

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles, please, to Genesis 2, verse 18. I had a lady tell me after the last service that when she drove onto our parking lot this morning, she burst into tears because she sensed the presence of the Lord—just by driving on the parking lot. Amen. Praise God.

I'm preaching through the book of Romans, but we're taking a little four-week vacation from that, and I'm going to talk about marriage and the family. I'm doing a four-part series entitled "Blueprints for Beautiful Homes." Today and next Sunday, I'm going to be talking about marriage. The third Sunday, I'll talk about parenting, and the final Sunday about the beauty of Christian friendships within families. Listen carefully, guys. Don't miss this. Next Sunday, at the beginning of the message, I'm going to give couples an opportunity to renew their marriage vows. So husbands, you're going to be real smart if, sometime this week, you get down on your knees (those of you who can still make it down there) and say, "Sweetheart, would you do me the honor of renewing our wedding vows this next Sunday?" Ladies, if your husband hasn't done that by Wednesday or Thursday, remind him of what I said.

Even if you're in the choir, you can go to where your wife or husband is. And you can be as creative as you want to be. Ladies, you may want to wear your wedding veil or, guys, you may want to wear a tux or bring flowers. Guys, if you want to get your wife a new ring with a big diamond, feel free to do that. For everybody who wants to, we're going to have a renewal of wedding vows at the beginning of the message next Sunday.

I've been married 25 years now, and so you would think I'm an expert, but actually I know less about marriage now than I did when I first got started. After I had been married about 3 years, I preached a sermon entitled, "25 Ways to have a Great Marriage." Now that I've been married 25 years, I want to talk about 3 or 4 things that may or may not work.

I think the longer you're married, the more you figure out you're not going to completely figure it out. There is no such thing as a perfect marriage because you've got an imperfect husband and wife. There's no way it can be perfect. Couples who think their marriage is going to be perfect have unrealistic expectations. Marriages are either healthy or they're unhealthy. We ought to thank God if we have a relatively healthy marriage. When your marriage becomes unhealthy, you shouldn't pull the plug. You should not commit marital suicide. There are plenty of so-called Dr. Kevorkians out there telling people, "If you have an argument, pull the plug, destroy the marriage." No, friend, you look to the Great Physician who is able to heal all kinds of sicknesses, even marriage sickness.

You may be going through a marriage problem right now or you might have been going through one or maybe you are the victim of divorce and maybe you're remarried or not remarried. There is something you can learn from this point onward in your life. God has something he wants to say to you about your marriage. I want us to look in Genesis 2, at the very first marriage that ever took place. I call this the marriage in paradise.

The title of the message is, "Marriages are Made in Heaven, but Maintained on Earth." After the first service, a man who had been married for many years said, "Marriages are made in heaven,

but so is thunder and lightning." Let's begin reading in verse 18 of Genesis 2. "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'" The King James Version says a "help meet." Sometimes people have even made that one word, "helpmeet." The word means, "it's a helper who is just right for him." A suitable helper is a good translation.

Continuing in verse 19, "The Lord God formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them, and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air, and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam, no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs, (the word literally means side, flesh and bones) and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib or the flesh he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man."

It's amazing today that scientists are getting too excited about cloning. That's what God did thousands of years ago. He took a cell and made a whole person out of it, but the key is, only God can make that first cell. Only God can create something out of nothing.

Look at verse 23. Adam wakes up and he sees this beautiful woman. In verse 23, what you actually have is a strong Hebrew exclamation. I mean these words really don't capture the spirit. I imagine probably Adam looked at her and said, "Ooh-la-la." That's a better rendering of the text. He said, "Whoa, man." That's why we call her "whoa man, woman." It is a Hebrew exclamation. You know? The text sounds tame. He says, "This is now bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman, (whoa man, like I told you) for she was taken out of man."

Verse 24 is the first of perhaps hundreds of principles in the Bible for successful living. Here is the first principle in all the word of God. "For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united (the King James Version says cleave to his wife) and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame."

