

Wisdom for Marriage

1. Intro

- I think it's fair to say that our world is as confused as ever when it comes to sex and marriage
 - This has always been the case, but even more so since the sexual revolution of the 1960's

- Since then we've seen this tragically downward progression
 - Casual sex that was part of being a rebellious hippy in the 1960's is now the norm
 - Pornography that started out with Playboy in 1950's is now an \$8bn industry in USA
 - Divorce rates in Australia have rocketed from 6,633 in 1960, to nearly 50,000 in 2012¹
 - Living together is the norm ...
 - Because people want the sexual relationship without the commitment of marriage; or
 - They believe that unless you live with another person and are in a sexual relationship with them ... you won't be able to determine whether or not you should marry

- So confused about sex and marriage ... there are now websites set up to enable people who are married or attached a partner to have an affair
 - Like a dating website for married couples ... will hook you up with someone who's compatible for you to have a fling
 - MarriedAffair.com.au
 - Are you looking for an affair? So is everyone else here
 - VictoriaMilan.com.au
 - Discreet dating for the married and attached
 - AshelyMaddison
 - Life is short, have an affair

- We see these attitudes flowing through into TV programmes and movies
 - Where most shows and movies seem to portray casual sex as the norm and marriage is downplayed or ridiculed
 - TV Sitcom Friends
 - Ross married three times ... laughing stock of his friends

¹ <http://www.aifs.org.au/institute/info/charts/divorce/index.html>

- Joey is portrayed as a hunky gigilo who's whole purpose in life is to have sex with as many girls as possible
- We live in a society that is confused and messed up when it comes to sex and marriage
 - What we are hearing from our culture around us is like the voice Woman Folly in Proverbs ... calling out to us to come to her and drink in what she has to offer
 - To listen to her and follow her advice
- But the book of Proverbs offers us a different voice to listen to
 - Lady Wisdom > the voice of wisdom
 - In a world that is confused and messed up in its views about sex and marriage ... Proverbs offers us wisdom for marriage

2. The Good Marriage

- Right from the start of the Bible, right from the beginning of creation we see that marriage was fundamental to the social structures of humanity
- God designed the human race for men and women to marry²
- Marriage is part of God's good pattern of creation > it's fundamental to the world he created
- The book of Proverbs affirms this
 - When Solomon sits back and observes the nature of marriage in our world ... he knows marriage is a good thing
 - But he also knows the reality of marriage
 - Proverbs doesn't paint an idealistic, fairytale view of marriage
 - It recognises the difficulties and problems of marriage
 - It knows no marriage is perfect > there are struggles > e.g.
 - Proverbs 21:9 – *Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.*³
 - Now if you're a married man, you'd better not be laughing at that because you know you're going to cop it later ☺
- Proverbs is not sexist ... not against women or picking on wives
 - It's written from the perspective of a father speaking to his son

² Genesis 1:27ff – 'male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number"; Genesis 2:18 – "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Genesis 2:24 – For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

³ Proverbs 21:19 – *Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered wife.*

- If it had been a mother giving wisdom to her daughter I'm sure it would included Proverbs like this
 - *Better to sleep outside with the dog than to share a bed with a husband who snores*
- But the recognition that marriage
 - isn't always easy and
 - isn't always smooth sailing
- Doesn't lead Proverbs to cynicism nor to despair
 - Proverbs unashamedly says marriage is a good thing
- So for instance ...
 - 18:22 – *He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favour from the LORD.*
- If you're married, your marriage partner is a gift from God
- If you have a wise marriage partner, you only have God to thank
 - Proverbs 19:14 – *Houses and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the LORD.*
- **Application**
- So, if you're married ... think about your partner
- Or if you're not married think about your future partner ...
 - Think about them as a gift from God to you > God's gift to you
 - That's very different from thinking about yourself as God's gift to your partner
 - You've got to get it the right way around ... they're quite different ways of thinking! ☺
 - Your partner as God's gift to you
- So that means your spouse is
 - Never to be taken for granted for the ways they contribute to the marriage
 - Never to be presumed upon to fit in with your agenda
 - Never to be treated harshly
- Rather, they're
 - Someone to be cherished
 - Someone to be honoured
 - Someone you serve in love
- God has a very high view of marriage and our marriage partner is someone to be cherished

3. The Wise Marriage

- Much of the early chapters of Proverbs is framed in the form of a father imparting wisdom to his son
 - One of the recurring themes in chapters 1-9 is the father giving his son wisdom for marriage
- And it follows that if marriage is
 - Part of God's good design for creation
 - Part of fundamental social structures of humanity
 - Your marriage partner is God's gift to you ...
 - Then the wise thing to do is to fiercely guard and cherish your marriage
- This is the wisdom for marriage that Solomon makes very clear in Proverbs 5 & 6

