

The Ideal Marriage (Part 2)

by Bayless Conley

Copyright © Answers with Bayless Conley

Well, friend, welcome to the program today. We are talking about something that is so incredibly important, and we're taking it all from Genesis chapter 24. We've pulled out six principles from the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah that are absolutely key in having a healthy relationship.

So listen, if you're married and loving it, if you're married and you're in a hard place, if you're unmarried, if you're widowed, divorced, whatever, today's message is for you. Grab your Bible and get ready.

We are on a very interesting and important subject. We're actually talking about what I call the ideal marriage. There's no such thing as a perfect marriage, but we have some principles from the story of Isaac and Rebekah that actually point to what an ideal marriage can and should be.

And again, you may be unmarried, you may be single, you may be divorced, you may be widowed, you may be happily married, you may be unhappily married, you may never want to get married, you may desperately want to get married, whatever status you're in right now, whatever season of life you're in, there's going to be something in this message for you.

Yes, we're talking about marriage, but these principles go much farther than that. And just to make it easy to remember, I've used the word "Spouse," S-P-O-U-S-E, as an acrostic, one letter standing for each one of these different principles that we find in the life of Isaac and Rebekah.

Now, Abraham, he has sent his servant back to the land of his family to get a marriage partner for his son, Isaac. And that was our first letter; it's S. It stands for "Same faith." Abraham said to his servant, "Look, I don't want my boy marrying one of these pagan Canaanite girls. You need to go back to the land of my family, my people, and find a wife for Isaac, my son, from there."

And you can read in Genesis chapter 20; there's a little section where it talks about the fact that Abraham continued to have communication with his family even after he obeyed God and left. And he's become a sojourner in the land of promise now. But there's still information being exchanged back and forth with the families. And Abraham, having this relationship with the one true God, now, you know that they had to travel over those communication lines. Of all of the people in the known world then, they would have been the only ones that would have had some knowledge about the one true living God.

We found that the Scriptures teach us as believers not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. One translation of that verse says to stop forming intimate relationships with unbelievers. If you're going to get married, you need to marry somebody with like precious faith. You need to marry somebody that likes your hallelujahs.

We talked about the fact that we're triune beings; spirit, soul, and body. Marriage is the highest form of agreement between two people. And so, to have an ideal marriage, there needs to be agreement spiritually. That's most important. Secondly, emotionally and intellectually in the

The Ideal Marriage (Part 2)

soulful realm, and thirdly, in the physical realm. We talked about that last time. So people of the same faith need to get married.

Listen, if you are a Christian and you are planning to get married to a non-Christian, stop. The Scriptures tell you not to do that. God is smarter than you are, my friend. If you truly are a follower of Jesus, the most important thing in your life should be your relationship with God; it should be your trust of His promises and the Word. Growing spiritually, that's the most important thing. And you need to be able to share that with a marriage partner.

And if you're thinking, "Well, he treats me better than all the Christian guys I've dated, and I just trust he's going to come to Christ." There's no guarantee of that. Possibly he can be won to Christ by your godly lifestyle, but that's not a guarantee. And the Scriptures tell you not to be unequally yoked together with an unbeliever.

My friend, you need to marry a believer. And I'm sorry if I just rained on your parade, but God is smarter than you, and He's smarter than me. And as believers, we need to make His Word the final authority in our lives.

Our second letter was P, and that stands for "Prayer." We found out that Abraham's servant, once he arrived there at the well in the land of Abraham's people, that he earnestly prayed.

Marriage is so important. It should not be made without prayer. Even if you got yourself a boyfriend or a girlfriend that loves Jesus, you still need to pray. It's important.

I knew I was called to ministry. I was called to be a preacher. I knew that when I came to Christ, which for me when it comes to marriage, it narrowed the field quite a bit. Because even though some gal, she may be a lover of Jesus, may be a Christian, she may not be able to hang with the lifestyle of a preacher.

For many, many decades, I've traveled the world as a part of my calling. We've established our church. We've been pastoring for many years. If you think it's easy, well, you've just never done it. It's like one person said, "Hey, well, pastoring a church, that's just like taking a walk in the park." I agree. Jurassic Park. It's not an easy thing to do. And even if someone is a believer, they may not be cut out for that. Their giftings may not match that. So you need to make it a matter of earnest, heartfelt prayer, and God will guide you.

Our next letter was O in the acrostic S-P-O-U-S-E, and that stands for "Others." We found out that Rebekah was industrious. She was not self-absorbed. She wasn't lazy. She had a heart for others. She had a servant's heart. Lazy people make bad marriage partners. Self-absorbed people make bad marriage partners, but industrious people that put others before themselves tend to make great marriage partners.

