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Presentation Transcript
God-Based Marriage, Premarital Considerations
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For those who have been following our series, *The God-Based Marriage*, this is the 11th and last of the series. In this series, we've covered 9 organizing principles of marriage. And today, we're going to think about those principles as they can be applied by those who are not yet married, but hope to be, how to use biblical knowledge about marriage to help them find the best mate for them, and how to organize their new marriage so that it aligns easily and naturally with the fundamentals God has installed in the marriage institution.

Let's look at those organizing principles again – get them in mind. The first one we talked about was *God's universal hierarchy*, and how husbands and wives fit into that. The second one was the *Golden Rule* – treat other people the way you would like to be treated. The third was *sacrificial love* – that's the kind of love needed in marriage – just like Christ has for the church. (Fourth) – that we are *heirs together of the grace of life*, both working toward the same goal ultimately, which should talk about how our marriage should function. The fifth one was *having the back of your mate*. We all know we're imperfect and we need somebody to help us cover for our imperfections. The sixth was *emotional connection*. The thing that we all start out with from the womb is a desire to emotionally connect – to attach to our parents. And that need *never* goes away. God created that in us so that we would want to connect to Him emotionally, as well as psychologically and intellectually, etc. The eighth principle is *rupture and repair* – talking about relationships. They *can* be fixed if they're broken and God shows us how to do that. So that becomes one of the organizing principles. What do you do when things aren't working? The ninth and final one was *commitment* – very clearly important and probably one of the most fundamental. I don't know if it's *the* most, but if you're not committed to making it work, then the easy way out is available, and we don't want that.

How can knowing these things help us in starting out a marriage? There are three main ways. The obvious is that we would be building the relationship on the principles God built into it for success. It seems self-evident. Secondly, most of us would think to go looking for a mate who

also values these qualities. And thirdly – and much less obvious to most – if we know these principles, we can look within to see if we are already practicing them or not. And if not, then we can start learning to practice them in our lives before we're married.

So let's start with that one. Our whole life before marriage – think about the universal hierarchy – by submitting to parental authority, a person is learning how God's universal hierarchy works. So we can start learning as children how things work in the family, and then we see how it works throughout all human experience. For example, when our parents treat us with respect, and include us in decision making, we can recognize that they could be otherwise. You know, they could be repressive or controlling and not fair, and we wouldn't like that. Then, when they treat us badly, we can learn that the way they have treated us is *not* productive, and we can determine to treat our children differently, as God instructs. There's never been a totally imperfect, nor a totally perfect parent. So every human should have both of these experiences. So, if you're a male, and you can learn how to treat your wife from your parents' example – good or bad. It's there for you. And, if you're a female, you can learn how to look for a good man, for example, from your parents' example.

Just thinking about it, if you're thinking about someone that you're interested in, is he able to consider your desires just as important as his? How does he treat his mother and his father? Are you able to work within God's hierarchy as a wife as well as when you were a child? Are you able to work within God's hierarchy as a husband? And that means that the emphasis is not so much on control, but on team effort and working *with* your wife, and considering her a part of yourself. Would you be able to rule well your children, because every mother is over her children in God's scheme of things.

Notice what God thinks about when He judges people as fit for leadership. Both parents are leaders in a marriage with children. Right? So here's God speaking about Abraham in Genesis 18:19:

Genesis 18:19 – *For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him."*

Notice the *so that*. If we are not able to be good parents, that means, to God, that we have some character flaws and wouldn't necessarily make good leaders until we've overcome them.

The second organizing principle that we listed was *the Golden Rule*. So let's look at that one. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Is your prospective mate considerate of you? Are you considerate of them? Do they always have to have their way, instead of thinking about you too? So marriage is organized around this principle. How else could two independent people of opposite gender ever get along and flourish if they didn't have this as an underlying value? It would be impossible. This is one of the litmus tests for the ability to be successfully married. It's important to look for somebody with these characteristics, but it's also very important to ask

ourselves, “Can I follow this rule as well?” – not, “Can I find a good mate?” but, “Can I *be* one?” So, have you placed a high priority on this value all your life? Well, no time like the present to get started on it. If we ever hope to be happily married, we are going to have to learn to think this way about ourselves and others.

