

TUESDAY 6/2/20

SERIES: FAMILY DONE GOD'S WAY

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

Title: Family Done God's Way: Dangers of Marriage

Yesterday we began to talk about the topic of marriage. We came to realize that marriage matters to God. But we also recognized that we have a lot of confusion about marriage, sex, and parenting, a lot of confusion about the topic of family. The reality is marriage, and its importance, is decreasing. More people are cohabitating than before, and fewer people are getting married.

The problem is that Christians aren't bucking the trends. They're not at the same levels as non-believers, but they are still gravitating farther away from a Christian view of marriage. That's why yesterday, we tackled the topic of "Why marriage?" We covered that topic and suffice it to say, there were surprising reasons, like it displays God's image, and it's there to refine us. One of the biggest disappointments couples need to hear, is that marriage isn't there to make you happy. It's there to make you holy. And because of that very reason, marriage comes with some major dangers. There are pitfalls of marriage. And if you're not wise, you can fall into these pitfalls and seriously injure yourself, your spouse, your family, and your marriage. So let's look at these dangers to marriage.

The first danger is selfishness. Selfishness is a killer of marriage. You see, marriage is not about you. Marriage is not meant to make you happy, or to make all your dreams come true. It's not meant for you to meet your soulmate. It's not about finding someone to become your servant or flatter you.

Marriage is about refining you. It's about sanctification. What's that? Sanctification is the process of making you more and more like Christ. This goes against what we're told from the culture. This is against our natural tendency. We're told by the media, by You Tube, by TV shows, by mainstream magazines, that if you're not getting your needs met, ditch the loser. If your spouse doesn't fulfill you or make you happy, find the one that does. It's completely selfish and totally ungodly.

But in some ways, we unintentionally set ourselves up for failure. Here's what I mean.

I remember when my wife and I were dating, I wanted to really impress her. So what did I do? I knew she liked the arts. We actually both love musicals and theater. So I called her up and said, "Babe, I'm going to take you out."

"Yeah?" She said.

"Oh yeah. We're going to get dressed up."

"Keep going, she said."

“We’re going to go out to a nice dinner.”

“I’m liking this.” She said.

“And then we’re going to a show. I got us tickets.”

“Ooh...let me guess. Phantom of the Opera?”

“Nope”

“Les Mis?”

“Nope”

“Cats?”

“No”

“Well, what is it?”

“W...W...E”

And what did she say? “Oh wow...”

And guess what, she went. She was on national TV, holding up signs and having a good time...or so I thought. She actually hated it. But she went through with it. Why? Because she was infatuated with me. She was happy to go. Heck, I went to the ballet and pretended I liked it.

And you see, that’s what you do when you’re dating. You think of the other person. You do things you never would do, but you’re in love, so you kind of turn off selfish mode. And then you get married!

I can’t tell you how many times I heard in counseling sessions: “She tricked me! She’s not the girl I dated!” Well, the spouse may be right, but you were actually avoiding the danger zone, by thinking of the other person. Unfortunately, we default to our sinful nature and begin to think of ourselves. That’s the first danger to marriage: selfishness.

There are more dangers to marriage:

The second danger to marriage is culture. I touched on this briefly earlier, but I’ll talk more about it. Relationships, according to our culture, are performance-based relationships. They’re not grace-based. They’re not mercy-driven. They’re not based on unconditional love and respect. No, it’s all about keeping score. It’s all about doing, so you can receive.

In preparing for this message, I just put into Google, “What to do if you’re unhappy in marriage.” Here are some of the top suggestions:

Here’s one person's advice: “Not all marriages are meant to be forever, and that’s okay.”

Another article began with, “If you’re in a bad marriage, don’t try to mend it; end it.”

You find articles on when it’s time to cheat on your spouse and so on. I found all sorts of crazy advice. If I could consolidate all of it, it would say, “Get even and then get out.”

This is completely against the Word of God. 1 Corinthians 13:4 says, “[Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful.](#)” (Vs. 4-5, ESV)

Love doesn't resent; in other words, it forgives often and freely, just like God forgives us.

But again, the culture says, forget that. If you get hurt, give hurt. If you feel pain, give pain. If you're unhappy, they should be too.

A performance-based relationship is ungodly and unlivable. That's why culture is the second danger to marriage.

The third danger to marriage is your past.

