

01. How to W.I.N. at Marriage Workshop

“Warfare”

(8/18/23)

Tonight, we want to look at the first study in our “*How to W.I.N. at Marriage Workshop*.”

I specifically chose the word ‘workshop’ rather than the word ‘*conference*’ to call it by because—in a workshop you *build* something.

This is not a conference (classroom)—I want you to think of it as a *workshop* where we’re going to give you tools to build your marriages into something strong and beautiful.

Let me give you some introductory comments before we actually get into our first teaching tonight.

Marriage was originally designed by God to be one of the greatest blessings and sources of joy on earth.

In fact, it was designed by God to represent the oneness and love relationship that He desired to enter into with the human race, which would find its fulfillment in His marriage to His Bride—the Church.

What has happened to marriage to corrupt it as we see today—to twist it from its original form into the mess it has become in American culture?

Well, it was man's rebellion in the Garden of Eden which led to the Fall of mankind—but also to the fall of marriage.

Sin not only disrupted mankind's relationship with God but it also corrupted our relationships with each other—and in particular, the Fall/Curse brought conflict and chaos into marriage.

So ever since the Fall—marriage has been a difficult proposition to say the least.

Because in marriage we have the joining together of two fallen human beings, each cursed with a fallen nature (full of pride and selfishness) trying to become one with each other.

This can be like combining gun powder and nitroglycerin together—it can be a very explosive mix!

And often conflict fueled by selfishness and pride becomes the spark that ignites the two and blows marriages apart!

But it seemed that for many years in our nation's history as long as we as a people walked with God and lived according to His Word—He gave us the grace to have strong marriages and families.

However, in the last 70 years or so, as our nation has more and more turned away from God and His Word—marriage has been steadily declining and the statistics bear this out.

Every year a little over 2 million couples pledge themselves to one another in marriage vowing to love each other and stay together for better or worse until death separates them—and yet almost half of them will eventually wind up getting divorced—why is that?

I mean, many couples *try* to make their marriages work—they seek professional help from marriage counselors, they attend marriage camps, weekends, and seminars.

They watch videos on the subject of marriage, they read books and fill out workbooks all in an effort to fix their broken marriages—and yet half of these couples will still wind up getting divorced—why?

Well, part of the problem lies in couples trying to get answers from secular professionals as to how to fix their marriages.

Here’s the problem with that—marriage is not the *invention* of man, it’s the *creation* of God!

And that means, He’s the only one who knows how it functions and how to fix the problems couples face in their marriages.

God created marriage in Genesis 2 and man fell in chapter 3—and the Fall brought all of the problems into marriage that we see today and throughout human history.

The reason marriage is so difficult is because—it’s under the curse!

But take courage—in Christ our marriages can be what God intended them to be Pre-Fall—before the curse!

And so, if couples want to find answers to help them have a healthy, blessed marriage they need to understand—they won’t be found in running to secular counselors to drink from the polluted wells of the world’s wisdom—the answers lie with God and His Word!

And that brings us to the first study in our “How to W.I.N. at Marriage Workshop.”

If you want to win at marriage, you need to start by understanding and applying the first letter in the acronym: ‘W. I. N.’”

The “**W**” in our W.I.N. acronym stands for ‘**Warfare.**’

Now, at this point you might be thinking—“*Why begin a workshop on marriage with a study on spiritual warfare?*”

Why? Because spiritual warfare is the direct cause of all marital problems—unbeknownst to many couples!

As I just said, the reason marriage is so difficult is because it’s under the *curse*, that’s true, but what couples often fail to understand is that the devil is using the curse as a vehicle to attack their marriages!

So let me put it this way—the *real* reason your marriage is so difficult is because—it is under attack!

Ephesians 6:12 (NKJV)

¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

Our struggles in marriage are really not with each other—they are spiritual in nature.

Of course, we become willing pawns and participants in the devil’s attempt to destroy our marriages through our own selfishness and pride.