If you keep reading into chapter 3, do you know what happens? Satan slithers his slimy self into the picture, and he decides to drive a wedge between Adam and Eve. I want you to understand he's still doing exactly the same thing today. Satan is attacking every single marriage, every single family relationship. He's trying to drive a wedge between husbands and wives; he's trying to drive a wedge between parents and children; he's trying to drive a wedge between in-laws and children. That's what he does. He divides and he conquers. And he's trying to do that today. If you are having problems in your marriage, you need to understand that it's not just happening. There is a malignant, invisible force that is intent upon destroying your happiness, which involves destroying your marriage.

Let me ask this. How long a time elapsed between the end of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3? Since it is the next sentence, we think it is maybe a week or two or a month. How long do you think Adam and Eve enjoyed marital paradise? Well, the Bible doesn't say. Why do we think it just happened next week? Are you ready for this? Adam and Eve might have been happily married for hundreds or thousands or millions or billions of years before marriage

problems erupted. How do we know? We don't know, because they weren't aging, that's for sure. But for sure, sometime later, Satan came and tried to destroy them.

I. GOD'S PART IN THE FIRST MARRIAGE (18-23)

Let's examine God's part in the first marriage of Adam and Eve. (a) First of all, he prepared a husband to lead. He prepared a husband, Adam, to lead, to be the leader. He said, "Okay, Adam, I want to give you authority. First of all, I give you authority to name all the animals. Then I'm going to give you a wife, and I also want you to lead her." The Bible says in the book of Ephesians in the New Testament that husbands are the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church.

Now, I know there are some of you guys right now, you're agreeing, "That's right, Pastor, preach it, I'm supposed to be the leader." It doesn't mean you are to be the dictator, the boss. There is a difference in being a leader and being a dictator. You are to lead your family the way Jesus leads the church. How does Jesus lead? Look at it. Jesus is a leader who serves.

1. He prepared a husband to:

a. Lead (Jesus is a leader who serves)

Now, for any husband listening to me right now, whether in person or on television, if you are having problems with your marriage, the very first place to look is at yourself. Ask yourself, "Am I being a good, spiritual leader? Am I being a spiritual leader for my wife, for my children?" If you are not being the kind of spiritual leader God wants you to be, that is probably the main source of problems in your marriage. Other things are symptoms, but that is the main problem. He made you to be the leader.

Sometimes you lead by serving. Being the leader doesn't mean that you boss your family around, "Sit here, go there, do this." I'll tell you how Jesus led. One night Jesus and his disciples were sitting at the supper table and Jesus noticed the disciples' dirty feet. To eat with dirty feet was a terrible social faux pas. Jesus didn't ask, "Who is going to wash my feet?" Instead, He took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist and went to each one of those disciples and washed their feet. That's a leader.

Husbands, for you to lead your wife, you must sometimes get down and you wash her feet. If her feet aren't dirty, try massaging her feet, she'll like that, too. Be willing to get down and serve. It means that sometimes you help her with the dishes. It means that sometimes you take over the vacuum cleaner duties. This is the servant leadership role of a husband. God prepared a husband not only to lead, but also to

b. Love (Jesus is a steady lover who sacrifices)

God gave Eve to Adam and said, "Here, love this woman." Here again, Ephesians 5 says we are to love our wives the way Christ loved the church. If I asked, "Do you love your wife" you would probably say, "Sure." The question is, "Do you love her the way Jesus loves the church?" Jesus is a steady, or a steadfast lover who is willing to sacrifice.

Jesus gave himself up for the church. He died for the church. Husbands, would you die for your wife? "Sure, Pastor, I would die for my wife." Would you give up a Monday Night Football to do something with her? "I don't know if I love her that much."

I've been preaching for almost 30 years and during these 30 years, I have had a lot of couples come to me with marriage problems. There have been many, many times that I've heard a statement like this. The husband will say to me, "You know, Pastor, I just don't love her anymore." Or sometimes the wife will say to me, "Pastor, I just don't love him anymore." I've heard them say, "Well, I guess we just fell out of love."

Can I just be real honest with you? Every time I hear a husband say to me, "Pastor, I don't love her anymore," I want to jerk him up by the shirt and slap the snot out of him. That's what I want to do; but I haven't done it yet. You know why I want to do that? I want to quote that great theologian, Tina Turner, who said, "What's love got to do with it?"

