

# 1 - Before I Do.

## Various Scripture

Good morning and welcome to Restoration! My name is Wade and I'm the minister here. If you are a guest with us today, please know we are excited you are with us. After the service I would love to have an opportunity to meet you. I will be standing by the information table in the lobby, please come by and say hello.

Today we kick off a new series called "**Before & After.**" We are going to spend a few weeks talking about the before and afters of marriage. What happens before we say, "I do?" What happens after? And regardless of your marital status or situation, whether you are single, not yet married, don't want to be married, divorced, widowed, separated, whatever your status is... there is going to be some relevant material for you. So I am very glad you are here today.

Let me start by asking the ladies a question. Ladies, when you were a little girl, how many of you dreamed about your perfect wedding? You dreamed about your husband, who obviously worked out, right? You dreamed about your movie star looking husband carrying you over the threshold into your perfect house, giving you foot rubs as you cuddled on the couch watching TV, picking out the names for your unborn children. How many of you did that?

Now men, did any of you dream about that?

No way!!! What did you dream about? You dreamed about getting married and being intimate with your wife twice a day during the week and three times on Sunday. All Glory to God!

While men and women are different, all of us approach marriage with a box full of dreams. This isn't wrong, it's just reality. We have our box of dreams...

I imagine we are going to live in a big dream house.

I imagine we're going to have the perfect dog.

I imagine my wife is going to take care of the house because that's what my mom did. And if you have the perfect dog, well, even the perfect dog requires attention, so my dream is my dream wife is going to take care of this dream dog in our dream house.

I imagine we are going to have kids. We might have them in year 2 or wait 5 years, but we've got the perfect house to fill up with the perfect kids.

I imagine I'll drive one of these because eventually I'll make enough money for us to afford my dream car.

I imagine about how our marriage is going to be scheduled. All our time together is great, but will also have our own time, and time with our own friends... and maybe our friends will meet, maybe they won't, but I have a dream about how our time is going to be spent in marriage. Especially during the holidays. We're going to visit my family at this time and be part of things with them during these special occasions.

Men, you get married with a dream and a vision of what you're wife WON'T wear to bed at night, right? And ladies, you just know he'll love you for who you are and it won't matter. This is secondary. He'll just say he wants you to be comfortable.

We all come to marriage with all of these desires. There's nothing wrong with that, it's how we are designed to be. God has created us with desires.

The problem, however, is when we convince ourselves that if we find the right person, they will meet all of our needs, fill in all of our weakness, and complete us. And pretty much every movie, television show, and book you read will convince you of this theory.

I call it the Matthew McConaughey approach to marriage: If I marry the right person, everything will be all right, all right, all right.

But isn't this the theory of our culture?

## **The world says: If I marry the right person, everything will be all right.**

So we go on a quest to find "the one." We hunt for the person who will make all of our dreams come true. And while I hate to ask this question, I simply have to ask: How is this theory working out for our culture?

Statistics tell us nearly 50% of all marriages will end in divorce. This number has trended down recently because more people are living together rather than getting married. Marriage is so broken in our culture that people don't want to take the risk! So we're just going to move in together and try this out.

After all, you wouldn't buy a car without test driving it first, right?  
You wouldn't buy a pair of shoes without trying them on first, right?

But instead of finding our dreams fulfilled, we are heartbroken. We are frustrated. We are hurt. We are lonely.

We look around and wonder...

## **Is it even possible to have a good marriage?**

A little over 7 years ago I went through a divorce. One thing that bothered me was the reality I'm now a statistic. I hated being a statistic. And I don't want you to be a statistic. I don't want you to have an average marriage where you tolerate one another. I want you to have the marriage dreams are made of.

And I believe with all my heart it is possible to have a good marriage. However, you're not likely to have a good marriage if you do what everyone else in our society does.

## **A great marriage is possible, but not probable if you do what everyone else is doing.**

Through this Before & After series we are going to focus on two systems or two ways to operate when it comes to our relationships. There is one way, that we will call the world's way, which is the most common and popular approach to relationships and marriage that we see around us. The world's way believes if we find the right person, everything will be all right.

But there is another way, and this is God's way. (Amanda said to call it the "Yaweh." lol)

Here's the difference between the world's way and God's way. While the world says the key to a successful marriage is to find the right person, God says the key to a successful marriage is becoming the right person.

## **The key to a good marriage isn't finding the right person, it is becoming the right person.**

I'm going to be upfront with you and tell you this is NOT the easy way. It is the hardest way. It's the most difficult path. But it's not because God just wants us to be miserable. Far from it. God gets a bad rep and is made out to be this cosmic cop who wants to keep everyone from having fun. But just take a minute and think about how ridiculous this is. If God didn't want people having sex, don't you think He would have created us in such a way that we wouldn't have sex? But instead, God designed us to have sex. And He designed us to enjoy this gift of sex in a marriage relationship. Not because God wants to keep something from us, but because He wants something for us!