We can’t blame the devil for our failed marriages—but we must not be ‘*ignorant of his devices*’ either. (2Cor. 2:11)

So, the real problem in your marriage is spiritual in nature, and if you don't isolate the *core* problem (spiritual warfare) and target it—your marriage will be reduced to endlessly running around trying to fix *symptoms*.

And this is basically what we see with many married couples today—instead of dealing with the real problem in their marriages, they spend all their time working on symptoms (selfishness, lack of communication, out of control spending, in-law problems etc.) while leaving the core issue undealt with (kind of like taking aspirins to heal a headache that is due to a brain tumor)!

What we need to do in our marriages is focus on the core problem which is our fallen natures being manipulated by Satan and used against us to destroy our marriages!

One of the things that has many of us pastors concerned is how many Christian marriages are struggling and failing today.

I mean we understand the problems that those who don't know the Lord have in their marriages—but Christians!?

Yes, especially Christians!

And the reason is because unbelievers are not at war with the devil—but we are!

I personally am seeing more Christians getting divorced today than I saw 40 years ago when I first got into ministry.

One Christian couple I knew got married (I married them), two months later she was cheating on her husband and two months after that they filed for divorce.

And while that may be an extreme example of the flimsy, shallow commitment that many are entering into marriage with—it is nonetheless becoming more and more the norm rather than the exception.

I personally believe that one of the main reasons Christian marriages are failing at a record rate today is due to the epidemic of self-love that is so rampant in the world—but which has also infected the Church.

The apostle Paul prophesied about this in 2Tim. 3—“*In the last days people would be lovers of self...*”

I see many couples entering into marriage on the basis of self-love (“*I love you because you make me feel good...or because of what you give me...*”)—entering into marriage more for what they can get out of it rather than what they can put into it.

Whenever a person enters into marriage with that mindset that marriage is doomed from the start because—they’ll always be looking for a ‘better deal’, someone else who can make them feel better or give them more...etc.

The only kind of love that will allow your marriage to endure the hardships, pain, problems, and difficulties of life—is the love of God (agape love), which is supernatural, selfless and sacrificial. (Romans 5:5)

And until we love God and our spouse *more* than we love ourselves—marriages will continue to suffer and die on the altar of self-love.

Whether Christians realize it or not—so much of self-love is being stimulated and exacerbated by the devil and his demons working through our fallen nature—leading to great conflict and division in marriages.

Jesus warned us that—“*If a house (or marriage) is divided against itself, that house (or marriage) cannot stand.*” (Mark 3:25)

Satan's strategy has always been "*divide and conquer*" because he knows there is strength in numbers and that—the only way he can defeat us is to divide us!

Ecclesiastes 4:9–10, 12 (NLT)

⁹ Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. ¹⁰ If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble...¹² A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken. [a husband and a wife and God]

We are in a battle with the devil for the survival of our marriages—Satan wants to destroy them, but God wants to grow them so that they flourish and glorify Him in this world.

This war is with the devil and his demons not really with each other—however, in any war there is a certain percentage of casualties that come as a result of "*friendly fire*."

Every soldier knows that sometimes in the heat of battle allies can be mistaken for enemies—and when that happens the results can be devastating.

Unfortunately, when we talk about spiritual warfare the same thing is true.

There are many casualties in the Body of Christ that are the result of friendly fire.

And by that I mean—people who are supposed to be on the same side fighting together against the real enemy often find themselves fighting each other, taking shots at one another, wounding and hurting and even destroying those who are supposed to be allies and not enemies!

How true this often is in marriage.

In Ephesians 6 when Paul reminded us that our real struggles are not with each other but with principalities and powers, the hosts of wickedness in the spirit realm—he did so directly on the heels of his teaching on marriage.

I wonder if that was intentional on the part of the Holy Spirit working through Paul.

I wonder if the Spirit of God was telling us that marriages can expect to get the brunt of much if not most of the spiritual warfare that we will encounter as Christians.

In fact, as we read the first few chapters in the book of Genesis, we can see that it didn't take Satan long to attack the first marriage on the face of the earth.

At the end of Genesis 2 God joined Adam and Eve together in marriage—and in the beginning of chapter 3 Satan attacked them—why?

