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**SERIES: HOW TO HAVE A FEAR-LESS CHRISTMAS
PART 3: FIGHTING FOR AN AWESOME MARRIAGE**

Christmas has a lot to do with marriage. You see this in the first Christmas. Mary was asked to participate in God coming to earth that put her reputation and character at risk. The same was true for Joseph, and I will talk about this more on our special Christmas Eve services that we have planned. You won't want to miss this marvelous time together to reach out to our community. I want to say a huge thank you to Beth Krausse and Kathe and the over 60 volunteers that put on our Explore Bethlehem and did all of the decorating of our facility. We could not have the impact without our CVCHURCH volunteers. You are the heroes of our CVCHURCH. It will take every one of us who calls CVCHURCH your home church to impact our community in a deep way in all three services. I want to invite you to sign up today to come be a part of what God will do in our midst.

The Apostle Paul was not married. He was a single adult, but God had him communicate this to the Corinthian Christians and to us. In 1 Corinthians 7 he is dealing with the misconceptions that they had concerning marriage and sexuality as a whole. They had questions whether it was good to be married. Christians in Corinth were surrounded by sexual temptation. The city had a reputation, even among the pagans, for sexual immorality and religious prostitution. It was to this kind of society that Paul delivered these instructions on sex and marriage. The church was in turmoil because of the immorality of the culture around them. Some Greeks, in rejecting immorality, rejected sex and marriage altogether. The Corinthian Christians wondered if this was what they should do also, so they asked Paul several questions: "Because sex is perverted, shouldn't we also abstain in marriage?" "If my spouse is unsaved, should I seek a divorce?" "Should unmarried people and widows remain unmarried?" Paul answers many of these questions by saying, "For now, stay put. Be content in the situation where God has placed you. If you're married, don't seek to be single. If you're single, don't seek to be married. Live God's way, one day at a time, and He will show you what to do."

1 Corinthians 7:7 says, **“We are all given different gifts. God gives the gift of marriage to some and to others He gives the gift of singleness.”**

How do you know if you have the gift of singleness? If you have any desire to get married some day you most likely don't have this gift. If you say, “Really, I'd like to be married some day. I'd like to have a wife or I'd like to have a husband,” then you most likely don't have the gift of singleness. The gift of singleness, when God gives it, means I'm perfectly happy to live the rest of my life not married. That's the gift of singleness. Whether you have never been married or you're divorced or you're separated or you're widowed or you are currently married, regardless of what state you're in, the next verse applies to all of us. Hebrews 13:4 says, **“Give honor to marriage, and remain faithful to one another in marriage. God will surely judge people who are immoral and those who commit adultery.”** Sadly marriage is no longer honored by everyone in our society. In fact it's the exact opposite. Today, marriage is dismissed as irrelevant by many people. As archaic--“Who needs to get married?” That's something maybe for another generation or another culture, a manmade lifestyle choice. Really, it's dismissed. The sentiment today is no one needs to get married. Just living together is fine. Marriage is demeaned in our culture by saying it's a career buster. Marriage is delayed. People are delaying marriage more and more--many times for the wrong reason. There are good reasons for delaying marriage, but there are also selfish reasons for delaying marriage. Marriage is being redefined. It's being ridiculed. It's being demeaned. It's being denounced. It's being discourage and disrespected. We don't live in a culture where marriage is honored by everyone any more. Even Christians fall for this trap. Part of the problem is that people don't know the basics of marriage anymore. Fifty years ago, if I were to go out on the street and say, “Tell me the purpose of marriage,” they could give you the five or six purposes of marriage. No one knows these today. So marriage is treated like just one more little lifestyle choice. It is not, loved ones. It is far more important than you realize whether you ever get married yourself or not. Marriage is essential. God gave marriage to us for six reasons. Please hear me, church. Marriage won't solve all your problems. Let me correct that! Marriage won't solve any of your problems. A lot of people think marriage creates problems. I didn't have

problems until I got married!” Oh, no! That’s wrong too. **Marriage doesn’t solve your problems. Marriage does not create your problems. Marriage reveals problems.** During our celebrations of Jesus Christ coming to earth to demonstrate how much He and the Father love us, care for us and cherishes us, I want to look at quickly the six purposes for marriage and how you can use them to fight for the ability for those who are to marry to have an awesome marriage and for those of us who are single to fight for the honor of marriage.

How to fight for your marriage by knowing why your marriage matters: God created it...

