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What You Absolutely Need To Know Before You Get Married (Part 2)



What You Absolutely Need To Know Before You Get Married - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses the importance of faithfulness and integrity in marriage. He stresses that unfaithfulness is a sin and goes against what God approves of, and encourages listeners to make a commitment to their spouse and treat them with the same faithfulness and respect as they would treat Jesus. Gregg also speaks about the value of having a clear conscience and the importance of maintaining one's integrity, stating that violating marriage vows is not only a breach of trust with one's partner but also a promise made to God.

Transcript

As a person with some experience with divorce, as you know, I've done a lot of reading, statistics, and things like that. And I'm always amused when I hear authors writing about divorce, even Christian authors, who say things like, you know, the main cause of divorce is financial tension, or the main cause of divorce is sexual incompatibility, or the main cause of divorce is differences over the children. And there have been, you know, interviews, and, you know, why did your marriage break up, and so forth.

And these are the things, I guess, that come up highest in the surveys. But none of those things are causes of divorce. Financial difficulties are not a cause for divorce.

I know this because I've had, I've gone through financial difficulties and not gotten divorced. Sexual incompatibility, problem, difference with the children, these things put strain on the marriage, to be sure, very severe, serious strain. But they don't cause divorce because I know people who've lived incapable of having sex for 20 years together in marriage.

That's got to be frustrating. But, you see, what causes divorce is not those strains on the marriage. What causes divorce is one thing, and it's always only one thing, unfaithfulness.

Someone decides not to keep their promises anymore. Because no matter how great the strain is on the marriage, if you say, I don't, I'm not going to bail out of here, I'm going to

keep my promises. If both parties do that, the marriage stays together.

And it's faithfulness that is so lacking in modern people. And not just modern people. Apparently in Solomon's time, it was fairly lacking.

In Proverbs 20 and verse 6, Solomon said, Most men will each proclaim his own goodness, but a faithful man, who can find? Who can find a faithful man? And it wasn't any easier on women because in Proverbs 31, he talks about that faithful wife. He says, The heart of her husband safely trusts in her. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.

But he first says, Who can find that? Who can find a virtuous woman? Who fits that description? Who can find a faithful man? Who can find a faithful woman? Apparently in Solomon's day, it wasn't that easy. And frankly, it still isn't. But it should be easy to find that trait when you come into the house of God.

When you're with the community of people who say they're followers of Jesus Christ. But you see, it has not been taught to us that way. Jesus said to the church of Samaria, Be faithful unto death, and I'll give you the crown of life.

And yet, we don't require people to be faithful to death. We don't even require people to be faithful unto dissatisfaction. We let them give up their promises.

We let them cave in on their integrity. We give them a pass, perhaps because we hope they'll do the same for us when we plan to cave in on ours. I don't know why we give people a pass, except we just feel like I don't want to be judgmental.

Well, I don't want to be judgmental either. But there are things that we are going to be judged by God about. And if I know about them and you don't, I'm doing you a favor to let you know in advance.

It's better that you hear it from me than you hear it at the great white throne, you know. There are things that God has against churches. We know that because in the book of Revelation, He several times says to the angel of the church of Samaria, I have something against you.

I have something against you. This idea that once you're a Christian, God can't see you, He can't see your sin, He just sees this like cardboard cut out of Jesus and you're kind of behind there hiding out. He just sees Jesus, not you.

Well, I don't think that's true. I do believe that when it comes to my acceptance and recognition as a son of God, it's all in Christ and it's not because of me. It's Christ's merit, not mine.

But that doesn't mean God's not paying attention. If He knows the number of hairs on

my head, He certainly knows how many sins I commit as well. And God does not approve of sin.

Now, I don't say that if you sin, you'll go to hell for it because frankly, then all of us will be in hell because we all sin. But if we sin and aren't repentant, then we're probably not what we call Christians, not what the Bible calls Christians. Christians are not sinless, but they're dead set against sinning.

That's just part of what it means to have repented, to become a Christian. I'm dead set against my sin. It may defeat me from time to time, but I'm never going to surrender to it.

I'm never going to say it's okay. I'm never going to stop fighting against it because I am very ambitious. I had a girlfriend once who didn't want to marry me because she said I wasn't very ambitious because I'm one of those people having food and raiment, let us therewith be content.

She said, you're not ambitious enough. Ambitious? I've never met a person more ambitious than me. I want to be just like Jesus.

What higher ambition is there than that? And I'm not satisfied to get 90%. I won't be happy, as David said in Psalm 15, I will be satisfied when I awake with your likeness. He probably meant something else than that, but it's a good line.

Anyway, that's what I feel. I'll be satisfied when I'm like Jesus and not before. Until then, that's the direction I've set my face like a flint to go.

And that's, to my mind, that doesn't make me exceptional. That just makes me a Christian. That's what it means to become a Christian, to set out on the journey of following Christ to the destiny of Christ's likeness.

And we need to be like Christ. We need to be like God. Ephesians 5.1 says, be imitators of God as dear children.

