

Benefits of a Good Marriage

As we continue our series on “Towards a Loving Marriage” and understanding God’s purpose for marriage, we see that God said it first, at the time of creation, “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Gen 2:18).

Many years later, King Solomon repeated the same sentiment in the words of our text, “***Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.***”

Strength like that is exactly what we seek as we do life together in marriage. It is a strength God wants to give us so that our marriages are strong and enduring.

Unfortunately, it is a strength that is not always seen because of the sin of selfishness which separates us from God and from each other.

It isn’t always easy to give willingly of ourselves for someone else.

Our nature tempts us to look after ourselves, to assert our own rights, to seek our own needs.

I always laugh, for example, about a couple—not unlike other couples here today—as they anticipated their life together.

The bride to be was certain her love would make a wonderful husband, especially after she met his parents. “They’re so nice to each other,” she remarked. “It’s great how your dad brings your mom coffee in bed every morning!”

On the first morning after their wedding, the bride again mentioned the groom’s father’s habit of bringing his wife coffee in bed. She asked with a smile, “Does this trait run in the family?” “It sure does,” the groom answered with a smile of his own, “and I take after my mom!”

In the sense of serving ourselves first, we all take after our spiritual parents, Adam and Eve. But God has promised wonderful blessings or benefits if we, by faith, take after his Son, Jesus Christ.

This morning we are going to look at the benefits of a good marriage.

Even our federal government understands that there are benefits to a healthy marriage.

Researchers have found many benefits for **children and youth** who are raised by parents in healthy marriages, compared to unhealthy marriages, including the following statistics:

- More likely to attend college
- More likely to succeed academically
- Physically healthier
- Emotionally healthier
- Less likely to abuse drugs or alcohol
- Less likely to commit delinquent behaviors
- Less likely to be a victim of physical or sexual abuse
- Have a better relationship with their mothers and fathers
- Decreases their chances of divorcing when they get married
- Less likely to become pregnant as a teenager, or impregnate someone

- Less likely to be sexually active as teenagers
- Less likely to be raised in poverty

Researchers have found many benefits for women who are in healthy marriages, compared to unhealthy marriages, including the following statistics:

- Emotionally healthier
- Wealthier
- Less likely to be victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, or other violent crimes
- Less likely to attempt or commit suicide
- Decrease risk of drug and alcohol abuse
- Less likely to remain or end up in poverty
- Have better relationships with their children
- Physically healthier

Researchers have found many benefits for **men** who are in healthy marriages, compared to unhealthy marriages, including the following statistics:

- Live longer
- Physically healthier
- Wealthier
- Increase in the stability of employment
- Higher wages
- Emotionally healthier
- Decrease risk of drug and alcohol abuse
- Have better relationships with their children
- More satisfying sexual relationship
- Less likely to commit violent crimes
- Less likely to attempt or commit suicide

Researchers have found many benefits for **communities** when they have a higher percentage of couples in healthy marriages, compared to unhealthy marriages, including the following statistics:

- Higher rates of physically healthy citizens
- Higher rates of emotionally healthy citizens
- Higher rates of educated citizens
- Lower domestic violence rates
- Lower crime statistics
- Lower teen age pregnancy rates
- Lower rates of juvenile delinquency
- Higher rates of home ownership
- Higher property values
- Decreased need for social services

Source: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage/benefits/index.html>

(Department of Health and Human Services: Administration for Children and Families)

So, we know that having a healthy, joy-filled marriage makes a difference in so many ways. The benefits to a good marriage are innumerable.

Today's Scripture passage can be used for all aspects of community and relationships, but today, I am going to focus on the marriage relationship.

To find strength, companionship, and joy in your marriage, we are going to allow the Word of God to sink in and let the following principles from God's Word guide us.

These are principles that encourage mutual submission, service and commitment on the part of both individuals.

Our passage starts out in verses 7-8 by contrasting the lonely, isolated and self-serving person versus the benefits of a person who lives for another in verses 9-12.

“Again I saw something meaningless under the sun. There was a man all alone. He had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil.”