What’s next? Well, the third one was sacrificial love. Jesus tells us, “Greater love has no man than this – to lay down his life for his friends.” And we know that He did that literally for us. Most people who are going into marriage are looking for someone who can meet their needs. And this completely misses the point of this principle, which is sacrifice. Men and women are incomplete. Both need help. And to help someone else, sometimes – most of the time, actually – means sacrificing our time, our energy, our momentum to come to the aid of someone who needs it. That’s somewhat of a mundane example when you consider that Jesus submitted Himself to a brutal death – truly sacrificial. Sometimes, this same kind of sacrifice may be required of us. I read of a man recently who was killed by a psychotic low-life rioter in the grip of an evil frenzy. And this man was killed because he tried to help a woman who was being beaten by this rioter – coward that he was. So he wasn’t even married to this woman. He didn’t even know her. But he had mercy and compassion on her and he sacrificed his own life to take care of her. His attitude was, “If you’re going to do it to her, you’re going to have to go through me first.” And sometimes in life that *is* what happens. So, are you ready for that – in a sacrificial way – to be a mate?

The fourth one we talked about was heirs together. The real challenge here is to look at your mate as an imperfect person and know that you are both headed for the same destiny with all the same kind of problems. Are you capable of helping your mate get to the goal? Or will you start to think about you and your mate as two disparate separate beings who are opposed to one another? That’s not how your relationship is to be organized. You’re on the same team. You’re not enemies. You’re friends and you’re working together to both get to the same place. So, are you capable of that? Or will your faults, unresolved, become a stumbling block for your mate? What are you willing to do?

The fifth one we talked about was having your mate’s back. This might seem like a bit of a *duh*, but there is more to it than meets the eye. We all know, at some level, we are incomplete beings. We need help. And when we cover our mate’s blind spots – which is the back – it causes them to love us. In other words, intentionally trying to have our mate’s back helps them provide to us what we want most in our marriage, which is a close emotional connection. So right there...do you remember when Jesus said when He’s lifted up from the earth, He will draw all people to Himself? And He made that great sacrifice? When we cover our mate’s blind spots, when we’re sacrificially having their backs, it causes them to love us. And so, when they do that, it causes us to love them. So, when we intentionally try to have our mate’s back, that helps them provide to us what we want most in our marriage – close emotional connection. Do you try to have the backs of your fellow workers, or your boss, or your employees? Or, are you centered only on yourself. It’s a bad habit we get into from early. So, if we can start working to correct that before

we get married, then our chances of being happy with our mates is much better. Self-centeredness cripples a marriage and robs it of its full potential – not only for the selfish one, but also the unselfish one too.

The sixth principle was emotional connection. Most of the men I meet in marriage counseling *want* emotional connection, but are so out of touch with their own feelings, they don't even know what they want. I tell all the young guys who finally give up the front – you know, the mask they're wearing – and come for therapy that they will learn a lot about their own feelings, and that may be a more important benefit from the therapy than the original reason they came. It's hard to be emotionally close to someone if you don't know what you're feeling. So I advise all young men to do some therapy for some of the problems they have, if for no other reason than they can learn more about their own emotions.

