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Do You Want to Marry Well? Proverbs 18:22

The wise writers of Proverbs can sum up their wisdom in one quick statement; Don't mess it up! Go ahead and blow an example. Dent the car or shank your 9 iron. Strike out in the bottom of the ninth or miss the last pin in the 10th frame, but don't, whatever you do, don't make a mistake in selecting your marriage partner. Its far too important. A mess up there will cost you big, years of pain and heartache.

Why? Because God intends it to be a permanent choice. In a disposable world God calls us to a life-long partnership. Proverbs 5:18 "Rejoice in the wife of your youth." Its supposed to be a relationship to rejoice in long past your youth, in fact till death causes you to part. Malachi 2 "Do not deal treacherously against the wife of your youth and companion by covenant. For God hates divorce. Everyone would agree with that. There is nothing great about a flesh ripping divorce experience. Those of you here this morning who have walked down that painful path would be the first to agree with me. Kids who have been forced to choose alliances would be the first to agree. Divorce is plain ugly. So to stay away from ugly, to keep some from making mistakes..this morning I want to offer some tips to help us choose marriage partners for life. The stakes are high so Proverbs tells us to be wise.

Proverbs uses some colorful word pictures to describe unhappy relationships that are not much fun. We don't need to look very far in life, but Proverbs does it best to describe what we are trying to avoid. Look at 15:17 "Better is a dish of vegetables where love is than a fattened ox and hatred with it." If you have ever been in a struggling marriage than you know exactly what its like to sit across the table at a fancy restaurant staring down at big fat juicy steak without any appetite because the person sitting across you seems much more like a stranger than a lover and friend. The distance between you seems like a million miles than the 2-1/2 foot width of a linen tablecloth. You don't want to

get into that kind of relationship do you? Wouldn't it be wise to choose well up front?

Look at Proverbs 21:9 "Its better to live in a corner of a roof, than in a house shared with a contentious woman, (or man)" Having to sleep up in a corner of an attic might be bad, but try sharing a bed with an arguing, fight-picking, competitive spouse. Even being under the same roof is too close. 27:15 "A constant dripping on a day of steady rain and a contentious woman are alike." Do you want a relationship like a leaky roof, won't go away with its constant annoyance? Look at 21:19 "It is better to live in a desert land than with a contentious and vexing woman." The desert is hot, dry, no lush vegetation. Basically anyplace on the earth is better than with that spouse. Is that what you want for your life? Now some of us have already chosen our marriage partner for life. You have willed to stick with it and work out the tough stuff no matter how hard it may be. By God's grace and power of transformation He can take the broken things, the messed up things of our lives and breathe life and freedom. He walk us through many difficult things. May God bless your commitment and efforts to stick it through the tough times.

This morning I want to talk to those who are single, teens, children, parents of singles, grandparents. There are some guidelines that wisdom shines through to help us make wise choices in the second most important decision of your life. I want to offer some tips from the Bible to help you avoid the greatest tragedy of your life. To do a better job in choosing the one who will end up becoming your life-long marriage partner that offers the love, intimacy, satisfaction, fulfillment and happiness you have always dreamed about.

Here are a couple of tips. First tip. Take it slow. Look at Proverbs 21:5 "The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, but everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty." The first error one can make in choosing a mate is to marry too quickly. I have heard several stories about love at first sight and married in four weeks and everything turned out great. But, I would say God was very kind in His sovereign hand in your life. It is far too risky to make a hasty decisions in the important things of life, especially in choosing a life-long partner. There is a strong correlation between long courtship's and satisfying marriages. As there is also an equally strong correlation between short courtship's and heart-

breaking marriages. What in the world was Darva Conger thinking anyway?

Its wise to take it slow. But couples starry eyed caught up in the excitement of love are just not interested in applying the test of time to their relationship. But you need to listen and take some time. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose by allowing time for your relationship to develop. Each month your relationship can be extended will either strengthen and confirm or erode the confidence and health of the relationship. You really want to know all this before it becomes permanent. You might find that the relationship is not all you thought it was. After some time you might run into an irreconcilable difference. Its far better to find out now then before its too late. Before marriage you still have the honorable option of breaking up rather than violating marriage vows made before God.

