

“MAKING LOVE LAST A LIFETIME (#4):  
THE HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE MARRIAGES”

(Colossians 3:12-17; Ephesians 5:21-33)

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**[PROP NEEDED: Video interview with member married 50+ years]**

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 2-4-07]

--I--

1. Read Text: Colossians 3:12-17; Ephesians 5:21-33. Pray.
2. Over the last few weeks we've been sharing in a sermon series called Making Love Last A Lifetime in which we're exploring biblical perspectives about love, marriage, and sexuality to learn how they can help us improve our relationships, whether we're married or single.

A--Up to this point, I've just been sharing these in large part based out of my own experience of 17 years as a pastor and husband.

B--But as we move into today's topic of "*The Habits of Highly Effective Marriages*," I thought it would be beneficial to see and experience at least one living example of these principles being put into practice.

C--So I'd like to begin by inviting us to watch highlights of interviews I had with a couple in our church who've been married 60 years – watch and listen as they first introduce themselves and then respond to three basic questions...:

D--**[SHOW VIDEO** with Intro & responses to Questions 1, 2 & 4 (Q#3 shown next week):  
Intro--Introduce yourselves, briefly tell how you met, & how many years you've been married.  
1--In your opinion, what would you say is the secret to having a successful, long marriage?  
2--In general, how did you get through the difficulties you faced over the years?  
4--What advice would you give a couple seeking marriage or who are newly married about how to make marriage last a lifetime?]

3. Now, there are some great words of wisdom in what both Luther and Carolyn said, and I appreciate them being willing to share these, and for allowing me to build on their responses.

A--In fact, what you heard from *their* own experience about how to have an effective, successful marriage is exactly some of the same things we find the Bible teaching us in today's two scriptures, as well.

B--We find there the apostle Paul writing to Christians in the cities of Colossae and Ephesus to help them in their relationships with one another, both as singles and as married couples.<sup>1</sup>

C--And believe what we find in these passages are at least **FIVE HABITS OF EFFECTIVE MARRIAGES** & other relationships (*Four* of which I'll discuss today & *One more* next week).

D--To help us remember them, all of them start with the letter "C", and I believe our practice of these will help strengthen and grow *any* relationship, whether we're married or not!

--II--

4. The first “habit” that’s found in all effective marriage relationships is COMMITMENT.

A--In Verse 12 of the Colossians passage, one of the practices Paul says we’re to “*clothe*” ourselves with is “*patience*.”

1--The Greek word means “*forbearance, longsuffering, or persistence*.” <sup>2</sup>

2--In fact, the entire passage assumes that God’s desire for us is that we *persevere* in our relationships with one other another; to heal divisions & brokenness among us. <sup>3</sup>

B--Now especially in terms of marriage, that means we’re not to give up on our relationship at the first sign of trouble (or even at the second or third sign!)

1--Instead, it means being totally and completely committed to each other and to making the relationship work, even when the “going gets rough.”

2--It means *choosing* to love our mates even when we don’t *feel* like it – at times it can even mean DOING actions and behaviors of love UNTIL we feel them again. <sup>4</sup>

C--Remember from the interviews that...

1--...Luther and Carolyn talked about the “*bumps in the road*,” how “*NOT to expect everything to go smooth*,” and that a successful marriage “*it takes a lot of work*.”

2--But near of the end of the interview, Carolyn reminded us that no matter what the difficulty,... “*You CAN get through it if you have God to walk with you*” – implying that if you commit to sticking with it, your marriage CAN survive. <sup>5</sup>

D--You see, both the Rabuns and today’s scriptures teach us that effective marriages are effective, first of all, because the individuals who make them up are *absolutely committed* to the ultimate success of their relationship with one another.

5. Now, to have this kind of commitment, though, also requires a second habit that we touched on two Sundays ago: COMPASSION, (or...*Grace and Forgiveness*).

A--Colossians 3:12-13, “*As God’s chosen ones... clothe yourselves with compassion... Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive*.”

B--I mentioned two weeks ago that forgiveness is the oil that lubricates all successful relationships (married or otherwise), and that there are six words that no effective relationship can do without (esp. a marriage!): “*I am sorry*” and “*I forgive you*” (if you can’t say and receive these, your marriage/relationship probably won’t survive long!).

