

## 1 Sermon, January 29, 2012

Texts: 1 Corinthians 7:1-16

Title: "Promises – Lessons from Re-Marriage"

1. Relationships
2. Honor each other
3. Save each other
4. Children/family

### 1. Relationships

I want to talk today about relationships.

Relationships can be messy and hard to figure out.

In fact, they're so messy that I decided to skip the reading from Deuteronomy that's printed in your bulletin, because that would take *another* ten minutes to talk about!

In order to talk about relationships that can sometimes be messy, I talked to ten people in the church who had experienced divorce and re-marriage, and ask them what they had learned, and the blessings they discovered along the way. I'll be sharing their comments in the context of today's reading from 1 Corinthians.

In 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul wrote about several kinds of relationships.

First, he says that it's OK to be *unmarried*. Paul saw some spiritual advantages to being unmarried, because it frees up the person to be more spiritual. He said that some people are called to be married; others are called to be unmarried.

### 2. Honor each other

Paul also wrote that in a marriage, you should honor each other. He wrote that your body is not your own, but your partner's. In the very best of marriages, you share your very selves with each other.

Jesus talked about the two becoming one flesh. And while that's a very physical kind of intimacy, there are many other kinds of intimacy that involve the emotional and intellectual parts of us.

Among the people I interviewed, the things that made a real difference in marriage were things like being able to talk about anything (there were no subjects you couldn't talk about).

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Another person said that, the second time around, she wanted to marry someone who could take care of themselves, rather than having to be cared for all the time -- Someone who was a partner, rather than a dependent.

Another person wanted a new partner who was truthful, another said being accepting was the most important. Another said respect was key.

All of these are ways of honoring each other: truth, acceptance, and respect.

And there was a strong sense of a need for real partnership in marriage, and their experience was that in this marriage, the partnership was much more real than in the previous marriage.

It's interesting how the sense of partnership could be broken by either doing too much *or* doing too little in the relationship.

One man told me how, in his first marriage, he was driven in his work. He did an excellent job at work, and neglected the relationship with his spouse.

One woman told me how she had expected her husband to meet all her needs in the first marriage, but now she knows to meet some of her needs in other ways.

One man told me how you don't always understand each other, but you are there for the other.

A couple told me, each separately, that you can't change another person. The Lord can do it, but not you. So don't try. It works much better.

One man told me: never stay mad, never hold a grudge, build your partner up all the time, place their needs as a priority. Learn patience and practice it.

One woman said that it takes a lot of prayer, patience and love.

These are ways of honoring each other.

## 3. Save each other

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The apostle Paul also wrote that husband or wife can save the other – that God working through the husband can make the wife holy, and God working through the wife can make the husband holy.

One woman told me how important it was that her second husband be someone with a strong connection to God.

A man told me that a close relationship with Jesus changes your outlook on everything, and that has made a huge difference. Not that you couldn't have a good marriage without Jesus, but with Jesus it's so much better.

A close relationship with Jesus gave him love in his heart for others, and he became more forgiving. Christ truly changed him, and hugely impacted their relationship.

One woman told me how it was possible to see things through the other person's eyes. And there was a preciousness about the relationship she deeply appreciated.

For the people I talked to, their relationship was holy work, something sacred, and it took time and energy and listening to keep it that way.

### 4. Children/family

The other thing, which the apostle Paul didn't talk about, was family. The apostle Paul doesn't seem to have related much to children. We know that Jesus loved the children, and we know that children are part of the relationship. Honoring the other means honoring their children and other members of their family.

One woman told me how you needed to help each other work through family relationships. Another told about how much her husband cared for her mother.

A woman told me that it was a struggle trying to blend together two sets of kids. When the children can grow up to be friends, it is a real blessing.

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Another woman told me how important it was that her second husband got along with her daughter. Also that her husband and she were on the same page in raising children. They wanted to make a good family unit.

A man told me how you might not get along the very best with your inlaws at first, but you try to win them over. If you keep your spouse happy, it keeps her relatives happy.

A woman told me that when you divorce and re-marry, you never have the same normal, but you develop a new normal, one that includes new people.

#### 5. Not easy

None of this is easy.

When you get divorced, most people choose sides, and so you lose friends right away. It takes a while to make new friends. At first it can be lonely.

It's not easy. It takes both people working on it.

And it takes a sense of humor.

And it is amazing how almost all of these lessons apply if you are single, or if you've been married 50 years, or married 5 years. These lessons apply if you are in your first marriage, just divorcing, or in your fourth marriage.

In good relationships, we honor each other. We respect each other, have patience with each other, are honest with each other, we are able to talk about things.

In good relationships, we hold the other person as sacred in and of themselves. God made that person, that person needs God, and perhaps you can help that person to deepen his or her relationship to the Lord.

In good relationships, you recognize that you're not simply dealing with one other person, but with a whole constellation of their family. The family is present in that person in their attitudes and beliefs, even if you were never to meet any other family members.

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Thanks be to God! Amen.

“Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: “It is well for a man not to touch a woman.” But because of cases of sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a set time, to devote yourselves to prayer, and then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. This I say by way of concession, not of command. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has a particular gift from God, one having one kind and another a different kind. To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion. To the married I give this command—not I but the Lord—that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. To the rest I say—I and not the Lord—that if any believer has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. And if any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. It is to peace that God has called you. Wife, for all you know, you might save your husband. Husband, for all you know, you might save your wife.” 1 Corinthians 7:1-16, NRSV.