

Introduction

I'd like to begin this Mother's Day message with a critical question. What is the foundation of our children's lives? What is the one thing more than any other that makes them confident and secure in their worlds? Proverbs 5:15-20 tells us. It's intoxicated spouses and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

Marriage Defined

The Book of Proverbs was originally compiled as a training manual for adolescent Jewish males. In our text, the wise man who wrote it teaches them what they'll need to know when they become husbands. Notice the word "**wife**" in verse 18. It's singular and presupposes that each will have one wife and only one. That, in conjunction with the creation account of Adam and Eve generally and Genesis 2:24 particularly, makes it clear. One man and one woman united permanently and exclusively is God's plan for marriage.

But let's quickly admit that our current culture opposes every aspect of that plan. Many challenge the "**permanently and exclusively**" part, like actress Shirley McLane who declared: "**I don't think it's desirable to conform to having one mate. Who said that's the ideal? To whom does monogamy make sense?**" Many challenge the "**one**" part, like two television reality shows that portray two husbands with four and five wives respectively. And finally, many challenge the "**man and woman**" part. 37 states have laws that define marriage as the legal union of one man and one woman. Arkansas's, for instance, reads as follows: "**Marriage shall be only between a man and a woman.**" Plaintiffs have filed lawsuits in 30 of those states challenging the constitutionality of that definition. They want it changed from "**a man and a woman**" to "**consenting adults**" of whatever gender. District Court decisions, generally, have ruled in favor of the plaintiffs.

But man's rulings don't change God's plan. He rules that marriage is

always and only between one man and one woman till death do them part. Any other plan for marriage is objectively and morally wrong, period.

Intoxicated Spouses

Marriage defined that way, in other words, is God's creation, and in verses 18-19, He describes what it should be like. Notice the specific exhortations there. Verse 18a – Let your fountain (marriage) be a blessed or happy one. Verse 18b – Rejoice in your wife. And verse 19a,b – Be sexually fulfilled with her. Verse 19c sums it up well. Husbands, be always exhilarated with your wives. The Hebrew word translated "**exhilarated**" is also used in the Old Testament to describe the effects of strong drink. A good translation is "**intoxicated.**" Husbands, be intoxicated with your wives. Commentator Franz Delitzsch explains what that means: "**to be wholly captivated by her, so that one is no longer in his own power, can no longer restrain himself.**" It's a stirring reality that extends to wives as well. Husbands and wives, God wants us to be "**drunk with love**", as we say it, for our spouses.

He wants that no matter how long we've been married. The wise man makes just that point to his young male pupils in verse 18b. When they're old, they should rejoice in the wives of their youths. Most of us were drunk with love when we courted our spouses years ago. We should be just as drunk with love now. That's the meaning of verse 18b.

Recall the romantic feelings you had on your honeymoon. Sociological studies show that the intensity of those feelings decreases 80% during the first two years of marriage. If something isn't done, the intensity of 20% that's left will also continue to decrease until finally, the marriage is dead. As one 40 year-old wife told her pastor: "**As soon as our last child leaves, I'm leaving too. I want more out of life than this marriage will let me have.**"

Many, if not most, marriages are that way, but they shouldn't be. Verses 18-19 exhort us, as disciples and friends of Jesus, to be intoxicated spouses, drunk with love. They command us to make our

marriages passionate and highly charged. They call us to delight in the ones we've married – to be always ravished or infatuated with their love.

I know I am and I'm not ashamed to admit it. I remember two things about courting my wife. First, I routinely thought about her when I wasn't with her. And second, I eagerly anticipated being with her. I still do both of those things over 42 years later, and even more so after her bout with cancer. I'm drunk with love for her.

A Fountain of Blessing

But what about you? Are you drunk with love for your spouse? If not, you need to be and verses 15-17 explain why.

Verse 15 uses a metaphor to teach the exclusiveness of marriage. We should satisfy our need for water by drawing from our cistern or well and no one else's. In the same way, we should satisfy our need for intimacy and sex by uniting with our spouses and no one else. We should be drunk with love for them and no one else, a point verse 20 reiterates.

Verses 16-17 go on to explain what happens when we are. Verse 17 states that the blessings of our unions with our spouses aren't ours alone. On the contrary, verse 16 says, they stream out from us to benefit the persons and lives of others as well.

The first of those others of course are our children. Acclaimed Christian psychologist James Dobson contends that the best thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother. And the best thing a mother can do for her children is to love their father. He's right. That's why I do what I do, if it's appropriate, when I counsel spouses with troubled marriages. I ask the husband, **"Do you love your children more than yourself?"** If he answers that he does, which is almost always, I then say: **"You will, therefore, do the best thing for them, which is to love their mother."** I go on to do the same with the wife. It's true. The best thing parents can do for their children is to love each other the way our text teaches they should.

Studies confirm that. They show that children thrive when their

fathers and mothers love each other the way they should. A loving and nurturing marriage relationship does two things.