This guy works all the time. **“Yet, his eyes were not content with his wealth.”** Never had enough money.

We all would like more money. But, to get more money, you have to work more hours. So, we work more hours to get more money.

But, here’s the problem. **“For whom am I toiling”**, he asked.

He woke up one day and said, “Now, what’s the point again? Why do I keep working overtime and spend every free moment in the office?” “And why am I depriving myself of life’s most basic enjoyments. This, too, is meaningless and miserable business.

What he says is this. “I want money. That’s my goal. Now, to get money, I need to work more hours.

So, to work more hours, I don’t have time to invest in my marriage. I don’t have time to be with my kids. I don’t have time to have friends because I’m working.”

“Why?” “So I can get more money.”

Okay, you got money. How are you doing? “I’m depressed. I spend all my money on medication and therapy.”

“Well, does that seem like a good plan?” “No, that was a bad plan. What am I doing? I got all this money and I don’t have time to enjoy it.”

- How many people in our city have a bike that they don’t get to ride on because they’re always working?
- They have golf clubs that they never get to swing because they’re always working.
- They have books that they really would like to read, but they can’t because they’re always working.
- They have kids that they would love to play with, but they can’t because they’re always working.
- They have a spouse that they are losing touch with and so desperately want to reconnect with, but they can’t because they’re always working.
- They have friends.
- They have hobbies.
- They have church.

They have things that they could enjoy, but there's no time because they're always working.

Why are they working? To get more money. Why do they want to get more money? Who knows?

Money is a means to an end. It's not an end. We don't live to work. We work to live.”

That's what he's saying. That if our goal is the money and things, then what we will do is we will mis-define what it means to be a wealthy person.

A wealthy person is not just someone who has a lot of money. A wealthy person is someone who takes a nap and doesn't feel guilty. A wealthy person is someone who has time for their spouse, their kids and their and friends. That's a wealthy person.

What he's saying is this. If you misdiagnose your wealth as just being your income, you will find yourself not enjoying your life and realizing that it's all a vain waste of time.

Now, am I saying, “Don't work”? I'm not saying that at all.

Work hard. Have your work be part of your wealth. But, also as part of your worship. The manner in which we work is an act of worship to our God.

I tell you what. When you die and you go to Heaven, there are only two things that are going to go with you. Friends and memories with those friends. Everything else stays here.

And so, if you want to be wealthy and you want to take your wealth with you, invest it in people and memories with those people because those will go with you. Any other kind of wealth, really, is temporary.

So, what is it that we need to invest in to have the benefits of a good and healthy marriage?

The first thing Solomon talks about is a...

A. Mutual Support

Solomon began this portion of Scripture by noting in verse 9-10, “***Two are better than one and have a good return for their work: if one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!***”

You see, in a marriage, we need each other. God has gifted you and your spouse with different gifts that will compliment your marriage relationship.

I remember when Claire and I started our marriage counseling with Pastor Steer. We took a personality test and the results came back that we were complete opposites.

We looked at the results and we were distraught. I can remember looking at Claire and she looked as if she was about to cry. That could be because of the full impact of who she was marrying, but let's just say it was the results.

Then John intervened and said "Isn't this ripping! If you were exactly the same, you wouldn't need each other and what a boring life you will have."

He was right.

There may be differences in your marriage, but together, it works so much better.

There will always be a better return on your work in marriage, parenting, life, when you do it together. You will always get a better return on your efforts than if you did it alone.

Also, it much easier to face difficult situations together because you can be an encouragement to one another.

Billy Graham has often spoken about his in-laws, Nelson and Virginia Bell, noting that they had a beautiful and lengthy marriage.

As the years passed and their health began to change, Ruth Graham one day entered her parents' home to find her father on his hands and knees putting shoes and stockings on his wife. He looked up at his daughter and said with deep affection, "You know, the greatest privilege of my life is taking care of your mother" (Marriage Partnership, vol 9, no 4, p 14).

