

## Selfless Marriage – August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2024 - Part 2: What went wrong?

**Corporate Prayer:** Announce first, song, pray after song for offering.

1. **Pastor Stefan**, Louise & Family on Holidays!

Pray for Rest, Safety and a fun time to grow closer to God and each other as a family!

2. **Life on Mission** - "each one, reach one"

- For 1000 ppl to engage their life on mission through actively reaching ONE PERSON

3. **Young Adult Camp**

- For camp staff, volunteers, campers - belonging, safety, fun, to know & love Jesus!

4. **PRAISE God** for answering prayer for campers, and for us, and those in our region!

Good Morning and Welcome here this morning, if you are visiting, online or in the RTC! My name is Martin Gunter and I am one of the Pastors here Southland Church and today we are going to continue on our small 3 part series on Selfless Marriage.

**Recap:** Last week we talked about “who’s Way will you be following in your marriage?” Will you follow Culture’s Way or God’s Way? And looking more closely at how in God’s Way that both Wives and Husbands are called to a specific role within marriage. We looked at the 3 parts in Ephesians 5 **Part 1** in verse 21 **submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Part 2** in verse 22, **Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. Part 3** in verse 25 **Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,** BUT also being reminded that this submission is only possible if we are filled with the Spirit and walking beside Him. Galatians 5:16-17 **So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.** This morning with that reminder lets remember that without being **filled with Holy Spirit and walking with Him in our marriages**, it becomes very difficult and its only through being filled and walking with Him that we can have wholeness in our marriages! So do not fit God into your marriage, have a selfless marriage where we fit into God’s original and good plan for us, doing it His way! Now the question is, what do we do when marriage is not going well, or when things go wrong and we are trying to live a Selfless Marriage in God’s way?? What should our reaction be and what can we change?

### A. Common reasons why marriages struggle

Before we jump into the message, I do have a caveat, I want to address something that is serious. The series we are in is called a Selfless-Marriage, and I am of the firm belief that is where God wants our marriages to go to and next week we will discuss the goal of a Selfless-Marriage. But this week as we talk about what to do when your marriage is struggling or difficult, I am not associating struggles or difficulty with physical or emotional abuse, or with what to do with ongoing affairs. These are much more severe issues, and the steps I will give you later on this morning can help and will help you lay a foundation, but there are many more intentional and carefully planned steps that need

to be taken as well. I would encourage you to come talk to me or one of our Pastoral Staff members to help you pray and seek God's wisdom on how to navigate such impossibly hard situations. Today's message is the result of the most common issues that I come across here in the church and that is why I am addressing them here and not the more severe issues like abuse or affairs, not because I do not want to, but because of the unique nature of each one and how we navigate them together! So please reach out if you feel stuck, you do not have to do this alone!

1. **We are too different** Yes, we are different, but opposites attract, I bet that many of us got married because of our differences. I agree that in the beginning we are looking for similarities, and its so cool when you are meeting someone and you share similarities, but in the end, it's the differences as you get to know someone that really attracts you to them because they are completing you in an area that you are either struggling and striving to do better in. The problem is that after awhile we feel that its not so cute anymore or that little adorable annoyance is now becoming unlivable. Andrea and I share many differences and its been an interesting journey. First off, we did not grow up in the same country or even spoke the same languages, or even have the same customs growing up. Let me share an example with you! We are very different about birthdays... When we where still dating, I learnt something early on about her, she loves her birthday! She loves it so much that she told me about a sacred Canadian tradition that you all have that I need to make sure I adhere to every year, and that is the deeply binding Canadian tradition on half-birthdays. Now I was at first very intrigued and inquired about these "half-birthdays" and was told that close family and very close friends celebrate this... OK! So I did the math and we celebrated half-birthdays... One year, we went to cabin with her family and it happen to be over her half birthday and that morning I get up, got her a present, and gave it to her in front of all to see in the expectance of more half birthday gifts to come out, this did not happen and I was in formed that this scared Canadian tradition is a scared Andrea tradition, which by the way, we still do!! But besides that, let me give you some examples where we are different... OR, maybe you where very similar in the beginning but WOW, did you ever change from the person you once where, and again, the answer is yeah! People don't stay the same, we all change, we grow, we hopefully mature but we grow up and we start liking and disliking different things. The real issue is to make sure that the differences do not distract you from what the goal is... See, Andrea and me separate, we are not well balanced at all, especially me, I do not know how to stay in the middle of the road, I am in one ditch, then out of it again into the other, but together, because the one place where it matters, we align, JESUS! Both of our value is in Him... **Its like this, it does not matter how far you are apart, but as long as your goal is Jesus, you will grow closer together in unity as you grow in Him.** We can then turn and see God created us with intentionality and purpose so that together we can be a better

