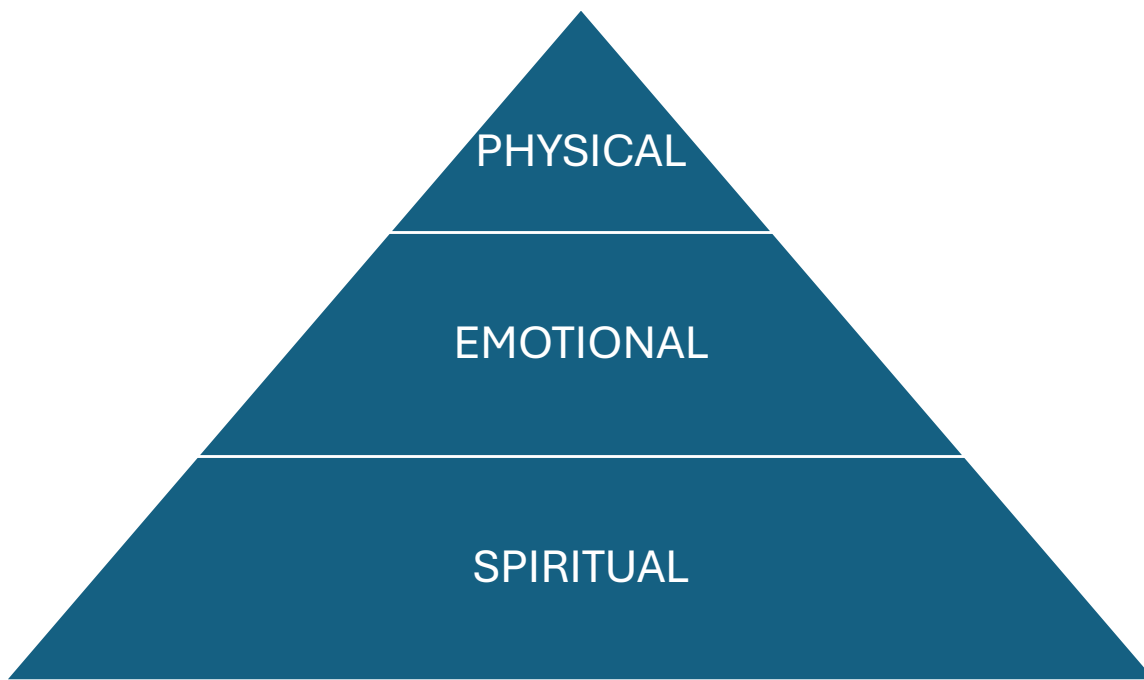


**What I Wish I Knew... Single. Dating. Married.
Building a Spiritually Strong Marriage • Message 5
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A. Introduction



Usually, when it comes to marriage, we spend time talking about sex and physical intimacy, and that is important, very important.

When it comes to marriage, we spend time talking about emotional intimacy. I spent time talking about that last week, and it's important, very important.

But the thing we don't talk as much about is the most important building block of any relationship, especially marriage. And it's the spiritual; it's faith...

This is the foundation or the most important thing to get right.

Said another way, I really believe if you get this one right, the others fall into place... but I know some couples that have one or the other, but they don't have the right foundation...

There was an article done in 2010 by Christopher Ellison at the University of Texas San Antonio called "The Couple That Prays Together... and in it, he found that from over 1,000 couples interviewed, less than 1, or 1% of those who prayed together ended in divorce... he found that data supports that those who pray together stay together. I've heard people say the divorce rate is the same among Christians as non-Christians; that's simply inaccurate. Those who attended church and had a shared faith, meaning they

prayed or read the Bible together, had radically lower divorce rates. Not only that, their satisfaction in marriage was higher.

That's why Paul says we shouldn't be unequally yoked... why? Because the foundation has to be spiritual.

In the Bible, we really only have one couple we read about that has a spiritually strong marriage. We just don't hear a lot about it... so that means this couple who has this spiritual foundation right, we would be wise to draw a couple of principles from them to build a spiritually strong marriage.

- Some key points on them...

Aquila, a Jewish Christian, and his wife, Priscilla, first met Paul in Corinth, became good friends of his, and shared in his work. They came to Corinth from Italy as victims of Roman persecution, not for their Christian faith but because Aquila was a Jew. The Emperor Claudius expelled all Jews from Rome. Aquila and Priscilla found their way to Corinth and settled there, pursuing their trade as tentmakers. When Paul, a tentmaker himself, came to Corinth, he went to see them. Paul lived and worked with them while founding the Corinthian church.

After a year and a half, Paul left for Ephesus and took Aquila and Priscilla with him. The couple stayed in Ephesus when Paul left and established a church in their home (1 Corinthians 16:19). Both Aquila and Priscilla possessed an in-depth understanding of doctrine learned from Paul, and this husband and wife team was able to pass it on to another Christian and build him up in the faith.

