

## A Marriage Q&A with Don Green

*A Real Look at Real Marriage*

By Don Green

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Moderator Nathaniel. We're so glad that you're here this evening, and we're looking forward to the interview and Q&A time. I'm just going to start by reading a few short verses from Colossians chapter 3, and then Don will join me up here and we'll jump right in tonight. These verses, of course, are speaking of the extension of our life in Christ into our homes and Paul says in verse 18,

18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. 20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

So we're looking forward to discussing Don's series. So Don, if you would come up and join me. This will be a great opportunity to consider the implications of marriage and what you've been teaching on the last few weeks.

Don Green. Thank you. Lay it on me.

Nathaniel. Alright, so we'll start with that initial message you preached. It was titled, "When Marriage Gets Difficult," and I just happened to peek on Sermon Audio this afternoon, and I noticed that there's almost 2,500 downloads of that particular message and from that, I say, well, obviously this content is timely. When we asked for feedback, our people wanted more teaching on marriage.

Don. What you don't know is that I goose-stepped those numbers by clicking on it 1,500 times.

Nathaniel. Oh, man! I was taken. Totally taken. Well, you know, I think marriage is difficult, right? And that seemed to resonate with people.

Don. That's right.

Nathaniel. It's always been difficult. It's difficult for anyone who's married and is honest.

Don. That's right. The honesty is the big thing and what kind of drove the whole series that I wanted to do. So that's a good observation on your part.

Nathaniel. So, you know, if you're married and you're finding marriage difficult, you're in good company. That's a good place for us all to start and recognize tonight. When you went on to extend the series, you started with talking about the value of women, emphasizing the value of women, and can you kind of expand on what generated that starting point?

Don. Well, I think what struck me in maybe a way that hasn't in prior times that I've taught on marriage, was just to try to set a broader biblical context for the whole concept of marriage, and I keep coming back to the phrase that wives come from the realm of women and if we understand women in a biblical context, it gives the wives something to aspire after and to sanctify them, and it also helps husbands to view their wives with a greater sense of honor. I'm a man, and I've been around men a long time, and I think there's a sad tendency for men to take their wives for granted. and to reduce them simply to the cook and the maid and other things, and when your perspective is informed by a biblical view of women, and especially when you're challenged by, I'm not saying all men are like that, but I think there's definitely a tendency, when your view is informed and challenged by the way that Jesus dealt with women in his ministry, then it kind of revolutionizes things in a way that doesn't happen if you just go straight to Ephesians 5 or Colossians 3 and just start preaching there apart from the broader context of the book and the broader context of the Bible. Context is everything. And so that's kind of where, you know, I trust the Spirit led me.

Nathaniel. So in a lot of ways what we're saying is that marriage falls under the category of bringing glory to God in everything, but to do that we have to understand the broader context.

Don. That's right, "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God," and marriage falls within that and I think that earnest Christians, a genuine earnest Christian who genuinely born-again, genuinely having a desire to honor God, will find his ability to address the problems that she or he are bringing to a marriage. If it's from a context, "I have to glorify God here," rather than simply, you know, "I'm not getting what I want," if you have a vertical focus when you think about marriage, and you have a biblical perspective of women in the marriage, then it's going to, you know, it's going to shape your thinking, and if your thinking is shaped, your heart will be moved, and, you know, differences will come forth as a result of that. And I don't mind telling you, I preached, I think this series I preached was much different than the way I preached on marriage 20 years ago, or the first times that I started preaching on marriage. I've been chastened by my own failures in marriage, my own bad attitudes in marriage, and so I'm no longer preaching down from Mount Sinai, but rather in the Valley of Bones, looking for the Lord to bring something to life. Can these bones live? Well, they can, by the grace of God.

Nathaniel. Recently, I was talking to an old friend of mine who's older than me and been married many years longer than me.

Don. He must really be old.

Nathaniel. Yeah. And just along the lines of what you were saying, I was rebuked, chastened, challenged, convicted by what he said and he just said that in the context of caring for his aging wife, the one thing that he said he was seeing was he needs Christ to continue to sanctify him.

Don. Yeah, that's right. It's easy to preach on marriage out of context, just go straight to Ephesians 5:22 to 33, and you just preach on the principles there without tying them to the broader context in the book of Ephesians itself, the broader biblical context, the theological, practical context of salvation. We need all of that context to inform us because marriage is part of a greater whole and if you can help people see that, it seems to me you're on the road to actually helping them, as opposed to just delivering principles that are idealistic, they're biblical, they're idealistic, we need to know them, but if they're not preached with a sense of pastoral understanding, then you're really not going to help people. I have a friend that when he would preach on marriage in years gone by, he would just say, "This is your last day, this might be your last day, so you need to get your marriage right." And we've had a chuckle over that since then, just recognizing that that kind of preaching just isn't helpful and, you know, if you portray yourself as, you know, the fulfillment and the embodiment of everything that you're preaching on, you're probably not being honest and you're also having an effect of discouraging people because, "I don't live that way, I can't live that way." So bringing the full context in, we're all fallen, we're all sinners, marriage is difficult, the Bible repeats that in so many books of the Bible, all of those things help us to say, okay, now we've got a lump of clay in our hands and we can start to form that and shape that because it's been softened and conditioned by biblical context, theological context, life context, in a way that, you know, I think maybe my earlier messages on marriage perhaps fell short on.

