

## “MARRIAGE MAINTENANCE” by Rom A. Pegram (2/23/20)

Welcome, today, to our final installment of ‘Relationship Rescue.’ A couple weeks ago, we started with ‘Back to the Basics,’ where we saw God’s plan for relationships. Then, last week, we moved to the topic of dating with ‘Dating Dilemmas’; both are now online. And then, today, we’re going to be looking at the idea of ‘Marriage Maintenance’ ... and that doesn’t sound sexy at all, does it?

When you first hear the word ‘maintenance,’ maybe you think that’s a bit negative, but I actually want you to think of it in a very positive way today. If you think about the difference, maintenance is kind of like the opposite of ‘repair.’ I mean sooner or later, you have to deal with one or the other...

If you’ve ever owned a car before, you know there’s a big difference between maintenance and repair. When you take your car in for maintenance—like an oil change, it’s going to cost you a little bit. But, in the long run, it’s worth it to keep things running smoothly, as they were intended. If you don’t take care of the regular maintenance of your vehicle, what happens? You end up dealing with ‘repair’ instead. Repair is reactive to a situation; it’s prescriptive ... and can be very costly...

Maintenance, however, is being proactive. Maintenance is like preventative medicine—dealing with a problem before it ever starts. Given the choice, especially when it has to do with relationships, I’d rather deal with marriage maintenance than marriage repair. Don’t you think?

So, the best way to avoid dealing with major repairs in your relationship is for there to be ongoing maintenance. Because, what do they say? If you ignore it, it will go away! And you may find yourself praying this prayer we’ve been praying together (Psalm 144:7)—a prayer of distress. It goes like this (*please read this with me*): “Reach down from heaven and rescue me; rescue me from deep waters....”

But I don’t want you to have to pray a prayer of repair! Instead, I want you to gain the wisdom of marriage maintenance and know how to put that into practice—from Proverbs 5 today—sometimes known as ‘the proverb of an immoral woman.’ But I’m going to call it: WISDOM FOR A MARRIED MAN. I think that sounds more positive, which is what I want this time to be today. Folks, Jane and I have been married for a bit over 40 years, so this wisdom hit home for me. I hope & pray it does the same for you.

Let’s get started by going to Proverbs 5:1-2 (MSG): “Dear friend, pay close attention to this, my wisdom; listen very closely to the way I see it. <sup>2</sup> Then you’ll acquire a taste for good sense; what I tell you will keep you out of trouble.” So, let’s acquire some good sense—that we can do our best to stay out of trouble in our marriages. I’m going to move through the rest of Proverbs 5 (MSG) as we go through this today, giving you a ‘3-Point Inspection’ for your marriage. So, here’s Question 1 from vv. 3-11...

**AM I PROTECTING MY MARRIAGE?** Now, the word ‘protection’ is very important in scripture; if you look at various verses using this word, a lot of the biblical uses of ‘protection’ are about marriage, and the protection of that very holy union. It says that, in marriage, two people from different backgrounds are ‘made one.’ And then the responsibility, in this new union, is to protect it from outside dangers...

There were a lot of things in biblical days that would try and pull marriages apart; the same is true for our day, too. That's why the Bible talks so much about the protection of marriage. For example: It says things like ... protect your marriage from anger ... and a lack of forgiveness. The Apostle Paul, in the New Testament, says this (Eph. 4:26-27): "And 'don't sin by letting anger control you.' Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, <sup>27</sup> for anger gives a foothold to the devil." And this is often translated as 'don't go to bed angry at one another'—holding something against one another. Folks, if you thought this was just an old wives' tale, or just something your mother used to say ... *it came from scripture first!*

Ask many couples who've been married for a while and they'll tell you this is one of the secrets to being married for the long run. 'Don't let the sun go down on your anger.' Sometimes, the nights are very long, as you talk things out, but always better to get them settled before going to sleep...

Then, our Proverb for today—from the Old Testament—reminds us that at times there are some pretty big things our marriage needs protection from. Listen to this section (Proverbs 5:3-6, MSG): "The lips of a seductive woman are oh so sweet, her soft words are oh so smooth. <sup>4</sup> But it won't be long before she's gravel in your mouth, a pain in your gut, a wound in your heart. <sup>5</sup> She's dancing down the primrose path to Death; she's headed straight for Hell and taking you with her. <sup>6</sup> She hasn't a clue about Real Life, about who she is or where she's going." So, men, here's a warning from Proverbs about protecting your marriage...

I don't know if you know this or not, but we sometimes bring habits formed from when we grew up into our marriage. Did you know that? Sometimes the way your parents lived out their marriage, you now try and live yours out too. Sometimes that's good ... and sometimes it's not. 'Any of you guys ever heard from your spouse, "You're acting just like your father!" Usually, because we are... But we don't have to ... do we? With God's help, we can change some of the bad habits we've learned about relationships along the way...

This particular Proverb is obviously talking about 'adultery.' Do you remember the book that came out back in the early 80s, "Real Men Don't Eat Quiche?" Now, I don't know about that, but the writer of this Proverb is basically saying, "Real Men Don't Commit Adultery." And we don't like that word, do we? That's a harsh word—adultery. You don't hear it often anymore; we'd rather say someone 'had an affair.' That sounds much nicer. But, either way, this is one of the protections we need in our marriages. Soften the language if you want to, but it's the same thing; it's 'adultery' in the Bible. And we have to protect our marriages from it.