Like children imitate their father, we need to imitate God. Now, God is faithful. Why is it so important that we are faithful? It's because we're to imitate God.

But why is that even important? Because people don't see God, they see us. And they assume God must be either like us, or at least we perceive Him to be like us, because we admire Him, we worship Him, we think He's the greatest, that we must be trying to be like Him. And what we behave like is what they assume.

Well, let me just put it this way. Have you ever heard an atheist present an argument against the existence of God that didn't simply boil down to criticism of Christian hypocrisy? You know, how come the churches have all these wars? How come the

Catholic priests are pedophiles? How come Christians who are supposed to be so holy get caught in affairs and scandals and things like that? Yeah, that's a pretty embarrassing thing for sure. It shouldn't be happening.

The truth is, of course, the world doesn't extend any kind of measure of grace to our failures, which fortunately God does. But despite the grace of God, we're not off the hook. We are to resemble God.

Paul said, be imitators of me as I am of Christ in 1 Corinthians 11.1. Can you say that? I remember a pastor that I used to sit under, he taught through the Bible, and when he came to that statement, be imitators of me as I am of Christ, he said, man, I couldn't say that. He said, Paul could. He said, I don't want you to be imitators of me, because he was trying to be humble, trying to say, you know, I'm so imperfect, you shouldn't set me up as a standard.

It was his way of trying to sound humble in the face of that. I don't think Paul was unhumble. I think Paul was just a real Christian who did imitate Christ.

He said, if you can't see Christ well enough to imitate him, imitate me, because I'm following pretty close. Follow me. I'll show you how to be like Christ.

A Christian, once they're a mature Christian at least, should be able to say that to people. I remember Richard Wurmbandt, who spent 14 years tortured in Romanian prisons under the Communists because he was a pastor, and uncompromising. And he was thrown into a prison with a guy who had actually been a guard.

One thing that in the stories he tells about the life in Communist prisons is the people who were his torturers one week are in prison with him, actually because the regime change has come, and there's new leaders in the Communist Party. They throw out all the old guys, and the other guys go to prison. So he had at one point in his imprisonment been tortured, particularly by being beaten on the soles of his feet by a particular torturer guard, and then some years later that guard ended up in prison with him and was dying of tuberculosis, as I recall.

And Richard Wurmbandt served him. He washed his feet. That man had beaten his feet.

But he just really served him and loved him, and the man came very close to the kingdom. And the man did die in prison there, but before he did he asked Richard Wurmbandt, he says, Pastor Wurmbandt, you're always talking about Jesus, but really what is Jesus like? And Wurmbandt said, He's a lot like me. How many people would say that? Wouldn't you feel like it's blasphemy? It shouldn't be.

Every Christian should be able to say that. He's a lot like me because I'm his follower. He is in me.

His love is manifest in me. I've been imitating him for years. I'm not just like him, but he's a lot like me because I'm a lot like him.

I used to be less like him than I am now. And the older I get, the longer I follow Christ, the more like him I should be. And it should be possible that people should see how faithful we are and say, Wow, I guess maybe you've got some credibility when you say God is faithful.

Now, why do people need to know that God is faithful? Well, isn't faith the basis of just about everything? You're saved by faith. Your prayers are answered because of your faith. You're filled with the Spirit by faith.

God gives His Spirit through faith. Demons don't go out if you don't have enough faith. And you try to cast them out.

Why couldn't we cast them out? You're unbelief, Jesus said. Faith seems to be the one thing that God values most in people and wants most for people to know. But what is faith? Faith isn't some kind of substance.

I know Hebrews 11, faith is the substance of things hoped for. But it's not saying faith is a substance. It's saying that faith renders things that are hoped for and promised substantial to us.

But faith itself isn't stuff. Faith is just believing. But we can't believe what we don't think is believable or reliable.

You can't trust somebody who's disloyal. But if somebody has proven themselves honest, even at their own expense, you trust them. Not because you have a virtue called faith, but because you perceive them to have a virtue called faithfulness.

Hudson Taylor, the great missionary to inland China in the 1800s, lived by faith in a marvelous way. And people always commented about his faith. They'd comment, say, oh, you have such great faith.

I wish I had great faith like you. And his answer was always, I don't have great faith. I just have a God of great faithfulness.

You know, faith is effortless if the person you're believing you know to be completely faithful. Faithfulness is what faith is built on. You are not commanded to trust people.

We are commanded to love people, but not trust them. Woe to him who puts his trust in man, Jeremiah said. People are not trustworthy.

But we do have to, in life situations, trust people in some measure. If we didn't trust any people anywhere, then we couldn't believe a thing we read in the newspapers. Of course, maybe you don't anyway.

But the truth is, you couldn't believe anything you read in a history book. You couldn't look at a map and know that those countries are really there if you haven't been there yourself to see, because someone's telling you they're there. Someone made that map who apparently claimed to know, but you don't know.

You have to trust them. We know almost everything we know by faith. It's so ridiculous what atheists say.