Now here's what I mean, because you are maybe thinking: "Hey wait. I've lived a good life. Sure not perfect, but it's not like I have a negative past." To that, I say, "Awesome." What I'm talking about here is your spoken and unspoken expectations that come from your childhood, upbringing, and your life up to the point of marriage. Things that you bring to your marriage are values, religion or denomination, finances, family dynamics, holidays, former relationships, finances, and experiences. All of these and more make up your past.

Consider this: My wife and I came from two different backgrounds. I come from a divorced family. My wife comes from an intact family. I was an only child. My wife has siblings. My family thrived on conflict and confrontation. My wife's family avoids conflict. Holidays for my family meant high conflict and quick exits. My wife's family finds value in spending a lot of time together. You can see the issues. We both have very different families who value different things. But how do you sort out what's going to be the values, family dynamics, holidays, etc. of your own family? Don't fool yourself and think this won't be an issue.

I remember doing pre-marital counseling for a couple who had very different financial backgrounds. One person came from a family of savers, who were very conservative in their spending and lifestyle. The other came from spenders, who lived on credit. You can see the fights that would come.

So, we all bring past into our relationships that need to be discussed, worked through, and compromised on for your future. So, we've covered 3 dangers to our marriages: 1) Selfishness, 2) the culture we live in, and 3) the past. I'll be back with one more important consideration in just a moment.

So, selfishness, the culture we live in, and your past. These are 3 possible dangerous landmines for your marriage. There's one more; **the fourth danger to your marriage is The Future!**

There is so much that lies ahead for couples. But have they begun to think about roles that can and will be fulfilled in the marriage? Do both spouses plan to be career-oriented, or does one intend to stay at home with the children? That doesn't sound like a big deal, but what do you do when a spouse really wants to be a stay at home mom, when she's built up a career, and now feels stuck because she can't stay home? This happens often.

How about the topic of children? I was amazed in counseling how many couples never talked about having kids, until they were a couple of years into the marriage, when one spouse declares, "I never really wanted to have kids." And others feel deceived or at least very hurt. Or instead of no kids, one spouse wants 1 kid, and the other wants 5.

Or what about maintaining the home? Does one spouse expect the other to cook and clean exclusively, or does it seem appropriate to split the duties, based on differing factors? This is a big one.

What about love languages? In Dr. Gary Chapman's book "The Five Love Languages," he identifies 5 primary ways that individuals can prefer to receive and give love.

The 5 love languages are: gifts (giving gifts of various kinds), acts of service (such as cooking a meal, or fixing a car, or sweeping the floors), quality time (such as focused time with your spouse – no other people and no other distractions), words of affirmation (such as a note or a voiced observation and appreciation), and last is physical touch (hugging, cuddling and things like that). The kicker of these love languages, is that often how you prefer to receive love, is often different than how your spouse desires to receive it.

I remember early in my marriage, I would cook and clean the house. I'd iron clothes, but my wife would come up and give me a kiss and hug me. I thought that's weird. Why doesn't she just sweep and vacuum? That would mean a lot. She would suggest we go out on a date, but I'd invite friends over to our house. And she'd say, "What's your problem. I want to just be with you!" And my argument is, "You will be with me...and with 10 more people." You can see the problem. We were both emptying our love tanks, and not getting them refilled. This was a major hazard to our marriage, until we realized each other's love languages and began to speak them.

Other areas that involve our future and/or desires are sex and planning for the future.

So that's four dangers, and one last one I want to point out, is **handling problems**.

I can't tell you how many premarital counseling sessions I did, when I'd ask the couples, "Is there anything that would cause you to dislike your future spouse?" They'd look into each other's eyes and go into that weird place where they were floating in space. And they'd always say, "No." They were wearing rose-colored glasses. They didn't believe in the worse, the poorer, or the sickness in the wedding vows. To them, all it would be is better, richer, and good health.

So many couples ignore the warnings that there are dangers in marriage, that they do need to anticipate the trials of life. James 1 says, "[when you experience trials of many kinds.](#)" Not *if*, but *when*. This applies to every area of life.

But here's the truth. Challenges and trials do not mean your marriage is broken. It means real life is happening, and you two as a couple need to rely on God to get you through it. You see, your response to the trials and difficulties will either drive you apart or make you an unbreakable team.

Remember, 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.'](#)" God did not intend for you to do life alone if you're married. He gave you a helper to get through it together.

But the real ticket to overcoming the hurdles, is to do it not just as a twosome, but as a holy threesome. Ecclesiastes 4:12 says, "[And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him-and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.](#)"

I can't tell you how many couples have faced adversity and trials alone – that is, as an individual. And they struggle. I've seen couples who faced opposition, by means of health battles, financial crisis, or something else, but they did it apart from Christ, and the relationship failed.

