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Presentation Transcript
God-Based Marriage, The Organizing Principle 3 – Sacrificial Love
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I was talking to a twenty-three-year-old client once, who came from a terribly unhappy family. She had been coming to see me for about seven months or so, and was becoming more psychologically sophisticated due to her EMDR therapy. She was starting to see how it works and why she felt the way she did. After summarizing the behavior and modes of all the members of her family, she suddenly stopped, looked me in the eye, blinked a couple of times, and said, “My family, including me, doesn’t know how to do relationship!” That was an insight that she had, and I agreed with her that they weren’t good at it. And there we have it. Increasingly, people in Western culture are losing the ability to relate to each other. That makes for terrible family work and social issues.

That’s why we’re doing this series on the *God-Based Marriage*. If we have something to focus on that works, we have a much better chance of it working. You’ve heard me say – related to various principles, “It only works if you work it.” But, if you don’t know what to work, then there’s no chance of it working. So this series is about the underlying principles to make a marriage successful – many of which are also about success in life in general. In our series, we’ve covered the introduction, which listed the organizing principles that we’re going to cover in the series. And we’ve covered two of them so far. This is the third one. The first one was *God’s Universal Hierarchy*, and the second one was called *The Golden Rule*. Of course, I’ve thought of several more since I started this series, so that intro will soon be out of date. And today, we’re considering the kind of love that makes marriage work – *Sacrificial Love*.

Let’s go to John 15:13, where Jesus said (John is quoting Jesus here):

John 15:13 – *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*

When a person lays down his life for his friends, or his children, or his spouse, that’s as good as it gets when it comes to love. Notice where this scripture came from. It came out of John 15. The

apostle John wrote it – Jesus said it – and he was the only one of the four that wrote it down. Jesus said it on the night before He died. Let's look at something that might help us understand why he wrote it down. In John 19:25, we read:

John 19:25-27 – *but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved – that would be John himself – standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.*

So Jesus was dying and He knew His mother needed a place to go. And He, in this way, told His mother and John that he was to take care of her, and she was to go live with him. Of all the disciples, He picked John. Other scriptures tell us that the other disciples had run away. John was the only one that *saw* what happened to Jesus. He, more than the rest perhaps, understood what it meant to sacrifice one's life for one's friends. There can be no greater love.

Notice also what Jesus said would be the result of His act of sacrificial love in John 12:32, Jesus said:

John 12:32 – *And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die, John tells us.*

So this kind of love has a drawing effect on people. When a husband, or a wife, sacrifices life, time, attention for the other, it tends to draw the other to them emotionally. It softens us. That's why it's one of the organizing principles of marriage, as well all of life.

In marriage, it's hard enough to be married to the opposite sex. Anything we do to bridge the gap is going to be helpful. There's a reason why the term *opposite sex* exists. We really are opposite in so many ways. It's kind of like email. If there's any way somebody can misunderstand an email you write, the person you're writing to *will* misunderstand it. And the same with talking to one's mate – which gets to one of the principles I've left out of this series up to this point – marital communication. And we *will* find a place to fit that in, though I've covered it many times in other presentations.

So John heard the night before about the meaning of sacrifice. It's love. And when he saw Jesus die that horrible death willingly for him, it caused him to change, and he became a sacrificial person. At one point in his life, Jesus called John and his brother, James, the Sons of Thunder. They were very angry, vengeful people. But this changed everything for John. His interactions with Jesus, in the three and a half years that Christ was with him, changed him.

When we marry someone who is willing to sacrifice for us, it has the same effect. We tend to want to also be sacrificial for them – unless, of course, there is narcissism. But more about that later. Let's just say, for now, that even narcissism has a hard time withstanding sacrificial love.

