

Sermon – Family Makeover
Sunday March 20, 2022

I want you to think of someone who lives their life well. Someone who reminds you of Jesus in the way they live.

- Maybe it's someone who's full of compassion. Whenever you're with them, they give you their undivided attentive! (They're not distracted and checking their phone every few seconds!) They're fully present, they genuinely care and they'll do anything to help.
- Maybe it's someone with integrity. In every situation they're asking, what's the right thing to do? They don't complain or gossip. They don't cheat or take shortcuts. They honour God in everything.
- Maybe it's someone who never gives up on people. They may have been hurt in the past and they may have challenging relationships in their life, but they're never bitter or resentful. It doesn't stop them from loving others well and building them up.

Who comes to mind for you?

When I was in high school, I hated Christians. I had a bad experience at a church and vowed never to have anything to do with them.

But in Grade 12, I went on a school trip to meet the Prime Minister with some other students selected from other Scarborough schools. We stayed at a hotel in Ottawa. And I learned that my roommate would be this really cool guy I had just met on the trip. He also happened to be a Christian.

But he wasn't like other Christians I knew. There was something different about him. He didn't just treat some people well but ignore others.

He was kind to everyone. He took the time to get to know me. He listened to my story. He shared his testimony with me and talked about how Jesus had changed his life.

Now I didn't become a Christian on that trip. That wouldn't happen until university, but God used this encounter with this Christian to prepare my heart. Because I knew that if I ever did become a Christian, I wanted to be a Christian like him.

You see, God uses Christians to be a witness to the world. Christians are called to live differently, treat people differently, respond differently. And our lives are to be so attractive and compelling that when people see us, they get curious, they get inspired, they take notice.

How do you live in a way that those around you take notice?

We're in a series in the letter of 1 Peter called *When the Going Gets Tough*. Peter's writing to persecuted Christians living in Asia Minor. He starts his letter by calling them exiles because this is not their home. They belong to another King and another country.

But in the meantime, they're living as strangers in a foreign land. That's why they're misunderstood and mistreated. That's why they face harassment and hostility from their neighbours.

But in the midst of their suffering, Peter reminds them, You are called to be a witness to the world.

Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. (1 Peter 2:12)

I like Eugene Peterson's translation.

Live an exemplary life in your neighborhood so that your actions will refute their prejudices. Then they'll be won over to God's side and be there to join in the celebration when he arrives. (1 Peter 2:12, The Message)

How do you win over a hostile culture? By the way you live.

In this next section of his letter, which Bible scholars call the household codes, Peter shows us how to live differently in four areas of social life: government, workplace, marriage and the church.

Today we're going to focus on the last two areas – marriages and the church.

How can our marriages and our life in the church be so compelling that they draw others to Jesus?

The first area we're going to look at is marriage. Peter tells husbands and wives how to have a Christ-centred marriage.

First, some context. This is a patriarchal society. Men have all the power. Women are considered property. Women don't have many rights and freedoms. They aren't even allowed to choose their own religion. They take on the religion of their father.

After they marry, they're transferred to their husband. They become his property now. His religion becomes their religion.

But during this time, something amazing is happening. The gospel is being preached. Women all over are hearing the good news and discovering their new identity and freedom in Christ. So they're giving their lives to Jesus, they're getting baptized and participating in the life of the church.

With all that's happening, there's a strong temptation for these women to leave their unbelieving husbands.

And it's into this context that Peter writes these words.

Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, ² when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. (1 Peter 3:1-2)

Peter uses the S word – submit. Now I know what some of you are thinking. How could Peter be so condescending? There's a tragic history of Christian men who have misused God's word and perpetuated the abuse and subjugation of women.

You need to know that this isn't right. It grieves the heart of God because it dishonours women whom he's created in his image.

So before looking at what Peter is saying, let's look at what he's not saying.

He's not saying that women are inferior to men. Women just like men are created in God's image. Later in verse 8, Peter calls women equal co-heirs with men. The Apostle Paul also reminds us that in Jesus,

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)

Peter also isn't saying that women in an abusive relationship should stay in that relationship. Women have often been told that if they love God, they should submit, even to an abusive husband. That their suffering is somehow part of how God's plan to grow them.

Make no mistake - this a horrible abuse of God's word! And if you are a woman in an abusive relationship, you need to get out and get to safety. The church should be a place that supports you and stands with you.

So Peter isn't saying that women are inferior or that they should stay in abusive relationships. He's saying that Christian wives married to an unbelieving husband should stay in that relationship. Don't leave your unbelieving husband as many Christian wives were tempted to do.

Instead, Peter says, **Win them over with your gracious behaviour.**

I was talking to a woman from our church this week. She was sharing about how a few years ago, it felt like her marriage was done. She was tired of his anger, his emotional baggage and his lack of spiritual interest. She wanted a husband she could respect and grow with spiritually.