Sometimes when a husband says to me, "I don't love her anymore," I say, "Big deal. Just stay married to her." You see, the problem is with our word "love." In English, we have one word for love and we have to make it mean everything. In the Greek language, there are at least four words to express different kinds of love. Look at the differing ends of the spectrum. They had a word called *eros* that meant an erotic kind of feelings. I know that's what that husband means. He is saying, "This woman used to give me a buzz, used to really turn me on. I had feelings of affection for her, and that is gone." Well, frankly, folks, the Bible never says that's the kind of love that maintains a marriage. That is a sensual kind of feeling based on hormones more than anything else.

The Bible says the love we are to have for our mate is the word "agape," which is an unselfish kind of love. Agape, according to 1 Corinthians 13 is patient and kind, it is not arrogant, it is not rude, it doesn't keep a list of wrongs. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. That kind of love never ends. So when a husband says on to me, "I just don't love her anymore," I want to say, "Start loving her again, because love is not a feeling, it is a choice. Love is an act of the will. Love is a decision." Sometimes we may not feel very good towards our mates, but we can still choose to love them.

One time, my wife, Cindy, was so mad at me she put this note on our refrigerator, "Dear David, I hate you. Love, Cindy." Is that possible? Absolutely. That is what love is in marriage.

Sometimes we may not like what they are doing, the way they are acting, but we choose to keep on loving them anyway. You don't fall in love, you fall in holes. You don't fall out of love, you fall out of trees. Love is not something that can die. It is a choice, an act of the will. You choose to love that person. And that's the way husbands ought to love your wives. God prepared a husband to lead and to love.

2. God prepared a wife as a:

a. Perfect helper

Did you notice God said, "I'm going to make a helper that is suitable for you." When I say perfect, I don't mean flawless, because there's no such thing as a flawless wife. What it means is that ladies, if you understand your role, God really made you so you can make more of your life and make more of your husband's life by helping him. I've just got one word for wives, and here it is ladies, "Help the boy." He needs a lot of help. Just help the boy.

Ladies, I realize that sometimes it is so hard to understand men. Since I am a man, let me help you a little bit. You need to understand what your husband really means when he says something. When your husband says, "Hey, this is really a good movie we're about to see," it means it's got a lot of guns, lot of explosions and fast cars but no romance. Whenever your husband says, "Honey, take a break, you're working awfully hard," what he means is, "The noise of the vacuum cleaner is keeping me from enjoying my television program." When your husband says, "I just cut myself, but I'll be okay," what he means is "I just severed an artery, but I'm never going to admit I need some help and ask for it." When he says, "You look great in that outfit," what he means is, "Don't try on another outfit, I'm starving to death; let's go eat."

Would you like me to help you fellows understand what a lady means when she says something? I'm sorry. I can't do that because I don't understand. Nobody does. But guys keep trying, okay? Pay attention and keep trying. Somebody said, "Women aren't meant to be understood anyway, they are meant to be loved." There's a difference there. You see, fellows, God has given you your wife as a gift. The beautiful thing about her is that she is changing, and there's always something new and different about her personality to appreciate. That is one thing I've learned about my wife of 25 years. She is different and there are new things to discover. Ladies, help your husband find out who you are. Help him in this marriage; he can't do it all himself. God prepared a wife as an

b. Equal partner

Now, you need to understand this. Even though the Bible says, "Wives (and here's the "S" word) submit unto your husbands," it doesn't mean that you are in any way inferior. It doesn't mean you are less of a person. In the Bible, the word "submit" is the Greek word "Hupotasso," which is a military word that just means to recognize the rank of someone. It is like two five-star generals. The commander-in-chief realizes there is an important battle coming up, and you can't have two generals, so he designates one of those generals, even though they're equal in competence, equal in experience, he designates one to be the commanding general. That is the way it is with husbands and wives.

God said, "Husband, you're to be the head, but you are totally equal." This general in charge is very wise if he always looks to the other general to seek advice, counsel and wisdom. The other general is wise to recognize that the commander in chief has designated one of them to be the leader in the battle, and he'll submit to that leadership: to do otherwise leads to anarchy and chaos. That's the way God has settled it. Ladies, you can be the kind of wife that makes your husband so much more than he could ever be without you. Ladies, your husband will respond in a way that can make you more fulfilled than you could ever imagine being.