They say, well, we atheists don't have faith. I remember Richard Dawkins was debating. I think it was John Lennox he was debating.

And he said, we atheists, we don't have faith. Faith is irrational. And Lennox said, well, do you trust your wife? He said, of course I do.

It never occurred to him. He just admitted that he had faith. But, you see, if you trust your wife, if you trust your husband, if you trust your friend, if you trust the pastor, if you trust the bank with your money, if you trust your financial advisor or whoever's handling that stuff, if you trust your doctor, if you trust the airline pilot when you get on the airplane, you don't know he's not drunk.

You certainly hope he's not. You don't know he's not suicidal that day. You hope he's not.

But you don't know. You're just trusting. If you don't trust anyone, you can't live in the world with other people.

You would not get in your car and drive on the street, certainly not on the freeway, because a whole bunch of people you don't know are on the freeway with you. You don't even know if any of them are trustworthy at all. But you have to assume they're in some measure trustworthy.

Hopefully, they don't want to kill you. Hopefully, they don't want to drift over on the other side of the road where you are. Hopefully, they will stay where they are.

But you don't know. You're trusting. We're always trusting people.

If you couldn't trust anyone, you'd have to be in a straitjacket and a padded cell and never have contact with people because you'd be totally paranoid. Now, the truth is we sometimes trust people and they aren't trustworthy. People don't deserve to be trusted unless they earn it.

Because the Bible says, Let God be true in every man a liar. Men are liars very often. And we have to assume that anyone we meet might be a liar.

But to the degree that we have to trust them, we hope they can earn our trust. Now, I don't know that I've earned anyone's trust. If I told you that my wife and I drove over here from Santa Cruz this morning, you might say, How do we know that? We didn't see

you there.

Well, actually, you don't know if we did or not. I might be lying. Probably not.

But I could be. You don't know. If you assume that I'm an honest person, you probably believe when I say it.

If you have reason to suspect I'm not an honest person, you might withhold judgment. That's just it. What is faith but a judgment you make of another person? Are they honest or are they not honest? You do it all the time.

When you watch CNN or Fox News or something like that and you hear someone being interviewed and you know their political orientation and you know that they've got a certain spin they're probably put on it, you probably watch with suspicion. You probably take everything they say with a grain of salt. You judge that they're maybe not completely honest and, therefore, you can't completely trust everything they say.

But if there's someone you do completely trust, my dad, for example, my dad is a man that I've never heard tell a lie. As near as I can tell, he's a completely honest man. I'm not sure that he's never lied, but it certainly is not his habit to lie.

He's an honest man. His character is good. And if he would call me on the phone right now and tell me that something happened that's totally unlikely to be true, something amazing and sensational that's a once in a million, one in a million possibility of being true, I'd believe him.

Not because I'm gullible, but because I'd judge him to be an honest man. We always do that. We believe history books.

We believe lectures. We believe sermons. We believe the Bible or not, if we judge it to be honest and true.

We trust God only if we judge him to be faithful. If you don't judge God to be faithful, you can't have faith. You can pretend.

You can try. People often say, I just wish I could have that faith. Well, what's stopping you? Faith is just believing God.

The only thing that can make you not believe God is that you're not so sure he's faithful. Because you effortlessly believe people that you know to be faithful. I know my wife's faithful because I know her character.

I don't have difficulty believing that. I don't have to strive to believe that. People are, I'm just trying to believe God.

I'm trying to crank up my faith more. You don't crank up faith. You just know God to be

faithful, and then you believe him.

You trust people who are honest. I really think a lot of Christians don't have very much of a real connection with God in a dynamic way, and they haven't discovered whether he's faithful or not. They're told they're supposed to believe that, so they try.

But this is just the thing. God wants everyone to believe him, but that means they have to know that he's faithful. Because you cannot make yourself believe someone that you really believe is untrustworthy.

And you shouldn't. The real question is, what do you judge God to be? This is why faith is so important. It's not just that it, you know, God's just looking for something to make the basis for salvation.

Salvation is God. Salvation is in God. Salvation is in a relationship with God.

And you can't have a relationship with him if you don't trust him, if you don't know that he's faithful. And if all the Christians you met have been unfaithful in some measure, then you might begin to wonder, why should I believe that their God is faithful? Now, it's interesting. It says in Hebrews 11, verse 11, talk about the faith of these people in the Old Testament.

It says, By faith Sarah, when she was old, received strength to conceive seed when she was beyond the age for childbearing, because she judged him faithful who promised. That's a very important statement. She believed for the same reason anyone believes, because they judge God to be faithful.

It is upon us to make it easier for people to judge God to be faithful, because we want all people to believe and God wants all people to believe. And if we stumble them, Jesus said, you know, it's inevitable that stumbling blocks will come, but woe to him by whom they come. It's better for him to have a millstone tied around his neck and be thrown into the sea than to cause one of these little ones who believes in me to stumble.

