

MARRIAGE

This morning/evening we are going to look at
some of your major complaints with your marriage.

I should begin by saying that many of you are very happy with your marriage.
You responded to the question “What’s your biggest complaint with your
marriage?” with comments like:

Absolutely nothing,
None, my marriage is the best thing in my life,
My wife and I are in such a good place with God
as the head of our marriage.

But there were many more of you who expressed some real
frustration and pain in your relationship with your wife.

This is a tough topic
because when I talk about marriage there is so much to say
and it’s hard to know what to leave out.

But rather than try to be comprehensive,
I’ll focus my remarks on the struggles that you mentioned most often.
So, what I share with you today may be a bit disjointed,
but hopefully something we address will hit home for you.
And then we’re going to do something a little strange.

If you’re not married,
a good bit of the talk this morning will apply to relationships
other than marriage.
So, I hope it will be beneficial for you also.

It’s not surprising that marriage is difficult.
When you get married,
you marry someone who is different than you.
I mean really different than you.

Unless, of course, you’re Jerry Seinfeld.
Clip

Our culture tries to tell us that boys and girls, men and women,
are really the same.

We act differently only because we have been raised differently.

But the male brain and the female brain have real biological differences.

Not surprisingly the part of the brain that process sexual thoughts
is much larger in men than in women.

What part of the brain is more developed in women?

Again, no surprise:

the parts that are dedicated to communication
and to storing emotional memories.

There are other differences,

but these explain some of the frustrations you wrote about.

There are going to be challenges in just about all marriages.

We are

different genders,

different people and

we have different brains.

We can get very frustrated by the fact

that we didn't marry ourselves.

Or, we can determine that we will make the most of our differences.

Listen, marriage is one of God's best vehicles for sanctification.

Sanctification means becoming more like Jesus.

Loving someone who is different than you.

Learning to be patient and kind and forgiving.

Learning to humble yourself

and put another person's needs ahead of your own.

Persevering when your best efforts seem to

be ineffective and unappreciated.

Marriage gives us opportunity after opportunity to do these things –

these very difficult and very necessary things

if we are going to become more like Jesus.

Loving a real, fallible and flawed person
 who is different than you –
 that ain't easy, brother.
 But that's what makes us more like Jesus.

So, let's get down to some of your complaints.

A big one was this.

1. I don't feel like my wife respects me.

You wrote things like:

I'm always wrong, even when I'm right.
 My wife doesn't appreciate my contributions to the family.
 Being criticized when it isn't warranted.
 I'm not respected and
 my wife turns into my "mother" at times.

So, here's the problem with this frustration and today's talk.
 Your wife isn't here.
 I can't tell her what you need
 or how she might change to make your relationship better.

You're here and I get to talk to you.
 So, one, I can empathize with you.
 This complaint was expressed by many of you.
 So, it's real.
 And women need to understand how huge feeling respected is to men.

But since your wife isn't here,
 I need to talk with you about how you can change.
 I do think this might be a good lecture to share with your wife.
 I think it would help her understand you and help your marriage.

But it's just us guys
 and it's not going to be helpful for me to agree with you
 that you're doing everything right and you're wife is a difficult shrew.

That's what bartenders are for,
not pastors.
But, I promise,
I'll be gentle with you.

One of the big differences with men and women
comes down to our primary needs and our primary fears.

We all need many of the same things,
men and women.

But there is a difference in how men and women feel good about themselves
and in how we define ourselves.
This is a bit stereotypical,
but there's a lot of research that backs this up.

Women tend to define themselves by their relationships.
Men tend to define themselves by their accomplishments.

Women feel best about themselves when they feel connected to others.
Men feel best about themselves when they solve problems and succeed.

A woman's primary fear is being alone –
not just physically, but emotionally and relationally.
A man's primary fear is being a failure,
and therefore not worthy of respect.

Look what the Bible tells us.

Ephesians 5.25: Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church
and gave himself up for her ...

Why? Because women need to be connected to their husbands.
They need to feel an emotional bond
that provides them with security and comfort.
A Woman needs to feel that the man she loves
understands her feelings and her concerns
and that she matters to him.