Warning of being unfaithful

- In 5:1-14 ... the focus is not so much on the immorality of unfaithfulness, though that is there
- Proverbs goes beyond the immorality of unfaithfulness to say it's **foolish**
- In vv3-4 Solomons makes clear the deception of adultery
 - Proverbs 5:3-4 – *For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; ⁴ but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword.*
 - The fling with an office colleague
 - The dalliance with someone you meet on a conference
 - They seem so alluring > the thrill seems so exciting
 - But the end result is disaster and it turns out to be the opposite of what's was expected because it ends in pain, bitterness and hurt
- Then Solomon goes on to outline the folly of adultery ...
 - v5-6 teach us that unfaithfulness in marriage is
 - not just wrong,
 - not just foolish,
 - not just disastrous ... it is deadly
- v8-10 we see to do so is to waste your life and your money
- In addition ...
 - It will cripple your conscience (v11-13)
 - It will bring social disgrace (v14)

- The foolishness if unfaithfulness will only bring regret and sorrow when one reflects on the squandering of life and reputation for the sake of brief moment of pleasure

- And for all those reasons ... Solomon's wisdom is
 - *v8 – Keep to a path far from her, do not go near the door of her house,*
 - The wise thing to do is ... don't go there
 - Stay well away from the temptation⁴

- **Application**
- Proverbs is very aware of the temptation to unfaithfulness
- But it recognises and urges anyone who's willing to learn wisdom to see that ... what you think is on offer ... is always a lie
 - It's always deceptive
 - Wisdom teaches us unfaithfulness without disastrous consequences is not possible

- I'm sure you've seen the fall out before
 - Broken marriage > broken trust, broken hearts
 - Single parent families
 - Lost friendships
 - Unwanted pregnancies
 - Maintenance payments
 - Kids growing up without a mum or a dad
- When we go against God's good purpose for marriage the fall out is terrible

- And when we get to the NT Jesus makes it clear that adultery isn't just limited to a one night stand or an affair
 - *Matthew 5:28 – ... anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*
 - Fantasizing about being with someone other than your spouse
 - Losing yourself in romantic novels
 - Getting on line to view pornography ...
 - That's adultery
 - You may not physically do anything ... but it's being unfaithful to your spouse

- And so in our marriages we need to guard against such temptation

⁴ Paul says the same thing in 1 Cor 6:18 – Flee sexual immorality

- You need to put safe guards around your marriage so that you don't go anywhere near the point of temptation
- You need to flee sexual immorality as Paul says in 1 Cor 6
 - That may mean ... the best thing for you and your marriage ... is that you need to
 - Change your job ... to steer clear of that person your attracted to
 - Change your friends ... who are doing things that are putting you in difficult situations
 - Delete that phone number or email address of that person you're attracted to
 - Put accountability software on your computer to help stop going to websites you shouldn't
 - Stop watching that sexually explicit TV series that's causing your mind to wander

Call to be faithful

- v15-23 Solomon urges his son what he should do in marriage
 - That's to be faithful to his marriage partner
- *Proverbs 5:15-17 – Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers.*
- Solomon is saying ...
 - Find sexual satisfaction in the well your own home ... not out in public
 - Your God given sexual desires are not to spread beyond the privacy and intimacy of your marriage
- He goes even further to urge his son to enjoy the blessing of sex with his wife
 - *v18-19 – May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer-- may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love.*
 - A husband and wife are to find pleasure and joy in the sexual intimacy of marriage
 - Rejoice in each others sexuality
 - Delight in one another
 - Cherish the intimacy of the marriage God created it to be

- Why go elsewhere? Why embrace another
 - Don't lose sight of the good gift that God has given you in your marriage partner
 - Don't lose sight of that good - you can't improve on God's gifts
 - Foolish to think you can find better than what God has given you

- **Application**
- When I was thinking about going to Bible College, I met with a older wiser man I trusted to talk about whether or not I should go
- We met up for coffee and one of the first things he asked me was
 - "How's your sex life?"
- As you can imagine I was little taken aback
- I can't remember my answer ... but I realised in hindsight what he was trying to do was to see what my marriage was like
 - Because often ... a couples sex life is a good barometer of how they are going relationally
 - It's very hard for a married couple to have a healthy sex life ... if relationally their marriage is down the toilet

- **Illustration - Work of John Gottman**
- This ties in with the research of psychology professor John Gottman
 - Gottman is known for his work on marital stability and relationship analysis through 40 years of scientific research
- What Gottman did was
 - Create a 'love lab' like Big Brother House
 - Recorded conversations of married couples over a weekend
 - Over long time saw patterns in way we relate and what is good and bad for marriage