1. For the connection of men and women

This seems like commonsense, but it is being turned upside down on its head. 1 Corinthians 11:11-12 says, **“But among the Lord’s people, women are not independent of men, and men are not independent of women. 12 For although the first woman came from man, every other man was born from a woman, and everything comes from God.”** Do you realize what a radical statement this is? A lot of people don’t believe that. There are those that argue women don’t need men and that men don’t need women in their lives. But we need each other. God designed you whether you get married or not to need both men and women in your life because the Bible says that God made humanity both male and female in His image. God has wired all of humanity this way. God designed gender and your human sexuality. God wired us this way for marriage. It is His idea. We’re purposefully made the way we are. Marriage and family is not a human construct but a divine relationship. Genesis 2:18 says, **“It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a companion who is right for him.”** Please notice that marriage, gender, sexuality, men and women--all of these differences are a God-given thing. He calls it good. The companionship of a man and woman who are faithful to each other in the covenant of marriage is unique, special, and we’re commanded by God to honor value and esteem this relationship. Here is what Jesus had to say about marriage in Mark 10:6-9 **“But ‘God made them male and female’ from the beginning of creation. 7 ‘This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his**

wife, 8 and the two are united into one. Since they are no longer two but one, 9 let no one split apart what God has joined together.” Much can be said about this passage, but I want to point out three key ideas Jesus taught. Marriage is God’s plan. It’s not a human design. God created marriage, and we’re to honor it and participate in it and support those who do. Secondly, marriage is between a man and a woman. There is no other human coupling that the Bible calls marriage. Our anatomy was created specifically by God in order to create other human beings that will last for ever. Thirdly, marriage is to be permanent. Jesus says what God joins together no human is to split apart. Loved ones, this is why CVCHURCH takes Premarital Guidance so seriously. Once you’re married this is God’s will. You must not go into marriage without understanding the importance of why God created marriage and what your responsibilities are in marriage as a man and as a woman. If you’re here today, and you might say to yourself, “Well my marriage can not be a God thing.” Guess what--it is, loved friend. You might not have been married under the best circumstance, but you are now one with your wife, with your husband. It is God’s will that you fight for your marriage and make it work for the glory of God.

2. For the procreation of the human race

Loved ones, you’re only here because your parents created you. God has chosen to populate this planet through marriage. This is why your sexuality, and how you live it out, is so important. This is why satan is working overtime to create such confusion over gender identity and what marriage really is. What is incredible is to think that God wanted a family to live in eternity with Him, and He chose to create this family through marriage and the sexual relationship. No one would be in heaven for eternity if He hadn’t created marriage and human sexuality. Genesis 1:27-28a says, **“So God created human beings in His own image. In the image of God He created them; male and female He created them. 28a Then God blessed them and said, ‘Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it.’”** God has given the human family two basic commands: Marry and have children, and steward the resources I have given to you in the planet. Let’s see what God says about marriage in Malachi 2:15-16, **“Didn’t the Lord make you one with your wife? In body and spirit**

you are His. And what does He want? Godly children from your union. So guard your heart; remain loyal to the wife of your youth. 16 ‘For I hate divorce!’ says the Lord, the God of Israel. ‘To divorce your wife is to overwhelm her with cruelty,’ says the Lord of Heaven’s armies. ‘So guard your heart; do not be unfaithful to your wife.’” If you’re married and have not been able to have children God is not unhappy with you, and you’re not to see yourselves as having failed. You have not. There are all kind of reasons why couples can’t or don’t have children. God is not disappointed with you at all over this issue. What this passage is saying is that we’re all alive because couples have gotten together. For thousands of years, God has used marriage to populate heaven. This is the 2nd purpose for marriage. God loves family, and He wants a huge family, and He has created us male and female, and through marriage we can give our Father the family He has always wanted.

3. For the protection of children

God created marriage for the protection, nurture and love of the children the couple produce. It is a proven fact that kids grow better, healthier, stronger when they grow up in a stable family. When they grow up in a marriage with a mom and dad. If you are a single parent this is not a criticism against you. As your CVCHURCH family we take our ministry to single parents incredibly seriously. This is why we have Kids’ Place and EPICC Youth ministry. This is why having healthy men and women who volunteer in these most important ministries are so important. Many of you function like fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles to those children who don’t have those important people in their lives. I know Kathe and I are incredibly thankful for those of you men and women who love, care for and pray for Benjamin and Whitney. No one couple can parent their children successfully alone. You need your family here at CVCHURCH to help you love, care for and protect your children. This is why we do background checks on everyone who wants to be involved in children’s ministry. We are committed to the safety and protection of every child here at CVCHURCH. I won’t quote you all the statistics I researched that prove that children do better in school, have a better chance of avoiding addiction to drugs, alcohol and sex and most likely to develop skills and have access to resources