So if you choose God's path, it isn't because it's the easiest way, it's only because it's the best way.

Let's compare and contrast the two methods for creating a successful marriage.

First...

# **THE WORLD'S WAY**

As I've already mentioned, the first step according to the world is...

## **FIND THE RIGHT PERSON.**

This step is true of so many things in the world... when you're looking for a job, or hobbies, or marriage. It's like we must go on this hunt to find the one thing that will bring satisfaction to my life. We're looking for that Jerry Maguire moment: "You complete me."

So we go hunting. We look for the perfect spouse who will meet all our needs because in the world's way, you cannot be happy in life until you find "the one."

And then it happens. A guy goes out and he meets this girl, and she's pretty... and he says, "Oh she's so pretty and she smells good! And when she smiles it makes me tingly all over!" And then he says to his friends, "I think I've met the...one!"

Or a girl says, "Wow! I met this guy and he's so sweet. He just talks and talks and talks to me." (Enjoy it while you can ladies.) And she tells her friends, "I think I've met the one!"

And we do this because the world's way says you have to meet the one in order to be complete. You cannot be happy without the one.

Because once we find the one, that means we can...

## **FALL IN LOVE.**

After all, you can't help it, right? You just fall. Like it's a ditch or something. When you fall in love, you just can't help it. I fell. I know I committed to you, but I fell in love.

No, that's not love. That's the world's way. It's infatuation or lust, or maybe just attention. We get so lonely that when we finally have someone paying attention to us, we can't help but think we're in love. We want to be around the person who thinks we are special. So we fall in love with them. After all, they're the one.

So after you fall in love, you...

## **FIX ALL YOUR HOPES AND DREAMS ON "THE ONE."**

Everything in my life is going to be based on you. You are my foundation. My rock.

And what I've done is I've placed the responsibility of my happiness on this one person. As long as they meet my expectations I am happy. They complete me and life is good.

Of course, the same is true for them. As long as you make them happy, life will be good. You complete each other. But all we've done is set ourselves up for failure... because no human being can ensure all of our hopes and dreams. At some point there will be disappointment. There will be failure.

And when there's failure, you...

## **IF FAILURE HAPPENS, YOU REPEAT STEPS 1, 2, & 3.**

I guess I was wrong about her. She wasn't the one. But now after another search I've finally found the one! We tell ourselves sometimes you have to learn the hard way in life. Let's just keep repeating these steps until we get it right.

And this is the pattern the world gives for finding the person you want to marry.

This is why I'm not a fan of dating the world's way... because dating the world's way is practice for divorce. The world's way says I can have a relationship and do married things without commitment, then when I'm tired of you, I will move on to the next person. Basically you do this so many times in your dating life, it becomes what is common to you so you just eventually expect this in your married life.

There's an old expression in sports: you play like you practice. The things you do in practice will find their way onto the court during your game. That's why coaches stress intensity during practice. We want to be focused because how we practice will impact how we play the game.

How you prepare for marriage will impact your marriage. If you go out and date a bunch of people, act like a married person with the one you're dating, except there's no marriage commitment, then you're just setting yourself up to do the same thing once you get married. You play like you practice.

So when the world experiences failure, we just repeat the same steps.

But let's look at God's way of preparing for marriage.

## **GOD'S WAY**

With God's way, instead of finding the right person, you...

### **BECOME THE RIGHT PERSON.**

You develop to the point you are bringing something to a relationship instead of expecting the relationship to bring something to you. You become a contributor, rather than a consumer. Instead of finding the right person, before marriage you focus on becoming the right person.

This is so key because who you are, the quality of person you are based upon your character and interests, this will attract the person you want to marry.

So the question to consider is: **Are you who the person you are looking for is looking for?**

If not, then you won't meet him or her and if you did, they would not like you.

When you think about the qualities and characteristics of your future spouse, you think about someone who is honest, who is trustworthy, who is faithful. Well, the best way to find someone like that and have them be attracted to you is for you to be honest, trustworthy and faithful.

If you want to be married, and even if you're already married or don't want to be married, pray every day that God will do something inside of you to make you into the best husband, dad, wife, employee, friend... you can possibly be! God's way is not about finding the right person, God's way is you becoming the right person.

And as we become the right person, instead of falling in love, we...

## WALK IN LOVE.

There is a huge difference between falling and walking. We don't fall into love, we choose love. Real love is not a feeling, it is a choice. It's not what you feel, it's what you do. Real love is thinking the best and doing the best for someone, even if it involves a sacrifice.

You choose to love. That's why Paul wrote in Colossians 3:14 for the Christians to "Put on love." You suit up to love others.

Everyone who follows Christ is called to love others. Jesus said in John 13:35, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

This isn't meaning the people who are easy to love. It doesn't mean just the people we like hanging around. We don't love because we only feel like it, we love because it's a choice we make every day.

As we become the right person, we begin to live a life of love. Because once we understand what love is based upon the way God loves us, we then...