First, it makes children feel confident and secure in their worlds. Listen to what a fourth-grader wrote about her father, **“He treats my mom very nicely, which makes me feel wanted.”** Children are quick to pick up on the presence or absence of love between their parents and are profoundly affected for good or ill by that. Ken Canfield, former president of the National Center for Fathering, writes these insightful words to fathers: **“Words and deeds that demonstrate your love for your wife provide your children with convincing proof that the foundation of their lives – your marriage commitment – is not going to shake, buckle and split apart. When Dad loves Mom, all is well in the universe.”** He’s right on all counts. Husbands and wives, your marriage relationship is the foundation of your children’s lives. When you love each other as our text commands, therefore, all is well in the universe – as far as they’re concerned at least.

A loving and nurturing marriage relationship does a second thing. It gives children a model for marriage that they can one day follow. For one thing, it assists them in knowing what they should *give* to their spouses when they themselves marry. They’ll know how they should treat their husbands or wives. For another thing, it assists them in knowing what they should *get* from their spouses when they marry. They’ll know how their husbands or wives should treat them. That in turn enables them to choose wisely whom to marry (those who will treat them that way) and whom not to marry (those who won’t). The bottom line is this. Children are more likely to give and get what they should as spouses when their parents love each other as our text commands.

But the blessings of a loving and nurturing marriage stream beyond children to others as well and even to society generally. I don’t have time to discuss it, but loving and nurturing marriages are foundational to the health of any society. That explains a lot, including America’s rapidly deteriorating social and moral state.

There's no doubt about it. Blessings stream out from the kind of marriage our text describes to both individuals and society as a whole.

Be Intoxicated Spouses

So, let's be intoxicated spouses. The question of course is "**How?**"

Let me quickly say that the kind of love we see in our text doesn't just "**happen**" to us. Most people seem to think it does. They talk about "**falling**" in or out of love, which reflects the Western view. Love is something that overtakes us, something we can't help. And since it overtakes us, it can leave us as well. I've heard it many times over the years. A husband or wife sits across from me and says, "**I'm not 'in love' with my spouse anymore**" or "**I've fallen out of love.**" That language necessarily implies, which I point out to them, that love is something that happens to us, something that overtakes or leaves us.

But it isn't. It isn't something into which or out of which we "**fall.**" It isn't an irrational emotion over which we do not have control. It's a rational commitment instead over which we do have control. Under normal circumstances, we're "**in**" or "**out**" of love because we choose to be. So, let's choose to be in love with our spouses by doing two things.

First, think. Ponder the truth about our spouses. Consider the following realities. #1 - The second most profound decision my wife has ever made or will ever make was to marry me. She chose to spend the rest of her life with me and not someone else. #2 - My wife is the witness to my life. She alone knows my history, the most significant things I've become and done. #3 - There's a last time for everything with her in this life - a last time I hug her, converse with her, have dinner with her, come home to her, and so on. And #4 - Jesus loves my wife infinitely and died for her. I routinely think about those realities and others. I routinely bring them to mind. Doing so helps me to get my wife in perspective, to recognize her value and the value of my relationship with her. That in turn stirs feelings of love for her.

We can choose to be "**in**" love, not "**out**" of it, by doing a second

thing. Act. Karl has a slogan he uses with our young people, **“Fake it until you fill it.”** That slogan of his does reflect a deep psychological reality. What we do conditions what we feel. Feelings follow actions. Do you realize what that implies about love? It’s created and nurtured by its expression. People who persistently do loving things will eventually have loving feelings, and that includes spouses.

Sociologist Tony Campolo explains what he does when he counsels spouses who say they’re no longer **“in love”** with their husbands or wives. He begins by telling them that if they do what he says faithfully, their feelings of affection will return within a month. They’ll be **“in love”** again. He then tells them what to do. It’s two things. #1 – **“Each day make a new list of ten things that you would do for your spouse if you were in love.”** And #2 – **“Then each day, do the ten things that are on that list.”** **“It’s as simple as that,”** he says, and I believe he’s right. People who persistently do loving things, including spouses, will eventually have loving feelings.

That’s why I’ve drawn up a mental list of loving things that I routinely do for my wife: listen attentively when she speaks (first and foremost), open the car door for her, compliment her whenever I can, notice when she gets her hair cut, keep the ice cube trays filled, feign interest in the HGTV show she loves, *Buying Alaska* (don’t tell her), hug her, tell her I love her, and so on. Loving feelings follow loving actions.

Conclusion

Realize what that means in closing. We don’t have to be at the mercy of falling in and out of love with our spouses. We can be always in love with them and never out of it. Barbara Johnson wrote: **“What’s so remarkable about love at first sight? It’s when people have been looking at each other for years that it becomes remarkable.”** She’s right. It doesn’t matter if we’ve been married one year or fifty years. Think and act as I just explained it in the context of discipleship to Jesus. We’ll be something remarkable if we do, intoxicated spouses.