equipped team to help others, parent our kids, and help each other grow closer to Jesus! Let me encourage you, coming from what I just shared... Be continually fascinated and curious about the unique differences in each other. Neither of you should attempt to be different from what God made you to be. **The ideal objective is to honor and value the uniqueness of each other while learning how to best utilize the differences.**

- 2. Unmet Expectations** One of the most common issues I have encountered that influences our marriages revolves around expectations. The thing with expectations is that we usually don't even realize we have them until they are not met. And it's certainly not limited to newlyweds. In fact, many couples discover and even develop new expectations throughout their years together. And while some new ones may develop over time, there are some common expectations that seem to surface regularly for all couples. For example with money, are you a spender or saver or how do we deal with the in-laws or how do we parent, or what are you responsible for in the relationship. **Problems develop because we assume the other person shares our expectations. But when something doesn't go the way we think it should, we feel frustrated, disappointed, even angry.** Expectations are everywhere where we go, we can have good expectations or the wrong expectations. Some examples of Good expectations are: Monogamy – having commitment for each other in marriage, or respecting one another, spending quality time together, (BTW – quick interruption on this one, this is one of these that if not explained, people take this to all kinds of weird places... Spending quality time together looks different for everyone. Be careful not to place a metric from someone else on how you should be spending quality time together. One area where me and Andrea agree on is that we think dates are silly... We don't like dates very much, we go on 3-4 dates a year! And there are MANY books written on exactly the opposite of what I told you. See, we love talking, we sit together at home, make a fire outside, or in winter on the couch with coffee or hot chocolate and we talk! Or we get a big puzzle and we will sit there and puzzle and we talk... When we go on a date, its not nearly as good as what we already do, so we sit in a restaurant, and now what.... We talk, but there are a lot of people around, so we feel weird, and then we leave. The only bonus is good food and no dishes, but then we can't wait to get home to talk again... Let me just say again, this is not for everyone, we feel that we do dates all the time, at home, and we like that!! We all have expectations in marriage, at work, with family, friends, its everywhere! It's when we have unmet expectations or uncommunicated expectations that will then lead to poor communication that will lead us to issues with kids, sex, money, etc. Unmet expectations will almost always lead us to our next point...

3. **Blaming - It's their fault!** We are so quick to point the finger when some injustice have been done to us in our marriage or when we feel something is unfair that we point our fingers at our spouse and we blame them! "Oh and my wife is great at it"! DO not point the finger or think, wow, I hope my spouse is listening, because then you are already there thinking its their fault! Blaming is not an issue with the generations that are coming up behind us, blaming each other in marriage is as old as the first marriage... Look at **Genesis 3:11-13** He (God) said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." When God showed up and asked Adam what he did, did he take responsibility? No, he blamed Eve, and when God asked Eve what did you do? Did she take responsibility? No, she blamed Satan! This is not a new issue for us on blaming others, this is as old as it gets... When we start blaming others we are walking out of the way God setup marriage for us and its no longer a selfless marriage, but its all about who is wrong. Let me say it this way, its not even about who is right and who is wrong, because all that creates is a loser in the relationship. When we are blaming one another, we are under attack! RIGHT!? When we are under attack in our marriage and we have to recognize that there is an enemy out there trying to divide us, and let me give you a hint, **the enemy is not your spouse!! The enemy is the enemy!** The enemy wants us tied up in personal battles against one another instead of us fighting together against him! We see that the devil was witness to Adam and Eve being created and that God placed them in this union called marriage and that they are a team against him now, and if 2 or more a gathered.... God is there... **Matthew 18:19-20** Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." Notice verse 19, if two of you AGREE.... Not fight, not blaming, but agree...The enemy knows this and is fighting us to separate us to cause us to blame one another so that we will not agree and miss out what God wants to do through your marriage!! Am I saying that we will never fight or have conflict? No, I firmly believe that marriage was made not just to withstand conflict but to equip us for conflict, but more on that next week!