B. When building a spiritually strong marriage...

1. Both have to PRIORITIZE their faith.

(Acts 18:1-4; 2 Corinthians 6:14)

In the Bible, we only see one real example of a godly couple, and it's Aquilla and Priscilla.

After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.

Acts 18:1-4 (NIV)

So, understand this... Paul started preaching the Gospel in Rome, and the emperor kicked all the Christians out... Aquilla and Priscilla had to move from their home because of Paul. And Paul shows up... and what are you going to do? And notice, they give him work, a home, and fund his ministry...

They could've said we just run a business; we don't want to complicate things,... but they said, *so you need a home... we've got that... oh, you need funds... we've got that... you need work... we've got it...*

I may not be a gifted speaker, but I've got money... I may not have all the theology, but I've got some skills... God wants you to take what you have and leverage what you have...

What I love is that they aren't just throwing a few bucks in an offering plate... so many people do that, and it's not bad, but it's not all God wants... He wants you to experience the thrill of living on mission, of a marriage on mission where you join and serve God.

They share finances; they share their home; they share their bed; they share their children, and they attempt to share meals (and I say attempt because have you noticed how women will say, *no, I don't need a dessert. I'll just have a bite of yours*. I think we need to define a bite, women. $\frac{3}{4}$ of something isn't a bite. Get your own). You share responsibilities, you share vacations...

So why would you share all that and not share what's most important—your faith...

As a couple, you have your individual faith, but you also are called to have a shared faith. To grow together spiritually. You are called to have one faith, to build, and to grow together.

Our intimacy with our spouse increases as our intimacy with God increases because He fills us with a supernatural love and gives us greater character.

That's why the Bible talks about not being unequally yoked...

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?

2 Corinthians 6:14 (NIV)

That may seem like an odd term to use... but it's drawing imagery that would have been familiar.

Two animals would be yoked together to pull a plow... but everyone knew you wouldn't put an oxen and donkey together. They don't work well together, they aren't meant to be joined, they don't pull the weight...

Steph has been on a diet... and I'm also on a diet in mind... I told her I would join her for 3-4 weeks... and the other day, I said *what we are having for dinner*, and she said *pizza... and chicken*. Great... I get home ... and what I got wasn't pizza and chicken... she put this in front of me and said, *it's chicken pizza. It's healthy, and you'll live longer*. And I thought *I'm ready to go see Jesus*.

But we are in this season where she's trying to eat healthy, and I'm just eating healthy amounts of fried food. And we have felt this tension of pulling in a different direction on something as simple as food... but imagine something like faith. That's why Paul says this.

If you aren't married, you shouldn't be dating someone who isn't a Christian. Yes, you may influence them, but I have seen hundreds of people be influenced the other way.

If you are married, you know what it's like to carry all the spiritual burden if your spouse isn't a believer. My encouragement to you is to keep praying and planting spiritual seeds. Let me ask you this: do you believe Jesus rose from the grave? Do you believe it? Do you believe He can do a work in your spouse?

I have seen spouses come to church kicking and screaming, and then God gets a hold of them, so don't give up hope!

2. Both have to **PURPOSELY** serve God.

(Acts 18:24-26; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31; 1 Peter 4:10-11)

The two things people are looking for in life are:

- 1.) Community (intimacy)
- 2.) Cause (impact)

They want somewhere to belong, and they want a cause for their life.

And the best communities are forged with a commitment to the same cause. It's true in the military, teams, businesses, and in relationships.

C.S Lewis speaks about this... if you want friendship, it's got to be about something. Friendships are formed around causes, around hobbies, around doing something.

And the strongest marriages are formed with a common cause...

Think about it: when couples get divorced, they say, *our lives went in different directions*. What does that mean? It's not that one got a new career. They are talking about priorities and missions. Values shifted

You aren't created just to look into each other's eyes and find meaning; you were called to link hands and step together in the cause that God has.

This is exactly what Aquila and Priscilla are doing.

Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

Acts 18:24-26 (NIV)

So Paul was there. Then, all of a sudden, they get this new preacher. They didn't want this new preacher. They wanted to work with Paul, but he left, and now they are here...

I was talking to someone, and he said *Perry's amazing, and nobody compares with him*, and he was going on and on... Then he said, *you aren't that bad either...* 😊 But think about it, this church... has been a picture... so grateful for Perry... (have him stand in 2nd)... not called to replace, but I'm not called to replicate him.

Stepping into a role with someone like Perry, who is a Paul, is a big task... but this church has loved me and taken me under its wing... this church models what Aquila and Priscilla do...