1--Remember in the interview Luther said that there’d be times “*when the troubles occur and you get huffy with each other*,” but he and Carolyn (in his words) “*made a point never to go to sleep without a goodnight kiss and a couple of hugs*.”

2--That’s good advice my wife and I have tried to follow, as well – we try to never go to sleep angry at each other; and although we’ve had some close calls, so far we’ve always managed to at least come to a *détente* before we went to sleep. <sup>6</sup>

C--Well, these are both examples of “compassion” (grace/forgiveness) working in a marriage.

6. A third habit of effective marriages is **COMMUNICATION** – finding and making time for and with each other to truly share and listen.

A--Colossians 3:16 says to “*teach and admonish one another in all wisdom...*” – in other words, *communicate* with one another! <sup>7</sup>

1--I believe that many relationships fail today because we haven't learned how to effectively *communicate* with one other about our true needs and desires, our joys and concerns, our interests, and even about our fears and frustrations.

B--As I've counseled with couples throughout my years as a pastor, I've discovered that most problems in the areas of sex, money, careers, children and other things are often merely *symptoms* of an inability of at least one spouse to effectively communicate.

1--Many times we just don't KNOW each other as spouses because we haven't really taken the time to truly *communicate* about what's going on in our lives – the same can be said about defective friendships or family relationships.

2--However, *effective* marriages and other relationships MAKE time for each other –time for mutual *sharing*, for mutual *listening*; time to simply *be together*, and to be *with each other* <sup>8</sup> – Communication is key to healthy relationships!

7. A fourth habit of an effective marriage is not so much a “habit” as it is an attitude: **COMPLEMENT** (with an ‘E’ – what the Rabuns called “*being respectful*” and having “*old-fashioned, common courtesy*,” especially through differences).

A--This in fact seems to be the whole point of ALL of today's Ephesians 5 reading. <sup>9</sup>

1--Now, I know that Ephesians 5:22 (“*the husband is the head of the wife*”) is often quoted to somehow “prove” that men are to be the “*head of the household*”(some of you here today have grown up being taught that perspective – that's okay).

2--But I want to suggest that if we truly read this verse *in context*, we'll find that the dominant theme of this passage is NOT control or “headship” *by either* spouse, but a *sacrificial LOVE* in which *both* of them are willing to give themselves up for the other because they know that they NEED each other--a *complementary* relationship. <sup>10</sup>

3--That's essentially what Ephesians 5:28-29 says: “*Love your [spouse] as you would your own body, nourishing (KJV cherishing) ... and caring for [them].*” <sup>11</sup>

B--You see, the controlling sentence of this whole Ephesians passage is NOT Verse 22, but Verse 21: “*Be subject [KJV submit] to one another out of reverence for Christ.*” <sup>12</sup>

1--It's NOT a warrant for one spouse to dominate or “lord over” the other (as some men want Verse 22 to say).

2--Instead, it's a call to remember the *complementary* purpose of marriage – that God *created* our differences as men and women so that we might NEED each other as PARTNERS (even though those differences often drive us nuts!).

3--One author explained it this way: “*Marriage is that relation between man and woman in which the independence is equal, the dependence mutual, and the obligation reciprocal.*” <sup>13</sup>

4--Friends, I don't know about your marriage, but in my wife and I's relationship that means that the only true “head of the house” is *Jesus Christ*.

C--And when married partners see it this way, I think we'll find that each of us is so busy meeting the needs of our spouse, and they ours, that our OWN needs are met by THEM – that's the beauty of seeing and understanding our mate (or if single, our opposite sex friend) as our *complement*.

–III--

8. So then, here are at least four habits that can help us have an effective marriage (or any other relationship, for that matter)– *Commitment, Compassion, Communication, and Complement*.

A--Now, next week I'm going to add a fifth habit to this list that the Rabuns confirmed as essential for the long-term success of any marriage: ...***Christian FAITH & a relationship with Jesus CHRIST through the CHURCH*** -- <sup>14</sup> come back next week for this.

B--But to end today, let me just remind us that having an effective, successful marriage isn't just something we pick up and learn from a book, or a seminar, or even from a series of sermons at church.

C--Instead, it's something that must be learned along the way and practiced daily.

D--And if we'll practice at least these first four habits (and the fifth that I'll talk about next week), then I believe that we'll be well on our way to making love last a lifetime.