That's to stumble their faith. If you put something in front of somebody that makes it harder for them to believe God, well, there's millstones, a pile of millstones at the end of the pier waiting for people like that. And it says, Jesus didn't say that just to hear the sound of his own voice.

He's telling us something that must be true. We are not to be damaging other people's faith. And we do.

If we name the name of Christ and take that name in vain by being unlike him. If we can't say, he's a lot like me. You see, I would say, frankly, I would be able to say to my children, with reference to my previous marriages, I'd say, I think Jesus is a lot like me, because he's put up faithfully with my failures, and I was determined to put up faithfully

with the failures in my spouse, and hopefully she with me, my failures.

Being faithful to your spouse is one of the most important proving grounds of whether you're a faithful person or not. And it is the one thing that a person should look for in a mate if they're not yet married. I know there's other things you look at too.

But the one thing that should be a deal breaker is if you're looking at a faithful person or not. How do you know? Do they pay their bills on time? Do they run up their credit cards and then default? Do they file bankruptcy instead of meeting their obligations? Do they say they'll be there at a certain time, but they don't make any pains to be there on time? By the way, when you're supposed to be somewhere on time, I'll tell you why this is an important thing for a Christian to do. And we don't think about it because we think about ourselves mostly, but the truth is that other people are stopping what they're doing to their own inconvenience to come and be somewhere at a scheduled time.

And if you don't, you're making them wait for you when you don't have any more right to be late than they did, but they were considerate of the group. And being on time is simply a way of saying, this is when I'm supposed to be here. I'll keep my obligations.

I'll be there on time. Sometimes you can't, obviously. You don't want to get all guilted if you get a flat tire or something, or some emergency happens at the last minute.

But many people have no interest in being anywhere on time. They just, what's it matter? It's just a matter of having a pattern of faithfulness. This is the expected thing.

People have reason to think you'll be there. You say you'll be there, you'll be there. Anything you promise, you should keep it no matter what.

And this is something that is a matter of personal integrity. If you are seamlessly honest and faithful, people will have to trust you. They'll have no way of not trusting you.

When Jesus talked about letting your yes be yes and your no be no, it's in the context of taking oaths. He said, you have heard that it was said you should keep the oaths you make to the Lord. He said, I say, well, you don't even have to take an oath.

Don't swear by heaven, that's God's throne. The earth, that's God's footstool. Or Jerusalem, that's the city of the great king.

You can't even swear by your own head because you don't have the power to make one hair white or black. Just let your yes be yes and your no be no. What's he talking about there? He's not saying oaths are a bad thing.

He's saying they have become a bad thing in the society. He's addressing because the Pharisees had a whole system of binding and non-binding oaths. He brings this up against them in Matthew 23.

He says, you Pharisees, you hypocrites, you say if someone swears by the gold of the temple, it's binding, but if they swear by the temple, it's not binding. If they swear by the altar, it's not binding. But if they swear by the gift on the altar, it is binding.

You know, the Pharisees and the rabbis had come up with this legalistic, picky, uni-set of rules about what oaths you're obligated to keep and which ones you're not. And the average man wouldn't know. So, you could say, give me your donkey today and I'll give you, you know, 30 shekels for it tomorrow.

And the person says, I don't know if I can trust you. Well, I'll swear by the temple. Oh, well, if you swear by the temple, I guess I'll trust you, right? You don't pay him the next day, say, where's the money? He says, I didn't swear by the gold of the temple.

I don't have to pay you, sucker. This is what the Pharisees did. You know, taking oaths is supposed to keep people honest.

They just made another way of deceiving people. We've got oaths that we can take, but we don't have to keep. Jesus says, hey, just throw out the whole oath thing.

Just say yes and mean yes. If you say yes, do it, as if you had taken an oath. He's saying, if you swear by heaven, you've sworn by God, that's his throne.

If you swear by the earth, you've sworn by God, because that's his footstool. If you swear by Jerusalem, you're swearing by God, that's the city of the great king. Even if you swear by your own head, you're swearing by God, because God is the one who has power over your head to make one hair white or black.

You cannot take any oath that's not binding. You're always swearing by God if you swear. Therefore, don't even bother with oaths.

Just do what you said you would do. He's addressing the need for faithfulness there in the Sermon on the Mount. And if you look at Psalm 15, you may notice I don't look at my notes very often.

No one can accuse me of being note-bound. I hardly even look at them until the lecture is over. Then I realize how many things I forgot to say I wanted to say.

I just get going. Afterwards, I say, did I cover any of this stuff? In Psalm 15, the question is raised, Lord, who may abide in your tabernacle? Who may dwell in your holy hill? This question is, God, who will you invite into your house and fellowship with? Who's welcome with you? I want to fellowship with you, God. I want to go to your house.

David said in another place in Psalm 24, excuse me, 27 for he said, One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek, that I may dwell in the house, he means the tabernacle, of the Lord forever and behold the beauty of the Lord and meditate in his

tabernacle. That's the one thing I want. How can I be sure God welcomes me? What kind of person does God want to fellowship with? That's the question.