**All these things we just looked at (Taking the easy way out, perceived differences, unmet expectations and blaming) are all symptoms of a Self-focused marriage. James 4:1** What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? I am certain of this, that I am the biggest threat in our marriage. No one can hurt Andrea more than I can. This is a battle that we have to win church, we cannot fool ourselves anymore that have a self-focused marriage is healthy or is in a place to be activated to do God's work and claim Kingdom territory for Him, when we are busy fighting

ourselves... Time is short!! In order for us to have a selfless marriage there are a few things that we can do then and regardless of where your marriage is at, I think we can all continue to grow in these 3 steps... Now I will caveat that these are not magical 3 steps that will save your marriage, but they are 3 steps that will help you grow into a selfless marriage from a self-focused one.

## **B. What steps can you take towards a Selfless Marriage?**

### **1. Don't take the easy way out!**

We all want to avoid hard or difficult things and this is no different in our marriages. We are all looking for the quick, or easy way out and in doing so we disrespect our marriage and our spouse because they are not worth the effort or we have simply put other things before them. One knee jerk reaction I see all the time is when we quickly run to a resource or book to solve my marriage or to give me a way out... Maybe I can find someone who agrees with my interpretation on my marriage to find that easy way, or just let it play out, or even better yet, that my spouse is the problem!! There are so many ideas, theories and books written on the topic of marriage and I get this question often on what I would recommend. Let me just say and be honest with you, I don't like the majority of popular marriage books out there! I actually have a bone to pick with most of them because some almost caused a divorce in my life. WHY?? Because every book has a bias and we all have bias, and I just wanted to caution you that when we look at marriage material, always go in with the mind to adapt some truths, but not adopt everything they say! So adapt, don't adopt, unless we are talking about kids, then definitely adopt! And I will give you an example, me and Andrea read and tried applying a marriage book that was highly recommend here at church, not a bad book, but it had disastrous implications for our marriage to the point where we went and saw Pastor Tim Ryan and asked genuinely if we should get a divorce because according to the book, we should never have gotten married in the first place. Now, clearly we did not listen to the book, we listen to God and followed scripture and saw NO reason to divorce simply because someone drew a conclusion in a book... **Books can change your perspective, but it cannot change you, only scripture can change you!** Now I will give you my OPINION on some good resources by highlighting some books for you, but I also wanted to give you a caution on all of them. I would always recommend that when we read something else than scripture, to adapt carefully, and go adopt scripture instead!! But here are some books I would carefully recommend you take a look at, I do not agree with 100% on any one of there, but I do agree with the majority that is stated in there...

- DNA of Relationships by Gary Smalley (Most Practical)
- Sacred Marriage by Gary Thomas
- The Meaning of Marriage by Timothy & Kathy Keller
- You and Me Forever by Francis & Lisa Chan

Your list will for sure be different than mine, and that is OK, but please discern and do not look for an easy way out from a book. Again, these books especially DNA of Relationships really helped our marriage, and the other ones gave me great insight and some tools, but that is all they are... Nothing more... I want to share a different list with you, here is my list of some scripture that has impacted my marriage that I have studied and try to adopt freely into my marriage as God gave me instruction:

- Ephesians 4, 5, 6
- 1 Peter 3 & 4
- Romans 8 & 12
- 1 Corinthians 13
- Ecclesiastes 4
- Matthew 5 & 19
- James 4
- Genesis 2
- Galatians 5
- Titus 2
- Psalm 34
- John 15
- Song of Solomon
- Philippians 2
- Revelation 19
- Colossians 3
- 1 John 4
- Mark 10