9. [PRAY: “*Lord Jesus, we thank you that your holy Word gives us guidance and direction for all the relationships of our lives, whether we're married or single. We confess that very often we've ignored that guidance and have even at times twisted it to justify our own selfishness in our relationships. But today, Lord, we receive your forgiveness and grace to draw on your strength to help us practice the habits of effective, healthy relationships that we've learned today.*

*God, we know that having successful marriages and other close relationships is not easy, but we've also seen and experienced today how it's possible with your help. So for those today who're struggling with a marriage or some other relationship,... give them the courage to follow your guidance we've heard about today, and even to ask for help if necessary. And for those who have strong, healthy marriages/other relationships today, we give you thanks for the ways you've walked with them through the struggles we know they've faced to get them to this point. Thank you, God, that we can draw upon you for hope and strength that we might grow healthy relationships with one another. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.”]*

10. [HYMN: #549, “Where Charity and Love Prevail”]

### ENDNOTES:

1. In the Ephesians passage, Paul is explicitly addressing the relationship between husband and wife in particular. In the Colossians passage, his focus is more generally on how ALL Christians should treat each other. However, if people of faith are to treat each other *in general* in these ways he describes, then how much more should this advice apply to our relationship with our spouse, the person whom God has specifically entrusted to our care?
2. See Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries, Word #G3115 (*makrothumia*).
3. We can presume this from the many phrases in the Colossians 3 passage which emphasize restoration, healing and/or maintenance of relationships, such as: "*Bear with one another...*"; *forgive each other...*"; "*love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony...*"; "*you were called in the one body...*"
4. I mentioned several weeks ago that effective marriages have learned that true love is ultimately NOT a feeling, anyway, but a choice – it's something we choose to DO . And ironically, the "doing" often reignites the "feeling." John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, used to tell his ministers to "*preach faith until you have it; And then because you have it, you can preach it.*" Similarly, in marriage we are called on to "do" love until we feel it; if we LIVE a life love with our mates, then we will begin to EXPERIENCE that life with them.– feelings, after all, usually follow the actions.
5. At a former church, one of my member couples who had been married more than 50 years said it this way: "*It's not what happens, but what you do with what happens that counts the most*" (Chuck & Velma McNitt, Interviewed at Faith UMC, Cartersville in January 2005).
6. A biblical mandate for this can be found in Ephesians 4:26, "*Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.*" After all, it's been said that "*Marriage is the art of two incompatible people learning to live compatibly*" [James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988), p. 331.
7. Ephesians 4:15 is an even stronger and more explicit verse, which says that we are to "*speak the truth in love,*" thereby growing and maturing in our faith. Again, although this verse is meant to apply to how we relate to ALL people, how much more so should it be applied to our most intimate relationship (our spouse)?!
8. "*Listening intently with one's mouth shut is a basic communication skill needed in marriages*" (H.Norman Wright, "Communication: Key to Your Marriage," Marriage Partnership, Vol. 12, no. 2).
9. Even Verse 12 of today's Colossians passage talks about this attitude in terms of the "*kindness, humility, and meekness*" with which we're to "*clothe [ourselves]*" in our relations with one another.
10. As the noted Bible scholar Matthew Henry once wrote about Eve in the book of Genesis:  
*"Eve was made by God not out of [Adam's] HEAD to rule over Him,  
 Nor out of His FEET to be trampled upon by Him,  
 But out of His SIDE to be equal with Him,  
 Under His ARM to be protected, and near His HEART to be loved."*
11. In the KJV, "*Nourishing*" is translated "*Cherishing,*" and during a couple interview at a former church, that's the word they used to describe their marriage – that they'd learned to "*Cherish*" each other as friends and companions; and the husband even said that he'd "*rather be cherished than obeyed*" anyway! (Bill and Ruth Harvill, married 50+ years, Faith UMC, Cartersville, GA, interviewed in January 2005). The point here is for those of who are married, we should "*cherish*" our spouse as our *best friend*.

12. If anything, Paul in this verse is saying that the only real “head of the household” in any marriage should be Jesus Christ himself (we’ll talk about that next week).

13. Louis K. Anspacher, cited in Edythe Draper, Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992), Entry# 7641.

14. Colossians 3:17 says, “*Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus...*” As one author explains it, “*It's easier to serve your mate if you envision your loving Lord rather than your flawed spouse. Picture doing it for Jesus. The imposition then becomes an honor*” (Jim and Sally Conway, Christian Reader, Vol. 33, no. 6).