The seventh principle is marital communication. Paul said that marriage is an analogy – or a type – of what's going to happen to us in God's Kingdom when we are the bride of Christ. So, when we pray to God, what's He do mostly? Well, He, in the moment, mostly listens to us, doesn't He? And that's the big thing about communication in marriage – is listening to each other – and then repeating back what we heard so we can be sure that we understood what they meant. So, a very important principle. All through the Bible, people complain to God and He listened, and then He took some kind of action. Sometimes He even answered them and explained to them what He heard. So they knew that He was on their side. So that's a very important principle as well. We can practice that all day long all our lives, if we will – if we'll learn how to listen to other people. If you're thinking about communicating back to them what you just heard from them, then it doesn't seem to them like you're just waiting for them to be quiet so you can talk now. That's one of the big problems we have in our society, because we're used to talking and not listening. We just talk *at* each other, instead of *to* one another. So that's a very important principle and it's something we can practice all our lives. We can practice it with children. We can practice it with employees, or employers or peers. It's a very important thing to learn how to do. God's good at it. We need to get good at it too.

If you heard the eighth presentation, you know it was about rupture and repair. It was about repairing damaged relationships. Think about your life so far. Are you good at reconciliation? If not, you better get after it, because when you're married, you're going to *need* to be able to do that. Are there some people that are angry with you, or that you're angry with. How are you going to work that out? It would be good to practice doing that, so that you can learn how to do it when you are married. We've given lots of presentations about this process, so you can go to our Website and just type in "Rupture and Repair" and see what comes up for you.

The ninth one is commitment. Are you able to commit to relationships? Have you stayed close to your parents, your children, your siblings, friends? Can you commit to your job, or do you bounce all over the place? Or your church? Do your values change a lot, or are you pretty solid with those? How about your religion? Or, do you find yourself waffling a lot – a lot of ambivalence

about everything in your life – even about your marital relationship? You know, that’s not going to help you when you get married. James, in 4:8, said:

James 4:8 – *Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

So we don’t want to be double-minded – back and forth. We want to do what’s right and stay with it – in our relationships with people as well – as much as can be possible.

Genesis 2:24 says:

Genesis 2:24 – *Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*

You know, that *hold fast* thing – does that sound like waffling back and forth to you? Or, does it sound like commitment? There really is no room for ambivalence in marriage. We can be like the unhappily married young man I met, who said to me, “I’m not good at difficult.” He didn’t know how to hang in there with things.

So how can we learn how to develop this ability before we get married? Well, like with all of them, practice makes perfect. If you have a boss that’s hard to work for, make a project of it. Learn how to hang in there with him and serve him, even if he is hard to deal with. That’s a pretty important thing for us to do.

Now, the next point is really important. One of the purposes for marriage in God’s plan – and we learned earlier in this series – is to perfect us – to make us ready to be in God’s family – to learn what we *need* to learn to live happily with God and others. Now, if you’re not married, and you can’t be for reason, or don’t want to be, that doesn’t mean that you can’t learn all the things you need too. But this is *one* way that you can. So it stands to reason that most of us will know much less about these principles before we’re married, because the whole point of marriage is to help us learn them better. And that’s okay. That’s how it’s supposed to be. You don’t have to be perfect to be married, you just have to *want* to be and to be working on it. But being completely ignorant of all the principles before we marry, on the other hand, makes learning them harder once married. So, to sum up, it’s unrealistic to think that we will get married already perfect in these values. And it’s unrealistic to think that we will find a mate who is perfect either. So the thing to remember is that we want to be willing to learn, and we want to find a mate who is willing to learn with us.

How do we find somebody who is ready to be a godly mate? Well, apply all of the above to the people you meet. Look for these values in others. How do they stack up? It takes two in this marriage thing. So the more both of you have these marital values – these organizing principles – under your belt, the easier it’s going to be for you. So you’re looking for someone who has

respect for, cares for others, is humble enough to submit to God's way in things. Now, the truth be told, most people are *not* thinking about that. They're thinking about how people look, how much money they can make, how much fun they are – things like that.

I think I might have mentioned this in the series, but it comes back to me again. I watched this movie, *Lost in Translation*, and there's a guy who goes to Japan to shoot a video for the movie industry. So he's a photographer. He's in this big hotel when he runs into this young woman who is an actress. She's worked with him before, and so she's all excited. The woman who plays the part is just awesome at being a ditz. She wants to be friends with this guy and all that. And the guy is married to this other woman, and later in the movie, his wife is outside where this young actress is doing a press conference, and they asked her in the press conference about her being engaged to this guy. She was all excited about it and telling them how much they had in common. They both like sushi, and both like dogs, and they both like yoga – or maybe it was karate. But it takes more than yoga and karate and sushi to say that we have something in common. Our marital values are very, very important in that area. Take a look the things that are really important.