One of my favorite preachers is E. V. Hill, a big black man who is pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church in Los Angeles. He was married for many years to a lady name Jane. When she died of cancer, he preached her funeral. In his sermon, he gave a couple of examples of what a great wife she was. When they first started out in the ministry and were poor, he came home to a beautiful candlelight dinner. After dinner he flipped the light switch and nothing happened. He flipped another light switch and nothing happened. He asked, "What is wrong with the lights?" His wife began to cry. She said, "Sweetheart, you are such a good husband and such a good provider, but they turned off our electricity. We didn't have enough money this month to pay the electricity bill." E. V. Hill said this woman, the daughter of a physician who never once in her life lacked anything, could have complained, could have griped about having their power cut off, but instead she turned it into an opportunity for a candlelight dinner. Good wife.

E. V. Hill said later when they were living in Mississippi during the very heated days of the Civil Rights controversy, there were many death threats issued against him. One morning, he woke up early and turned to look at his wife, Jane, and she was gone. The bed was empty. A pang of fear struck his heart. He got up and looked out the bedroom window, and saw her driving his automobile into the driveway. He rushed outside and asked, "What are you doing driving my car this morning?" She said, "Sweetheart, there was a rumor that your car was going to be bombed, and I took it out for a test drive to see if it was safe. Sweetheart, it is safe for you to drive." What a wife. God has given wives this ability to support and encourage husbands and to be all that God wants them to be in their own right.

II. GOD'S PLAN FOR EVERY MARRIAGE (24-25)

1. Leave – primary responsibility for each other

I want us to look at principle number two, God's plan for every marriage. Verse 24 is the first principle in the Bible about how to be happy in life. There are three words I want us to examine. First of all, if you want to have a great marriage, you must leave. Leave your mother and father. He said a man will leave his father. The couple will have primary responsibilities for each other. Once you are married, your primary responsibility is no longer to your parents or your brothers and sisters; your primary responsibility is to your mate.

Have you seen unity candles used at wedding ceremonies? That is a great symbol if used correctly. You have a lit candle on one side of the table or stand and another lit candle on the other side. Using the candles on the sides, the bride and groom light the candle in the center and blow out the other two candles. Why do they do that? One bride said, "Because I don't want him to have any old flames." It really means that you are severing those ties of dependence to your family, and this is a new family being created. Some of the biggest problems in marriages are caused when brides and grooms are still too dependent upon their parents or when parents become too interfering with that new marriage. That's when in-laws become outlaws.

So you must leave, so you can be joined together with your mate. Once you are married, you are no longer the children of your parents. You are adults; you are no longer children when you marry. They are still your mom and dad and will always be, and you should always honor them,

but you are no longer their children. You are adults, and you must make your own family the primary focus of your responsibility.

2. Cleave – lifetime unity with each other

Cleave means to adhere together or to be united. That means a lifetime unity with each other. The secret to a great marriage is maintaining this good unity. If you want to have great marriage, you must work on physical unity—that is sex in marriage; emotional unity—that is being a friend, talking and just doing fun things together; and spiritual unity—that means praying together, worshipping together, honoring God together: physical, emotional, spiritual unity. We are body, soul and spirit, and when body, soul and spirit are united with each other, that is when we have a successful marriage, cleaving together. The third word in this verse is

3. Weave – Make something beautiful together

It says, “They (two) will become one flesh.” I believe that means you make something beautiful together. Children are beautiful things that often come out of a marriage, but even if you don’t have children, you can make a beautiful home as a model to the rest of the world. It means that together you can do so much more than you could ever do alone.

The picture is of two single threads that may have their own distinctive color, but when they are woven together into a pattern, a beautiful tapestry can result. Please understand it takes more than two threads. It says in the book of Ecclesiastes, “A threefold cord is not easily broken.” How can there be a trio in a marriage? I thought that was wrong. It is not wrong if the third person is the Lord Jesus. You take the Lord Jesus and your own individual threads, weave them together, and it can become something beautiful.