Can we be honest for a minute... the question few ask, but we see through their actions, does reading the scriptures actually make a difference in my marriage?? because what you are hearing I am saying this morning is that just go to Jesus and my marriage will be better? Well YES!! Let me show you a piece from Nancy Percy as she wrote: *“Many people assume that most theologically conservative men are domineering in our culture today. But sociological studies have refuted that negative stereotype. Compared to secular men, devout Christian family men who attend church regularly are more loving husbands and more engaged fathers. They have the lowest rates of divorce. And astonishingly, they have the lowest rate of domestic violence of any major group in America. Nominal Christians, which means they are not particularly devout and attend church rarely if at all. They are prone to pick up terms like headship and submission but interpret them through a secular lens of power and control. Surprisingly, research has found that nominal Christian men have the highest rates of divorce and domestic violence—even higher than secular men.”* **So YES, the studies show that people who are devout Christians have healthier and more unifying marriages than secular ones, and far more than nominal Christians...** So yes, it matters that we are in our bibles, praying and following Jesus!!

2. **Pray Continually** – While preparing for this message, one thing I have not noticed in the account of Adam and Eve is when God showed up after they sinned. **Genesis 3:7-10** Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. 8 And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” 10 And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” Notice here that God did not show up when Eve ate the apple, or when Adam did, when did God show up? He came when Adam and Eve hid

themselves from God's presence! **Church, don't hide from God's presence**, don't withdraw from Him! Draw close to Him, I know that shame can be a powerful weapon that the enemy uses to try and get us down, especially after a fight or when you feel you did something so bad, that you cannot go to Him. I understand this, but let me tell you, His grace is new every morning, and even if you are hiding like Adam and Eve, or like Gideon, God will find you, and let me tell you, He is merciful and gentle! All it takes is an act of humility and a prayer to start and say Lord, I was wrong, please help me! I say this because I have prayed that God will change my spouse! Lord change her so that I can have a better marriage!! Well, my prayer was half right, it was I needed to change. **We do not pray for God to change or fix our spouse, we pray that God will change and fix me!!** It hurts, and its very hard, but that is how we build Godly character! You might ask, then how do I pray for my spouse with all this turmoil in my marriage?? Good question! I would encourage you to seek out help if you do not know how to pray, come see one of the staff here, OR come and pray with one of the wonderful people in After Service Prayer! We have such an amazing ministry there where you can go, share with them your request, and then they will pray for you! AND when they pray for you, listen and learn!! When you ask for prayer from others, listen and learn! OR go to one of the other passages I had on the screen earlier and use them as a basis to start praying! I picked one and let me show you what I do with them: **Romans 12:9-12 - Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.** OK... What can we pull from these couple of verses? 1. Let my love be sincere 2. Let me be devoted to my spouse and nothing else 3. Help me honor my spouse above myself. 4. Let my zeal never die down for my spouse. 5. Give me patience in my afflictions with my spouse. 6. Remind me to be faithful and keep praying for them! Crafted Prayer: **Lord, thank you for this opportunity to come to you in prayer, thank you for my spouse! Father, show me your heart for them so that my love would be sincere. Help me be devoted to my spouse alone and show me if anything stands in the way so that I can remove it. Jesus, help me to honor my spouse above myself, that I would think of their needs before mine and in doing so that my zeal for them would continue to grow! Lord, please grant me patience as future afflictions will come up and please give me reminders today so that I can keep them in my prayers! Amen...** That was easy right!!! Often if I do not know what to pray, I would search the scriptures and turn a passage to a prayer that I either write down in my journal or in my phone and I would take time prayerfully reading it to the Lord. I have one that I wrote to my wife and my kids that I will tweak and that I can say by heart as I have memorized them. This method is very simple and teaches us to pray as well for many other things in our lives.