Now let's turn to another scripture that helps us understand more about sacrificial love – Ephesians 5:25, where the apostle Paul writes:

Ephesians 5:25-33 – *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.... Okay, there it is – sacrificial love. A husband is to love his wife exactly the same way that Christ loved the church and sacrificed Himself for her. ...that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word. so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

So what is Paul telling us here? Well, I think one point is clear, but another, I think, has been missed by many of us. First, he says that marriage is modeled after the relationship between Christ and the church. That's one of the organizing principles. Jesus sacrificed Himself for the church. So that means sacrificial love is to be a part of the relationship. Then he says that Christ is preparing the church to be His bride, perfect and without spiritual blemish. And how is He doing that exactly? Is it by bossing the church around, by subjecting her to His choices? Well, some men act like they seem to think that's how He does it, but no! Go back to verse 27. It says that He sacrificed Himself for her, *so that* she could become perfect. As a member of the church – removing some autocratic church leaders who may have tried to force you into their way of thinking and believing – when has Jesus ever forced you into anything? Never! That's why the church is imperfect. We get to make lots of decisions ourselves. Sometimes we don't hit the mark. Have you ever heard a really bad sermon? – you know, somebody made a really bad choice of topic, or chose poorly how to present it? Or, maybe we were not open to it, in which case, it would be on us. Have you ever thought some minister gave a real clinker, only to learn other people got a lot out of it? Well, there you go. But either way, we get to choose. We get to make mistakes or we get to make good choices. We get to make both. And *He* sacrifices His time to let us learn what we need to learn from our own choices.

Husband, how do you relate to your wife and your children? Does your sacrifice lead the way? Or you need to be obeyed? On the other side of that coin, wives, are you sacrificing yourself for your husband, respecting him as leader, even though he hasn't yet arrived leadership skills as had Jesus? Because when he arrives, he will want to know what you want, what you think, how you feel about every situation that requires a decision about the two of you, and he will put as much weight on what you want as on what he wants. And so will you do that. You'll want it because of the fact that he values you so much, it draws you to him. And when you do that, too, he's going to be drawn to you. When you love him sacrificially, it causes him to want to know what you

need. When the two of you arrive there, the two of you will be a team. That fact that the man leads it does not mean that the woman misses out. It means that they both win. It means that they are heirs together of the grace of life, as Paul called it.

I'm going to tell you a story about somebody I met in that I met in therapy that I think will be an illustration of this principle. I had a little girl brought by her parents to therapy. She was eleven. She was very bright, very athletic, and very angry. She had a terrible relationship with her parents. But her parents kind of overlooked all of that good and bad stuff. They brought her because they learned that she was being groomed by a pedophile. I believe she was susceptible because of her disturbed relationship with her own father. I don't think she would have really entertained anything offered by this pedophile, except that she was lacking so much in her relationship with her dad. But her parents were terrified that she would become promiscuous, or addicted, or narcissistic, or all of those, as some children do when experiencing that kind of attention.

So we did EMDR about the situation itself. And she calmed down. She felt less afraid, less guilty, less responsible, more aware. Still, she was constantly angered by her father's behaviors toward her and her sisters. And this looked to her parents like she wasn't getting any better. But they didn't seem to realize that's because the upset was ongoing.

This man had no clue how to work with his three daughters. I tried to work with him individually on this, but I never made a dent. So, as the therapy continued, I listened and I listened and I listened to this child for hours, for days, for weeks, for months, for years. And, as she got older, she became more and more angry because her brain was developing and she was more aware of the meaning of more of the things that her dismissing, and upsetting, sarcastic father would do. And that aggravated her more as she got older.

When she was sixteen, she started coming into my office, almost every session, telling me about some ridiculous thing her father was doing to her now – or to her sisters now – and what vengeful actions she was going to take to get even with him. And I would reflect back all that she said to me to prove to her that I was listening, and noticing how angry she was, and then I would tell her a brief story about how I, when I was her age, tried something similar with disastrous results, or I would tell her a story about another client I had in times past who tried the same thing, only to have it backfire. And she would listen to my story, nod her head, and then wave it off, intent on her plan, as though she never even heard what I said.

But the next week, she would come in and tell me that she had come up with a *new* plan to deal with father. And, invariably, it was a version of the very same thing I had introduced into her thinking the week before. Now, how did that happen? Well, I think her therapy – once past the EMDR part – was to learn how to relate to a safe older male. And all that sacrificial listening I did for years earned me the right to put forth suggestions, albeit obliquely in story form. She knew that I cared about her. And I think that she really cared about me too.