And I just want to ask you before we move on right now, just thinking about this. All right. You know yourself pretty well. Would you consider being married to someone just like yourself that had the same values you have, that had the same work ethic that you have, that have the same temperament that you have, that was as self-absorbed or non-self-absorbed as you are? Would you consider being married to someone like yourself a great honor and a great privilege? Would you love to spend the rest of your life with somebody like yourself? If you have any hesitation in answering that at all, you probably know what areas you need to begin to work on.

The Ideal Marriage (Part 2)

I think if we take a look at ourselves one time, sometimes we could say, “Yes, I can be pretty doggone selfish. I really need to work in this area. Or I don’t communicate well. I can be stony silent when I should be sharing my heart. Or when I should be listening, I’m sitting in front of the TV because this is my show, and I don’t want to be interrupted.”

So just think about it because the truth is there is someone if you’re married, there is someone that’s married to someone just like you, your spouse.

And it may be, God bless them, how blessed they are, or God help them, they’re in trouble.

But a good marriage partner is somebody that has others on their mind.

And then we come to the next letter in our acrostic, and that is the letter U, S-P-O-U. U stands for “Undefined.” By undefined, I mean morally pure. The Scripture says this in Genesis 24:16,

¹⁶ Now the young woman was very beautiful to behold, a virgin; no man had known her.

Listen, it is possible to stay clean in a dirty world. Now, maybe your lifestyle, you were very sexually promiscuous before you came to Christ. All right. Thank God the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. Or maybe you’ve messed up since you came to Christ. Well, the blood of Jesus still cleanses us from all sin.

And you need to make the determination that you’re going to live pure, and that you’re going to live holy, and that you’re going to keep yourself sexually until marriage.

Now, I know that runs cross-grain of modern culture. We live in an oversexualized generation. Pornographic materials, explicit materials are readily, even for the very young. And in the world, we’re put forth as heroes. Whether it’s Hollywood doing it, or movies or TV or whatever that the heroes, well they’re generally very sexually active and usually with multiple partners. And the guys look at that as a conquest. That’s a real man’s man. And the women look at the gal, “Well, she’s just free.”

You know, God is smarter than we are, and we should keep ourselves morally pure. If you’re a Christian, and you want to get married, listen, keep yourself. If you’re already involved sexually, stop. Just tell your fiancé, say, “Look, this is not right. This is not God’s way. And we’re just going to keep ourselves; we’re going to do this thing right.” You honor God by doing that.

I remember this guy that came to church one time. He actually came with his girlfriend. And he was an outlaw biker. And he wasn’t a want-to-be outlaw biker; he was the real deal. As in armed guard in mafia drug deals, nose has been broken, can’t even count how many times from fighting. He walked into the church and had a big knife on him when he walked in. He was a rough boy. And he met Jesus in our church and got radically saved.

Now, this is a guy that his girlfriend said, “Look, I’m coming back to church.” Turns out she was a church girl from her past but was backslidden and is living with him. And she said, “The final straw for me,” she said, “stuff like this would happen all the time. There’s a party at our house. And some of the guys there held me down, and one of them put a gun in my mouth.” And she said, “When I got away from them, I went under the sink, and I closed the door, and I hid, curled up in a ball under the sink and thought, ‘Oh, Jesus, help me.’ What has my life come to? I’m going back to church.”

The Ideal Marriage (Part 2)

And the next day, she told her boyfriend, "Look, I'm going back to church." And he says, "Well, I'll come with you." And he came, and he got saved. And she rededicated her life to Christ. So, you imagine the situation they've come out of. They're living together in this little house. And we didn't say anything to them. We just loved them. They would come and sit, and he would cry like a baby every service.

And one day, I come up into the office, and he's sitting in the office, and he's boohooing. He's crying and crying. And the secretary that's there looked at me like, I don't know, and I said, "Hey, come on." He came back in the office, and he's sobbing. He said, "Pastor, I don't know what to do." He said, "My girlfriend and I, our lives have been changed by Jesus." And he said, "We're living together." He said, "We were living together when we gave our lives to the Lord, and I've come to understand from reading the Bible that it's not God's way, that it's not what God wants."

He said, "But we don't have enough money to get two places. I don't know what to do, but I know this is not God's way. I want to do what's right. I want to do what's right." I said, "Well, look, as hard as things are, you just need to take some steps. God will give you a way to do it." And you know, he did it. You know what he did? He actually went and asked a friend if he could live in his friend's garage. And there was an old couch in the garage. And for the next, whatever it was, three, four, might have been five or six months, he slept on a couch in his friend's garage while his girlfriend, now fiancé, has the house.

And when they got married, I married them, they kept themselves pure when they found out what Jesus wanted.

My friend, there is a way. Listen, girl, there is a way. Listen, sir, there is a way. You need to love Jesus more. Keep yourself morally pure.

