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Families On The Edge
“Making The Most Of Your Marriage”
(Part 3)

Intro: Princess Bride clip: Marriage – As you can guess, marriage is the topic for today. If we want to pull our families back from the edge, then we must focus on the health of our marriages. Often what is pushing our families to the relational edge is the condition of our marriage. Now, spending only one day on marriage can't fix all of our issues, but maybe I can give you some basics that you can begin to consider and apply that will begin to foster change. I want to give you 5 ways you can begin to Make The Most Of Your Marriage.

I. Make The Choice

Life is not so much determined by the events that happen to us but rather by the choices we make in the midst of them. We have been given tremendous power to choose the course of our lives...even our marriages. Therefore, let's choose wisely. 2 foundational choices!

*Deut. 30:19 “Today I have given you the **choice** between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the **choice** you make. Oh, that you would **choose** life, so that you and your descendants might live! (NLT)*

A. Choose to have a healthy marriage

1. Healthy marriages do not happen on their own. They are not the result of luck or just finding the right person. People do not just “live happily ever after”. These are myths that we need to let go of.
2. Healthy marriages are the result of the choices we make over the course of our lives. If we want a healthy marriage, then **CHOOSE** it! Choose life for your marriage.
3. It just amazes me the low expectations people have for their marriages. Well, this is just the way it is. We don't get along but that's married life. We fight and argue all the time but that's normal. **WHAT?** Why would we settle for such a thing?
4. If you want to pull your marriage back from the edge choose to do so. Choose to have a healthy marriage. You can't experience something you refuse to believe in. Don't you think God wants you to have a good marriage? Then by faith agree with Him.
5. Start by choosing life for your marriage. “God I don't know how to do this but in faith I choose life for my marriage. I choose to have a healthy marriage because I believe it is Your plan for my life.”

B. Choose to be a good spouse

1. Who doesn't want a good spouse? Notice I didn't say choose a good spouse. The decision we all must make is choosing to become a good husband / a good wife.
2. If you want your marriage to change then you must be willing to change yourself. As long as your focus is on your spouse and all their issues, you will ignore your own and your marriage remains unchanged.
3. You may be thinking, "Yes, but they have issues too they need to change! Absolutely! And, I'm sure you have done a good job pointing those things out over the years. How well has that worked for you?"
4. If we want to be a good spouse then we have to first be committed to become one and learn what one looks like and acts like. We must embrace learning something different than what our culture says is normal.

Prov. 2:2-3 "Tune your ears to wisdom, and concentrate on understanding. Cry out for insight, and ask for understanding." (NLT)

5. Notice all the imperatives? Tune / concentrate / Cry out / ask for / Are you willing to choose these things? "God, teach me what this looks like. God, show me how to be the spouse you have always wanted me to be."
6. You will never experience something you refuse to choose.

II. Make The Time

Heb. 2:1 "So we must listen very carefully to the truth we have heard, or we may drift away from it." (NLT)

- The writer of this verse is referring to people slowly neglecting their faith and gradually drifting away from it. BUT, this can happen in the marriage relationships as well. Neglect causes us to drift away from one another.

A. Many marriages fall apart because of neglect

1. We have to think about marriage like a home owner thinks about their house. If you neglect the normal maintenance on your house it will eventually fall apart. If you don't deal with the small issue today, it will be a larger more expensive one a year later.
2. Marriage works like this. No one intends to have a marriage filled with conflict and tension, but often because of neglect over time the issues just get worse and worse.
3. Unless both spouses are willing to be intentional with investing time in their marriage, it will be impossible to see progress. BUT, we all know this is easier said than done.
4. Unless both people make the time to deal with the little issues that normally pop up in a marriage, you will eventually face major repairs down the road.

I Cor. 5:6 "Your flip and callous arrogance in these things bothers me. You pass it off as a small thing, but it's anything but that. Yeast, too, is a "small thing," but it works its way through

a whole batch of bread dough pretty fast. So get rid of this "yeast." (Message) Don't ignore the little stuff! Don't have a flip attitude.

5. I can't tell you how many men I have talked to over the years after their wife left them sit and tell me; "I never even knew anything was wrong."

B. Make time for healthy marriage maintenance

1. **T** – Talk: We must take time every day to talk. To connect with one another. Sounds simple but it's amazing how many couples don't do this. There are 2 very basic reasons why this breaks down in marriage.
 - First, many men feel that every time there is a discussion, it is always negative / trying to resolve something / their faults are pointed out. Try talking without problem solving.
 - Secondly, the relational environment is not safe. If a spouse believes their opinions and feelings are not accepted, communication will not take place.
2. **I** – Initiate don't ignore: What do I mean? Initiate conversation / initiate help around the house / initiate meeting needs / initiate affection / initiate help with the kids / This is one of the biggest complaints I've heard over the years. When you initiate, it communicates love and concern to your spouse.
 - Lisa blowing leaves – explain
 - Me helping with dinner / or initiating conversation / "You never asked me about my day?"
3. **M** – Mend the relationship: This has to do with forgiveness. Since no one ever marries a perfect person, mending the relationship is just a normal maintenance item. Asking for forgiveness and granting forgiveness is part of a healthy marriage.
 - Resolving conflict this way reduces the overall tension / pressure in your marriage. This protects you from the emotional volcano's (explain)
 - Resolving conflict this way allows you to forgive and forget – Lisa and I have discovered the difficulty of remembering issues when resolved.
 - If you are the type of person that has a difficult time asking for or granting forgiveness, you are damaging your marriage. There is a reason the Bible tells us to not let the sun go down on your anger. Forgive!
4. **E** – Express love every day: This is a major area of neglect. This just seems so normal and natural when we are dating, but after the ceremony and a couple kids later, where did it go? It falls off the radar.
 - Tell your spouse every day that you love them (I have to tell Lisa this every morning I get up no matter what time I leave the house.)
 - Learn to be creative in your ways to communicate it. (example)