She was ready to leave but by God's grace, a friend encouraged her to stay. So instead of leaving, she decided to pray - for him and for their marriage.

During this season, God did an amazing thing. She learned to honour and accept her husband. She learned to support him through his challenges and celebrate him in his victories.

What she didn't notice at the time though was how she herself was changing. But do you know who did notice?

Her husband. He noticed that his wife who in the past could be mean, controlling and critical was noticeably different. She was more kind, caring and gracious.

And this began a powerful healing process. The wife was learning to accept her husband for who he is and not who she wanted him to be. The husband through her love, was learning to love himself and in turn, love her and love others.

Today, this couple is not only still together, they're enjoying the best season of their marriage.

This story can be an encouragement for any wife praying for her husband. Who's feels like her words aren't making a difference. Who feels like he's tuned out.

Because there's good news. Even when your husband stops listening to your words, he's still watching your life. So Peter says Win him over with your gracious behaviour.

As one preacher puts it, Christ-like behaviour speaks louder than Christian words. That means that even when your words hit a wall, even when your husband tunes you out, you still have the power to win him over. You still have the power to change the tone of your family.

How? Through your attitude, your prayers and your love.

I love this quote from Zig Ziglar.

"I have no way of knowing whether or not you married the wrong person, but I do know that many people have a lot of wrong ideas about marriage...I'll be the first to admit that it's possible that you did marry the wrong person. However, if you treat the wrong person like the right person, you could well end up having married the right person. In fact, it's far more important to be the right kind of person than it is to marry the right person."

How would our marriages change if we stopped thinking about how our spouse is the "wrong" person and instead tried to be the right kind of person?

So win over your husband with your gracious behaviour. Christ-like behaviour speaks louder than Christian words.

Now what does Peter say to husbands?

Just in case you're wondering husbands, he doesn't say, Tell your wife to submit. I knew someone in university whose life verse was Ephesians 5:22, Wives, submit to your husbands.

Peter does tell wives to submit to their husbands. But he doesn't tell husbands to demand it. Husbands aren't to demand submission, they're to lay down their lives to love and serve their wives.

That's why he says, **Husbands, in the same way...**

You see, submission is mutual. It's rooted in the person of Jesus who himself modelled submission by submitting to his Father. By submitting, we're simply imitating Jesus.

Peter goes on: **Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives... (1 Peter 3:7)**

In other words, husbands, Be considerate and thoughtful. Other translations say, live with your wives in an *understanding* way.

What does this mean? It means that Husbands, your job is to **Be a lifelong learner of your wife.**

As a husband to my wife Joanne, my job is to be a Jo-ologist. To understand her personality, her needs, her passions.

Now I have to admit, I don't always do a great job. Like many guys, I can be extremely dense. There's a lot I don't understand about women.

And do you know what makes it harder? Men and women are so different... have you ever noticed that? Men tend to get straight to the point. Women tend to take a lot of detours. Men tend to find their identity in work. Women tend to find it in relationships.

Joanne and I fell in love because of our shared passion for God and for people. But despite these similarities, over the years, I've come to see how very different we are too.

- She's an extreme extrovert who needs to be with people all the time. I'm an introvert who likes people but also needs to recharge on my own.
- Her top love language is Quality Time. Mine is Words of Affirmation.
- She's an Enneagram Type 7 – fun and spontaneous. I'm a Type 2 – helpful and caring.

At times, these differences have caused tremendous pain and misunderstanding.

But what if God can leverage these differences? What if these differences can be a strength instead of a weakness?

- What if these differences expose our selfishness?
- What if these differences help us to grow?
- What if these differences lead us to the God who alone can give us the love we need so that we don't demand it from our spouse?

It's not easy, but husbands, we need to be a lifelong learner of our wife. Why? Because **you can only love her well, when you know her well**. So be thoughtful, considerate, live with her in an understanding way.

Peter goes on...

... treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life... (1 Peter 3:7)

Isn't this so rude? Is Peter saying that women are weaker than men?

Certainly not. He says right after that women are equal co-heirs with men. In fact, no where in the Bible does it say that women are emotionally, spiritually or intellectually weaker. In fact, the opposite is probably true.

I know for a fact that Jo is stronger than me in so many ways. She's more caring and more thoughtful. She's a better planner and has more capacity. She makes me a better father, a better pastor and a better person and I'm so grateful for her strengths.

You see, Peter isn't saying that women are inferior. He's saying that generally speaking, women are weaker than men *physically*. They're generally smaller and have less muscles. Because men can sometimes bully those who are weaker, Peter's encouraging husbands to treat their wives with respect.

In a world where marriages and families are falling apart, Peter teaches us how to treat each other not only to enjoy a great marriage but also to demonstrate the beauty of self-giving love, sacrificial service and mutual submission.

The second area of social interaction Peter now turns to is the church. How do Christians witness to a hostile world that is against the church?