Nathaniel. And that broad view also has implications, though, for the very practical day-to-day ramifications. You know, one of the examples that comes to mind is communication in marriage. Often when, you know, when we talk to couples or, you know, just in our own marriages, you know, communication's a big deal and a lot of problems arise from poor communication. Communication is rooted in...

Don. In some ways, marriage is a lifelong test lab in communication. And, you know, I mean, not to at least think about it on a human level, it's just a lifelong exercise in communication and some people do it better than others. But there are some things that I think might be helpful on that.

Nathaniel. I was going to ask if you have, just out of your experience and pastoral experience, personal experience, if there are some helpful things that you could share along those lines about communication.

Don. Yeah, one thing that I really didn't understand, recognize, or figure out until pretty far into marriage; we'll be married 36 years in two weeks from today, July 16, is that it's a little bit hard to get your mind around it until somebody points it out to you and you say, "Oh yeah, I see that." And so I'll just kind of illustrate it from, just from our personal experience. Nancy and I communicate in completely different ways and I think it's common for couples to have different styles of communication without even recognizing it, and what I mean by that is this, is that when Nancy is thinking through an issue, she verbalizes it. She thinks through something while she talks about something in order to think through it, and part of my job is to participate in that conversation. I've not always done a good job of that. My style is the exact opposite. You know, my preference is I think through everything, I contemplate everything in my mind, and I go through everything, all the different alleys of thought in my mind, and then when I think I've got things figured out, then and only then do I speak. And so these are two rivers, these are two rivers running into each other, and sometimes, you know, it splashes up when that happens. You know, I think if a couple can recognize and even talk about, you know, how do you process information? How do you think through things? Well, I like to talk about things. Oh, really? I prefer to think through it on my own first. If I had understood that 35 years ago entering into marriage, you know, I probably still would have been just as bad and sinful as I always had been, as I proved to be, but at least I would have understood what was going on. And so there is an art to communication, and we need help to do that and, you know, whereas, I mean, I always want to set forth biblical principles in their context, rightly interpreted when I preach. As I get a little further along in ministry, closer to the end of my life than I am at the beginning of it, you know, I'm also, when it comes to these practical issues of marriage and family, I'm also just conscious of wanting to actually be helpful and not simply sound good in the pulpit and, you know, have people walk away and it doesn't do them any good three days later.

Nathaniel. Yeah. And if I could just build on that for a moment...

Don. Please do.

Nathaniel. ...with the communication aspect, you know, same thing. I had no idea that there was different ways of communicating and that set us back, I'm sure, many years.

Don. What are you trying to say? I'm not following.

Nathaniel. I'm saying when I got married, yeah.

Don. He didn't get the joke.

Nathaniel. Yeah. I'm very dense, as you can see. But one of the other things...

Don. You and Katie saw the same thing. You've come to the same observation, is what you're saying.

Nathaniel. Yes. That we communicate differently, and then also even that the way our backgrounds were, there were different expectations that affected our communication, and as we learned little by little to understand that, that was helpful.

Don. Yeah, you know, picking up on the different backgrounds, Nathaniel, one of the things that I do in premarital counseling, I have a very simple exercise that I ask the couples to do, and it's I have them talk to each other about three things that they appreciated about their parents' marriage and three things that they would do differently; and so there is a total of 12 things, six on each side, three positive, three things you would do differently. And the reason we do that is simply to kind of help people identify things from their background that they might not otherwise think about and as a couple interacts on that as they're approaching marriage, you say, "Really, your parents were like that? Well, my parents did it this way." And you start to recognize things that influenced you. And looking back on my own parents' marriage, my dad was not a believer and he was a very dominant force in every aspect of his life. I didn't have a real good model of a husband drawing out his wife, speaking tenderly to his wife or anything like that. Unless that's pointed out to you and you think about it and say, you know what, I've got to distance myself from that, but even as you're growing in biblical sanctification, you're still influenced by things that, by background and history, that you don't even recognize until it's called to your attention. You say, oh, okay, I've got to be different than what I learned, and that, even in the earliest days of parenting, you know, I had to unlearn some things. You know, being a Christian doesn't erase all of that from your background. It's part of the sanctification process that you recognize it, distance yourself, repent where you need to repent, and hopefully become more like Christ as the years go by.

Nathaniel. You know, when we think about communication as defined in Ephesians 4:29, let no corrupting talk proceed out of your mouth, that is a result of life in Christ and, you know, anyone who reads that verse says, oh, I fall so far short of that. And, you know, as we grow in marriage, there's a lot of humility that has to be present in order for us to grow in those areas.