I knew a very talented and beautiful girl who married a man and after the ceremony went for the get away car and never came back. It had been a huge and expensive wedding and he couldn't bear the shame of calling it off so he just left. She was left literally standing on the steps of the church. A year later a detective tracked him down. Their marriage was not consummated and was annulled in the courts, but...what an incredible pain. Know well before it becomes permanent.

If you take the time during courtship, the couples will grow with more and more confidence that this is indeed the one. They will grow to a greater peace and confidence. It may seem crazy but it is wise to allow time of at least a year after things get serious. Some say, I don't want the feeling to fade, I'm afraid if we wait we might fall out of love. That's exactly the point. Feelings will fade. They will come and go. That intense emotion that is connected with the initial attraction will fade and settle into something else. It is only time that will tell what that initial excitement will settle into. boredom? disillusionment? frustration? emptiness? loneliness? sadness. Or will it settle into a deeper satisfaction, enjoying, contentment, mutual friendship? Only time will tell if your relationship will settle into the good stuff. Give it time.

The extra benefit of taking it slow is that it allows family and close friends to observe the relationship. We are pretty sure that we alone are smart enough to make major life decisions by ourselves. But we

aren't...especially when it comes to love. We need the insights and judgments from those who know us well and have our best interests in mind. When this book Proverbs was written, you may cringe, but it was custom for the parents to arrange the marriages of their children. They know their kids well. They know who they like and what personalities would fit well together. Interestingly, we think we can do a whole lot better job...until we see the divorce rate is many times higher now than it was back then. Maybe there is some wisdom in bringing our parents and close friends into the major relationship decisions of our life. They are not blinded by love or caught up in the emotion of it all. If you are thinking about pursuing a serious relationship and you have not asked the opinion of your close friends or family...you may well be walking off a blind cliff. We get second and third opinions regarding medical procedures. Get many different opinions from people who have your best interests in mind, who know you and love you. Proverbs 15:22 says, "There is wisdom and success in a multitude of counselors."

So the first tip for those who desire to marry well is to take it slow. For those who are on the younger side of life, there is a huge amount of maturing and growing up to do. There is a good reason we don't let 3 year old play with knives, or 8ys olds drive a car. They have not yet reached the developmental stage necessary to handle those responsibilities wisely. It doesn't mean they are unintelligent or immature, they are perfect for their age, but selecting a spouse is the most important decision you will make in your life, next to choosing Christ. There is an incredible amount of maturing that takes place during the 16 to 25 year age. People will change alot during that time slot.

You will be asking and trying to answer the core questions of life. Who am I? Really? Who? What is my personality? habits? style? Is this me? There may be a rebellion against parental expectations? Who am I away from my family? What does it mean to have God in my life? What things are really important to me? What are the core priorities that will drive my life? What do I really want to live for? Do I really believe in God? Do I really believe that Jesus is who He said he is? Believe it enough to rearrange my whole life around pursuing God with a passion? If you are still asking those questions and your potential spouse is still asking

those questions...it takes time to know if your going to come down on the compatible side of agreement in the core issues of life.

Some people are just too eager to get married and they end up making poor choices. They don't take it slow because they want to escape out of a messed up home life. Maybe they think marriage in the answer to all of life's problems. Maybe they just want to try and end their loneliness, or heal their brokenness. Maybe their childhood was all messed up and their spouse will give them the 'life they never had". Maybe they are just in love with the whole idea of being in love. Maybe they feel pressured by parents or family gatherings. You know those subtle hints at the wedding parties. So...when are you and _____going to. "Isn't it about time? Your friend shows up with a big diamond ring on her finger and the pressure goes way up. Women may ask "What's wrong with me?" So she goes on a seek and marry mission to prove to others that she is marriage material. Marriage choices are not made by pressure of time or people or following other people down the isle. Proverbs speaks of the folly of blindly following anothers path just because they happen to be heading that way. He who walks with wise men will be wise, but a companion of fools will be destroyed. So take your time if you wish to choose wisely on the most important decision of your life.

Tip number two on how to marry well. Really get to know each other. Now all couples will tell me, "We talk all the time just about everything." Then in pre-marital counseling I hit several major topics they have never even discussed. But its just not talking with each other that you really get to know each other. Mate selection mistakes come because they have not shared enough range of life experiences. This relates to the first point. It takes time. If you have not weathered the storms of a tragedy together with your potential partner. If you have never had a conflict and resolved it with each other. If you have never had to negotiate a compromise. If you have never had to talk through a serious financial challenge. If you have never worshipped together, or prayed together. If you haven't gotten to know each others friends. If you haven't spent some significant time with the other persons family and friends then there really is some great wisdom in getting to know each other better before you make things permanent.