The writer of Proverbs goes on (Proverbs 5:7-8, MSG): "So, my friend, listen closely; don't treat my words casually. <sup>8</sup> Keep your distance from such a woman; absolutely stay out of her neighborhood." In other words, don't even let this temptation get close to your marriage! It doesn't say 'don't go in and sleep with her'; it says build a wall way around her; don't even get close to where she lives! If you do, here's what'll happen (Proverbs 5:9-11, MSG): "You don't want to squander your wonderful life, to waste your precious life among the hardhearted. <sup>10</sup> Why should you allow strangers to

take advantage of you? Why be exploited by those who care nothing for you? <sup>11</sup> You don't want to end your life full of regrets, nothing but sin and bones.”

Fellas, we have to protect our marriages in these ways—God’s word hinting at all of these:

1) *Protect your eyes* – It’s not the first look that gets you into trouble; it’s the second look. So, don’t fall for sexual fulfillment in another person...

2) *Protect your mind* – Be careful what you allow in. That’s especially true in our day; pornography is a \$2 billion dollar business ... and growing. Don’t be part of that!

3) *Protect your steps* – Don’t get near her front door! Don’t go out of your way to be flirtatious. Don’t go out of your way to receive flattery from another person. Protect your steps. And finally...

4) *protect your schedule* – Do this so you’re focused on your marriage. Make sure there’s time for you and your spouse on the calendar! Protect your schedule...

And then God’s word tells us to *protect anything that would destroy your marriage!* It’s kind of like ‘guarding your heart’ from last week; but this week, it’s guard your entire marriage. Fellas, that’s your responsibility in this holy union... NEXT:

**AM I INVESTING IN MY MARRIAGE?** This is looking at your marriage from within; protect your marriage from *without* ... and invest in your marriage from *within*; listen to the next verses (Proverbs 5:12-14, MSG): Saying, "Oh, why didn't I do what they told me? Why did I reject a disciplined life? <sup>13</sup> Why didn't I listen to my mentors, or take my teachers seriously? <sup>14</sup> My life is ruined! I haven't one blessed thing to show for my life!"

So, am I investing in my marriage? When I counsel couples prior to their wedding, I stress that marriage is not made by saying your vows once, but by renewing those vows day after day after day... The reality is, it’s the small investments in your marriage every single day that can reap great rewards in marriage!

You need to remember: The purpose of marriage isn’t to make us happy; it’s to make us *holy*—more like Jesus. And it’s the small investments in this holy union that really make a difference. So, are you investing your marriage? If you’re serious about this, there are multiple ways you can invest, like making...

- *Spiritual investments* – This should be a high priority when it comes to investing in your marriage. You do this by going to church together, praying together, studying scripture together (like in a study group). In these ways, you invest spiritually. Then there are...
- *Physical investments* – When you start feeling pulled apart, you compound that by not taking time for each other physically. And I’m not just talking about sexual relations; I’m talking about simple touch (holding hands), hugs, kisses—all those things that make marriage what it is. Then there are...
- *Emotional investments* – This, sometimes, is the one most difficult for me. Sometimes we build emotional walls and it’s hard to get over them, isn’t it? Life has taught me, though, that this isn’t just ‘talking about your feelings.’ It’s talking about facts that go on in your life—frustrations and how to deal with them, dreams, shared concerns, as well as feelings and opinions and desires...

So, there are many ways to invest in your marriage ... and we need to! Then the wisdom of our Proverb for today moves on to this (#3)...

**AM I ENJOYING MY MARRIAGE?** *God says you can actually enjoy your marriage, you know!*

It seems like most of the sitcoms & television shows that involve marriages often seem to portray this very holy union as something you endure—something you have to suffer through. But is that right?

Folks, God's word tells us that we are to enjoy marriage. And if you haven't read those parts of scripture yet, *you need to!* God's plan is for us, in a union of marriage, to enjoy one another. Someone once said that *it's not a lack of love that leads to unhappiness in marriage, but a lack of friendship.* And I think there's something to that; as I tell every couple I marry, *you'd better be best friends from the get-go, or you're in trouble!* So, along those lines, let me ask you...

- Are you planning time to enjoy your marriage?
- Do you have a regular date night, for example?
- Do you plan times for little get-aways together?
- Do you celebrate the small things in marriage?
- Have you taken the time—together—to count the blessings of your marriage?

We have to learn to enjoy our marriage! And God wants you to enjoy your marriage on a number of levels. He wants you to enjoy it emotionally, and spiritually, and physically. God's plan for maximum sexual enjoyment is what he created (Gen.)—one man and one woman in marriage. Listen to the last couple verses of our Proverb for today (Proverbs 5:18-19, MSG): "Bless your fresh-flowing fountain! Enjoy the wife you married as a young man! <sup>19</sup> Lovely as an angel, beautiful as a rose— don't ever quit taking delight in her body. Never take her love for granted!"

So, it seems pretty clear to me ... *God wants you to enjoy your marriage!* But, folks, let me clarify something: That doesn't mean your spouse will be the primary source of your fulfillment—your sexual fulfillment, maybe, but not your overall fulfillment. That must still be God—God in the center of your marriage. As we finish up this series called 'Relationship Rescue,' ask yourself: Have I allowed God to be the center of my relationships—the center of my marriage? If not, that's the decision you need to begin with, as you remember to protect the holy union God has provided...