KEYS TO “MARRIAGE PARADISE”

I want to conclude by giving you some very practical tips. Sometimes we say, “Okay, enough of that theological stuff, give me some practical things to do to improve my marriage, I need help right now.” Let me give you five tips.

1. Expect and cope with change

The only thing certain in life is change. The person you married is going to change inevitably. People change through the years. Sometimes a person will say, “I’ve got to get a divorce, because this is not the same person I married.” That is a brilliant statement. People don’t stay the same. Not only are you committing yourself to that person on your wedding day, you are committing yourself to whomever that person may become in the years to come. Every married person stood before a minister of the gospel and said something like this, “I give myself to you for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do us part.” We all change, so we need to expect it and cope with it.

2. Accept what cannot be changed

Sometimes people come to me and say, “I’ve got a problem with my marriage and it’s his fault.” Or, “I’ve got a problem in this marriage and it’s her fault. If she would only change.” She says, “No, if he would only change.” Understand this, we cannot change our mate. Write it down. We cannot change our mate. The only behavior we can change is our own, but we can change our attitude toward our mate’s behavior. Our attitude is the only thing we have control over.

Maybe you heard the funny story about the bride. She was so nervous as she was standing at the back of the church for her wedding, she said, “I forgot what I’m supposed to do at the wedding.” The wedding director said, “It is very simple, just remember three things: Walk down the aisle, walk toward the altar and turn, walk toward the groom. Remember those three things, the aisle, the altar at the front and then him.” The guests were laughing, because the bride was walking down the aisle saying, “Aisle, altar, him: I’ll, alter, him.” Ladies, have you learned you can’t alter him? Guys, you can’t change her. The only thing we can change is our behavior and our response to their behavior.

3. Constantly praise each other

Few things will give your marriage a positive boost like beginning to compliment one another. Guys, let me tell you something I’ve learned about females. Ladies can distinguish between empty flattery and sincere compliments. Most women have such a poor self-image that they only believe half of the sincere compliments they hear, which means if you truly want to compliment your wife, you’ve got to do it twice as much as you think she needs.

Husbands, if I had the money and the power to do this, I would say to you guys, “I promise you I will give you one million dollars tax free at the end of twelve months, if for every single day you will say to your wife something nice about her. Find something positive about her and compliment her. All you have to do is do this for 365 days. If you’ve done it, a million bucks is yours.” A lot of guys would do it in a heartbeat. I’ve got news for you, folks. The payoff in marriage is worth more than a million dollars. Do yourself a favor. Start praising and complimenting each other.

Sometimes guys just don’t know how to say things and we just start mumbling. We need to make ourselves say it. It’s like the old farmer who said, “I love Ruth so much, sometimes it’s all I can do to keep from telling her.”

4. Pre-decide to stay together, to stay with your mate

In other words, don’t even make separation an option to consider. Don’t be married for a few years and then decide, “Are we going to get a divorce or not?” Go ahead and decide up front from the very beginning, “I have pre-decided we’re going to stay together. I’m going to stay married to you. Even if you leave me, I’m going after you. We’re going to stay together.”

I’ve told you this before but it’s absolutely true in my marriage. We have never even considered the possibility of divorce. Years ago, I took an Xacto knife and cut the word “divorce” out of our dictionary. To me, it is not even a word. If you have already gone through the heartbreak of divorce, make a commitment that from this point on and this marriage on, you’re going to stay

committed to your mate from this moment on. Before I leave this point, I need to ask, "Have you ever gotten to a point in your marriage where you considered giving up, when you considered walking out and calling it quits? Then you just hung in there a little bit longer, stayed faithful a little bit longer. Can I tell you that those couples who have been married all of their lives and stay married all of their lives, go through a series of those time after time after time, and they just hang in there.

In fact, I want every couple in this room that's been married 50 years or more to stand up right now. Stand to your feet. Look at that. Praise God. Is it true, guys, you just hung in there? You just got through the rough times and stayed faithful, stayed committed? Good for you! I think one day, all of us would hope that we could stand up and say the same thing. We endured the rough times and decided to stay together.

