

## ***“The Journey of Becoming”***

You may not all know the story of Solomon, once thought of as the wisest man on the earth! Son of the great King David, Solomon is considered to be author for the Book of Proverbs and at least two more Old Testament books.

Did you know that he was a lustful varmint?

He reigned as king over Israel at its greatest time in history! He was a great ruler! But like us all, he had flaws. One of the flaws about which we read is the harem around him. The Bible tells us that Solomon had 700 wives and 300 harlots. That’s a thousand women!

Proverbs 30:18-19, Solomon wrote, **There are three things that amaze me – no, four things that I don’t understand: how an eagle glides through the sky, how a snake slithers on a rock, how a ship navigates the ocean, how a man loves a woman.**

The wisest man in all the earth – and *he* doesn’t understand how to *love* a woman!

But I get it! Solomon never had to experience love! Real love. He never had to care! I don’t know that he was in a relationship with just *one* woman for whom he cared.

He loved women! He loved what women could do for him! He loved the thrill of loving! But with that many women, Solomon was constantly being served! He was king! He commanded – and it was done! We might assume that women were like decorations around the palace; toys for pleasure.

Would he ever know that **Love is patient; love is kind ...Love does not insist on its own way ...Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.** (1 Corinthians 13)

What is the persistent cry for every man and woman in relationship? “All I’ve ever really wanted is for someone to love me.”

And Solomon admits that love – the bond, the self-giving sharing – between a man and woman confuses him. The feeling of being appreciated, needed, and valued, the idea of sharing ideas and dreams, and encouraging and serving each other, the connection of emotional and intellectual intimacy was missing for Solomon.

The Bible tells us that God created us for this; to be in relationship with each other.

(READING Genesis 2:21-25)

<sup>21</sup> **So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the LORD God took out one of the man’s ribs and closed up the opening.** <sup>22</sup> **Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib, and He brought her to the man.**

<sup>23</sup> **“At last!” the man exclaimed. “This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called ‘woman,’ because she was taken from ‘man.’”**

<sup>24</sup> **This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.**

<sup>25</sup> **Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame.**

We are created for one another! There is a leaving of one relationship for another relationship. And Jesus said about this bond: “**...What God has joined together, let no one separate.**” (Matthew 19:5-6) *No one!* That means you and me, too!

What’s interesting is that at a time when nearly 40% of marriages end in divorce, our

teenagers still hope to fall in love and to marry – despite the conditions of homes from which some of them were raised, the absence of an abiding love. We are created with this inner need to relate and be in relationship, to love and to be loved.

I came across the writings of a Christian counselor who went through training to help others overcome conflict, who expressed the same anxiety about his relationship after he was married. He thought that after two years into marriage, their marriage wasn't going to make it!

He said, "I thought she was going to leave me. We so poorly managed conflict that I began to think 'Maybe we weren't supposed to get married! Maybe this is not my soul mate. Maybe we were outside of God's will ...when we decided for this.'"

But then he went on to say, "that's all bologna!"

He described the typical pattern that created this anxiety: "When Erin and I got into trouble and the expectations for each other went unfulfilled and the hurt was there, the disappointment, the conflicts ...what it did was that it closed our hearts down to each other."

He began to describe the hardening of our hearts!

Now if you think about it, our hearts open and close every day. You can get "the look" – you know *the look* from that special someone in your life? (And we're not just talking to those in marriages, but to all of us who are in relationships and friendships!) You can feel very excited, very happy – or it may be the evil look that summons anger or anxiety, and your heart either *opens* or it *shuts down*.

The husband said, "I didn't understand how important it was to keep my heart open to my wife. Because when we'd get busy and we were in conflict, the tension was escalating, and we'd both reach the place where we were at such risk with our hearts hardening towards each other," hurting one another.

Some kind of interruption, or some kind of intervention is the key to recovering an open heart from a hardened heart. This Christian counselor went on to say, "The issue is never love. Now people try to make it the issue, saying, 'I just don't love her anymore. I just don't feel in love...'" and I don't think we can fall back in love. (Greg Smalley)

But that's not the issue. The issue is what you *choose* to do, how you *choose* to react and to feel towards your spouse. That's a very new thought: How will you *choose* to feel? We hardly ever advise a friend say, when he's complaining, "Hey, let's talk about your heart. Is it open to her or is it closed up?"

Hardening: How does the heart harden? What happens that we might become hard-hearted?

There are a couple places where we read about this in the bible. The most famous story is from Moses and the Egyptian Pharaoh. Moses would come and ask Pharaoh, "Let my people go!" God was ready to move His people from slavery in Egypt into the Promised Land! And because of the plagues, Pharaoh would make a decision to let them go – but later change his mind. The Pharaoh would deny and reject what God wanted for His people! The bible tell us that Pharaoh hardened his heart!

In the New Testament we find this passage in Romans 1: <sup>18</sup> **God shows His anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who *push the truth away from themselves*.** <sup>19</sup> **For the truth about God is known to them instinctively. God has put this knowledge in their hearts.** <sup>20</sup> **From the time the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky and all that God made. They can clearly see His invisible qualities – His eternal power and divine nature. So**

**they have no excuse whatsoever for not knowing God.** <sup>21</sup> **Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship Him as God or even give Him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. The result was that their minds became dark and confused.** (Romans 1:18-21)

And so as people refused to acknowledge the power of God, when “they pushed the truth away,” their hearts were hardened! So the hardening of our hearts can happen whenever we reject or rebel against the will of God or the love of God! And I'm talking about your anger and the way you may express negative ideas or the way you might criticize someone, the bitterness with which you fuel your anger. We're also talking about fear and worry, feelings that darken our minds and harden our hearts. Impatience is one of those.