Who may abide in your tabernacle? Who may dwell in your holy hill? And he gives a long list of his answer. He who walks uprightly, who works righteousness, who speaks the truth in his heart, who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend, in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but he honors those who fear the Lord. He who swears to his own hurt and does not change.

He who does not put out his money to usury, nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved. There's one line in there that's particularly attention getting.

Partly because it's a strange phrase and some people don't know immediately what it means. He who swears to his own hurt and does not change. What does that mean? It means you made an oath, you promised something.

And then you found out it's not going to be very easy for you to do it. Worse than you thought. It's going to hurt more than you thought to keep that oath.

So what do you do? Back out? No, you don't change. A person who's got integrity, a person who's got faithfulness, he swears and then he finds out he swore to his own hurt. It's going to cost him more than he intended.

He does not back out. He keeps his promises. Because his integrity is more valuable to him than whatever it is he's going to lose by keeping his word.

There is no price great enough to trade your integrity for. And this is something that's a lost value in our modern society. That's why there have to be contracts.

And then there have to be laws to enforce contracts. Back in biblical times, they just took an oath. In earlier times in America, they just shook hands.

Now you have to sign, you know, a stack of papers this thick to buy a car or a house or something like that. And then a lot of times, even then, the people don't fulfill the contract. Integrity just is not part of the human condition.

But it is part of God's condition. He is faithful and he intends for us to exhibit that trait of faithfulness as well as his other traits to the world by our own conduct. I remember I was, back in 1976, I was running a discipleship school in Santa Cruz during the summer.

And I did it every summer for several years in a row. And I didn't maintain property year-round because the school was only in the summertime. I didn't have any money anyway.

But I did secure facilities to accommodate like 25 students for the whole summer to

house and feed and school them each summer for three years. But each year I had to find a different place because no one is going to hold it from year-round when you only use it three months out of the year. And it was 1978.

The summer was approaching and I needed to find a place in Santa Cruz to accommodate. And there was a friend of mine in church, actually at Frank O'Neill's church, a friend of mine, had a house. And he was moving to Hawaii and he wanted to rent out his house.

And he showed it to me. It wasn't quite what I was looking for, but I could make it work. I thought I'd probably have to get that and another one close by to really accommodate the people.

But I thought, this is available, the price is okay, I can do it. So I said, okay, I'll rent that house, but I still have to find another one. And so I committed myself to rent his house.

Well, a few weeks later, maybe a month later, I came on another property and it was perfect. It was two buildings with a courtyard in between, and the cost of them together was just about what we wanted to pay and about what we could afford. I thought, well, this is the place I want.

So I called my friend Larry and I said, Larry, hey, brother, I found another place. And so I won't really be needing to rent your house. And he got a little indignant.

He said, brother, I've turned down other people who've come to me wanting that house because you said you took it. I want you to keep your commitment. I said, okay, I will.

I won't use your house, but I'll pay you for it. I'll trust God for the money because I'm going to use this other place that will really work for me. I will keep my commitment.

I'll rent your house and leave it empty for the summer if necessary. And I don't have that money, but I'll just trust God because I'm not going to back down, especially since you're holding me to it and you would have suffered loss by my default. I said, but if you do find someone else who wants it, let them know that it's available.

Thankfully, as a result of prayer, I'm sure God found someone else and I didn't have to rent his house. But I was determined I didn't have a clue where the money would come from. I just knew that God would honor it if I didn't break my word.

I had inconvenienced him by wanting out. And I thought, more important that I don't wrong another brother and that I don't compromise my integrity. Around the same time, I was washing windows in Santa Cruz area for a living.

I was not yet in full-time ministry. I was kind of in full-time ministry but working full-time too. I'd go to these houses and say, I'll wash your windows for so much money.

In the Santa Cruz mountains, there's a lot of custom homes, arty homes in the hillsides and stuff. And there was a house, a real beautiful house that I bid. I said, I'll wash their windows for \$50.

Now, back then in the 70s, \$50 was a good day's wage. It wouldn't be considered a day's wage today, but it was more than I usually got in a day. And so I thought, well, that's good.

They wanted me to. So I showed up with my extension ladder. And it was far worse than I thought.

First of all, the house was so close to a cliff and the ladder so tall, I couldn't put the ladder on level ground and lean it against the house. I had to have the ladder go down the cliff a ways and straddle a tree that was growing out of the side of the cliff. It was as long as extension ladder.

And I'd get up there and there were some cathedral ceiling windows. They were so tall, I actually had to stand. You're not supposed to do this.

I had to stand on the top step of the ladder reaching overhead to do these windows. Then worst of all, they had sprayed the house with some kind of sealer and it had gotten spackled all over the windows. They had to be scraped with a razor blade.

And I thought, this is going to take days. That's not worth \$50. And I remember as I'm doing it, that was a huge mistake for me to bid this job for this amount.