And Paul tells wives:

Ephesians 5.22: Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord ...

We could talk about what submit does and doesn't mean.

But here's the point: men need to feel respected and admired.

Men want to be thought of as capable and competent.

And Paul says, wives, when you follow your husband's lead,

and you make him feel like you trust him –

you'll meet one of his primary needs

and it will be easier for him to love you as

you deserve and desire.

But when you criticize him,

when you always have a different or better idea,

when you don't appreciate his efforts because

they are somewhat lacking or not exactly what you need,

you are going to crush his spirit

and take away his motivation to try to please you in the future.

So, what do should men do,

when they don't feel respected?

A. Realize you may be hypersensitive about being respected.

Last week we saw that many of us have a problem with pride,

and very often our negative reactions

to our wives' remarks about how we could do something better or

to her having different ideas than we do about how something should be done

very often our negative response

is about our pride and our male need to be right and respected.

The honest truth is we get offended when we don't need to.

We often become triggered because of our egos

more than because of our wives' remarks.

When we feel disrespected,
we need to ask ourselves if our wives are genuinely disrespecting us
or if our ego is overly sensitive.
And if it's the latter,
we need to crucify our pride
and decide that our marriage is more important than our ego.

I know some of you have wives who do disrespect you.
In my office, I have heard women attack their husband's manhood
in ways that made me cringe.
And if that's really going on in your marriage,
that's different than what I'm talking about.

But the place to begin is with the question:
Is she really disrespecting me
or is my ego getting triggered when it doesn't need to be?

B. Realize that your wife has spent a good part of her life mothering.

Most of our wives have been mothers.
It was or still is her job to direct others and tell them what to do.
We love it when she's mothering our children.
We hate it when she's mothering us.
But it's hard for everyone to switch roles.
You come home from work,
and you're likely to have a tendency to think things should be that way at home.

You don't need a lot of drama.
You don't need a lot of discussion about personal problems.
You need to create a plan,
keep the conversation limited to the issue before the group, and
then execute the plan.

But that's not the purpose of a family or a marriage.
It's, to a large degree, to
share life together and
create a safe and loving place where people
flourish and have their emotional needs met.

And it's hard for many men to move from a work role to a family role
when they walk the front door of their house.

And it can be hard for your wife to switch roles
from a mother who guides her children
to a wife who lets her husband take the lead just like that.

All I'm asking is that you understand this.
Yes, it feels demeaning when you're mothered.
You're not a child,
you're not an idiot, and
you need to be respected.

But when you feel mothered and smothered,
take a breath and realize it's probably not intended to be disrespectful.
So try not to make it into that.

C. Talk about it.

Tell her about this part of the lecture.
And tell her:

“Sweetheart, I know you don't mean to,
and I know it's often about what's going on in me,
but here are the ways I sometimes feel disrespected in our relationship.
I'm not saying you disrespect me,
I'm saying this is when I feel disrespected.”

And then let her know.
If it's when she finishes cutting up the meat on your children's plates,
and then she starts on yours.
Or if it's when she regularly asks for your opinion
and then ignores what you have to say.
Or if she says, “Let me do it, you know you're not very good at that,” –
whatever it is, tell her.

She honestly may not know what makes you feel disrespected.
And if she hears you and she tries,
be appreciative.
She's not going to bat a thousand – don't expect that.

Your wife is never going to be a man.

She's never going to figure out how to talk like your guy friends to –
 how to give you ideas and suggestions that you need
 and at the same time protect your ego –
 so focus on and be thankful if she's making an effort.

That effort alone means she respects you.

But talk about your problems with being disrespected.

Be vulnerable,
 don't attack.

But talk about this issue

and give her the best chance possible to understand and do better.

And if she understands this, it will help her with her sons.

And, oh – crucify your stinking pride.

A second area of complaint was

2. Our communication is often frustrating.

Here you wrote comments like:

I don't take time to process what my wife is saying and

I immediately jump to the worst case scenario and snap back at her.

I don't feel heard or understood as often as I'd like.

