

**THURSDAY 6/04/20**

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

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

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

We in America love the silver bullet, or the miracle pill, or the one-step solution to fill-in-the-blank problem we face. I mean, who wouldn't want the fastest way to lose weight, or regrow hair, or get a million dollars in your bank account. I'd take any and all of those, but the reality is there's just not a secret formula to quick health, wealth, and a full head of hair.

There's another area we want quick solutions, and that's in the area of marriage. I served as a pastor for 5 years at a church in Lincoln. I did plenty of marital counseling that was very discouraging. Many sessions began with, "Tell me why you're here." That question was like opening a flood gate. Each spouse would create a list of problems and issues with their spouse. Then I'd ask the question, "How long have these things been issues?" Each time I could have written the script, because the response was always "Years."

What took years to create, they hope or desire days, or even one session, would fix. The reality is there is no one-step solution to having a good marriage. It takes a lot of time and a lot of work. No two ways about it. You see, no one coasts to a good marriage.

Les and Leslie Parrott wrote a book called "Saving Your Marriage Before it Starts."

Unfortunately, my wife and I read it *after* we got married. But the lessons inside were still valuable. What I'd like to do today is not offer a secret formula, or one-step solution, to have the marriage of your dreams. But what I want to talk about is how to do marriage God's way. I've found that there are some key ingredients to having a godly marriage. So let's begin to look at **How to do marriage God's way:**

**First, to do marriage God's way, you have to begin by having God as the center of your marriage and your life.**

Jesus affirmed that your children are not to be God. Your spouse is not God. God is God. Listen to his exchange with the Pharisees in Matthew 22:34-40 (ESV), "*But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. <sup>35</sup> And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. <sup>36</sup> "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" <sup>37</sup> And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. <sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment. <sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."*

That's the deal. As Christians, we are to have no other gods before the one true God. Whether we like it or not, we begin to dethrone God and put other things in His place: jobs, money, cars, status, our kids...and yes, our spouse.

All of those things I just mentioned are gifts from God. But we are not supposed to worship the gift, but the giver. So are our families supposed to be priorities? Absolutely! Are they our number one priority? No, God is. And from our love for God flows our love and care for our kids and our spouse.

Now, a good question at this point is, what if my spouse isn't a believer? What am I to do then?

There are three things I'd encourage you to do:

First, *don't focus on your spouse's unbelief*. Here's what I mean: Is Hell a reality? Yes. Will those who are not found in Christ go there? Without a doubt. If I love my spouse, won't I evangelize them? I'd sure hope so. But, you can't do the saving.

Your job as a spouse is to scatter seed and water wherever you go – even in the home. Listen to what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:6-7, *“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. <sup>7</sup> So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.”*

You can't save anyone. So what you can do is love them. Approach each day and each moment with Gospel intentionality. But to obsess or focus on their disbelief can drive a wedge between you and them.

Former atheist Lee Strobel experienced this. His wife, Leslie, became a believer, and he was set to prove Christianity false. Here's what he said about Leslie's approach: “Leslie recognized that when she tried to “fix” me by stressing my shortcomings, she found that this actually reinforced my bitterness. She saw that it would be healthier for our marriage if she would emphasize all the things she loved about me. The more she accentuated my positive attributes, the more motivated I was to live up to her praises.”<sup>1</sup>

So don't focus on their unbelief.

Second, *live out the reality of your faith*. James wrote, *“Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; <sup>20</sup> for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. <sup>21</sup> Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. <sup>22</sup> But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”* Jesus said, go and make disciples who obey what I taught.

When we live out our Christian values – the teaching of God's Word - we become a light in a dark world. We are like salt that adds flavor to a disappointing world. We become like a telescope that lets people see our Savior up close. So we need to live out the reality of our faith.