I just thought after about halfway through the first day, I thought, I'm just going to have to tell them I can't do this. I'm just going to have to tell them this doesn't make any sense at all for me to do this for this price. But then as I thought more about it, I thought, but I did say I would after all.

That's an agreement I made. And yeah, they might let me out of it. What could they say if I just walked away? They couldn't make me do it.

But I thought, but my testimony and my walk with God require that I'm a faithful man. I made a commitment. I'm going to keep my commitment.

I swore to my own hurt, but I'm not going to change. And so I took days to do it, and I only got \$50 for it. But my conscience was clear.

There's nothing worth more than a clear conscience. And there's no way to have a clear conscience than to be a person of integrity and not compromise and be faithful. Now, how does this have anything to do with marriage? Well, much every way.

What do we call it when someone cheats on their wife? They're being unfaithful. Why do we say that? Because they made a promise, and they're not keeping it. When you get

married, you make solemn promises in the presence of all your friends and the church and God.

If you don't keep that promise, you shatter your integrity. I've often said, when people have asked me, you know, about them getting divorced, when they had no grounds at all for it, I say, what do you think? Do you think I should? I think, well, do you want to advertise to everyone in the whole world that you have absolutely no integrity and that they should never trust you in any way, in any transaction again? Since the most holy transaction you entered into, you're willing to give it up and just default? Why should anyone ever lend you money? Why should anyone ever trust you not to stab them in the back? I mean, you're stabbing the person you're most obligated to in the back, including God. Now, do you wonder what I think about it? I'll tell you sometime when I'm really unrestrained.

I think you're totally giving up any right for anyone to believe anything you ever say or anything you ever promise. If you would violate something like your marriage vows, you are saying, I am so unfaithful that nothing, no promise is too sacred for me to break. And in fact, you're breaking a promise to God.

I'm of the opinion that you cannot walk out on a marriage without grounds, without walking out on God at the same time, because He's the one you swore to. He's the one who demands that you are faithful to your promises. And if you say, well, God, I still want you, but I don't want to keep my promises, you don't get to write the terms with God, you see.

Jesus is what they call a Lord. A Lord is somebody who owns you and who gives you instructions, and you say, yes, sir, your wish is my command. Jesus says, why do you call me Lord, Lord, and you don't do the things I say? If people say He's the Lord, but they don't do what He says, I don't think He's their Lord.

They're not thinking like He is. And I realize every time we sin, we kind of act like Jesus isn't our Lord at that moment. But we repent.

If Jesus is our Lord and we realize we have failed to be holy or to do the right thing that pleases Him, we're smitten by it, we repent. We say, God, I don't want to keep being wrong. But when you leave your spouse, you keep being wrong as long as you're away.

It becomes a lifestyle of disobedience. When a person leaves their spouse, they are disobedient to God every second that ticks by, year after year after year, that they don't go back when they should. Now, there are things that can release you.

Obviously, your spouse gets remarried or something like that. I don't believe that everyone who has been wrongfully divorced is in a position where they have to go back to something because some situations have changed in different ways. That's not what

I'm saying.

I'm just saying that if you will give up on your marriage vows like that, you are essentially giving up on your walk with God. You're basically giving up on your integrity. You're basically saying, God may be faithful, but I'm not.

And I can never tell anyone, you know what, follow me like I'm a follower of Christ. I can never say, Jesus, you know him, he's a lot like me. Now, you might say, well, I'm so far from being able to say that anyway.

I guess that's not much of a, I'll take that risk, I guess. You shouldn't. You should be able to live by the grace of God through the power of the Holy Spirit in such a way that you resemble Christ that way.

And you should never voluntarily fall short of that. We all fall short because of weakness. James said in many things, we all stumble.

Yeah, we do. We're not perfect. We do stumble.

But there's never any call to say, I guess I'm giving up on this. I guess I'm not going to obey Jesus anymore. And when you leave your spouse and you've got no grounds, you're saying, I'm not going to obey Jesus in this anymore.

One of my ex-wives, when Christians confronted her about her leaving me, she said, I'm willing to go to hell. I'll take my chances with God about this. And she left the Lord.

But, I mean, that's kind of what you've got to say in a way. You say, I'm not going to follow Jesus, frankly. I know what Jesus wants me to do.

I'm not going to do it. He calls me to be faithful. I'm just not going to be faithful.

Sorry. Well, you're basically saying, I'm not walking with Jesus anymore, thanks. I've got other plans.

And Jesus will have other plans, too, for those who do that. And so, I don't want to mince words here. I really believe that choosing to be faithful is not negotiable.

It's not optional. It's not possible to be faithful to God and unfaithful to the people around you. Remember what it says in 1 John chapter 4. If anyone says, I love God and hates his brother, he's a liar.

Just that blunt. He's a liar. For he that loves not God or his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? Faithfulness is part of love, by the way.

Jesus said faithfulness is one of the weightier matters of the law. And all the law is love, in a sense. I mean, all the law hangs on the command to love.