So let's talk now about aligning marital values before marriage. Besides the organizing principles, what else is there to consider? Is race important? Is culture important? Is nationality important? Well, research shows that *none* of these make being married to someone harder unless they affect the one thing that makes it hardest of all – values. The more alike in values we are with our mate, the easier it's going to be to be married to them. And, if that's in line, then race, culture and nationality don't matter that much.

So I think we can all see that different races, cultures and nations *do* contribute to values in some way, but those things don't matter if the values are aligned. What matters is, can the couple on the same page values-wise. The organizing principles are all values. So, if you've been working on these values all your life, and you find a potential mate who has too, things are going to be very rosy. But there's also more.

When a couple comes to me for premarital counseling – which isn't too often, because we all want to make our own decisions, and we think, if we go for counseling, somebody's going to try to convince us we should or shouldn't marry somebody we do or don't want to, but – here's what I do. It teach them how to communicate by reflecting what they hear, like we just talked about. And we have covered this in other presentations that I've mentioned, so I'm not going to go over it again. Just search the Website and you'll find stuff about it – liferesource.org. Then I ask them to each write a list of the 25 things are important to them in their life in marriage, sorted with the least important things first. And then I tell them, "Don't tell your prospective mate what you wrote." Then I ask them to get together – and usually they do that with me, to begin with, until they learn how to do it – I ask them to find the values that are the same, and talk about them, and make sure they agree on them and line them out. You know, if it's not broken, don't fix it. And then I ask them to talk through all the things left on their list, one at a time. Where are we going

to live? What kind of food are we going to eat? What religion is important to us? What kind of work do we want to do? How do we want to treat each other? All of that. Then I ask them to talk through all these things on their list, one at a time, using the reflecting tool to make sure everyone understands and is understood. Then, if they can't come to an agreement on any one issue – like where we're going to live or what we're going to eat – I ask them to work out a compromise.

I remember I did some marriage counseling once for a man...he was Lebanese and she was Philippino. And one of the things that they discussed quite a bit, actually, was what kind of food they were going to eat. So sometime later, after the wedding, we were at a dinner with them, and I had an opportunity, and I said, "So, what kind of food did you guys ever come up with?" And she said, "Taco Bell!" And then we all laughed.

So, some of those things aren't as important as others. But the thing that I hear back from couples who have done this before marriage are two. One is, they say there were no big surprises. Isn't that nice? Because it's much easier to solve problems before marriage than after. So, how great is that?

One of my daughters told me about a friend who was married for four days before they broke up. What a mess! These people were adults, but they were acting like they were much younger, and they still didn't know each other at all before getting married, so they just jumped into it. No big surprises. And then the second thing I hear is, it's much easier to solve problems before marriage than after. So how great is that, right? If you pay attention to how God has organized marriage, and you start working on these fundamentals, it ups your chances of arriving at the wedding equipped to be successful with a mate who is also equipped to be successful with you.

At the beginning of this series, I did an introduction that included – as has this latest one – a summary of all the organizing principles. And I did that with the intention that anyone who listens to the first or the last presentation in this series will know where to go to find that list, so you can quickly refresh your memory. The human mind is only good at holding about three to five things before we start forgetting things. So these are important things – *all* of them – to stay in touch with them and to be evaluating ourselves on them. And now that I have written them all down, when some point of difficulty arises in our relationship, I can go to the list to organize my thinking around God's principles to find a solution for the issue. And you can do this too. And I hope you will, if you need to, because these principles are right out of the Bible, and they're about marriage, and so they will help your marriage be a good one.