When people go on dates they will put on a happy face or whatever face they think their date wants to see. They will act in such a way to please the other person. You can have great fun on dates, but you don't really get to know each other very well. The real person is how they act around their family when you as a date aren't around. That is how they will respond to you when your married. Gals listen carefully as to how that guy treats his mom. Do you like the way he treats his mom. You had better because that is the same way he will treat you when you are married. Guys. Same thing goes for you. Watch carefully about the way that gal treats and talks to her father. Do you like it? You had better if you marry her, that is exactly how you too will be treated.

Erin and I met at a Christian leadership School in Austria. The classroom was the Alps. They incorporated leadership principles into daily difficult things so that we could better get to know God, ourselves and each other. You really get to know someone well hiking in the rain for a week with them, rappelling off cliffs, scaling mountain peak, and crossing ravines on ropes. By the end of the six weeks there was no acting, no pretending. You knew exactly what each of the 40 students were made of. You knew exactly how each would respond to a difficult circumstance. You knew who could get along well with people and who could not. You knew the leaders and lazy. The whiners and winsome. The more I got to watch Erin respond, the more impressed I became. She is a high quality lady, with a steady, easy going personality. That was a great jump start on getting to know each other...but we were still just scratching the surface. After 14 years I'm still studying her and finding out more and more about her as we continue to walk through life. I enjoy making her a lifelong study of getting to know. Proverbs 20:5 "The purposes in the human mind are like deep water, but the intelligent will draw them out." (NRSV) The heart of man is like a deep water. Wade in there and get to know each other. Take the time, wade through the experiences of life. Ask the questions of life. How will you make decisions? How will you resolve conflicts? What will you do together? Apart? How will you handle finances? There is the whole area of children and parenting and discipline? What did you like about the way your parents did things? How would you do things differently? Who will pay the bill? Who will cook? Who will manage the household? Is one going to

have the final say? Or are you going to mutually agree before each other and God. Ask the questions of life. Get to know each other well before you decide to enter into the permanence of marriage. Weather a few storms together. Walk through the ebb and flow of life and feelings. Ask the tough questions.

That brings us to the third point in How to marry well. That would be to know the broken places. Knowing someone really well involves knowing and addressing the broken places of life. If you are buying a house, you are going to hire an inspector that gives you a report on the condition of the house. Its now a law that the seller must disclose all know pre-existing conditions of the house. Whether its a brand new dream house or a fixer upper. You want to go into the purchase with your eyes open. Proverbs 22:3 says "The prudent sees the evil and hides himself, but the naive just go on and are punished for it." Just like smart buyers want to know as much information as possible. What you don't know will hurt you and your future marriage. It's wise to know what your getting into in the potential partner who may marry for life; personality, behavioral problems, abuses and hurts and damage, family problems. You need to know up front. Because you marry the whole enchilada. It is only fair to tell them the traumas of your life, what happened to you and how it wounded and damaged you. What you have done to bring healing

We are all damaged in certain ways because we live in a fallen world with moms and dads that sin. Friends that sin against us. Uncles and brothers and sisters and teachers and coaches and neighbors and sadly even pastors that have inflicted great hurts on us. Those wounds don't make us unfit for marriage but they do have implications that strongly affect our marriage relationship. Maybe some of you who are married still have things that need talked about. Don't sweep it under the rug. Don't fear that they won't like you because of what has happened. If they can't accept you and love you in spite of your hurt, then they are not the ones you need to be spending the rest of your life with. What has happened to your good or bad with shape part of who you are and will affect your relationship. A healthy relationship will work it out together. Your mate or future mate may well be a point of healing that God wants to work in each others life.

Three tips for marrying well. Take it slow. You need time to get to know and allow others to get to know your potential mate, to grow up together and discover answers to the core questions of life. It takes times to weather the experiences of life that helps you get to know each other and prove whether you love is one that will grow strong or grow stale after the feelings have come and subsided and come again. Get to know the broken places and see how God has begun the healing. For the master physician is the kind healer. He may want to use you to be apart of that healing in your mate.

Obviously this is a huge subject. So next week we are going to explore five area of compatibility that need to be in place if you desire to marry well.