Marriage is a partnership between husband and wife, and the maker and sustainer of marriage: God.

Will it be easy? Hardly. Will there be dangers? Commonly. But is it worth it? Absolutely. Is it possible? Only with God.

N: Let me turn now to my discussion partners, Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney. Arnie, you and your wife Shar have been through a lot of challenges, I would say really tough challenges. How did those challenges affect your marriage?

A: I can say without fail, all of the challenges that we have been through have drawn us closer together, and made us really in step, not only with each other, but with the Lord. I'm going to say this word - I know it's not a word, but it's my favorite word - "irregardless" of what other people told us, or the advice we got. You know, there's a lot of people that really want to help and give you advice when you're going through these things, but staying focused on each other, and staying focused on the Lord really brought us through everything, so that we're quite strong and best of friends.

N: I want to ask you a follow up question, because a lot of people would say, "Yeah, I know, in order to keep this marriage going through the hard times, I need to stay focused on God." How did you do that? What does that look like practically for you?

A: You know, I'm a big observer, and early on going into ministry, I noticed that a lot of guys weren't very happily married, that were in leadership positions in ministry. And it's almost like they gave up their marriage for their ministry, which was just kind of crazy, bizarre. And I just thought, I'm not going to be that person. You know, I don't want to, when I get old - like I am now - ready to someday retire, to have my wife absolutely despise me, because I was gone 90% of the time. So God's just totally blessed us. But I've had a lot of heads up experiences by watching other guys.

N: Yep. And I think that's a great piece of advice, so we can learn from other people's mistakes and even their victories. Cara, I'd like to hear from you. I'd like to hear your take on the idea that our culture is a danger to marriage. How do you see this happening today?

C: Well in all the ways that you had previously mentioned Nat. You know, our current model, if your spouse isn't satisfactory, you know this world encourages you to trade them in on a new model. You know, you've got movies and books that give you an idea that you're going to live happily ever after, but it never really tells you what happens if Mr. Darcy falls off his horse, and has to eat pancakes through a straw for eight weeks, or you know, he doesn't want kids, or keeps peeing on the toilet seat, after you've asked him over and over again to put the seat up. So, [Unheard of] yep, I would say that that's probably the biggest problem is, it never really tells you that there's problems, and that you have to work through them together.

N: Right. Okay. Well how about this though? How are you guarding your family, your marriage, against the influence of the culture? Because I mean, I once read from Josh McDowell that you know, your family is one click away from an alternative worldview, or a thought, or philosophy. And so the point is, we are inundated with influence from the culture. How are you

protecting your family and your marriage from that influence?

C: Well, I protect my family by hanging out with my family. I hang out with my kids; I talk to them. I hang out with my husband; I make time to talk to him. And so you never have to get to know someone again, if you're constantly hanging out with them, you're laughing, you have inside jokes. So that's how I protect myself from the culture, and my family. When we're together, I mean we text each other goofy pictures. Yesterday, when my husband and my son were at the dentist, we started a whole text string. I mean we just, we like each other.

N: I think that's really good advice, that when you are committed to your family, you will invest your time and your attention with them, even when they are around quite a bit. And by doing so, you will be guarding against the cultural influences. One last question. You know, I think we may have talked about this a little bit, but you know the trials of life, we're going to experience them. They're going to happen. There are plenty of dangers to marriage, but do those trials that we experience strengthen or weaken a marriage, and how do we leverage those to strengthen our marriage instead?

C: Always strengthen. If you're in Jesus and you're following Jesus, always trials strengthen a marriage, because trials expose your holes, and then you get the absolute privilege of fixing them together.

N: Arnie, what about you?

A: It depends on the trials. I mean, I don't want to oversimplify it, because there are some trials that are just devastating to a marriage. And people do stupid things, and forgiveness is such a big thing, and focus on Jesus. But what happens, you know, when you mess up big time? And it's just, it's so complicated. My take would be, if you can focus on Jesus and how Jesus has treated you, if you can return that to the person you love, regardless of what they've done, you will get through it pretty strong.

N: Yeah, I think that the trials, they should strengthen us, but the reality is that they can weaken and even break a marriage. The key is to keep Christ first, and I think you alluded to it as well. There are self-inflicted trials that can tend to weaken a marriage, more than the external trials that come, but regardless, whether it's an internal or an external trial, we need to keep our commitment to Christ and when we do so, the trials can be leveraged to strengthen our marriages.