

# For Keeps

## Matthew 5:21-37

### INTRODUCTION

I vividly recall the first sermon I preached on the subject of a Christian marriage. It was in the spring of 1980. I was the student pastor of the Messick United Brethren Church, a small country church outside of New Castle, IN. About two months later I would be graduating from Huntington College (now Huntington University) with my Bachelor of Arts degree in Bible and Religion.

I had learned in my short experience as a pastor that it worked best if could somehow combine my academic studies with my sermon preparation ... so since I was taking a class on the book of Ephesians, I started that calendar with a sermon series on Ephesians. If you know that book, there is a big section in chapter five about the relationship between a husband and wife.

- My sermon was preached somewhere around the middle of April.
- Karen and I would be married at the end of June (June 28, 1980).

I began my sermon with this disclaimer:

I do not claim to be an expert on marriage.

I stand before you today, 43 years later. We are just shy of our 43<sup>rd</sup> wedding anniversary. And I still believe what I preached 43 years ago. And I still make the same disclaimer today.

I do not claim to be an expert on marriage.

Author Stewart Stafford once wrote:

Marriage is the Rubik's Cube of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – something everyone is fascinated with but has no idea how to do.  
(Stewart Stafford)

Fortunately for me, I do know the person who designed marriage. Thousands of years ago, when a man named Adam was introduced to a woman named Eve, the God who created them officiated at the very first wedding ceremony. It was a small, outdoor service. And in that first service God said words that are almost always recited in Christian weddings today. Those words were repeated by Jesus in Matthew 19:

“Haven’t you read,” (Jesus) replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.” (Matthew 19:4-6)

Here in this 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew, the God who created marriage voices His strong support of that institution, warning us that marriage was intended to last a lifetime. It is FOR KEEPS.

Marriages fail. It is a heartbreaking reality. And this passage talks about that, too. But design of God was for one man and one woman to make a lifetime commitment:

For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, forsaking all others until death do us part.

As you know I am a firm believer that God has organized the Scriptures in such a way that the context always sheds light on the teaching. So in these verses that surround God’s Defense of Christian Marriage, God identifies three general principles of life that can easily be applied to marriage.

### **PRINCIPLE #1: WATCH YOUR TEMPER**

It is fascinating, isn’t it, that Jesus makes a connection between anger and murder:

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, “You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.” But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. (Matthew 5:21-22)

Did you realize that every time you lose your temper you may well have committed murder?

Uncontrolled anger kills relationships.

The Gottman Institute in Seattle, WA has done some interesting research on the topic of anger and relationships.

- They discovered when you are angry enough (which they define as emotion that causes your heart rate to rise above 100 beats per minute) you become incapable of processing information effectively.
- That means you become less able to look at things objectively and make good decisions.
- During those times you can easily express (usually by yelling) your side of the argument, but your brain won't let you understand the other side of the argument.
- It's as if they are speaking a foreign language.
- All of that leads to a breakdown in communication that will destroy your marriage.

## **PRINCIPLE #2: LEARN TO FORGIVE**

Look at verses 23-24:

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23-24)

Shortly after breaking up with his fiancée, a young man named Jimmy realized he had made a big mistake. He wrote this letter of apology:

"My dearest Marie,

No words could ever express the great unhappiness I've felt since breaking off our engagement. I have realized now that no one could ever take your place in my heart. I feel empty and alone without you. Please forgive me. I love you more than I could every express. Please say you'll take me back. With all my love,  
Jimmy

P.S. Congratulations on winning the lottery."

I used the word "forgive" in this bullet point because that's one of the two words spouses need to say and hear. (The other one is "sorry.") But did you notice the word used in these verses: *reconciled*.

Reconciliation is taking two things that are not perfectly aligned and restoring them into one new state of unity.

- You do it every month with your bank statement – at least you should be doing it every month. Your checkbook matches the bank statement. You reconcile it.
- But in a Christian marriage, the man and woman become "one flesh." Conflict causes a separation that requires reconciliation.
- The reconciling words are "I am sorry" and "I forgive you."
- Here's a helpful hint: Full reconciliation is only possible with the cleansing power of God. That why the text says:

First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift (at the altar). (Matthew 5:24)

### **PRINCIPLE #3: KEEP YOUR PROMISES**

Verses 33-37 read:

Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, "Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have

made." But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one. (Matthew 5:33-37)

We call those words said in a marriage ceremony a "vow" but Jesus says all that you should need is a simple promise. A "yes" will suffice.

Jesus taught that our conversation should be so honest, and our character so true, that we would not need "crutches" to get people to believe us.

- No oath can compensate for bad character.

That is part of what we want to do today. We are gathering to celebrate Christian marriages, and in so doing we are reminding ourselves what we have promised to each other.

## **APPLICATION**

I have one major longer-term personal goal related to my marriage. Someday I want Karen and I to be named "King and Queen of the Golden Wedding Anniversary party" at the Clark County Fair. I've done some research. I think that Larry and Sue Skeen, who won that title in 2017, have the record at 73 years of marriage. 73 years. We have 30 to go.

- If you are around in 2053, I will invite you to the party.

But in the meantime, let's every day celebrate the Christian marriages around us and do our very best to support them.

Amen.