Many attempts at conversation end up with one or both of us frustrated
 with the way the conversation went.

Again, this frustration is understandable and very common.

Men and women come at language differently.

Remember what we said about the differences in our brains
 regarding communication?

Typical female speaks 6-8 thousand words per day.

Typical male: 2-4 thousand.

You come home after work

and you've used 3000 words.

You've got maybe 500 words left.

She's spoken 4000 and has another 4000 to go.
Buckle up, boys, it's gonna be a long night.

And on top of that the purpose of our words is different.

Women tend to use speech to process information,
work through their thoughts, and
bond with others.

Men use speech and language primarily to communicate facts and data.
We are doers,
we are competitors, and
we are problem-solvers,
and that's what we use language to do.

And that makes conversations very difficult
with a person who uses language to
express and explore feelings,
create a sense of togetherness, and
connect the myriad of thoughts running around in their brains
that to an outside observer
do not seem to any logical connection whatsoever.

That's why in a conversation,
men often can't follow what their wives are saying
or even figure out why they're talking at all.
And when it goes on and on,
we get overwhelmed and frustrated
and either we turn off or we attack.

Look.
If we're having trouble communicating,
it means we need to change something.
Saying the same thing the same way –
except louder and slower and
with a face that is redder and angrier
is not going to get us what we want
or what our wives need.

We're going to look at this verse much too quickly,
but it's a good place to start.

James 1.19-20: Be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry,
for human anger does not bring about the righteous life God desires.

Let's break it down.

A. Be quick to listen.

James says if you want to communicate when you converse,
the place to begin is with listening.

Be quick to listen –
in other words:
hurry up and listen because
healthy communication begins when you seek to understand
before you seek to be understood.

When are we truly listening to the other person?
When we are more interested in what he or she is saying to us
than in what we are going to say back to him or her.

Many of us,
and this can be especially true with our wives,
we listen to fix her problem,
we listen to critique her argument, or
we listen to defend ourselves
against what we perceive to be her attack on us.

And that never goes well.

We need to listen to understand.
That means we ask questions
and we ask for clarification
for no other reason than to comprehend
what's she is trying to communicate to us.

That means in addition to asking question that help us understand her words,
we elicit information that will help us understand
what's going on beneath her words.

Like:

“Tell me why this is so meaningful to you.
What did you feel when that happened?”

It's your own little game of True Detective.
Why is she telling me this
and how does she want me to respond?

Maybe she just wants you to know what she's thinking and feeling
because she wants to feel connected to you.

Maybe she's just working out a problem
and needs someone to listen.

Maybe she's worried
and needs to be reassured.

Or maybe she needs her feeling validated.

Maybe – and this is not meant to be demeaning –
maybe she doesn't even know why she's talking.

And it's important that you figure this out before you respond.

This can be really difficult.

Here's an example.

Your wife tells you she's having a problem with one of your children.

You haven't listened enough to respond
until you understand what she's telling you.

Well, that's not hard,
she just told me that one of the kids is acting up.

I know what to say.

Do you?

Does she want you to discipline the child?
 Does she want you simply to listen
 and empathize with her frustration.
 Maybe she wants you to assure her that she's handling the situation correctly.
 Maybe she wants your suggestions on what to do.

Just got complicated, didn't it,
 smart guy?

Don't listen enough to know what she's asking for
 and you'll make a bad situation worse.
 Assume she wants your suggestions
 when what she is really asking is for you to listen and care –
 give her your brilliant solutions when she wants a little empathy,
 and she'll have a bigger problem with you than she does with the kids.

Why?
 Because you didn't listen enough to understand what she's really telling you.

When have you listened enough to respond?
 When you know the issue behind the issue
 and you have a good idea how she wants you to respond.
 And if you're not sure,
 just listen and say,
 "Wow, interesting, tell me more."

Be quick to listen.
 Be quick to listen long.
 Be quick to listen long enough to understand what's really going on
 in your wife's heart and mind.

Second important truth from James 1.19

B. Be slow to speak.

Why?
 Because our first reactions are so often wrong.