And last, *pray for them daily*. Ephesians 6:12 says that our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces. So we need to be on our hands and knees praying for the lost—including our spouses. I love what author and pastor Kevin Harney says about prayer. He says,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/mismatched-marriage-when-one-spouse-is-an-unbeliever/>

“When God’s people pray, heaven shakes, strongholds are broken, and power is unleashed.” You see, without prayer and the work of the Spirit, our efforts are powerless.

So, to do marriage God’s way, we need to have God where He belongs: at the center.

**The second ingredient to do marriage God’s way is to commit.**

Marriage isn’t a negotiated contract. It’s not a pinky swear. No way. It’s a covenant, a promise between you, your spouse, and God.

Listen to what Malachi 2:13-16 says. This will no doubt be controversial, but God’s Word always has been. Malachi 2 says, *“You cover the LORD’s altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. <sup>14</sup> But you say, “Why does he not?” Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. <sup>15</sup> Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. <sup>16</sup> “For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.”*

God hates divorce. Yes, humanly speaking, there are times where divorce is permissible, but it’s the last resort. And that’s not how people approach marriage today. Even in Christian circles. It’s good to give it a try, people say, treat it like your purchase from Walmart. Take it back. No receipt required.

So, our vows are to be taken seriously. Yes, marriage will be tough, but your problems are never bigger than God. The question is, will you allow Him to take first place and begin to change you, so he can heal you and heal your marriage. To have a godly marriage, we need to hold fast to that commitment! Now, there’s more Biblical insight to share with you on marriage done God’s way ... and I’ll get to that right after this ...

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**To do marriage God’s way, you have to begin by having God as the center of your marriage and your life. The second ingredient to do marriage God’s way is to commit.**

**The third ingredient for marriage done God’s way is to leave.** Genesis 2:24 (ESV) says, *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”*

When a man and women marry, they are to leave their parents and become one. Dr. Henry Cloud, in his book *Boundaries*, shares this: “The Hebrew word for “leave” comes from a root word that means to “loosen” or to relinquish or forsake. For marriage to work, the spouse needs

to loosen her ties with her family of origin and forge new ones with the new family she is creating through marriage.

This does not mean that husbands and wives shouldn't have a relationship with their extended families. But they do need to set clear boundaries with their families of origin. Many marriages fail because one partner fails to set clear boundaries with family, and the spouse and children get leftovers."<sup>2</sup>

This is by no doubt an easy task, but for the sake of establishing a marriage done God's way, you have to leave. But that also means you need to cling to your spouse.

**And that's the fourth ingredient for having a marriage done God's way. You need to cling to your new spouse.**

You see, when you leave something or forsake something, you're letting go of one thing and clinging to something else. In marriage, you are leaving your parents as first importance for relationships, and you're clinging to your spouse. They've now taken first place in earthly relationships. It's not your parents. It's not your golf league. It's not your muscle car. It's not your Netflix or YouTube. It's not even your kids. In marriage, after God, you cling to your spouse. They are your priority.

Remember, Adam was alone in the garden, so God made Adam a helper. Just like salvation, God saw a need. He provided the need for Adam. But Adam had to receive Eve. Just like we are offered the free gift of salvation, God offers us a great gift in a spouse. Will we receive them? And will we cling to them?

But a key piece of this is knowing that we don't receive and cling to our spouse, based on their looks, their behavior, or their performance. We cling to them because they are a gift from God.

So we leave and cling to our spouses for a godly marriage.

**The fifth ingredient to marriage done God's way is to have you connect with your spouse.** You need to be intimate with your spouse. Remember that marriage exists to display God's image. God is one and triune. God has always existed in a perfect perpetual relationship within the Godhead.

So intimacy and connection are vital to a marriage. Yes, intimacy involves sex and that physical oneness, but it's so much more. It's vulnerability. It's caring to the point of being hurt. God cares and loves His creation, and yet He was hurt by his creation. And it cost Him the death of His son Jesus Christ to restore that relationship. That's painful vulnerability.

So if you want a godly marriage, you need to listen, care, provide, and be there for your spouse, before any other human relationships - which means sacrificing your own desires sometimes - which brings us to our last ingredient for a marriage done God's way.