Don. Yeah, you say humility that has to be present. I think it's humility, you know, I'm just speaking for myself, you know, humility that's forced upon your character by, you know, by your many failures and, you know, the, you know, the continued work of the word of God in your life and you just start to realize just how far short you fall of the glory of God, generally speaking, and then in just being the person that you're called to be in marriage. When you start to realize that, I mean, there's a breaking effect that it has that is good, and yet we can't lose sight of the grace of Christ to us, even in the midst of that. Yes, I've fallen short, and yes, Christ is a great Savior. That's a good combination.

Nathaniel. Yeah, so I mean, essentially what we're saying is that to have a Christ-honoring marriage, it's the outflow of life in Christ.

Don. Yeah, of a Christ-centered inner life, and that's one of the things that I think is just so easy to miss, especially if you're having difficulties in your marriage. The tendency, and it's a very understandable tendency, is, I want this problem fixed. You could fix one

problem. It's like pulling up one weed in your garden. There's going to be another one that pops up. So unless you're dealing with the whole cultivation of everything, you know, you're just going to be dealing with repeated problems, missing the common thread through it all, which is that it's tied to your life, it's tied to your life in Christ. So that's, you know, it's an excellent observation by you.

Nathaniel. Well, I mean, you just think about the epistles, right? Where does the instruction come? It's in an epistle that was written to a church. The whole epistle likely was read to the church, and it starts with our life in Christ, all that Christ has done, and the abundance that we have in him and the riches, the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, all of that. And, you know, so correct me if I'm wrong, but, you know, to come and hear a sermon that exalts Christ, that confronts us with the glory of Christ, would be a very profitable way to strengthen your marriage.

Don. Even if the sermon is not directly on marriage at all. And that's one of the reasons why I feel sad for people that are not consistent in their participation in the life of the body because they miss that and then when their marriage starts to fray on the edges and there starts to be more and more conflict, it never crosses their mind that the pattern of the way that they've responded to the body of Christ is a serious contributing factor to the tension that they feel, and that's not easily corrected. And I could go to a million examples, so again, just generally speaking, someone comes and their wife is leaving them after 10 years of marriage or 20 years of marriage or whatever, and they expect us as pastors to be able to give them a verse or give them something that'll fix it in 10 or 20 minutes, and I mean, it just does not work that way. If you've taken 20 years to get into a problem, I would say, anybody, and I say this hopefully humbly and gently, if you've had 20 years of developing the problem and haven't addressed it, there's no quick fix to this. And it's going to be a humbling process to start from the beginning brick-by-brick rather than thinking that you can just erect a wall along the entire southern border of the United States in one day. It doesn't work that way. And so for people here, you know, I'm very encouraged for those that are a consistent part of the life of our body, without even realizing it, they're contributing to the health of their marriage just by being faithful in the context of the local church, because this is where God does so much of his work. And if you stand outside or at a distance from that, it's like missing regular meals, and you become malnourished, and the physical effects of that are pretty far-reaching.

Nathaniel. So, to be clear, what we're saying is that you can't just come and get isolated principles to fix your marriage.

Don. Yeah, yeah, that's right. Marriage is part of an overall life of living for Christ, living for the glory of God. It's one aspect of it, and you can't isolate that any more than you can take a seamless garment and rip one piece out of it, and you've both ruined the piece and the garment that it came from.

Nathaniel. And that has an effect even on, you know, being careful about resources that we look to, you know, outside of the church.

Don. Yeah, and no doubt—I don't have any specific things in mind, necessarily—you know, no doubt that many a publisher have made many a buck on books on marriage, of the writing of books on marriage there is no end, that ultimately don't help because they just focus on one narrow thing on the thing of marriage and separate it from the biblical context. Ephesians 5 is in a context of six whole chapters, and a lot of the richest things of Reformed theology are found at the front end before you even get to marriage and if you try to bypass sound theology and just address marriage, it's like trying to drive a car without any tires on it.

Nathaniel. And that's not Ephesians only. Every epistle where marriage is addressed, it's the same thing.

Don. Yeah, 1 Peter 3 it's the same way. The first two chapters of 1 Peter come before that instruction on marriage in the first seven verses of 1 Peter 3. So context matters.

Nathaniel. Absolutely. I used to have, one of my professors used to say, realtors say, "Location, location, location." Biblical expositors say, "Context, context, context."

Don. Yeah, and same thing in marriage. You know, when marriage gets difficult, context, context, context, far beyond the immediate relationship with your spouse.

Nathaniel. Absolutely.

Don. Why people don't like to hear that though, because what that means is there's no quick fix. People want a quick fix and there is no quick fix when you've gotten to a difficult crossroads like that.

Nathaniel. Having established some context, we got some questions in response to the email we sent out. You want to dive into some of those and answer some of those?

Don. Sure. You're running this thing, not me.

Nathaniel. All right.

Don. I'm just responding to you.

Nathaniel. Well, let's do that and I'm sure it'll generate some other conversation as well as we go through these.

Don. I typed out a few notes so I wouldn't forget.

Nathaniel. Perfect. So, just going through the list that we got, thank you all for your response to these questions. It'll be really beneficial, I think, for us here this evening. First question, "How would you counsel a friend who claims to be a Christian but is considering an unbiblical divorce?"