3. **Listen Carefully** – One of my favorite verses that I believe really summarizes our culture today when it comes to communication is **Proverbs 18:2 - Fools find no pleasure in understanding, but delight in airing their own opinions.** We are in a culture today that we need little reminders on how its intolerance to anything that does not look after itself first. In opposition then, if we examine this verse, we need to start learning the pleasure again of understanding what is on your spouse heart and leave your opinions out of it unless asked or invited to do so! **James 1:19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;** Right, slow to hear, and quick to speak!! Got it!! NO, quick to hear, quick to listen, and then think about it before we respond. God in his majesty and wisdom gave us one mouth and 2 ears. Listen twice, speak once can be a great rule of thumb for many or let's not be speakers in waiting when we talk with our spouses, but practice the art of active listeners. Active listening takes focus and effort and its taking the effort to listen, process and then come up with a proper response. This will in result let your spouse know that they are valued and loved because you make the effort to do so! BUT there is also another side effect to doing this, and its something increasing valuable that takes so much time to build, TRUST! **Ephesians 4:29 – Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.** When we respond, its not about bringing up the past to shame, or proving the inconsistencies of what your spouse said, but to understand what is going on in their hearts so that you can build them up according to their needs in the moment. Why is listening so hard? Maybe you should spend some more time praying, get all that speaking out of your system so you can listen to others, God is a great listener!
  
4. **Act in Love** – **John 13:35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”** If we love one another, how do you think everyone will know that we love one another? Is it what we do on valentines day? Its is merely in our words alone? **1 John 3:16-18 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. 17 If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? 18 Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.** We need to be sure to have kind words and be careful what we say yes, but we also need to show our love in our actions and reveal truth in love! This can be difficult to do because our actions don't always get translated as help or I love you! Let me tell you of an example that I have permission to share. This couple came in and we talked about some issues in their marriage and all the sudden the guy turned around and said, “And I am tired of always eat the drumsticks when we have chicken!” I looked at him, thinking – what did I just miss? Turns out she has been under the impression that he likes drumsticks and has given him the drumsticks first every time even though its her



favorite part of the chicken. So her motive was to sacrifice her favorite part of the chicken to say I love you, but her actions over the many MANY years of marriage to him was that he hates that part but his motive was to eat it anyways not to complain because she probably does not like drumsticks and that is why he is getting them! It's a funny story, but it had real implications for them and they both had good motive, but it did not line up with their actions to say I love you!!! Now, they are eating chicken in peace and now when she takes the drumsticks, her action is telling him, I love you! The problem that many of us face is that our motives do not always line up with our actions. We will many times have good motive, but the person we are trying to help does not see our motive, they only see our actions and the reverse is true I only see their actions and not their motives. This is exactly what John is talking about is that the world need to see our actions, not motives, because no one can see them. **This can easily be a place where we get defensive and we want to defend our actions because of our motives was not wrong**, but this is where we need to surrender our pride, understand and see the possibility that our actions did not come across as love or help, but actually hurt the person we love. Its then taking responsibility for your actions and I am sure God will give you another opportunity to try again!

C. **In Conclusion, don't discount God in your marriage!** Galatians 5:16-17 **So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.** The steps I just shared with you in the end here is nothing new, it's not groundbreaking if we just talk about it, **its only groundbreaking when we practice them!** Let me also encourage you to seek out help and please take me up on going to After Service Prayer, we have men and women there ready and willing to pray with you right after the service. I do have some home work for all of you. What is a next step God is asking you to take that we just talked about?

- i. **Don't take the easy way out!** – Take the next right step!
- ii. **Pray Continually:** What passage can you use to start writing our a prayer for your spouse and intercede as the Holy Spirit is interceding f them too?
- iii. **Listen Carefully:** Ask the Lord to grant your understanding and discernment to see the heart of your spouse as you listen.
- iv. **Act in Love:** How can you respond in love with not just words, but in action? What action can you take this week to show your love?

IN the end it's a great goal to try and make our spouse feel loved, heard and understood, **Let's pray** and ask the Lord to reveal His next step to you!