When we really listen to people, and are interested in what they have to say, that draws them to us. That's how she grew close to me. She started to share herself, and she found that, as she did that, I was receiving it. I was taking it in. I was hearing it and that it was a safe place for her to do that.

So when that happens – when one person listens to another long enough – they eventually want to know what the other person thinks too. They want to share the relationship that way. So, sacrificial love is not just for marriage. It's an organizing principle in heaven and on earth. So here's a question for you: When you pray, is somebody listening? Well yes, God the Father and Jesus Christ are listening. Right? That's what They promise us. So They love us sacrificially as we clumsily cover the same territory over and over again and express grave doubts that They're going to deliver on promises They have already made to us. So how does that make us feel? Well, it makes us feel humble and it makes us feel loved. And we want to know what They think as well. So then we're open to listening to them, aren't we?

I'm going to talk just a little bit about communication as related to sacrificial love and the one weakness I can see about it. There's a short story by O'Henry called *The Gift of the Magi*. It's about an impoverished young married couple who love each other sacrificially. The young woman has beautiful long hair – her crowning glory. And her young husband has a beautiful gold watch – a family heirloom handed down from his father. And it was his grandfather's before that. Neither of them had enough money to buy much of anything for a Christmas gift for the other, so he sold his watch to buy her the perfect gift – a beautiful decorative set of hair combs, encrusted with gems. And she, not knowing what he had done, sold her beautiful hair in order buy him the perfect gift – a gold chain for his beloved watch.

Now I know they both kept their secrets because they wanted them to be a surprise. So we have to take that into account. They did it for sacrificial love, however, didn't they? But when two people are intent on sacrifice, sometimes communication needs to be a part of that. I would never buy my wife anything expensive – having learned the hard way from this – without making sure it's what she wants. And what that looks like is both of us going to the store together, as a team, to pick out a gift for her. And as I ask her if she likes this ring or that, for example, she also wants to know if I like any of them more than the other. And then I remind her that this is about what *she* likes, not what I like, but then, being a sacrificial partner in the marriage, she factors in what I think too. So then there are some gifts that require no conferring – you know, like an envelope stuffed with cash, delivered by surprise, or pink roses found on the coffee table. But they are, sometimes, not as much fun as picking things out together.

So this brings us to the issue marital communication, which as we said, we would include later more effectively. But there is that possibility – when people love each so much that they're willing to sacrifice something of theirs to get something for someone else – that there needs to be communication about these things. I mean, what if the young woman told her husband what she was thinking. Well, he wouldn't have bought the hair combs, would he? So what would have

happened was, they would have had to do one for Christmas and one for birthday, or something like that. Right? Just thinking about it practically.

Another thing to think about when sacrificing for the family – or issue of it. You know, about 75% of the marriages that wind up in my office, the wife's complaint is that the husband doesn't sacrifice enough time for the family. To which he invariably replies, I sacrifice my whole life working to support the family. So she doesn't feel like he cares and he feels like his sacrifice is not respected. So he *is* sacrificing and it's probably also true that she's missing him, so this can be resolved with communication. But they both feel defensive because of the way it's been communicated. He doesn't love her enough and he doesn't feel appreciated enough. So their energy is going to be spent on self-defense. He's going to defend his position as provider and she's going to attack his position as not present in the family.

So what they need to do is sit down and figure out how to help everyone get more of what they need. And, if it doesn't work for *both* of them, that solution they choose, in the end, it's not going to work for either one. So that's something to think about as well. It's fine to be sacrificial – it's the greatest kind of love there is – but, in a marriage, where many things are intertwined, it's good to talk about these things ahead of time. We'll have a lot more about this later.

Okay, that's something about sacrificial love – the most powerful kind of love – as it's applied to marriage. Next time, we'll take a look at the reality of being heirs together of the grace of life and what that means in an everyday way.

Don't forget to check out our Website, liferesource.org or look us up on the Apple podcasting site. Our short presentations are great to listen to while driving, exercising, or as a replacement for daydreaming.

Until next time, this Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.