Don. Yeah. Assuming that you're not in the same church, I would just send him to his pastor or his elders, and I wouldn't be looking so much to support him, and it's important to realize the premise here is that the guy is pursuing or the gal is pursuing an unbiblical divorce, and you know that. Assuming that, then, I'm not looking to support them, I'm looking to rebuke them. God hates divorce, Malachi 2:16. Jesus said, "What God has joined together, let no man separate." You made a vow in the presence of God and, too, in the presence of witnesses, that you were going to be faithful to this marriage, and if you're contemplating leaving that, you've got bigger problems in your marriage if you can just so easily and readily contemplate sinning against God. So you need to go talk to your pastor. Nine times out of 10, the church isn't going to do anything about it, but there should be a process of biblical discipline that's exercised. If that was happening in the walls of Truth Community Church, you know, we would be instituting a process of church discipline to resist that, and to warn them, and to call them back to repentance. But it's just a sad fact that there aren't a lot of churches that do that, but given the premise of the question, "I've got a friend in another place, another church, supposed Christian," you know, I'd say you've got to go talk to your elders but as you go, understand what I'm telling you is, you know, you're sinning against God even thinking this way, let alone doing it.

Nathaniel. And as unpopular as that is in our society, that's what true love looks like. It's looking for the best for that person, and the best for that person is to be under the right authority and to pursue righteousness, not to endorse them in their pursuit of sin, wrongdoing.

Don. Yeah, that's right and above everything else, as Christians, what we want to do is we want to be faithful to God, we want to be faithful to the word of God. And when there's a clear biblical principle that's being violated and we have opportunity to speak into it, to speak those principles, to honor them, and trust God for whatever he does with it. If I lose a friendship over something like that, I can live with that, because I've spoken the truth in love, and there you go.

Nathaniel. Second question, "How should a wife think biblically about when to bring up an issue to her husband? When do we let things go, or when do we speak?"

Don. Yeah, kind of a communication issue again, right? Look, I wouldn't make this too complicated. Especially in younger couples that are earnest Christians and they want to do things right and they want to do it by the book, it's easy to overthink things. You know and my counsel, you know husband or wife, would be to, 1) look for a time when your spouse is not preoccupied with with other things. You know, if this can wait until after the final two minutes of the Super Bowl that would be wise to do that, if it can wait, and just to talk about when we're going to talk. You know, "I need to talk to you about our finances. When would be a good time to do that?" And let your spouse guide you on that. Say, "Well, could we talk about it tomorrow night after I get past this big exam I've got," or whatever? "Yeah, we can talk then." Okay and then you plan it and do it that way. And, you know, it's also Nancy and I have found it helpful, although it's not easy to even do this sometimes at our stage in life, is to just set aside a time where you can talk about

several things at once, you know, and often what we've done is we've just, we'd go out to dinner and, you know, and talk through a number of things in that setting rather than just, the bottom thing, bottom line is, the bottom thing is, you know, you have to be intentional about it and considerate of your spouse. And there have been times, I remember one time with, in our early days of marriage. We had gone to bed, and she started talking to me about something important and when my head hits the pillow, I'm asleep within 60 seconds most of the time. I just remember I was in a restful slumber that was pierced by the question, "Have you heard anything that I've said?" Well, yeah, you were talking about XYZ. That was like 10 minutes ago. And so you just have to be mindful of putting your spouse in a position to succeed, asking, "When could we talk about this?" And then, you know, I'm presupposing a spouse that will earnestly cooperate with that, and you'll be fine.

Nathaniel. And, you know, just something from a husband's perspective that I'm not good at, but I'm trying to learn, is, you know, asking your wife if there's something on her mind and just giving her the opportunity to say, "You know now's a good time. Let's talk." And you know...

Don. Usually not wait until you know that she's upset about something.

Nathaniel. Exactly.

Don. Ask that question before she's steamed.

Nathaniel. Precisely.

Don. Not that Katie's ever steamed. I'm just speaking in general terms.

Nathaniel. Right, totally get that. Absolutely. Concur.

Don. You better concur.

Nathaniel. So, moving on, that was a great question, and thank you for the answer there. That's very helpful, just good practical advice. The third question I have here this evening, "Several times a husband is commanded to love his wife in Scripture. The converse of a wife being commanded to love her husband is not explicitly found. Why?"

Don. Well, I think if you look at broader context, again, in the broader context of Scripture, like in Ephesians 5:22 to 24, wives, submit to your husbands as opposed to, wives, love your husbands, there's already been a command, broadly speaking, to all believers to love one another in Ephesians 5:1 and 2. And so the broader context has established the principle that we should love one another. If things are really bad in your marriage, you still have to go back, and Jesus said, love your enemies. So either way, you're coming or going, you're commanded to love this person that's in front of you, to love your neighbor. You know, if we're supposed to love each other, love our enemies, love your neighbor, you know, your spouse falls in there somewhere before you even get

to the concept of marriage. So I think the broader context of the passage and the broader context of the Bible itself just shows that there's going to be a manifestation, there's a command to love one another that's present in every relationship, and that just applies to marriage as well. I think, you know, I don't like to speculate on why a writer didn't say something different than what he did say. I think if you look at Ephesians 5, for example, Paul's dealing with the principle of submission and authority in the broader context, wives and husbands, children and parents, slaves and masters, and he's dealing more directly with the principle of authority rather than of love in that section of Scripture and showing how either side, those that are under authority and those that have authority, are to handle their aspect and their portion in that relationship. And so the wife told to submit to the authority, the husband told to love his wife, meaning you handle that authority in a way that results to the benefit of your wife rather than lording it over her. And so I think we can navigate through that question in that way. It's an excellent question. Good observation of Scripture.