Our first reaction is usually to get defensive and deflect
 what may sound like criticism.
 Or even to attack back.

What I'm about to say will help you
 if you can remember it before you speak.

Behind every complaint there is a longing.

So when your wife is complaining, criticizing or angry with you,
 ask yourself what the longing is.
 What is she telling me that she wants and needs.

Example.
 Your wife says:

“We never go out.”
 That’s her complaint.
 And our normal response is to get defensive.

“Yes, we do.
 Last week we went to the movies.
 The week before that I said,
 Let’s go to out to eat and we did.
 It wasn’t that long ago,
 we walked around Hughes Landing and got ice cream.
 Or, do those things not count?”

We feel unappreciated,
 we get defensive,
 and we say something that’s really not helpful.

Your wife says we never go out
 and you tell her all the times you’ve gone out recently
 and her response is what?

“So, you think I’m stupid for feeling this way?”
 When she says that,
 you really better be slow to speak.

The complaint is what?
We never go out.

What's the longing behind the complaint?
I want to spend more time with you.
It makes me feel good when we go out together.
I feel like a couple,
 I feel like you're invested in our relationship,
 it makes me feel valued and secure.
I love it when it's just the two of us
 and I have your full attention.
And I want to feel that way again.

Now, if she said it like that,
 you'd have a very different reaction, right?
So, why doesn't she say it that way?
Because your wife is almost as messed up as you are
 and she has a hard time expressing her needs
 and she feels if she has to beg for your attention
 it may not be worth getting.

So, maybe she needs to do better in expressing her needs,
 but you and I –
 we definitely need to listen for the longing beneath the complaint
 and be slow to speak until we have that figured that out.

What else do we get from James?

C. Be slow to become angry.

When we react with anger,
 it tells our wives
"I don't want to listen to you,
 I don't want to hear what you think is important,
 I blame you for our problems, and
 I don't value you or our relationship enough to change."

We're going to get angry.
But we must realize it

and we must overcome it.
 It's ok to say,
 "I'm getting angry.
 And I don't want to respond that way.
 Give me – 20 minutes, an hour, the morning,
 to think about this and get my emotions under control,
 and then we'll talk about it."

Guys find it difficult to express their feelings.
 When we feel criticized or attacked we go to
 fight, flight or freeze.
 None of which help us communicate.

D. Speak the truth.

James says be slow to speak,
 but that implies that we are to speak.

We need to tell our wives
 what we're thinking and feeling.
 But the truth is not
 Woman:
 You're making me mad or
 You're unappreciative or
 You're a critical nag.

The truth is
 "When this happens, I feel unappreciated, or
 when you say that, my feelings get hurt and I get angry."

Or even,
 "Sweetheart, maybe I'm just not hearing you,
 but I feel like you're often critical of me
 and you don't give me credit for the things I do and the changes I've made.
 Feeling like you noticed those things and they mean something to you
 is important to me."

Your truth is not what's going on in your wife,
 but what's going on in you.
 Spend some time figuring that out,

and speak the truth about yourself.
Another problem you shared was

3. Not connecting emotionally.

You wrote in your comments on the survey
either about feeling alone or
not feeling like you can meet your wife's need for emotional intimacy
and connection.

One more time, this problem is
not unusual and
it's not hard to understand given the fact that we are so different.

Women are driven to connect
verbally and emotionally.
They are wired to form, maintain and nurture relationships.

A man is different.

In "Why Men Don't Have a Clue and Women always Need More Shoes"
Allan and Barbara Pease write:

Allan and Barbara Pease: The concept of focusing on a relationship is not a
natural part of the male psyche, thinking or scale of priorities.

Bill and Pam Farrel in "Men are Like Waffles, Women are Like Spaghetti:"

Bill and Pam Farrel: The bottom line with men is: they feel best about
themselves when they are solving problems. Therefore, they spend most of
their time doing what they are best at while they attempt to ignore the things
which cause them to feel deficient.

By the way, what area of life causes a man to feel more deficient than any
other?

His relationships!

Especially his relationships with women
and in particular his relationship with his wife
who wants him to do relationships the way she does them.