Though he may have been a mess with relationships, Solomon did understand the way the world works. He gave some great principles for how to maintain a healthy heart: **“Guard your heart, for it affects everything you do!”** (Proverbs 4:23)

Relationships and marriage can be hard work, and if you're rigid and you're saying, “I am right and the way I do things are right and the way I am is just fine – you're just going to have to get over it, and you're just going to have to accept me for who I am!” you're not making any room for your heart to be open for love and patience and kindness or understanding.

Guarding. So how do we “guard our hearts”? No one has ever taught us that. But it's a journey. Guarding your heart and keeping an open heart takes time. We will do very well at times, and we will embarrass ourselves at other times. Marriage can be hard. But a marriage relationship is a reflection of the Bible story. If we think about God's people coming into the Promised Land from out of slavery in Egypt and the wilderness – it was a tough journey. And sometimes the people did well, but sometimes they rebelled against God!

Settling the land, like settling our hearts, is hard work! But when I'm growing and *becoming* more like Christ, I'm going to have more success in my marriage and with my relationships. And we could make a strong argument that that is the purpose for marriage – from a Biblical perspective, God is using our relationships in marriage and in family as a tool to shape us into His image with love and holiness. Becoming someone new as we become holy in His likeness!

When you come into marriage you are used to being *single people!* But now you get into this mess of learning what it means to be “Us” – together. Moving from “Me” to “Us.”

How do we fit into this new “Us” that we've created for ourselves? And here we are, trying to stand up for the “Me” that I am, adapting into this “We” in which we are becoming! “Can you hear ‘Me’? Am ‘I’ still important and significant?”

Some couples freak out in their marriage relationship when they find they are arguing for the first time ever – but some arguing is necessary in order to sort through the evolution of becoming a new thing together! We “become” sometimes when we debate and argue, and try to manage our new identity as a couple, ping-ponging back and forth in order to express ourselves, to be seen and to be known!

So, are you paying attention to the *message* in the conflict as opposed to the volume or the anxiety of confusion it immediately creates?

Becoming. In order for your relationship to last you have to learn to love well. Loving well is going to require you to be on the potter's wheel, to be at the place where God shapes you into that

new vessel.

And so we say, “Lord, teach me to love well.”

Humility. Do you understand the humility it takes to ask, “Lord, teach me to love well!” Humility is the openness and the admission that we need to change. Here’s the *choosing!* The humble, open heart asks, “Was I rude? Did I have an attitude? Was I acting selfishly? Was I indifferent towards you?” Having that mentality allows us to be shaped and molded so that we can *become* this new creation in the image of Christ!

God is using marriage, God is using your relationships and parenting and the place you have as a sister or a brother to mold and to make you more holy! To make you more like Him! A good marriage takes character, which is shaped through humility and submission.

Influence. Young people will sit on the edge of their seat for an answer to the question, “What is the key for a healthy marriage?”

Dr. John Gottman has one answer for us: A primary sign for *a healthy marriage is whether or not a couple can accept influence from each other.*

Accepting influence. What do you think that means? Accepting influence from another is when you allow the other to influence your ideas, your opinions, or your ultimate response in decision making.

When I was young I overheard my parents talking about a husband and father in our neighborhood who could’ve taken promotions, a transfer and moved away for advancement, but he declined because his wife wasn’t for it. She didn’t want to move away. It made it sound as though he was hen-pecked. But let’s reform that idea to understand that he accepted her influence in the marriage and the family, he loved her in a real way that communicated her value to him – and that it was really a decision they both could accept together.

We’re talking about an open heart or a closed heart. Are you available to be influenced by your partner?

You come a long way when you see that your spouse is a struggling human being, just as you are, and he or she is longing for what you’re longing for: to be seen, to be heard, to be understood. We may not understand together how to get to that place. But when you see your partner so angry and hurt, and you’re angry and hurt too, and yet you have compassion for them, it opens your heart to one who’s refusing you.

When your hearts are open, you are able to *become* this new creature for which God has created you to be! God gave us this task to know His love. And this is what we want our young people to learn. We want you to be aware in your dating relationships, to find someone who understands God’s love and is comfortable in who they are becoming in Christ, too! *Listen:* We have to learn to love and honor God first before we have any business asking someone else to love us. Because if I can’t love me – why should I ask you to love me? That’s not fair, because you’ll never win, you’ll never live into my expectations, and we will always be miserable.

Rather than look for the perfect spouse, let us become the new, improved spouse!

Invitation: There are couples in the trenches – some who may be in our pews today – who are about to give up. But don’t give up. There is help finding the way through. Learn how to have your hearts heal and how to emotionally connect. Don’t do it alone. 80% of couples who divorce don’t need to. They give up too soon! Find the help.

And one final dimension to this journey is whether you will accept influence – from God! Will you allow God to shape and influence your lives and your actions and your will? Will you conform to His will and be transformed by the renewing of your minds?

Do you believe and trust that God has a plan for your life, your heart, and your family? He does! God is showing us a new place on the journey to becoming like Christ! Are you ready to listen and to follow?