Nathaniel. Absolutely. Fourth question we have here tonight, "When a man and woman have no children, can she remain in the workplace? When husband and wife do have children, is it unbiblical for the woman to continue working?"

Don. Well, when it comes to a couple without children, if we're going to exercise ourselves biblically in a marriage, I think the starting point is for the wife to understand that she does not make that decision unilaterally or simply based on what she wants to do. This is something that's decided with your husband, under his authority, and not apart from him. For example, if we want to turn to Titus 2 for just a moment, we read this, older women and younger women, older women "are to teach what is good," verse 3, "and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled." The key term there, not exactly where you'd think I would go, but submissive to your own husband. If you talk this over with your husband, he says, "Yeah, I'm okay with you doing XYZ," then, you know, the Lord is going to lead you through your husband's leadership. But the wife should not do anything that's contrary to the desires of her husband in that situation and so you just process it in terms of spiritual priorities, recognizing that your first priority is at home, but when a couple does not have children, then there's time left over. When Nancy and I got married, she did a lot of substitute teaching, as I recall. And that was fine. The thing that I'm always concerned about is that it's easy to, especially for younger pastors, I guess, to just make dogmatic statements that this is the way that it has to be and, you know, and ignoring the fact that there are, you know, if there's a million marriages in front of you, there's a million different circumstances where one principle can be worked out and applied in different circumstances. And so, you know, if you just make a dogmatic statement without any qualification, the wife can never work outside the home, what do you do when the husband's in an accident and he's set aside for several months? Are you going to bind their conscience by a principle that's not taking into account the different facts? I don't think that that's the way Scripture should be handled.

When you have children, I think that one of the things that we should state clearly is that the mother is responsible for the care of her own children. Whatever you do with that principle, the mother is responsible for the care of her own children. Not child care, you know, the debate, presidential debate, you know, child care came up and it's \$22,000 per child or whatever it is, you know, some ridiculous figure. But for the Christian woman, she's not thinking that child care are responsible to raise my children. She's not thinking that I'm going to delegate this to compliant grandparents so I can just continue to pursue my career without the kids getting in the way of my career. And even to say that, you know, for really large families, I think a mother should be mindful of the fact that it is not the responsibility of her older children to raise her younger children. It's the mother's responsibility to take responsibility for these things. And Proverbs 31 talks about a woman that evaluates fields, she's doing things that generates income, she's very industrious and all of that, and so I'm not going to try to make a black-and-white rule about these things. I've got enough problems trying to tend to my own life in ministry without trying to run everybody else's lives by rules that go beyond what Scripture says. I would just say this, that if a woman is making excuses for not taking care of her children, then her priorities have somewhere gone astray from the biblical order. Her priorities are, by Titus 2, clearly, her priorities are in the home, with her husband and with her children, and anything that she does beyond that is subordinate to that, not the other way around. It's when we turn things upside down, and moms are chasing after careers while someone else is raising their kids, that's a clear violation of the order that God has established, and those kind of set the boundaries around which we have other discussions.

Nathaniel. And we're seeing the same theme continue to arise. Understand the principles, biblical principles, and then work from there, and that's the joy that we have as elders, is helping to help people think through those principles, and not think in isolation of those principles, but providing the breadth that gives us liberty in Christ to pursue the right things, but takes into account the reality that life is very different for nearly everybody.

Don. Yeah, it is. And I guess another aspect of it is that sometimes women are put in the uncomfortable position of the husband telling them that they have to work when the mom would rather stay home. You know, you run into that, that's a very difficult situation and to the extent that a woman under our ministry would encounter a problem like that, all I could say is, come and talk to us and let us help you walk through that. And sometimes you're almost faced with, it seems like conflicting principles, competing principles, if that if that comes up, especially if a woman perhaps is married to an unsaved man, then you're going to have difficulties and then either the elders can help you or we'll give you an older woman that can help you think through those things. But I just, you know, there are certain kinds of Christians that just want everything laid out for them in easy rules and, you know, if I do the rule, then I can do that and just bypass the principles. Just tell me what I have to do. We've got to work through the principles. That's how you're going to be sanctified, not simply somebody telling you another rule to follow.