And when he gets the message over and over
that he's not doing it right,
he's likely to give up
and go find something he can be successful in –
like work or fishing or working in the garage or hanging out with the
guys.

And when he does this,
his wife feels what?
Disconnected from him.
Which drives her nuts
because what's her greatest need?
To be connected!

There are some simple things we can do.

Set aside time to be alone with our wives.
Daily check in with “how was your day?”
Have a date night.
Go to Re-Engage here at the church together.
Put down the phone and turn off the TV
and look her in the eyes when she wants to talk with you.

Spend time talking to her about her love language.

In his book, *The Five Love Languages*,
Gary Chapman writes we all want affection but we have favorite ways of
receiving it.
The problem is we often give affection to our wives
in the form that we like best.

But we speak different emotional languages.
What conveys love in your language
may not speak at all to her.

Chapman lists the following.

- A. Words of affirmation – compliments, telling her how much she means to you, saying “I love you.”
- B. Quality time – walks, going out to eat, special get-away-weekends, playing games with the children and her
- C. Gifts – large or small, especially things that say, “I noticed what you like”
- D. Acts of service – chores around the home, volunteering to care for the kids, keeping her car serviced
- E. Physical touch – holding hands, hugs, a kiss on the way out of the door

Again this is not what you like as much as what she likes.
 Though if you talk about this,
 you should tell her how best you receive love.

For the next few minutes I’m going to share a few unrelated things.
 I don’t have time to develop them fully.

And then we’re going to do something pretty funky.

4. Pray for your marriage.

We guys like to say we’re the head of the house
 and the king of the castle.
 As George Clooney says in O Brother Where Art Thou –
 the paterfamilias.

Ok, you’re the leader.
 And what does the leader do.
 The leader gives more than everybody else.
 The leader cares more than everybody else.
 The leader sacrifices more than everybody else.

When Paul tells us to be the leader,
 he says to love our wives as Christ loved the church.
 That’s what the leader is.
 The one who is more committed than anyone else
 and who is willing to go to a cross for the others.

So, if you're going to be the leader –
lead.

Decide you will make your marriage better.
Complain if you want to,
sometimes we need to get it out of our system.
But decide that you are going to work on your marriage,
you are going to make your wife feel loved, and
you are going to be a great husband.

And lead by praying.
Be the high priest of your home.

I have a sheet attached with 15 short prayers for you to pray each day
for thirty days.

5. Insight from Timothy Keller.

“Over the years you will go through seasons in which you have to learn to love a person who you didn't marry, who is something of a stranger. You will have to make changes that you don't want to make, and so will your spouse. The journey may eventually take you into a strong, tender, joyful marriage. But it is not because you married the perfectly compatible person. That person doesn't exist.”

That's marriage.
That's marriage for everyone of us.
Sorry nobody told you,
but that's the game we're all in, buddy.
The way to win is to make changes you may not want to make,
but you do it because you're committed to another person
and to the vows you took years ago.

6. Die to the things that live in you that are hurting your marriage.

Sad, I can't spend much time here.
But the way to glory and greatness in the Christian faith
is dying to self so a new self can be born.

Some of us, we have been disappointed – maybe even betrayed –
and we need to die to bitterness.

Some of us, we need to die to our expectations of
what marriage was going to be or
who our wives were supposed to be.

Some of us have to die to being closed off and refusing to share our feelings.

Some of us need to die to a critical spirit
or to always having to be right.

Some of us have to die to the need to control our wives
and to the idea that the husband is anything but the chief servant.

And of course, there's procrastination, impatience and pride.

And to be honest, I need to say that
some of us need to die to an affair.

A physical affair.

An emotional affair where we are sharing personal information about our lives
with a woman who's not our wife and she's sharing that kind of information
with us.

Or an imaginary affair.

Nothing has happened but we have in our mind that something might.

A marriage with three people does not work.

And we need to die to an affair – physical, emotional or imaginary –
it our marriage is to be better and be a blessing to our wives and to us.

We can let those things live in us
and our marriages will die.

Or we can die to those things
and our marriages will live and thrive.

Going to pray.