## FIX ALL YOUR HOPES AND DREAMS ON GOD.

Everything in my life is going to be based on God. God is my foundation. My rock. I seek Him to find my fulfillment in life. God becomes the ONE for me. He is number one in my life.

Jesus said in Matthew 22:37, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." **38** This is the first and greatest commandment.

God becomes my One. And since God is number One, I seek Him in everything. All of my hopes and dreams rest on God. Whenever we put someone besides God in the number one space, we are making an idol out of them.

Think about the number one in your life right now... whatever is number one is what you idolize.

If it's a person, then you are making an idol out of them. They are just amazing to you right now. They meet your needs. You may think, "No one has ever felt what we feel." They make you feel complete. But after awhile, given enough time, they will let you down. No human being is capable of taking God's place in your life.

Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount this important lesson:

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:33)

When we seek God first, Jesus says all these things will be given to you as well. What things? Well, when Jesus was speaking, it was in the context of worry. What do we worry about? Jesus says when we seek God and His kingdom first, all of those things we worry about will be taken care of.

Do you worry about finding a spouse? Stop seeking a spouse and start seeking God. Stop searching for the right person and start becoming the right person.

Don't put off this time of preparation and think you can do what you want right now, but once I find the right person, then we can settle down and go to church and honor God. It doesn't usually work this way. Instead, seek God now and use this time to prepare yourself and become the right person for the right person.

Andy Stanley, a preacher in Atlanta, told a story that illustrates this really well. Andy said:

*There was a young girl who was a very committed Christian but when she went off to college she did what a lot of college students do. She first gave in to peer pressure and started partying and the alcohol turned into drugs and then from there it turned into guy after guy after guy after guy; and she really fell into a lifestyle of very destructive sin. In the back of her mind the whole time she told herself, "But I still believe in God," and, "I still want a godly marriage and one day I'm going to come back and do the right thing." But she continued living in her lifestyle.*

*One day she met a guy that was everything she had ever hoped to marry. He was godly, he was a terrific leader, he was making a difference, he was disciplining other men, he had a great career. And she said, "Mom, I met this guy, I mean he's everything, he's godly, he's perfect, he's the kind of guy that I want to marry. I'm going to let him know how I feel."*

*And the mom just said very lovingly she said, "Well sweetheart, you need to know, a guy like that is not looking for a girl like you."*

Ouch. A painful truth bomb. A guy like that is not looking for a girl like you. It doesn't matter what you want, like attracts like.

Is it possible to have a good marriage? I believe it is. But only when we stop searching for the right person and start becoming the right person. Become the person you want to marry.

You can say it's too hard and not worth it, there's too much fun to be had out there. And if you want 50/50 odds, then go ahead and live like everybody else.

But if you want something different... something better... then seek God today. This is what we need to do before we say, "I do."

That way, if a Failure occurs, and unfortunately sometimes they do, then you just...

## **IF FAILURE HAPPENS, YOU REPEAT STEPS 1, 2, & 3.**

God doesn't want failure to happen, but God also allows free will. Sometimes you can do everything right and people will still disappoint you.

But if you're seeking God, a failure in life is not permanent. Your life is not based on the person you thought was the one. If failure happens you continue seeking to become the right person. You continue walking in love. And you continue to put all of your hopes and dreams in God. Even though there may be nothing in our life that makes sense, we keep trusting Him.

Even when we feel alone and abandoned, we keep trusting Him.

When the one you love tells you they aren't in love with you anymore, you continue seeking the One who said, "**38** For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, **39** neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39)

Before we turn to anyone else, we seek Him.

I want to let you in on a secret... God doesn't want you to fail in life. He really doesn't. But when we experience failure, God has a way of taking that and working it out for good!

Listen to Romans 8:28...

**28** And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him...

Do you love God? Then God is working all things together for your good.

You see this morning, if you are single, married, divorced, widowed, lonely, hurt, abandoned, used and abused, God can work every painful experience you've been through for good.

Let me finish reading verse 28 and into 29:

**28** And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. **29** For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son..."

What this means is from before the beginning of time, God knew people would sin. God knew we would be separated from Him. So God made a plan. A plan that involved sending His Son to die on the cross, taking evil and working all things together for good. And God knew you were going to be on this earth, even before time began. And God has said, "I want you to choose to be like my Son Jesus." Conformed to His image means we will look like Jesus.

I told you earlier I went through a divorce 7 years ago. Divorce is one of the most painful experiences you can go through. I look back and I know I was not the person I should have been. I know I'm still not the person I should be today. But God, in His grace and mercy, has taken my circumstances and worked them for good. I still have a long way to go, but I want every day to become the right person. I want every day to look a little more like Jesus.

## COMMUNION TRANSITION

God's way involves becoming the right person, regardless of whether or not you want to get married. God wants everyone to be like His Son Jesus Christ.

That's why I'm thankful for our communion time each week. It reminds us of Jesus, and gives us an opportunity to examine ourselves. Let's take time to remember and give thanks.

(Video after prayer)