God is smarter than we are. It may run cross-grain to societal thinking. The society around us says, "Well, that's outdated, and that's prudish." It's still right. King David said, "Lord, I consider all Your precepts concerning all things to be true."

And so we need to keep ourselves until we are married.

All right, we come to our next letter, and that's the letter S. It stands for "Selection." Even in ancient culture, it was the way of things that the father would give his daughter away in marriage without her consent. If it would improve the family's economic status, if it would improve their status in the community, or if it would cause political ties to be strengthened or military ties to be strengthened, the daughters would be given in marriage. And they didn't have anything to say about that at all. They had no selection in the matter whatsoever. But when it came to Rebekah, and when it came to the servant of Abraham going to find a wife for Isaac, this is what Abraham said. Abraham said to his servant,

⁸ And if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be released from this oath;

That's Genesis 24:8. In other words, the oath of swearing that you're going to find a daughter for my son Isaac.

The Ideal Marriage (Part 2)

And then, after receiving the marriage proposal, Rebekah's family said this to her, Genesis 24:57–58,

⁵⁷ “We will call the young woman and ask her personally.” ⁵⁸ Then they called Rebekah and said to her, “Will you go with this man?”

And she said, “I will go.”

Even here in western culture, it is not uncommon for parents to pressure their son or to pressure their daughter into marrying a certain person or marrying a person that has a certain career. And listen, there's nothing wrong with wanting your daughter to be taken care of. You don't want your daughter to marry some guy that can't hold down a job. In the garden, God gave Adam a job before he gave him a wife. So, guys, you need to have a job before you get yourself a wife. And girls, before you get yourself a husband, make sure that guy's got a job. So there's nothing wrong with that.

But sometimes, again, even in western society, and I know there are other regions of the world where there are arranged marriages, and I'm just going to leave that alone for right now. But in this case, Rebekah actually had the power of selection. She had the power to choose for herself.

Now, as a parent, we wanted our sons to marry good Christian girls, someone that's a good fit for them. And our daughter, we want a great husband for her. A man that loves God, and God is first in his life. We want someone that can provide for her. Those things are normal. But Janet nor I have ever, or will we ever, put undue pressure on one of our kids. We haven't, and we won't, to marry someone that we've selected. It needs to be their choice. And it was Rebekah's choice.

And then the final letter in our acrostic, our word is “Spouse,” S-P-O-U-S-E. E stands for “Emotion.” Isaac and Rebekah's marriage was not just built on convenience; it was built on love. It was emotional as well. Genesis 24:67 says this,

⁶⁷ Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent; and he took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

Did you know that Isaac never took a second wife, even though that was the custom of the day? He remained true to Rebekah, and Rebekah remained true to him. There was love in their marriage. It wasn't just about convenience. It wasn't just about some economic arrangement. There was actually love. Their relationship was emotional.

Now, falling in love, listen, that's easy to do. In fact, it's easy to fall in love with the wrong person. The truth is, I've been in love a few times in my life. I've been in love a few times before I was saved, and I think I was in love after I got saved, but I never ended up marrying those girls. You can fall in love with the wrong person. It's not a hard thing to do. There can be an endorphin rush, and your emotions can soar, but you know what? You can fall out of love. Just like you can fall in love.

Now, I did fall in love with my now wife, Janet. And the truth is I'm still in love with my first wife: my only wife, Janet. We've been married 41 years, and I love her. But listen, that emotional high of falling in love, that'll tend to fade. Now, by fading, I don't mean that it diminishes. It actually fades in the sense that it grows into something more mature and more subtle. And so, this

The Ideal Marriage (Part 2)

maturation of love that I've had in my heart and in my soul for my wife Janet, it has grown. And that keeps me from falling in love with the wrong person. I will not fall in love with another person because I have a deeper, more grounded, more important love now with my wife, Janet.

C. S. Lewis said this about married love. He said, "Being in love, first moved them to promise fidelity: this quieter love enables them to keep the promise." Now, when he speaks about the quieter love, that's the more mature love, the more settled love, the more rooted love that marriage grows into. "Being in love, first moved them to promise fidelity," he said. "This quieter love enables them to keep the promise. It is on this love that the engine of marriage is run: being in love was the explosion that started it."

So being in love, that's the explosion that started the relationship, but this deeper, more mature love, it's the engine on which marriage runs. I think that is brilliant, and it has certainly been true in my experience.

Marriage, as well as many other relationships in life, can be quite difficult to navigate at times. If it was easy, everybody could do it, and they'd get a gold star next to their name. But it's not always easy, and not everyone's willing to put in the effort and the work. To have a good marriage, to have a great marriage, it takes work, it takes understanding. To have successful relationships, friendships, whatever it might be, successful work relationships, it takes effort, but it is worth it.