But having said that, the other thing that I would want to say is I gladly went out of my way to speak about the dignity of women as I did this series on marriage and talked about the high dignity of women and women who showed the way and talking about Christ and

women and the example that so many women set for us, so that there should be no question about the highly dignified role that the Bible assigns to women, and that I've done my best to try to honor that principle in this series. That said, it is incumbent upon that woman, the woman, in marriage, if she's going to be dignified, if she's going to have a humble, teachable spirit before the word of God, to realize that it is her responsibility to honor her husband and to not speak badly of him to others unless she's seeking counsel in a private setting. But, you know, for a woman to broadcast and make her husband look bad in front of others is an ungodly, sinful thing for her to do. And sometimes, you know, the other side of this needs to be stated also. I remember a friend of mine, his wife was in a circle of conversation with a lot of women who were bad-mouthing their husband. She said, "Well, actually, I love my husband, and I respect my husband." And she stood up, and she didn't join in the dishonoring of the men that were represented there. She spoke up and honored her husband. It changed the course of the conversation, and that's the way that it should be done. One of the things that I especially love and appreciate about Nancy, about my wife, is that I have known always that she would never speak badly about me to others and it's not because I haven't given her material to speak from. She's careful to honor me when she's having conversations with others, to not speak badly about me, even though there would be occasion to do so, and in that way, it's exemplary. That's the way that women should approach their marriage. And again, women get stuck in marriages with dishonorable husbands and so sometimes the application of that is going to be difficult for them, and that's when you seek help privately from your elders, from older women in the church. How can I handle this? And to be able to have someone to be candid with is one thing, to broadcast in conversations or on social media what a terrible husband you have is a terrible dishonor to Christ who gave you that husband to respect and honor.

Nathaniel. And that's directly from 1 Peter 3, that the wife order herself, even in a difficult marriage.

Don. That's right. Win him without a word. And so that passage for wives in the first six verses of 1 Peter 3 is quite important.

Nathaniel. And the next question, you've already answered, I think, or laid the foundation for the answer, even in talking about Proverbs 31 and the virtuous woman, all the things that she does and how women think through different things, but this question combined a couple that came in. Can you speak to the unbiblical use of the concept of submission? Do husbands dictate everything to their wives so that they comply regardless?

Don. Yeah, all I could say is that I spent five pulpit hours answering that question and I just think the key is to focus on the full biblical teaching of women, and for men to realize that when the Bible says, wives, be submissive to their husbands, it's a command that's addressed to the wives for them to honor and to obey. It's not said, husbands, make sure that your wives submit to you. I mean, just the simple reading of the text. It takes 60 seconds to read the Bible, to read that text and realize that what husbands are to do is laid out in verses 25 to 33, love your wives, nourish them, cherish them. If you take that as seriously as you say you take the first three verses of that passage, then you're not going

to ever start thinking in those ways of domination and submission, and, woman, shut your mouth, you answer to me. You're not going to speak that way. A man, I don't care what kind of testimony he thinks he has, a man who acts that way in private has serious grounds to question his own salvation.

Nathaniel. And that goes along the line of the principle that you emphasized when talking about the different roles that each of the instructions or the instructions to each person in the marriage is on its own regardless of how the other spouse responds.

Don. Yeah, don't go reading someone else's mail.

Nathaniel. Precisely. Husbands don't love their wives only because their wives submit to them. No, they love their wives regardless.

Don. Regardless and vice versa. And so that's why, you know, that's why it's so important on the front end for couples to get not premarital counseling, in my opinion, get pre-engagement counseling, and talk through these things in advance, and to the extent that you can, have a sense of understanding what these principles are, and for the woman in particular, do I really want to submit myself to this man? Do I know him well enough to undertake that biblical responsibility before Christ of submitting to this man? You need to know that guy before you embrace that and women who short-circuit that just because they want to not be lonely anymore, they're putting themselves in a very vulnerable and even dangerous position. And, you know, I've said it so many times, it's better to want something you don't have than to have something you don't want. And my mom, bless her heart, she's 91, and we were just with her on Sunday, you know, she got married when she was 16 and I think that if greater principles of wisdom had been in operation in her mind at that time, she might have made different decisions than she did. Of course, if she had done that, I wouldn't be here, and we wouldn't be having this discussion. So, you know, the Lord works all of that out in his providence. But, you know, we've got to be wise, and it's okay to ask yourself hard questions before someone leads you down the aisle to get married.

Nathaniel. I think that the next question is very simple, but it's very important as well. "If there is unresolved conflict or even unrepentant sin in a marriage, can it hinder or even negate our prayers to the Lord?" Yeah, Scripture is explicit about that, isn't it? Psalm 66 verse 18 says, "If I regard sin in my heart, the Lord will not hear." 1 Peter 3:7 is specific on it in the context of marriage, love your wives lest your prayers be hindered. Give her honor as a fellow heir of life that your prayers be not hindered. And for a Christian man, again, someone genuinely born again, maybe having going through struggles with his wife, maybe having, on a human level, legitimate reasons to be dissatisfied or whatever, those kinds of verses where you want to know Christ, you do fear God, you want communion with Christ, those principles, those verses motivate you to address the problem and resolve it, not to feed your resentment and anger for the very reason that even if you won't do it for the sake of your wife, you do it for the sake of the Lord and for the sake of fellowship with him. And so those principles have a sanctifying effect. The

last thing you want to do is to have your marriage turn into an occasion by which you turn the heavens into brass and your voice doesn't penetrate to the throne of God.