- Gottman's found it's not the content of the arguments that predicted divorce, but the emotional disengagement that accompanies these fights
 - In other words as long as the couples remained emotionally connected ... their marriages can survive rough times
 - But couples who divorced were emotionally disconnected and withdrawn

- From his research Gottman says there are four things that will kill a marriage
 - Criticism, Contempt, Defensiveness and Stonewalling

- **Criticism**

- Constant criticism of your spouse wears them down
- **Contempt**
 - Hostile humour > sarcasm > cynicism > mocking your spouse
 - Body language > eye rolling > sneering > deep sighing > don't say it verbally ... but body language show contempt for spouse
- **Defensiveness**
 - When criticised we throw blame back to the other person
 - "Only did it because you did this"
 - "I had to do it that way because ... "
 - When we get defensive we're saying the problem is not with me, but with you
- **Stonewalling**
 - When one spouse starts emotionally tuning out > they shut down in the relationship
 - They put up an invisible barrier
 - They pull back, turn inward and shut down leaving the other spouse out in the cold
- When married couples start to display these characteristics ... they're well on their way to emotional disengagement
 - And when couples are emotionally disconnected ... then that's when they're most vulnerable to unfaithfulness
 - Because that's when they may be tempted to look elsewhere for that emotional connection
- The other common cause of emotional disconnection is busyness
 - When as husband gets caught up in his work
 - Wife gets caught up in looking after the children
 - Those things become the focus
 - There's no time or emotional energy for their spouse ... therefore no sexual energy for each other
 - And so ... couples disconnect and become vulnerable to go looking elsewhere
- So for married couples to remain faithful ... they need to work hard at being emotionally connected
- **Closeness**
- One way is by maintaining connectedness is by maintaining closeness
- *Joke*

- Couple out for dinner at a restaurant. The wife sees another couple their age sitting at a table nearby. She sees the husband sitting close to his wife, with his arm around her. He is whispering things in her ear and she is smiling and blushing. He's gently rubbing her shoulders and touching her hair
- She turns to her husband and says "look at that couple over there. Look at how close that man is to his wife, how he's talking to her. Look how sweet he is. Why don't you ever do that?"
- He husband looks up from his meal and glances over at the table nearby, then turns to his wife and says "Honey, I don't even know that woman?!" 😊
- Husbands not naturally good at closeness
 - Husbands need to keep moving towards your wife > this will energise her
 - Hold her hand
 - Hug her
 - Set up a regular date night to keep connecting
 - Go on a weekend away for your anniversary ...
- **Openness**
 - Open up ...
 - Share about your day and difficulties
 - Share how you're going > what stresses you > what are your fears
 - Show you're listening with your body language
 - Give them your full attention
 - Guys ... not grunting responses while watching TV > reading paper / iPad > writing emails
- **Peacemaking**
 - A willingness to reconcile
 - Admit your own failings in an argument and apologise
- **Pray**
 - Pray together
 - Pray for each other, your marriage, your parenting, your children, work
 - A couple who prays together, stays together
- **Sex**
 - Have lots of sex!

- It's biblical! ... *rejoice in the wife of your youth ... may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love.*
- There's an attachment bond that is created when couples have sex
- Of course that means being emotionally connected
- But sex is good for marriage
- So plan for it, talk about it, make it happen

4. The Ultimate Marriage

- It's clear God has a high view of marriage and therefore he has a high view of sex within marriage
 - It's also clear that God's good pattern for marriage is to enjoy the goodness of sex within marriage
 - That's how God designed it
 - To step out of pattern is not only foolish but destructive
- And so if we're going to be wise and enjoy our marriages and enjoy God's good gift of sex ... married couples need to be committed to fiercely guarding our marriage and being faithful to our spouse
- But for the Christian ... there is an even greater reason to be faithful in our marriage
 - That's because a marriage between a husband and a wife is meant point to the ultimate marriage between God and his people
- Throughout the Bible, the relationship and intimacy between God and his people is often portrayed like a groom and bride
 - God is the groom / husband
 - God's people are the bride / wife
- See this in the OT in Isaiah, Jeremiah > see it most clearly in Hosea⁵
 - Hosea was a prophet > God told him to marry an adultress
 - He was to graciously and unconditionally love her and have a family with her
 - Reason God did this was for the Israelites to see ... that this is exactly how God was treating Israel
 - They had prostituted themselves to foreign idols
 - They'd forsaken God, been unfaithful to him and turned their backs on him

⁵ Isa 54:5; Jer 3:14, 20; 6:11; 31:32; Hos 2:16

- And the family situation of Hosea is to show that God is a compassionate and gracious husband to continues to unconditionally love his bride > the people of Israel ...
 - despite their unfaithfulness
 - despite their sin

- God's marriage to his people is the ultimate marriage
 - He shows the ultimate love
 - He shows the ultimate forgiveness
 - He shows the ultimate faithfulness