We put God's love on display. Peter uses five adjectives to describe what this looks like.

Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. (1 Peter 3:8)

For those of you Bible nerds who love studying God's word, here's something really cool! There's a Hebrew literary technique Peter is using here called chiasm. He's taking these five adjectives to form a pattern.

The first and fifth adjectives form the first pairing, the second and fourth adjectives form the second pairing and the third adjective stands alone as the most important point.

These five adjectives form three marks that describe the love we're called to display to the world.

The **First mark of love: Unity – We set aside our personal differences for the sake of God's mission.**

This is made up of the two adjectives: like-minded and humble.

People often think like-minded means thinking the same and having the same preferences. For example, you and I would be like-minded if you love shawarma, you prefer Marvel better than DC and you think Episodes 4, 5 and 6 are still the best Stars Wars.

But does unity mean thinking the same way? If we were to have a discussion right now on politics and theology, what would happen? We'd have a huge disagreement! Is that okay? Of course it is.

The early church disagreed on many things. How Jewish and Gentile believers should relate, which widows to take care of. Paul and Barnabas even disagreed on whether John Mark should come along with them.

Unity isn't being like-minded around our preferences. **Unity is being like-minded around the person of Jesus and his command to love one another.**

But we can only do that when we have the second adjective, humility. You see, humility is:

- placing the needs of others above our own.
- sacrificing for others instead of living for ourselves.
- setting aside our personal preferences for the sake of God's mission.

In a world that's so polarized, what would happen if Christians demonstrated what true biblical unity looks like? What would happen if Christians didn't hold on to their personal preferences but set them aside so they could place the needs of others above their own?

The **Second mark of love: Care – We stand by others by entering into their pain.**

This is made up of the two adjectives sympathetic and compassionate.

- The word sympathy means to enter into someone's feelings.
- The word compassion means to have so much concern you feel it in your guts.

In other words, true care is entering into someone's world and feeling what they feel. Paul says it like this, Rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn.

But caring has a cost.

- It will cost you time.
- It will cost you emotion energy.
- It will cost you the safety of relating to someone from a distance.

There's so much divisiveness in our world. When you turn on the news, everyone has an opinion. People argue, debate and attack to convince the other person of their point. But is there anyone out there who is listening?

In a world of outrage, what if we were different?

Instead of trying to prove our point, what if we listened – even to those we disagree with? What if we listened to their stories? What if we heard their concerns? What if we entered into their pain? What if we cared for them the way Jesus cares for us?

The **Third mark of love: Brotherly Love – We look out for each other like family.**

The Greek word here is philadelphia which means brotherly love.

In the Roman world, the strongest allegiance was to your family. These relationships were stronger than any other, including your marriage. Families would stick together. No matter what.

In the book of Ephesians, Paul says that when you become a Christian, God adopts you and brings you into his family. You now have a Heavenly Father who cares for you.

But this means that God's children also become your brothers and sisters. You now belong to a family, the church. And in this family, we look out for one another.

The Apostle John writes,

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. 1 John 3:16

This pandemic has been hard for all of us. There've been relational breakdowns, mental health challenges, loss of loved ones. But we've made it through, in part because of the way we've looked out for each other.

- Reaching out to others with our prayers and encouragement.
- Dropping off meals and care packages.
- Giving people rides to their medical appointments.
- Walking with people in their pain.

What distinguishes followers of Jesus in the world? Is it our moral superiority? Is it the correctness of our theology? Is it how loud we protest the moral decay of society?

What if we protested with our love?

The Apostle John says, **By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” John 13:35**

In the second century, the early church was growing like crazy. People all over the Roman empire were flocking to the church, attracted by this community and giving their lives to Jesus. The emperor became suspicious. So he sent spies into the church to investigate. One of the spies came back with this report.

These Christians are very strange people. They meet in an empty room to worship. They have no image. They speak of one by the name of Jesus who is absent but whom they seem to be expecting at any moment... And my how they love him and how they love one another. (Tertullian)

A recent report on the effect the pandemic has had on Canadians is sobering.

- 82 percent of Canadians believe the pandemic has made us more divisive.
- 79 percent believe it's brought out the worst in us.

- 66 percent believe we are less compassionate now than before.

Our world today is hurting and broken. How are Christians supposed to live? We're called to be holy and to live differently.

- What if instead of hurting each other, husbands and wives submitted to each other and treated each other with respect?
- What if instead of fighting for our rights, we laid them down to serve others?
- What if instead of arguing, we listened and entered into someone's pain?
- What if instead of tearing each other apart, we looked out for each other like family?

What if when the world saw us, they said, My how they love him and how they love one another?

This was Jesus's prayer for the church in his final days. That Christians would witness to the world through their love.

May we live in such a way that we reveal God's love and make his kingdom known to a watching and waiting world.

Amen.