And Jesus said there's weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faithfulness. Galatians 5.22 says that faithfulness is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. Certainly, that's supposed to be manifested in a Spirit-filled person.

We're supposed to be faithful. We swear. Yes, we do.

We swear to our own hurt. When you get... Almost everyone who gets married, in some measure, has sworn to their own hurt. Because you get married with all kinds of dreamy ideas of now, finally, it's going to be heaven on earth.

I've found the one. They're going to always be receptive and responsive to me and kind to me and always thinking about me and my needs. Of course, what else would anyone ever think about but me and my needs? And I found the one who's now willing to sign on the dotted line and say she or he is going to do that.

And so you move into marriage looking for something totally blissful. You might know there'd be a little work involved. But basically, you get in there and you go home and you find out it's not really Prince Charming after all.

Not quite so much as you thought. He leaves those little hairs in the basin. He doesn't put the toilet seat down.

I didn't sign up for this. Yeah, you did actually. He shouldn't do those things, but you signed up for that.

And she, you know, she snores. She gains weight. She's not what she appeared to be.

Well, lucky you. You get to be like Jesus now. You're not what you represented yourself to be when you came to Christ either.

You promised all kinds of things to Him, didn't you? Faithfulness means you found out you made a promise it's not going to be as easy to keep as you thought. Maybe it'll be very costly to keep. But you keep it.

You swear to your own heart and you don't change. To me, this is absolutely... I don't know how this got into my head when I was young. I was reading the Bible.

I saw this verse. He swears to his own heart and he doesn't change. That's it.

That's got to be what I do. I was in my early 20s when those stories I told you were happening. It was already a settled conviction.

If God is faithful, I'm required to be faithful. Because I want people to be able to see me and say, I think we've seen Jesus. I want them to think that they've been in the presence of the Lord when they've had dealings with me.

I realize I'm not all that, but the thing is everything I can do to have them think well of Christ through their experience with me is my obligation. And I don't mind it because I want to be like Jesus. That's actually been my main ideal since I was a teenager, honestly.

Just that nothing could be more wonderful than just being like Jesus. Unfortunately, it's one of those things that's going to happen someday. But it needs to happen more all the time.

And one thing that's got to be like him from day one is faithless. Because you see, becoming a Christian isn't just accepting Jesus in your heart, meaning you get a package called salvation. It means you're making a commitment to Jesus.

There's a covenant here. He's promised you something. You're promising him something.

You're promising to be his disciple. You're promising to be faithful unto death to him. But if you can't be faithful even to your wife, how can you claim to be faithful to him? If you can't love the brother who you can see, how can you love God whom you have not seen? Your faithfulness in human relationships is the measure, in many respects, of your faithfulness to God.

You can't still be a faithful Christian and be careless about being faithful in other relationships. Jesus actually said something about that, of course, not surprisingly, in Luke 16. We're just about ready to take a lunch break, but hang with me a little bit here.

In Luke 16, verses 10 through 12, Jesus said, He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much. He who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore, if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, that's how you handle God's money, which he's entrusted to you, who will commit to you, to your trust, true riches? Obviously, if you haven't been faithful, who will trust you with anything? Why should they? They shouldn't.

Even God can't. And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? The interesting thing here is that Jesus says faithfulness isn't something that really exists in degrees. You're either faithful in little and much or in neither.

If you're not careful to be faithful in little things, you don't know what faithfulness means. You don't value faithfulness. You can't be trusted in big things either.

You might think, well, I'd break a little promise that I made to pay this bill on time just because I'd rather use the money for something else right now. But that doesn't mean I'd deny Christ, even under torture, really, who's torturing you now to break this little promise. You don't value your integrity.

You don't value your reputation, and worse, God's reputation, if you aren't absolutely committed to faithfulness. And faithfulness, if it is part of your character, it goes all through. You'll find that the person who's faithful in much is the same as faithful in every little thing that they can be.

They're not deciding, I can be faithful in these things and not these other things. It is an unfaithful attitude to be negotiating, which things can I be unfaithful in? You're not a faithful person if you think that way. If you're faithful in what's little, you're faithful in much.

Jesus said in one of the parables, Well done, good and faithful servant. You see, it pleases God when you're faithful. That's one of the great things about being faithful.

You know you're pleasing God, and your conscience is clear because of it. Well done, good and faithful servant. You've been faithful in a few things.

Now rule over ten cities. Rule over five cities, He said. Rule over these cities because I can trust you.

I've discovered that you are faithful to me because you are faithful in little things, He said. And so, like I said, if you think about marrying someone, one of the main things on your list has got to be, Are they faithful people? Because if they don't care to pay their bills on time, if they don't care to show up when they say they'll be there, if they don't care to keep small commitments, Jesus said, well, then they're not going to be trustworthy in big ones either. And marriage is a big one, not a small one.

And if you aren't faithful in marriage, you just aren't faithful. And Jesus said we have to be faithful unto death. It's 1 Corinthians chapter 4, 2, I think it is where Paul said, It's expected in a steward, it's required in a steward that be found faithful.

