eyes flutter. And they just know. I could be describing many of the married couples here this morning. I also could be describing the very first wedding; a Mr. Adam and Miss. Eve. Of course they were the only two human beings and God brought them together. Jesus shares the details. **"At the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife."** Don't be fooled into thinking marriage was something invented by humans as time progressed. God knew long before that humans were meant to pair up. He knew that most people don't do so well alone. And Jesus connects marriage back to creation.

Jesus went back to the beginning because the Pharisees didn't. They forgot completely how marriage began. They forgot marriage's intentions and blessings. They forgot the vows spouses take and how serious God is about them. They forgot, but Jesus didn't. **"What did Moses command you?"** This wasn't the stopping point, but only the beginning. "Moses let you destroy marriage only because you were already destroying marriage with your hard hearts," Jesus said. Don't confuse that with God changing his mind about marriage. He's just as serious today as he was when he started it in the Garden of Eden.

Sometimes we aren't that different from the Pharisees. Marriage feels like a daily chore. We complain about the extra taxes married people pay. We see few upsides since we're basically forced to eat, sleep, work, and play with one person for the rest of our lives. We sometimes like that society makes splitting so painless; no reasons, no excuses needed. Maybe we've even joined in by getting an actual divorce or just entertaining the thought. At times we've been tempted to go off with someone else. Some may have actually gone off with someone not their spouse. Single people partake of blessings reserved for married people or they don't help support the ones who are. Whatever it is, we've sinned against God's gift of marriage. Each and every one of us.

Marriage was there at the beginning. It was there before sin entered the world. Behind each and every marriage, believers and unbelievers, stands this statement. **"Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."** God marries people. He yokes them together. It sounds bad, but it's good; actually great. Remember, we've been yoked to Christ too. Two people yoked are always going in the same direction. Two people yoked pull half the weight of life's burdens. Two people yoked keep close to each other so they can't wander off. And when God yokes two people together it's for life. In a world that's going crazy and pulling people apart God puts someone there who will always be a comfort. That person will be there for help, support, sharing experiences. Being united is God's gift. It shows his love in Christ.

Remember your wedding day. The people gathered to witness the vows. Parents and friends showing support and love. Before you knew it the day was over. A few days later none of those same people were there. Family and friends don't hang around. You're left to do the work together, but alone. Not when God's in the picture. God unites couples together. But unlike the family and friends he doesn't leave them alone to do the work. God remains with the couple throughout their marriage; after all he joined it together now he offers support.

Young people are sponges of information. If they look around today what messages are they getting about marriage? The media claims 50% of all marriages end in divorce. Years ago classrooms were filled with mostly children from married couples. Now many come from divorced parents. Young people observe parents arguing over assets and visitation rights. How many young people are learning that marriage isn't for life, but rather "for as long as we both shall love?" Rights and responsibilities in marriage aren't being taught. Many see failure and unhappiness and ask, "Why even bother getting married?"

The Pharisees thought the same thing. Actually they were dismissing the blessings and sanctity of marriage and looking at divorce as the ticket to freedom from marriage. **"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"** they asked Jesus. They knew full well they had no problem with divorce. They just wanted a list of proper grounds. Isn't that society's question today? It's not whether divorce is right or wrong, just what conditions must I meet. What will change that attitude? Will changing the divorce laws to eliminate no-fault divorces. Will forced waiting periods or cooling off periods? No! They may provide temporary fixes, but there's still the root of the problem, sin.

Sin is still bringing down marriages. Human selfishness sees a marriage without satisfaction and says I'm through. Human desire sees someone else I desire so I'll go after them regardless of the bounds placed on me by marriage. Human demands for freedom want ways around the absolute nature of marriage claiming it's old fashioned to be with one person for life. So many options, so many choices. How can I choose just one? And what if I don't love them anymore? Isn't it cruel to make me stay with them?

Married, singles, young and old, God unites a couple in marriage but that's not the end. God also remains with those he unites. He remains with those who will unite someday. He remains with those he gives the gift to remain single. He remains and shows how he supports us all married and single alike. Grace in action, love flowing from God, from the side of his crucified Son. That's God promise that he won't leave us or forsake us. That's God promise that in marriage ***"two have become one flesh"***. Marriage is a living breathing thing which takes work to keep going. But we don't work alone. Marriage is really three; the couple and Christ. Jesus pours his love into each of them so they can give completely to the marriage. Christ loving each. Man loving his wife. Wife loving her husband. Each loving Christ.

A word for those who might be living with guilt from a past divorce, or those thinking about divorce as a way out; face sin with confession, both past or present. Carry those sins to the cross of Christ. Recognize what marriage is. Repent when you sin against God's gift of marriage. Realize Christ forgives. It is God who unites and remains.

I wanted to share with you words from a book we're reading in the adult Bible study on Wednesdays, and also a suggested reading for you. *Prepared to Answer* isn't a self help book but rather a book grounded in the stories of the Bible to answer people's questions today. One section asks societies' question, "Does marriage make sense anymore?" The author responds this way, ***"If you should decide to marry her, I want it to be because of a new and holy desire stirring inside you to love someone well, to go all the way, to give everything. It comes to you by the Word of Christ. Build it into your life together and nothing will be the same as it was last time. That is my promise to you, which my God will surely keep. In fact, in the daily living and forgiving that comes from him, you get to live out a picture of the greatest love story ever told. 'As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.'"***