They take Apollos under their wing. He's gifted, but he's got some bad theology, some rough edges... and instead of complaining and talking about it in their small group... or going, *you know, I'm really more of Paul guy, and I'm just not getting fed by Apollos*, they took him under their wing... they loved him and served him.

Instead of sitting back and complaining about how things are, instead of just consuming and saying, *I don't like this about that*, they took this guy under their wing, and they loved and coached him.

And this man Apollos goes on to be a powerhouse for the Gospel. Paul mentions him 7 times, and compares Apollos' ministry to his and Peter's and even calls him a better preacher...

Countless lives were changed because they said, *God, whatever You have, we'll do*, and they encouraged a guy and spoke into his life, who shook the world... they didn't wait for some great thing. They just served faithfully in this season they were in.

They are running together on mission... Think about this: anyone ever been impacted by 1 or 2 Corinthians? They funded the church in Corinth... Or what about Ephesus, which is one of the richest books of theology and the kingdom of God... when Paul penned the letter to the church in Ephesus, the address he pinned on was the Aquilla and Priscilla's house...

If you have been impacted by any of those books of the Bible, and millions of people have, it's because of the mission of this couple to be faithful in the season they were in.

It's interesting that often times Priscilla is mentioned before Aquilla. Why? Because in that culture, the prominent person was usually mentioned first, and it was a way of saying they were on mission together. She was all in...

The Bible says it's not his work; it was their work.

So, they saw a need in the church, and they purposely served together. One of them didn't. They both served.

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. 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.

1 Peter 4:10-11 (NIV)

I love this verse: *whatever gifts you have*, use... don't believe the lie that you have to be a preacher or missionary to have a mission... you can use your words or you can serve do it unto the Lord... you can be Paul or Priscilla... just use whatever you have.

Have you thought about your home, your resources, your neighborhood as a mission field as a couple?

People like Aquilla and Priscilla opened their homes and cared for those around them.

If you're a stay-at-home mom, invite other moms to your house. If you're working, pick a night once a month and invite co-workers over to get to know them. Don't just hurry past others as you go on a walk or work in the yard. Pause to see people.

But let me say this, dear brothers and sisters: The time that remains is very short. So from now on, those with wives should not focus only on their marriage. Those who weep or who rejoice or who buy things should not be absorbed by their weeping or their joy or their possessions. Those who use the things of the world should not become attached to them. For this world as we know it will soon pass away.

1 Corinthians 7:29-31(NLT)

Notice what Paul says marriage is great, working is great, happiness is great... but you must live with a sense of urgency. We are in the last days. When you look at the story of Jesus we are in the final chapter.

So, if you are watching a football game and there are 30 seconds left on the clock and you're down by 2 points, don't run the ball for 5 yards. Why?

Because the amount of time on the clock should dictate how you play the game. Friends, your time is short.

I've lived in 3 different houses, and you know what I said: *One day, I'll talk to that neighbor about Jesus. One day, Steph and I will invite them over. One day, I'll invite them to church*, and now I will never see some of them again. That window is closed, and that season is done.

Listen, if you have kids, that season will blitz by... Create spiritual rhythms now with your family... A simple thing Steph and I do is read a Bible story before dinner, and we pray. I credit her because she keeps us on track. Then, at night, I try to pray with my girls and son several times that week when they go to bed. And a lot of nights, I'm tired, and I don't want to... but I know the season will close.

God wants us to live with a sense of urgency in our marriages, families, and lives.... And apathy will kill the Spirit of God in us...

But you have to make this a priority. Everyone reads Acts 2 and sees the miracles and power of the early church... but I want to say this: Everyone in our church would want the results of Acts 2 church, but you can't have the results without commitment.

People and marriages must both serve God.

What I find interesting... Think about this: 50% of Jesus' miracles that He performed were an interruption. Meaning He had something He was doing, and then He stopped and engaged.

But when your purpose is spiritual, you will allow yourself to be interrupted.

3. One SEASON.

(Genesis 2:23-24)

Sometimes, the reason we don't join God on the mission we have is because we are disappointed with the season we are in. Life has not gone according to the plan...

The other reason we don't live into the mission God has isn't always disappointments; sometimes it's because of this phrase we often say... *one day... one day...*

There are two problems with that. Number 1 is that you aren't promised another day. And number 2, you won't get this same season again.

So, my question is, what is a step today that you can build a better spiritual foundation? How can you create 1-2 spiritual rhythms in your marriage or in your family?

The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman, 'for she was taken out of man." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Genesis 2:23-24 (NIV)

Notice woman wasn't made from the feet so she could be beneath man.

Woman wasn't made from the head to be above man.

She was taken from the side to show she's equal. She's beside.

Even when it says in Genesis 2, God made a helper... do you know that same word is used to describe God with us? So, God looked and saw that there was no way a man would figure this out, so what did He do? He made a woman... again, not to be above or beneath... to be one.