There's nothing more important in the world other than our relationship with God than these other relationships we have. And at the top of the heap, at the top of the pile is that marriage relationship. And the truth is, is God will help us to navigate those relationships. He will give us wisdom. He will give us the steps that we need to take in order to navigate those relationships well.

So I just want to encourage you right now. In fact, I want to take a minute or two and I want to pray for you. Because I know there are people watching me, and you've been through a divorce, maybe a few, I don't know. Maybe you feel like you're just a broken toy, irreparable. You're not irreparable. Your life is not irreparable. God has not abandoned you. God loves you, and He wants to help you. The fact that you're listening to my voice right now, let it be a sign from God that He hears you, that He sees you, and that you are important to Him.

And yes, maybe you've made some horrific mistakes in your life, God still has a plan for you. Maybe your children have become estranged from you because of some of the bad choices that you have made.

I talked to a friend just recently whose father left his mother when he was a little boy, and his father's had nothing to do with him. Actually, he was just telling me how he reached out to his dad, and his dad sent back through a liaison, "I'm not interested in having a relationship with you." Well, you know what? That can hurt.

But, my friend, Jesus is the healer of broken hearts, and He's the healer of broken relationships. And He wants to heal you and help you in your life.

Father, I pray right now for the person that's watching me. For the girl that is just so desperate and so broken. I pray that You would reach out with Your invisible hand of love by Your Holy Spirit, Lord. And take her fragile, shattered heart and make it whole in Jesus' name.

The Ideal Marriage (Part 2)

To those that are struggling in their marriage, God, I pray that grace would pour into their life. Grace would pour into their family. For those with estranged children, I ask You to send laborers, oh God, across the pathway of their children and turn their hearts toward You, turn their hearts toward home. Lord, I ask You to give wisdom to those that truly are asking for it, that they might successfully navigate the relationship of marriage. The other relationships in their life, may they have wisdom to navigate those relationships well.

Friend, I just want to close by telling you this. You are important to God. Maybe nobody in your world tells you this, but I want to tell you. You are loved. God loves you. God sees you. He has not forsaken you. He has not abandoned you. He has plans for your life. He wants to have a relationship with you, and that only comes through His Son, Jesus Christ.

The Bible says, "We all stand guilty before God because of sin." But, in fact, the Scripture says the whole world is guilty before God. We've all sinned and come short of the glory of God. But God didn't leave us in our mess. He didn't leave us to wallow in our sin. He sent someone to rescue us. He sent a Savior, His own Son, who was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, worked miracles, healed the sick, and showed people what God was like. Not some distant, unconcerned being, but a Father that was close, that was concerned and caring.

And then Jesus was taken by wicked jealous hands, put through a mock trial, and He was crucified. And there hanging upon that cross, the sin of the world was laid on Him. He became our substitute. And God's justified punishment against the sin of the world, against your sin, against my sin, was laid on Jesus Christ. And He became our substitute, and He died under the weight and the penalty of our sins.

Now, the Scripture says, "His very soul was made an offering for sin." I don't think we'll ever truly know the depths to which Christ went in paying for our sin. The Scripture says, "He who knew no sin was made to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Christ." And after three days and three nights, the claims of God's eternal justice having been satisfied, the Spirit of God reached down into the depths of this earth and raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

He arose as the Lord victorious. Victorious over sin, death, hell, and the grave. And the Bible says that if you'll put your trust in this risen Savior and confess Him as Lord, that you can be saved. You can come into a relationship with God, and that relationship is called salvation.

Pray with me right now. Just put a hand over your heart and say,

"Oh God," say it out loud.

Say,

"Oh God, I put my trust in Your Son Jesus right now." Just say this out loud, "Jesus, come into my life. Be my Lord and be my Savior. All I am and all I have," go ahead and say it, "All I am and all I have, I put in Your hands, Jesus. Wherever You lead me, I will go. In Your name, I pray. Amen."

Hello, my dear friend. If I could, I would love to sit down with you in your kitchen. I'd love you to make us a beautiful cup of tea, and I'd like to sit down and share that cup of tea and just talk with you. Talk about the things that are going on in your life. Talk about maybe the struggles

The Ideal Marriage (Part 2)

you're having, and then spend a few minutes and pray, talk about the promises of God, and the greatness of God, and what He can do, and then pray. Now obviously, I can't do that with everyone that I would love to do it. So this is sort of the next best thing. I just want to tell you that God does love you, and He sees you.

And I want to ask you something because if these programs, if these broadcasts have been any kind of a blessing to you, and I hope that they have, I would assume that's why you watch, will you help us? And by us, I mean our whole team here that puts these together and produces them. Will you help us to take this word, these programs to other regions of the world? Right now, we're in multiple languages and multiple regions. So I'm asking you to pray about being a partner with us in prayer and a financial partner as well. Please pray about it and then respond. Do it now in Jesus' name.

Copyright © Answers with Bayless Conley