**The last ingredient to do marriage God's way is to defer to each other.** Ephesians 5:21 says, "*submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.*" You see, godly marriages require

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<sup>2</sup> 131.

mutual submission or deference. It's being selfless and thinking of your spouse and their needs more than your own. 1 Corinthians 13 says, *love does not insist on its own way*.

It's giving without the expectation of getting. It's forgiving without the desire for recompense.

You see, if you approach marriage from the expectation of giving and getting, you'll enter what Dr. Emerson Eggerichs calls the crazy cycle. As a husband, you withhold love because you don't feel respected. As a wife, you withhold respect because you don't feel loved. That's the crazy cycle, because there's only one way off: giving away freely what you feel should be earned.

That's grace, and that's what flows from a marriage full of deferment.

We've covered a lot of ground today. For that matter, we've covered a lot of ground in four days. Marriage done God's way isn't easy. There's no silver bullet or quick solution for years of hurt, but if you commit to adding these ingredients to your marriage, by God's grace, you'll begin to experience that marriage you desired, and God prescribed.

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N: Now let's spend some time with Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney on today's subject. Cara, describe what it means to you to have God at the center of your marriage.

C: All the things Nat. I think before I react to things, most of the time. And if I do react, God reminds me I need to apologize. I forgive, I serve my spouse, I try to see what my part is in things. And truly Jesus is slowly pruning branches in me. He's trimming away a lot of selfishness that was there.

N: Yeah, I think one of the hardest parts, probably the least fun part about marriage for me is the apologizing. It can take a lot for me to recognize what I've done, and why I've overstepped and hurt my spouse. That's probably one of the hardest parts of marriage for me. I don't know what your thoughts are on that or what's the hardest part of marriage for you?

C: I would say, yeah, it takes me probably two days to reconcile and apologize. Sometimes, maybe not that long. I find that if I go down, and like work with my horses, or find a quiet space, and if I'm still agitated by something, then it's something that needs to be addressed, right.

N: Well, Arnie, I know you're close to your children and your grandchildren. How do you balance being close, yet not stepping too far into your children's marriages and relationships?

A: That's a great question Nat. You'll learn, and you'll learn Cara, when you become grandparents, best thing to do is to keep your mouth shut, because advice is not going to be well received, if it's not specifically asked for. So, you know, with kids, they discipline differently

than Shar and I would. But the best thing to do is just not say anything, and lead by example, you know, without interfering, and don't say anything unless you're asked. And it seems to work pretty good. Now as a granddad, I have a tremendous advantage, because nobody expects me to be the disciplinarian. And so with my grandkids, I can be their best friend, you know, 90% of the time. And it works just tremendously. It's so much easier being a grandparent than a parent.

N: Yeah. And that's what I've heard so often. You know, you get to enjoy the best parts of the grandkids, but without the constant demand, the overnights, and obviously the discipline. So though I'm in no hurry, I'm sure Cara is in no hurry as well to get there, I'm sure it'll be a great season of life. Cara, what would you say to a listener today who has an unbelieving spouse, and what should they focus on, and how should they act?

C: Well, I would say be yourself. My husband was never an unbeliever, but he, I would say he was not walking with the Lord when we met. But I tell you what, when I started coming to know Jesus, invited Him into my life, Dan noticed a very positive change in me. And as I was discovering who Jesus was, I was becoming this better version of myself, and so I would say just keep moving towards Jesus and they're going to want that light in their life. Dan then rededicated his life to Jesus, and we're walking with the Lord together and it's awesome. Now, if your spouse is an atheist, I think that's a really hard situation, because you're in love with Jesus, so you're essentially in love with someone else, and it's someone that they don't approve of, but you know, Lee Strobel became a Christian out of his experience. He was an atheist and he married a woman who became a believer. So just keep praying. Just stay true to the Lord. Prayer is the best thing in that situation, I would say.