Nathaniel. Just on a personal note, that verse in 1 Peter 3, it's kind of the go-to when my prayer life is lagging, and one of the first questions I ask is, am I not living with my wife with understanding? Because God says that that has an effect on the prayer life, and woe is me to not have a prayer life with the Lord of heaven for his glory, and if there's something on earth that needs to be dealt with, then may the Lord graciously show me and bring conviction where that might be.

Don. Yeah, and even that unsettled sense, that sense that something's out of whack as you try to pray becomes a sanctifying... you know, the Lord uses all of this to sanctify us, to correct us, and he's very patient with his erring children, and so even when we fall, even when we have stumbled, we recognize this has been a pattern in my life that has been ungodly for a long period of time, he chastens us to sanctify us and he chastens us as a loving father, you know, chastens his younger child for the sake of turning that child into what that child needs to be. And so even when we encounter that, you know, the Lord turns that to our good and it's just one of the remarkable manifestations of his great loyal love and faithfulness to us. At the very time that you'd think anyone else would send us away, the Lord is using that to bring us closer to himself.

Nathaniel. That's right. And, you know, often that generates an opportunity for repentance and forgiveness within the marriage and the next question that came in was, "Can you elaborate on the role of forgiveness in marriage?"

Don. I can try. It's inevitable that there's going to be offenses in marriage. It's just inevitable at one time or another. Sometimes it's a mild offense. Sometimes it's profound and with lasting consequences even. But forgiveness, I like to think about forgiveness in this way, not trying to give a technical lexical definition but when Scripture speaks about the Lord's forgiveness of us, it says, it quotes God as saying, "their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." And in other words, it's not that God forgets it and then now something's outside his omniscience, but it's an indication that he will not hold that against us. You know, that the penalty has been paid in the blood of Christ, he cleanses us when we confess our sins, and he doesn't hold it against us so that that prior offense is no barrier to fellowship with him. And in marriage, there's a sense in which forgiveness means something's brought out to light, we talk about it, and the spouse says to the other, "I won't hold that against you. We can enjoy conversation. We can enjoy the fullness of our relationship together. I'm not going to hold that against you." And people that come from backgrounds where they've cultivated bitter, resentful hearts over a period of years, they're going to have to deal with that seriously and realize that this is a profound change, a profound repentance. Even if your spouse has sinned in this instance, that tendency toward bitterness and resentment that sometimes has been cultivated over years of claiming to be a victim, and whether you have been or not, you like to portray yourself as one, you've got to repent of all of that, again, for the sake of the Lord and to embrace your husband. And I think that there are some teachers who want to say, "Well, everything has to be identified. You confront your spouse and you confess this so that

there can be forgiveness and restoration." And that's a recipe if you carry that out to its logical conclusion and everything, every little irritation becomes a point of correction with your spouse, that's a recipe for a sour, miserable marriage. There is a lot of room for spouses to overlook each other's faults, overlook sins when you can, and to just let that be swallowed up in the love and forgiveness of a heart that's received mercy and you extend mercy. You know, I mean, God forgives all of our sins, and we only confess a fraction of them to him. We're unaware of most of the sins we commit against the Lord, I'm convinced, and so there's plenty of room for a spouse to pass over things and not make it a confrontation. And if you've been sinned against, there might be a time to turn on extra grace there and extra kindness, just as God in Christ has forgiven you.

Nathaniel. And that ties again into the broader context, even of Ephesians, end of chapter 4, beginning of chapter 5, we have a poignant section about forgiveness.

Don. Yeah, just as God in Christ has forgiven you. And that's kind of the runway that led to the takeoff on marriage in 5. "Forgive one another just as God in Christ has forgiven you." Was God stingy in his forgiveness? Did God make you crawl on your knees? Not in true salvation. There are silly Catholics that bloody their knees climbing up steps at Rome or something, but that's not biblical salvation. God has forgiven us freely, graciously, fully, abundantly, gladly, and that's our pattern, not a niggling recitation and accounting of every single offense that you can come up with. You know, love your spouse enough to overlook a whole lot, and you'll be in a better place.

Nathaniel. Well, we've been talking a lot about some of the difficulties of marriage and questions alongside of that, the final question of the evening, "What are some of the greatest joys of marriage?"

Don. Well, I think the best way for me to answer that is biblically, you know, because what I find joy in my marriage may not be the same thing that another person especially values or appreciates. And so biblically speaking, there are three C's that come to my mind. First and preeminently is Christ. You know, in Christian marriage, we are sharing in the life of Christ together and in Ephesians 5 there, you know, "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church." There are two people wrapped around one person in marriage. We're wrapped around Christ in an intimacy with him and with each other that cannot be replicated by anything and that's one of the reasons why it's so ridiculous, foolish, and a non-entity to talk about anything other than marriage as a man and a woman in Christ together. You know, the way that society has tried to redefine marriage is not marriage at all, because it couldn't begin to express this. And so joy in marriage is sharing life in Christ together.