to help them over depression and to stay out of jail, and they have a reduced risk of divorce or bearing children out of marriage. This is one of the reasons we promote adoption of children that don't have families. I am very excited about this new ministry that Jeff and Mindy are in the process of putting together with several other families that are deeply committed to providing a solution to get kids into families that will love, care and protect them. Proverbs 14:26 says, **“Those who obey and respect the Lord have a secure fortress; their children have a place of refuge and security.”** This is part of what it means to fight for an awesome marriage. I'm not only responsible for my own children, but I'm responsible for your children, also. Trust me, loved ones, to have a successful marriage, family and be successful in being there for other men, women, children, and marriages you must become a fighter. We're in a war. This is why Christmas happened. Jesus came to war on our behalf, and we join Him in this battle when we commit to marriage and to our families through being in a small group. If you're not in a small group, I encourage you to sign up on your connection card, and we will help place you in a small group. Please, parents, get your children involved in our Kids' Place ministry. If you were just a part of our Explore Bethlehem, that was incredible. Our Easter Egg Hunts are beyond extraordinary. Beth does such an incredible job with our children in our annual children's musical. You must show up to grow up, friends. We fight for awesome marriages by promoting marriage and family as the way connect men and women, for the procreation of the human race and for the protection of children.

4. For the maturity of our character

The purpose of marriage is for the maturation and perfection of our character. Remember the purpose of marriage is not to solve your problems, and neither does it create your problems, but marriage is meant by God to reveal your character defects and problems. It is in marriage, especially, that we learn to be unselfish, and learn to be sacrificial and serving. No relationship has greater impact on your life than marriage if you get married. You might say, “But my wife or husband is not a Christian. They're not a fully devoted follower of Jesus.” They don't have to be saved to be God's #1 tool to make you more like Christ.

Because they're closest to you and they have the most impact, it will help your character development in becoming more like Christ if you have the right attitude. Please write this down on your notes: **"The number one purpose of marriage is to make me holy not happy."** This is so counter-cultural, but it is God's truth. Here is an interesting truth, loved friends. Once you grow in your maturity and holiness this is how God gets you to happiness and joy. The maturity of your character is how God makes you happy. God's purpose in your life is to make you holy not happy. And that's the purpose of God for marriage in your life--that you become more loving, more giving, more serving, more sacrificial, more sharing, more nature and more unselfish. As you allow God's purpose of maturity to grow in you, that is how you get to happiness and joy. Proverbs 18:1 says, **"Unfriendly people care only about themselves; they lash out at common sense."** Romans 12:9-10 says, **"Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. 10 Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each others."**

5. For the development of society

Marriage is the fundamental building block of every community, church, state, nation, society, and culture. If you know anything about history, you know whenever marriages are strong, churches and nations are strong, empires are strong. You know that wherever marriages and families are weak, cultures and nations are in decline. We know that when marriages are devalued the more a nation is in decline. America is a great example of this. My prayer is that this will turn around. It begins with the marriages and families in the local church. Our nation has been going in the wrong direction, and I believe it is because we don't value marriage and babies in the womb. We value **"It's all about me. I've got to do what's best for me."** We've made individualism an idol. Fighting for our marriages and families is all about the development and the preservation of our society. Proverbs 14:34 says, **"Righteousness lifts up a nation, but sin brings disgrace to any society."** One of the best ways you can personally contribute to the lifting up of America is to honor marriage and family and to order your relationships and sexuality in a way that honors God.

6. For the reflection of our union with Christ

Maybe you have never heard this before. Marriage is to demonstrate our relationship with Jesus Christ. Marriage is a metaphor. It's a symbol. Marriage is a walking, living, object lesson of how much God loves us and how we're to be in relationship with Him. Marriage is a model of a profound deep spiritual truth. In Ephesians 5:25-33 Paul is talking about Christ and His church, but he uses marriage as a metaphor to communicate this deep truth. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. How did Christ love the church? He sacrificed His life. He died for the church. He says, "Husbands, that's the way you're to love your wife. You're to die for your wife." That's the kind of love you're to have. Sacrificial love. Where her needs are so before yours that you sacrifice your life. Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. Christ died so that He could give the church to Himself as a Bride in all her beauty. In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they love their own bodies. No one ever hates his own body, but feeds and takes care of it. And that is what Christ does for His church, His body. In Ephesians 5:33 the Bible says, **"Each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband."** The crux of this whole issue marriage is this, friends: As a husband I am to sacrificially lay down my life for Kathe. Kathe is to respect me. When a man is meeting the needs of his wife he is most likely to position himself to be respected by his wife. When the wife is respecting and valuing her husband she places herself in a way to best be sacrificially loved by her husband. The purpose of marriage is to demonstrate to the world how Jesus loves His church by how the husband loves his wife and how the church values and respects Jesus Christ by the way the wife respects and values her husband.

Prayer.