III. Make The Sacrifice

Eph. 5:33 “So again I say, each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.” (NLT)

Phil. 2:3-4 “Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.” (NLT)

A. Husbands must sacrificially love their wives

1. The best way a husband can look out for the interests of his wife is to learn to sacrificially love her. I say learn because this does not come naturally. WHY? Because men and women define love differently.
2. Every husband must learn how his wife defines love / what actions communicate love to her / and then he sacrificially does those things for her. Some women have a hard time with this. They are convinced men should just automatically know this. “He should just know how to love me!”
3. Here’s an assignment: Sit down and ask your wife what actions / behaviors communicate to you that I love and care for you?” Let her define it for you. Don’t argue with her / devalue her feelings / No matter how foreign it sounds to you .
4. This is unconditional sacrificial love. You choose to give your wife love in a way she understands. (NOTE of caution: Don’t do this unless you will follow through)

B. Wives must sacrificially respect their husbands

1. The best way a wife can look out for the interests of her husband is to learn to sacrificially respect him. I say learn because this does not come naturally either. The commands to men and women are different. A man’s primary need is for respect NOT love.
 2. In our culture, respect must be earned. BUT in the marriage respect is unconditional and is given to your husband the same way he gives you love. You would never expect that you have to earn his love. Neither should he have to earn your expect.
 3. This is why it’s sacrificial. It is given because he requires it to be emotionally healthy just like you require love. BUT, just like love, your husband defines respect much different than you do.
 4. Here is the second part of your assignment: Sit down with your husband and ask him to define what behaviors and actions communicate to him respect. You may be surprised. Since men will struggle with this assignment more than the women, it would be very helpful to watch the Love and Respect video / class – This January
- The person who has the greatest influence is the one who meets the deepest need. As long as you neglect the deepest need in each other, your marriage will never move away from the relational edge. Want to have more influence on your spouse – Meet their needs

IV. Make A Friendship

Gen. 2:22-24 “The LORD made a woman out of the rib. The LORD God brought her to the man, and the man exclaimed, “Here is someone like me! She is part of my body, my own flesh

and bones. She came from me, a man. So I will name her Woman!" That's why a man will leave his own father and mother. He marries a woman, and the two of them become like one person." (CEV)

- It is the design and intention of God that your spouse be your best friend. Unless we are intentional in cultivating this, it tends to diminish over time. So how do you work at developing and maintaining a friendship with your spouse? (*become like one person*)
 - A. Create positive shared experiences together
 1. In other words, keep having fun together. What happens over time in marriage is we settle for existing together instead of living. Before marriage the fun and shared experiences came natural. After marriage, we must become intentional.
 2. It is just a law of relationships. You will automatically feel fond feelings towards the people you share positive experiences with. If you want to have fond feelings towards your spouse, then go have fun together!
 3. What are the activities that you both enjoy doing together? It doesn't have to be expensive or elaborate. One of the simple things Lisa and I enjoy is to just go for a drive above town. About a month ago, we were able to spend an entire day!
 4. Once again though, we have to be intentional. You have to plan it / schedule it / and say NO to other things and other people. The more positive shared experiences, the better the friendship you'll have with your spouse.
 - B. Make more positive deposits than negative ones
 1. I have often talked about the concept of the Love bank. It is one of those simple concepts we can all latch on to and understand. Our emotional bank works much like a physical bank with deposits and withdraws. – Explain
 2. We all must be committed to making continual positive deposits into the life of our spouse. That way, when there is a withdraw, we are not overdrawn in our emotional account. Just like there are penalties for writing a bad check. There are penalties for being overdrawn with your spouse as well.
 3. How is your account with your spouse? Maybe it's time to start making some more deposits?

V. Make God The Foundation

HOW? What does this really mean? Let's listen to Jesus.

Luke 6:47-49 "I will show you what it's like when someone comes to me, listens to my teaching, and then follows it. It is like a person building a house who digs deep and lays the foundation on solid rock. When the floodwaters rise and break against that house, it stands firm because it is well built. But anyone who hears and doesn't obey is like a person who builds a house without a foundation. When the floods sweep down against that house, it will collapse into a heap of ruins." (NLT) There are 2 decisions we need to make that will have enormous impact.

- A. Decide to follow what God says in His word about my marriage
 1. Since God is the One who authored marriage, He is the One who knows it best. The

reason our marriages are teetering on the edge is that we have built them on the wrong foundations.

2. The right foundation according to Jesus is simply listening to His words and following it...obeying it. This alone will save your marriage against the storms.
3. You can build your marriage on the foundation of your own understanding and experiences / or what the culture says / or on what other people say – friends – relatives. OR what the word of God says.
4. If your foundation is working so well, then why is your marriage in the shape it's in? God is simply trying to give you what you want anyway...a great marriage!

B. Decide to follow what God says in His word about my life

1. The best hope we all have for our marriages to change is to make God and His word the foundation of our lives. Often our marriages are struggling to survive because personally, we are struggling to survive.
2. How can we consistently live these truths without His help? How can we make the most of our marriages until we allow God to make the most out of us? The best way to change your marriage is to start by allowing Jesus to change you.

Ezek. 36:26 “And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart.” (NLT)

3. My relationship with God is the greatest influential factor in my marriage. He is the One who helps me make the choice / make the time / make the sacrifice / and make the friendship. I can't do these things without Him.
- God wants to pull our families back from the edge. He is here to help each and every one of us. Will you let Him?