You don't have to be successful. Many times success lies beyond the range of your capabilities. Your marriage may fail through no fault of your own.

When people say, No, there's no innocent parties in a divorce. Nonsense. There are often innocent parties in a divorce.

Do you know that 80% of divorces are unilateral, initiated by one person against the wishes of the partner? They're not mutual. 80% is one person imposing their will on an unwilling spouse. That's unilateral.

That's not... Now, but they may say, Yeah, but the spouse that's being divorced, they're not perfect either. True. Whoever said anyone was perfect.

That doesn't mean that the person who's imperfect is responsible for the divorce. Everyone's imperfect. But faithful people stay with an imperfect spouse because they

are faithful.

The person who's responsible for the divorce is the one who says, I'm done being faithful. Period. Like I said, it's not money, it's not sex, it's not children that make people get divorced.

People get divorced because of unfaithfulness. You just can't get two people divorced if they're determined to be faithful to keep their promises. You can't pry them away.

And if one person is faithful, they won't be successful in the marriage because the other person's unfaithfulness will destroy it. It takes two people to maintain a marriage or any good relationship. It takes only one to destroy it.

And if you happen to have a marriage that fails, the testimony of your conscience has got to be, thankfully, I did all that I knew to do to prevent this. I kept my promise as best I could, as best I knew how. I never willingly compromised it.

And, you know, you still go through the pain. Divorce is painful. Probably more painful.

I would say having lost one wife who died and two wives who divorced, it's much easier when your spouse dies than divorce. People who've never been through divorce just can't imagine that probably. The truth is divorce is a betrayal.

When your spouse dies, they didn't betray you. You don't have to live with that since I was betrayed by somebody I trusted very deeply and loved very greatly and invested in very expensively with my time and my resources, and they just stabbed me in the back. That hurts a lot more than your spouse dying.

You're sad about your spouse dying, but you're just as sad in a divorce because there's that and the other elements. They might fight you over the children. Your children are definitely going to be damaged.

You might have to see your spouse with another guy or girl. That's not the case when your spouse dies. When your spouse dies, no one's fighting you for the kids.

You're not going to be running into them with their new partner. And you've got closure. You know they're gone.

In my case, it took years for me to decide that my ex-wife was never going to come back. I held out for years hoping she would. But when she finally remarried, I thought, okay, it's done now.

But, you know, you hang in there because divorce and unfaithfulness are absolutely the greatest cruelty I can imagine inflicting on someone besides physical torture, frankly. And so faithfulness in marriage is non-negotiable, but you will not be faithful in marriage if you're not seamlessly faithful in all things. And that's why looking for a qualified mate,

if you're looking for one, or simply becoming one yourself, means looking for or becoming the person who will not compromise your character, your integrity.

If you will not, and you find someone else who will not, your marriage will be successful. If your marriage is not successful, it's not important that... I mean, it is important, but it's not your fault if you've been faithful. You're required to be faithful.

It's required in stewards to be faithful, not always successful. Sometimes things beyond your control can spoil success of your marriage. But faithful, nothing can spoil but you.

No one can make you be unfaithful, not even under torture, which is why thousands of Christians have died confessing Christ without denying Him because they determined they would not be unfaithful to Him while they were tortured, even to death. And they loved not their lives, even to the death. And it says in Revelation, those who come with Christ, they are the called, they're the chosen, and faithful.

It says that in Revelation 17. These are the ones who overcame Satan by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony and did not love their lives, even to the death. Jesus said, you know, many are called, few are chosen.

But the ones who are really with Him in the end are those who are called and chosen and faithful. Apparently, you can be called and chosen and maybe not faithful. But being faithful to the end, being faithful to death, not just to God, but to all your commitments because your treatment of your brother is your treatment of Christ.

Jesus said, inasmuch as you've done it to one of the least of these, my brethren, you've done it to me. The way you treat your spouse is the way you treat Jesus. I remember my friend Danny Lehman once saying, you know, you can know if you love Jesus or not by little things like when you use up the end of the toilet roll spool.

Do you replace it or leave that for someone else to do? That's a small matter. But he says, if you knew that Jesus was the next person who's going to use the bathroom, what would you do? You know what you'd do because that's Jesus. Well, guess what? That person living with you, that's Jesus too.

And as much as you do it to the least of his brethren or sister, you do it to him. Being faithful to them is being faithful to him. And being faithful in the small things is what determines whether you're a faithful person or not.

And this is what, this is the one thing that you absolutely have to know before and after you marry. Now, we're going to talk about something else after lunch, but the one thing that will save every marriage is for both parties to be committed to being faithful to their vows. And faithful to the vows doesn't just mean you don't leave.

What did you vow to do? To love, to cherish, to nurture, to be the perfect spouse? Well,

you can't make them be your perfect spouse if they don't want to, but you can work on you. And no one can keep you from being a perfect spouse if it's your determination to do so by the help of God. And that determination is required in those who are faithful.

That is what faithfulness looks like.