My friends, can you say that today? The greatest privilege in my life is to care and serve my spouse? Your spouse is God's gift to you. Cherish that gift!

Verse 10. If one falls down, his friend can help him up, but pity the man who falls and has no one to help him.

Solomon's picture in his mind is of the topography of Palestine during his time. Roads and paths were not paved or even leveled and there were many hidden rocks in the fields.

It wasn't uncommon for even the most experienced traveler to stumble and fall, perhaps break a bone or fall into a hidden pit.

One of the benefits of marriage is this. There will be a day when you're not doing so well, when you or your loved one has stumbled or fallen into one of life's pits...

You're going to be sick. You're going to face financial difficulties, catastrophe, trial, death of a loved one.

Something's going to happen that is going to cause you to fall down on your knees.

And if your goal has been to make money and pursue vocational pursuits like the man in verses 7-8, not to invest in your marriage and family type relationships, what will happen is this. You're going to be miserable and you're going to be in very dire straits.

There will be times in your marriage when you will be “down”—emotionally, physically, financially, spiritually—but you will never be “out”; that is, unable to stand, because you will, in love, lift each other up in love as God, through Christ, has done for you.

The next benefit is...

Mutual Encouragement

Yes, when we are together in marriage, there is someone to lift us when we fall and, Solomon continued, “***If two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?***”

This is reminding us of more than being cold because our spouse has tugged the blanket to his or her side of the bed.

Does that happen to anyone out there? I call my wife the human burrito. She just keeps rolling up and rolling up in the blankets until I have none and get hypothermia.

One of the benefits of marriage is just good human contact and physical touch. Now, there’s a practical reason here. How many of you really long for human contact that is significant.

Again, Solomon has a picture from his day in mind.

Travelers in that day would stay in an inn, which would be a large room or courtyard with many people sleeping all over the area.

Now, the daytime in Palestine is hot, but the nights can be quite cold.

Because of that, people would need to huddle together to remain warm.

They would need each other's warmth for comfort.

People tend to recognize the importance of physical touch when it comes to babies and children. Infants are held much of the time. Many cultures place babies in a sling so they can be held close to their parent all the time.

Children are given hugs and kisses regularly.

However, many people underestimate the importance of physical touch in a marriage relationship.

Touch can be used for good or bad. People who experience physical or sexual abuse may suffer from emotional trauma as a result of how significant that touch was.

When touch is used in a good way, it can have an equally powerful, positive effect.

Men, listen closely, physical touch does not always have to be sexual.

Instead, it can include holding hands, giving a hug, or back massage. Think about how much you and your partner touch each other. Was it more often when you dated? Or when you first got married? Has it dwindled over the years?

Physical touch can be a great way to affirm to your partner, your love, and your commitment.

Sometimes in a relationship, one person appreciates physical contact more than the other person. This can cause some feelings of rejection if the other partner does not want to hold hands in public or sit close together on the couch.

Talk to your partner about what he or she likes. Be willing to offer a back massage or give a foot rub. Have your partner communicate what feels good and what doesn't.

Experiment with other things such as a hand massage or neck rub too.

Usually people who don't necessarily appreciate cuddling or holding hands can appreciate a good massage.

Increasing your physical affection toward one another can increase the intimacy within the marriage. Learning what your partner likes and being willing to provide that can be a very loving act.

For example, a massage on a day when you feel tired shows your ability and willingness to put your partner's needs first. Or if you don't particularly like holding hands, but your partner does, be willing to do so sometimes.

The writer wants us to recognize the importance of sharing for the deepening of our relationship.

Success in marriage does not depend on finding the right person, but on being the right person!

Jesus encourages us with his words, “**Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends**” (John 15:13).

And that is exactly how he loved us. He gave his life for ours when he died on the cross to take away our sins, including the sin of excessive self-love.

One result of his resurrection is that we are enabled to share ourselves and all that we have with each other. When we do, no one is left out in the cold.

The third benefit of a good marriage is...

Mutual Strength

When we are together in marriage, there is someone to support us and lift us when we fall and encourage us and warm us when we are cold.