- And God wants our marriages to be echoes of his marriage
 - To remind ourselves of what a faithful, loving marriage looks like
 - But also to show to everyone around, us who look at our marriages, what God's marriage to his people is like

- You see ... a Christian marriage is missional > it's God glorifying
 - The ultimate purpose in our marriage is not to satisfy our
 - Need for companionship
 - Need for sex
 - Desire to have a family
 - The ultimate purpose in marriage is to glorify God and point other people to him through your marriage

- The idea of the ultimate marriage between God and his people is developed even further in the NT with the coming of Jesus
 - See this most clearly in Eph 5
- In Eph 5 Jesus the groom of the church
 - He is THE faithful husband > the one who would **never** forsake his bride
 - In fact he did the exact opposite > gave up himself for the church

- The marriage of man and woman points to this relationship of Christ and his church
 - Paul says marriage between husband and wife is to mimic the relationship between Christ and the church

- How?
- Husbands are to give themselves sacrificially to their wives in the same way that Jesus gave himself up for his bride
- Jesus sacrificed himself for the church

- And he did it despite our unfaithfulness
- He gave himself up for us
 - Despite our sin
 - Despite our rejection of him
 - Despite our unfaithfulness
- Despite all that ... he was faithful to us

- Jesus is the ultimate husband
 - He is **the** faithful husband
 - Never forsaking his bride
 - Never seeking out his own interests
 - Never giving up on us when the relationship got strained

- **Application**
- So friends ... here is the ultimate marriage
 - This is the marriage that Christians are called upon to live out
 - When we imitate Jesus marriage to the church ... then we're living out the best marriage
- Because as we do ... marriage partners
 - Won't be seeking to satisfy themselves by running off to other partners
 - Won't be angry and bitter when they're marriage partners aren't fulfilling them
 - Sexually
 - Emotionally
 - Financially
- Because instead
 - Husbands and wives will be seeking the good of the other
 - Sacrificing their own interests for the interest of the other
 - Remaining faithful, even when it's hard

- But you won't live out this wise marriage relationship ... unless you understand the gospel
- Unless you and I understand
 - How much Jesus humbled himself to come to us
 - How much he loves us to die for us
 - How much he was willing to sacrifice to save us
 - Then we won't understand the true nature of marriage ... and what it means to have the best marriage

- But when we understand the gospel

- It shows us what faithfulness in marriage looks like and how to live it out
- It shows us how to have the best marriage ... because it's modeled on the ultimate marriage
- But not only does the gospel model for us how to have the best marriage ...
 - The gospel gives hope to our imperfect marriages
- Reality is ... the fall of A&E in Gen 3 means that all marriages are broken and hard work ... because we all sin
 - We're all sinners ... that means all marriages are sinful
 - There's no such thing as the ideal marriage or the perfect marriage partner
- That means ... there will be hard times in all marriages
 - Times when you hurt one another
 - Sometimes significant hurt
- But the gospel gives us hope
 - Because the gospel teaches us about forgiveness
- The gospel shows us ... that despite our sin and despite our adultery against God ... he forgives us
 - He takes us back to himself ... even though we are unfaithful to him and don't deserve it
- And for the person who has been unfaithful to their spouse ... there is forgiveness
 - Jesus died for all sin, once and for all ... and that includes the times we've been unfaithful
 - Unfaithfulness is a terrible thing ... but it's not beyond the forgiveness and love of God
 - The ultimate marriage between Jesus and his church shows us ... we are forgiven
- The other thing the ultimate marriage shows us ... is how we need to forgive
 - Because we're sinners and our marriages are sinful ... forgiveness is crucial
 - Jesus showed what it looks like to forgive
 - He paid a great price in himself to provide that forgiveness
- If God can forgive you for your unfaithfulness to him
 - Then we must be willing to forgive our marriage partners

- Repentance and forgiveness must be fundamental to a good marriage
- Without it ...
 - resentment builds,
 - hearts become hardened,
 - couples become emotionally disconnected ...
 - and marriages fall apart and fail to glorify God

5. Conclusion

- Our world has a mixed up view of sex and marriage
- But God gives us wisdom for marriage
 - Marriage and our marriage partners are God's good gift to us
 - God has a high view of sex and marriage
 - He wants us too as well

- So married couples are to cherish and honour one another
 - And that means being faithful in marriage
 - To delight in your spouse and no one else

- While this is Proverbs wisdom for marriage
- An even greater wisdom is given to us in the Lord Jesus
 - In the gospel ... his marriage to the church is the ultimate marriage
 - Not only is this a faithful marriage for us to imitate
 - It gives us hope of forgiveness when we have failed to be faithful
 - It gives us power to forgive our spouse when they've forsaken us

PRAY