Secondly, you know, I think about God created man and woman in Genesis 1. He said, he told them, you know, "be fruitful and multiply," and where the Lord has opened the womb and blessed a family with children, there's another joy all of its own. We share in Christ together. We share in the fruit of our bodies together and the joy of children, and then the challenges that come later. We're wrapped around each other in Christ. We're wrapped around each other in our children, which is just amazing.

And then just in kind of a summary thing, if I can put it this way, and I think I can, no one's going to stop me, is that marriage was designed for companionship. Biblically speaking, marriage flows from God's recognition in his declaration when he looked at Adam and said, "It is not good for man to be alone. I'll create a helper for him." And he forms the woman and he brings the companionship. And then you think about it from the negative side that what Jesus said in Matthew 19, verse 6, "What God has joined together let no man separate." There's a joining together. There's a companionship. There's an end of the loneliness when a man and woman get married. And so you think about Christ, you think about companionship through a lifetime together, children together. I mean, there's just an abundance that is given to a married couple by God that is not found in any other way.

Two other things that I would say alongside that to kind of expand it out. For people that are unmarried, widowed, single, divorced even, the fact that you don't have marriage is not an indication that companionship and fellowship are not available to you. These can be found in great immeasurable depth in life in the local church, life in the body of Christ. You know, this is one of the many important reasons why we come together is that we dilute that sense of isolation and loneliness by sharing life together as the body of Christ and you don't have to be married to share in that life of the body of Christ.

The other thing that I would say is that the perfection of companionship, the perfection of Christ, that's still ahead for us in glory, when we're glorified. While we're on this earth, these ideals and the enjoyment that we do share with Christ is not all that it's going to be then. Now we see dimly, but then face-to-face, you know, now we just have a dim reflection of it. And the fact that we're on earth and we're living in a cursed world, and, you know, marriage brings two sinners together, it's not going to be perfect. It's going to be diminished. That companionship will be marred at times by sin, but that doesn't mar the overall principle that God established marriage to accomplish.

And so while the companionship may not be perfect, but it can still be good. Children may cause us heartaches, and they do, but that doesn't mean that there's not good aspects and joyful aspects to it. And the companionship may sometimes be pressured and fractured by conflict and differences and physical illness and all of those things, but there's still an abiding reality to it that we can drink fresh water from that well, even if the well is somewhat lowered because of the difficulties in life. And so we recognize that marriage was a gift from God. It was an institution that he established and declared to be good. And we partake of it knowing that the ultimate fulfillment of our hearts is not in our spouse but in Christ, and the ultimate fulfillment even in Christ is still future to us. This is a great blessing given to us while we're waiting for an even greater blessing to come.

Nathaniel. As you were saying those things, what grace of God to preserve something that he established before the fall, marriage, and then within the difficulties of marriage in a sinful, fallen world, that it becomes such a source of joy and also sanctification in

drawing us closer to Christ. I mean, the implications of that and his grace and mercy to us are astounding.

Don. Yeah, they are infinite.

Nathaniel. That's right. Any closing thoughts that you have for us this evening as we wrap things up?

Don. You told me you were going to ask me that, and I didn't put it... this is like a presidential candidate at a debate not being prepared for the closing statement. No, I guess I would just say that, you know, hopefully speaking to you in the room, a few of you over the live stream even, is just to have a sense that when difficult times come in your marriage, that God has gone before you in that. God has even ordained that you would be in this time. Jesus said, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." And even when your spouse falls very far short of what he ought to be, your spouse proves to be changeable, you don't know when you wake up in the morning, Is he going to be in a good mood or a bad mood, or what's she going to be like, you know, at different times of the month, if I can be that direct about it, is to just realize that in those times where marriage is imperfect, it becomes an opportunity to appreciate afresh the immutability of our Christ. He is unchanging in his love. He is with us always, even to the end of the age. "Fear not, for I am with you. Do not look anxiously about you, for I am your God. I will help you. Surely I will uphold you. Surely I will strengthen you with my righteous right hand." "I fear no evil, for you are with me." And when marriage falls short of the ideal that God intended it to be, it's simply an instrument to point us and to draw us even closer to Christ and to draw upon him for our ultimate final satisfaction. Your spouse was never meant to be your ultimate satisfaction, the ultimate fulfillment of everything that your soul desires. It's a gift of God to help along the way as you come to embrace the fullness of all that Christ is for every desire and affection of your soul.

Nathaniel. Amen. Amen.

Don. So you want to pray for us?

Nathaniel. I will.

Don. All right.

Nathaniel. Let's pray.

*Father, we thank you tonight for your many gifts to us in Christ our Savior. We thank you for salvation from our sin. We thank you for the joy of life in Christ, of being a new creature in Christ, and the way that it changes everything about life. And Lord, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the important institution of marriage over the past few weeks of Don's teaching and then this evening, and we pray that you would continue to glorify your name in our lives and the lives of each couple that's a part of our church as we strive by the grace of God to honor you in our marriages and to give you the glory*

*that you alone deserve. So thank you for the time this evening, and may you strengthen us as we go from here to serve you. And we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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