There is also someone to help us overcome when we are under attack.

Solomon added, “**Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.**”

Yes, there is strength in numbers, be it husband and wife or two good friends.

To make the point, Martin Luther once explained that when a wise father felt that death was near, he summoned his children together and gave them a bundle of sticks to break.

None of the children could break the sticks when they were together in the bundle, but when the father pulled the sticks apart, one at a time, the children could easily break them.

In this way, Luther concluded, the father taught his children that their future would be secure if they stayed together and worked together.

There will be times when you will feel threatened, but by remaining together you will not be overwhelmed.

When we are together in marriage, there is someone to lift us when we fall, warm us when we are cold, help us overcome when we are under attack, and, best of all, keep us together so that we cannot be pulled apart.

Solomon concluded, “***A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.***”

Husband, wife, Christ.

If you look casually, a rope appears to contain only two strands. But it is impossible to create a braid with only two strands. If the two could be put together at all, they would quickly unravel!

It takes a third strand to give strength to the other two. The third person necessary for a strong marriage is Jesus Christ.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran pastor in Germany during the time of the Nazi's and World War II. He was imprisoned and later executed for participating in a failed plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler.

Pastor Bonhoeffer during his imprisonment was unable to perform a wedding for a couple in the congregation he was serving, so he wrote a sermon for them from his prison cell. And had it smuggled out.

He wrote that it is not love that sustains the marriage, but the marriage covenant (commitment, promise) that sustains your love for one another.

Some wise words both from the text from Ecclesiastes and from Pastor Bonhoeffer.

You know, as much as we love “they lived happily ever after” as endings to stories, life teaches us this isn’t always the case.

Married life for us will be hectic and crazy because of work commitments, disagreements, money, expectations and all those other things we bring into our marriages.

However, remember that third strand in your marriage, Jesus Christ.

Remember the love He has for the two of you. He understands.

He knows when we fall, when we are cold, when we are attacked.

Because he loves us...

- He lifts us when we fall.
- He warms us when we’re cold and alone and need his touch.
- And He protects us so that we can do the same for each other.

Whenever I teach, I try to make the statement that when we engage the Word of God, it should never be informational, but transformational.

We should never say – “That was interesting”, but rather, “God what do you want me to do with this teaching that I may be more of the image of Jesus Christ?”

So, I want to challenge you that are married, to talk to each other sometime today or tomorrow at the latest about the benefits of marriage in your life.

How are you doing with supporting each other? Do you feel encouraged? Lifted up? Do you feel comforted and are there areas of physical touch that you can improve on to create a deeper intimacy in your marriage? Do you feel protected and that the other person has your back?

Friends, if these are areas where you are struggling, this is not a blame game.

Your spouse is God's gift to you.

Ask for forgiveness from one another and set some goals to improve in these areas.

If you don't know where to start, contact me or one of the other pastors to assist you, or please, as Pastor Bill mentioned last week, contact a marriage counselor to help you in your communication and healing to have the marriage God planned for you.

There is no shame in embracing the marriage God designed for you!

I also want to address those who are not married. These benefits hold true in the community of Christ as well.

We were never meant to do life alone. We are committed to helping you find a place to belong here at ARC.

This September, we will be taking six weeks to emphasize the core value of belonging to the community of Christ.

We will be offering opportunities for people to get connected with others, so that when they fall, someone is there to pick them, when cold and lonely, someone to comfort and when attacked, someone to stand beside them.

We need each other.

And specifically, we need some people who would be willing to host a small group during these weeks of community.

If you have any interest in being that type of person for someone else, would you please write small group leader on the back of your welcome card and I'll give you call.

You can be part of changing someone's life for eternity.

My friends, it is my hope and prayer that you will remember these marriage benefits from God's Word, and apply them in your lives for a lifetime of joy in your marriage!

May you mutually submit to one another as you provide support, encouragement and strength.

May your partner know that they are cherished as God's gift to you.

May you praise our loving Father who has given us an example of pure love through his Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Let us pray.