5. Allow God to rule over your marriage

Listen to what Jesus said, "What God has joined together, don't let any man tear apart." Listen carefully: If you are considering a divorce, and you want to know God's will for your marriage, I will tell you. Here is God's will for your marriage, bottom line, exclamation point, no ifs, ands, or buts about it. "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder." Period. That is God's will for your marriage.

We don't always follow God's will, but that is His will for your marriage. Do you remember the first miracle Jesus performed when He went to the wedding at Canaan? He was the honored guest at the wedding. The hosts ran out of wine. Jesus took water and turned it into wine. When you have a marriage, you need to invite Jesus. He can turn bitterness into sweetness; He can turn emptiness into fullness. One little kid in Sunday School heard the story of Jesus turning the water into wine, and was asked, "What is the lesson of the story?" He said, "When you have a wedding, it's a good idea to invite Jesus." When you have a marriage, it's a good idea to invite Jesus to be the ruler of your marriage.

Sometimes all it takes is persistence, stubborn persistence, staying with your mate in good times and bad times. I want to finish by telling you a story about an old mule that fell down a well. It didn't kill the mule, he was just making a racket. The old farmer walked over and looked at the mule and thought about how much trouble it would be to get the mule out of the well and decided he wasn't worth it. He said, "I'm going to bury the mule in the well." He called his neighbors over and said, "We're going to fill this well in with dirt and bury this mule. He ain't worth saving."

So they began to dig and dump, and here's the old mule down in the well, with dirt falling all over him. The mule had an important decision to make. Was he just going to give up and be buried or was he going to do something about it? The old mule did something very wise. Every time a shovel full of dirt was thrown on him, he just shook it off, stepped on it, and would rise above it. Next shovel full of dirt, shake it off, step on it, and rise above it.

Now, you understand that in marriage, sometimes you're the dumper and sometimes you're the dumpee. Boom. Shake it off, step on top of it, and rise above it. You know what happened. The

well kept filling up with dirt, until finally the mule was able to shake it off, step on top of it, rise above it, and walk right out of the well, free and happy.

Friends, sometimes when things are tough in your marriage, and you're being dumped on, sometimes the smart thing to do is shake it off, step on it, and rise above it. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for your word, thank you for your will, and I thank you that you are still healing marriages today. And Lord, for that couple that's on the verge of destruction, that couple that is together, but they're not happy, God I pray that you would restore some joy and some life into that marriage. Lord, may they allow you to heal it. I pray in Jesus name, amen.

OUTLINE

I. GOD'S PART IN THE FIRST MARRIAGE (18-23)

1. He prepared a husband to:

- a. Lead (Jesus is a leader who serves)
- b. Love (Jesus is a steady lover who sacrifices)

2. He prepared a wife as a:

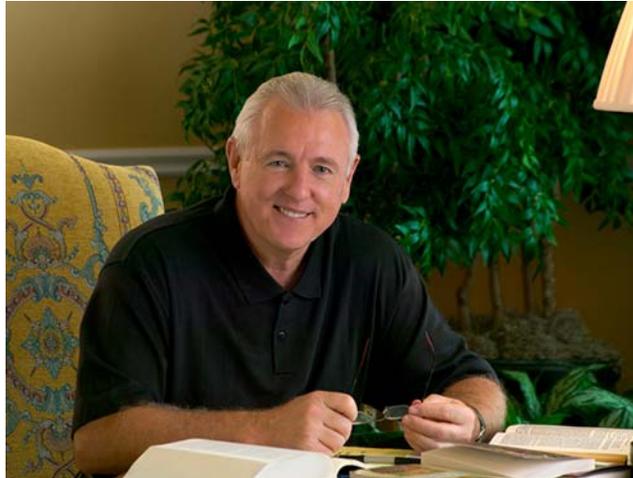
- a. Perfect helper
- b. Equal partner

II. GOD'S PLAN FOR EVERY MARRIAGE (24-25)

1. Leave – primary responsibility for each
2. Cleave – lifetime unity with each other
3. Weave – Make something beautiful together

KEYS TO "MARRIAGE PARADISE"

1. Expect and cope with change
2. Accept what can't be changed
3. Constantly praise each other
4. Pre-decide to stay with your mate
5. Allow God to rule over your marriage



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes