

**MONDAY 6/1/20**

**SERIES: FAMILY DONE GOD'S WAY**

**Speaker: Nat Crawford** (w/Arnie & Cara)

**Title: Family Done God's Way: Why Marriage?**

Christians are suffering. But it's not the kind of suffering you may be thinking of. Christians are suffering from a problem of confusion. I can hear you asking, "What are you talking about?" Well, I'm glad you asked. It's confusion around some of the most important topics in the Bible: marriage, sex, and parenting.

Marriage, sex, and parenting are some of the most confused topics in the world today. But Christians are just as confused. Listen to these statistics:

According to a 2017 study conducted by various survey groups, from the year 2000 to the year 2016, the marriage rate has remained constant at 52%. That doesn't sound alarming. But when looking at the data, there was a 7-8% drop in marriage rates between the ages of 25-39. The good news is that practicing Christians are higher, with a current rate of 59%. But without any details given, the percentage of divorce was 25%, and this was consistent with all surveyed.<sup>1</sup>

65% of Americans view cohabitation as beneficial. The problem is 41% of practicing Christians believe it's a good idea! That's a big problem.

44 percent of practicing Christians view same-sex marriage as positive, or they endorse it.<sup>2</sup> Of that 44% who support same-sex marriage, 24% are 18-29, 35% are between 30-49, and 27% are 50-64 years old.

The birthrate is also in decline across all Americans. The average is 2.1 births per woman today. Evangelicals are only at 2.3. This is a 6% drop in evangelicals' birthrate.

So to summarize, Christians have fewer children. They're still getting married, but nearly half believe cohabitation is beneficial. Nearly half believe in the redefinition of marriage. And our divorce rate is the same as the world's. So again, we are suffering from a problem of confusion. It's a confusion of marriage, sex, and parenting.

Over the next month, we're going to be in a new series called Family Done God's Way. Family matters to God, so it should matter to us as His children. God has been very clear about God's desire for the family, and we can find it in His Word.

And I think that's where a big part of the problem is: we are generally Biblically illiterate. According to our own Center for Bible Engagement, only 1/2 of professing Christians read their Bibles each day, and only 37% read it once a week. So it's no surprise we're confused. It's no surprise we suffer from a compromised Christian world-view.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.barna.com/research/trends-redefining-romance-today/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/christians/christian/views-about-same-sex-marriage/>

What's the solution? We need to go back to the Bible and see what God has said about family. So over the next month, we'll look at marriage, husbands, wives, sex, and parenting. And I'm pumped, because on Fridays, we'll have special guests to discuss their expertise in the areas of marriage and parenting.

So this week, I want to do a 30,000-foot view of marriage: Why it matters to God. What are the myths we believe about marriage and other topics? So let's begin by asking the question: why marriage? Why is marriage important to God? Why marriage?

The first reason is **to display God's image**.

I wonder if you've ever considered that. I thought as I grew up that people get married for tax benefits and a sense of security. But it's so much more than that. It's about displaying God's image.

Consider a few Bible passages:

Genesis 1:26-27 (ESV): Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

<sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.

God designed marriage to give a glimpse of the intimacy of the triune God. God has always existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There was never a time that God hasn't been in a relationship with Himself as the Trinity. Theologians call this Perichoresis or "the dance". It's a beautiful picture of God in perfect, perpetual, and unending intimate relationship.

Well, that intimate, unending relationship is to display God's image.

And God's image is displayed in the first marriage in Adam and Eve. Genesis 2:24-25 says,

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. <sup>25</sup> And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed."

Talk about life goals, right? To stand in front of my spouse and not feel awkward. But think about that: the man should leave his father and mother and create a new family unit and hold fast to his wife and become one flesh. Wow. So graphic and yet so beautiful. God is one essence, yet in a perfect, perpetual relationship with Himself in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So that intimacy is what a person experiences with their spouse. It is a glimpse into the intimate relationships of the Trinity. No, it's not sexual with the triune God, but it's a deeply intimate relationship. Nothing is held back and nothing to be ashamed of. That's the way marriage and a marriage bed is supposed to be. So God created marriage to display His image.

Just like God's unending dance or triune nature, so too the marriage is to be a covenant. Marriage isn't about prenuptial agreements or contracts. It's about a never-ending commitment and promise between one man and one woman and their heavenly Father in Heaven.

This is what Jesus said beginning in Mark 10:2:

“And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”<sup>3</sup> He answered them, “What did Moses command you?”<sup>4</sup> They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.”<sup>5</sup> And Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.<sup>6</sup> But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’<sup>7</sup> ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife,<sup>8</sup> and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh.<sup>9</sup> What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” (Vs. 2-9)

Jesus said, what God has joined together, let no one separate. In other words, this is a covenant, a promise. Now we know that this doesn't always happen, but it is supposed to, because this is a picture of God's image. And that's reason #1. We'll talk about reason #2 in just a moment.

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Why Marriage? We just went over reason #1: It is a covenant and a picture of God's Image. Reason #2 to answer the question “why marriage?” is **to complement each other.**

My wife and I are a lot alike, and let me tell you we are very different. We are both extroverts, which is great. But she's very relaxed. She's amiable and expressive. Me? I'm fast-paced, and I'm a driver or a type-A personality. Her love languages are one-on-one time and gifts. Mine are acts of service and words of affirmation. She desires love. I desire respect. She enjoys sitting on a beach for hours, napping, and tanning. I enjoy the beach, but I had better be swimming, running, and seeing. She desires an acreage. I desire a condo downtown. I could keep going, but you get the idea.

Those differences are the things that made her attractive to me and me to her, but if we're not careful, we could resent our differences. But God made people different and spouses different to complement each other. To fit together like a puzzle.

Genesis 2:18 says, “Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”

If you had it all, you wouldn't need a helper. Despite what you think, you really don't have it all. You aren't God's gift to mankind. But you are a gift to your spouse. You may be fast-paced, so she'll slow you down. And vice-versa. You may be logical, so she'll get you to feel. And vice-versa. You may be detail-oriented, and your spouse is a big picture person. You may enjoy home projects, he may enjoy naps on the couch. Or whatever. That's exactly what it's supposed to be like. You are supposed to complement one another.

There's a great story of a couple who served at a church. The wife couldn't remember names to save her life, but she loved people. She was an encourager and a hugger. Her husband was fine, not hugging, but he was a computer with details like names, hobbies, jobs, whatever. They'd tag-team a church foyer. She'd spot the person or couple, and he'd download the details before she went in for the hug. Both very different but essential to each other and serving the body of Christ.

So why marriage? To display God's image and to complement each other.

The third reason is **to grow followers of God.**

I don't know if you know what the first command in the Bible is. Do you know? It's found in Genesis 1:28, "And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it"

Okay, I don't mean to get weird, but let me just put this in modern terms. God's first command to Adam and Eve, that first married couple: Have sex. Have lots of sex and make babies. I mean, if people knew this about God and about Christianity, I think they might have a different opinion of God and our faith.

You see, marriage provides the right context for having children and leaving a godly legacy. There is a major problem today: broken homes. From 1960 to 2016, children living with both parents went from 88% down to 69%. In the same period, children only living with their mother went from 8 to 23%.

That negative impact on children is vast. One of the most damaging effects of broken homes is the children's view of God. In James Spiegel's book "The Making of An Atheist," he discovered a recurring element in the making of an atheist. That element was a fatherless home. In Paul

Vitz's book "Faith of the Fatherless", the majority of atheists had either no father at home or their dad was abusive. So for a great many people, how they were raised or *not* raised by their father impacts their view of God. So again, how we parent impacts how our kids will view God. So God established the family for the purpose of having children and creating a godly legacy. That is best experienced within an intact home.

Does that mean it's not possible in a broken home? It is possible. God's grace doesn't end at divorce. I am the child of a broken family, and there were unique challenges because of it. However, God's grace was sufficient and God worked through that situation!

Why marriage? It displays the image of God. It complements each other. It grows followers of God. And last, it's **to refine us**.

No one likes that reality. Out of all the premarital and marital counseling sessions I've done, when asked, "Why do you want to get married?" or "What is the purpose of marriage?" I always heard, "Because we love each other" or "Because they make me happy, and I want that to last." It's at that moment, I bring the mood down and say, "I hate to break it to you, but you won't remain happy, and your love will change." It's usually at that point, they get a really uncomfortable look in their face. And then I drop the truth bomb on them: "Marriage is not meant to make you happy. It's to make you holy."

Marriage is a powerful and, at times, a horrible tool that God uses, to let you see how broken, selfish, and in desperate need of God's grace you are. In marriage, it's not about you. It's all about God and your spouse. You'll never hear that in People magazine, or any other pop culture material out there, but it's the truth.

By God's grace, I'm not the person I was when I began in my marriage. By God's grace and my wife's patience and forgiveness, I'm a different man. Tiffany isn't the same either. And I thought she was perfect before. But now she's better than ever. That's because marriage has refined us.

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N: All right. Let me go to Cara and Arnie now and ask, how would you have answered the question, “Why marriage?”, before you became a follower of Christ? Cara, why don't we start with you?

C: I would say before I was a Christ follower, I didn't really believe in marriage, or even really think about it. I would go into relationships and, you know, I wasn't ever willy-nilly about them. I took them seriously. But I never thought about marriage; it just seemed complicated and just never thought much about it.

N: So why do you think people got married though? I mean, you may not have been that interested in it, but surely you must've had an opinion why people were getting married.

C: Well, you know, I saw my parents married, and I saw that they got married because my mom got pregnant, and it didn't look like that much fun to me. I would say when I met Dan, I wanted to marry him because to me it showed a commitment to him. And I wasn't a Christ follower then. He would talk about Jesus on occasion. I would say that marriage actually made me think more about Christianity.

N: Hmm. Interesting. Well, we'll come back to that in a minute. Arnie, what about you? I mean, how would you have answered the question, “Why marriage?” before becoming a follower of Christ?

A: I'd be like, Cara. I would say nothing lasts forever; why bother? I mean, I really didn't see the importance of it.

N: And I think you're seeing that across the board, as you look at the statistics of marriage, which we talked about earlier. So let me look at it from the other side. Cara, how has your marriage changed, since you have become a Christian?

C: Well, I'm not the same person. I'm me, but I would say that marriage, in coming to know the Lord, has made me a better version of myself. I've made my relationship with Jesus first, and that exposed a lot of my selfishness. So I once heard this saying, that you have to divorce yourself, before you can get married. And now I see what they were talking about.

N: Yeah. Marriage is not for wimps, that's for sure. Arnie, what about you? How have you seen God's hand, in how your other half complements you?

A: You know, I was somewhere as a new believer, and my wife Shar was with me, and, Oh, I know what it was. I was working in the Middle East for YWAM, Youth With A Mission. I was teaching missionaries how to be business people in closed countries. And anyway, these people came up to me and said, “Wow, I've met your wife and she totally legitimizes you.” So I guess I was kind of a crusty, old new believer, and my wife just gave me credibility. And it's never stopped since.

N: Wow. Okay. How about this for you guys? What have you learned about yourself and about God through marriage?

C: Well, again, it goes back to selfishness for sure. And also just how much I need God, in order to be married. Because if I make my life about God, and my husband makes his life about

Jesus as well, we have that common ground. You know, as you study Jesus, you get to be more Christ-like and it's almost like a pyramid. You just keep moving towards each other, instead of far apart, because Jesus is that magnet in the middle.

A: Well, and you know, it's a challenge to me, when you think of marriage, that I'm supposed to love my wife, like Jesus loved the church. And that's a tremendous challenge, especially when you get a little irritated or you know, sometimes those things can happen, and it's like, Whoa, stop. I'm supposed to love her just like Christ loved the church. And that's a tremendous challenge. And when I think how Christ loves me and what a tremendous loser I've been, it's like the least I can do is love my wife, like Christ loved the church.

N: That's a very high standard for us to try to follow, but it's the right way to do it, to sacrifice ourselves daily for the sake of our spouse. That's exactly what Christ has done for us, His body.