For several reasons but primarily to get back at God—to curse and corrupt something that God had created to be beautiful and blessed.

And so, in Genesis 3:1-7 we have recorded the Fall of man, and then in Genesis 3:15-18 God pronounces the curse—first on the serpent and then on the woman in verse 16:

Genesis 3:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶To the woman He said: "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire *shall be* for your husband, And he shall rule over you."

The final words of God to Eve are especially significant—“*Your desire shall be for your husband...*”

This sounds kind of endearing, and yet God is not speaking here in endearing terms—He is pronouncing the curse!

The word ‘**desire**’ in the Hebrew means “*to seek control.*”

It's the same word used in Gen. 4:7—“*[Cain] "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."*

God is saying that sin will seek to dominate and control us—but we are not to let it—we are to rule over it (i.e., ‘rule over our fallen nature’—Gal. 5:16)!

But also, God is telling us in Genesis 3:16 that, because of the Fall, this concept would have application in marriage as well.

That from this point on the woman would desire to control her husband—but he was to rule (have authority) over her (v.16).

Eve had been in submission to Adam before the Fall (this is evident from what Paul said in 1Tim.2:13-14)—and initially their marriage functioned as God had ordained.

The man was in authority over his wife, and she was in submission to her husband (although before the Fall the authority structure was in place but invisible).

However, when the Fall occurred, and the curse came upon mankind—all of that changed!

No longer would the man and his wife function so beautifully and harmoniously together in marriage each knowing their God given role and happy to fulfill it.

Now, as a result of the Fall, the woman would desire to usurp her husband's authority in an attempt to control him—but God commanded the man that he was not to allow that to happen—that *he* was to rule over (have authority over) her (v.16).

That meant he was commanded by God to be the head (leader) of his marriage, that he was not to allow his wife to be the dominant one in marriage and he passive to her control.

And it is within this context that we see the conflict in marriages today.

All of it can be traced back to the Fall—and that because of the Fall marriage is under the curse and under attack—an attack against God’s role for husbands and wives in marriage!

Today we see the effects of the curse being played out in marriages in the battle of the sexes with things like—*feminism* and *chauvinism*.

And so, the curse brought conflict and chaos into marriage—“*Is there any hope?!*”—Yes, but only *in Christ!*

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

God wants you to know that in Christ the conflict and chaos in your marriage can be replaced with peace and harmony.

And by God’s grace and power the effects of the Fall can be *overcome* making your marriage a new creation in Christ, where old things have passed away and all things have become new.

You say, “*But how?! It seems like our marriage has never gotten off of the ground!*”

It’s true that the Fall has kept many marriages “*grounded*” in the sense it has kept them from flying above the problems of life rooted in the curse.

As Paul called it Romans 8:2—the ‘*law of sin and death*’ (i.e., ‘the curse working thru our fallen nature’) has kept many marriages from soaring!

But in Christ we can use one law to counteract the other—

Romans 8:2 (NKJV)

² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

So, you see, in Christ the effects of the Fall can be overcome like the law of gravity can be overcome by the law of aerodynamics. (Explain)

The secret is to abide in Christ, because only when you're in Christ (salvation) and abiding in Christ each day (fellowship) can the effects of the Fall be overcome in your marriage allowing it to soar above the petty arguments and selfish actions that have grounded it (kept it down) for so many years.

Which means that, while many couples feel the other is the problem (and maybe they are part of it)—we must focus on ourselves because we are the only one God wants us to work on. (John 21:18-22)

As we bring this to a close—please understand that all of the problems in marriage result from pride and selfishness—they are the bottom line in marital warfare.

So, all victory has to begin with the cross—you must die to self if your marriage is going to be blessed and beautiful! (This is what spiritual warfare is all about—crucifying the flesh so we can walk in victory).

Paul in Romans 6 tells us that the Christian life is a supernatural life—which the Bible calls the "resurrection life."

This is a life that only the Holy Spirit can empower believers to live—it is a life of victory and power to be all that God has called us to be as His children.

However, before we can live a resurrected life—we first have to go the cross and die even as Jesus had to die before He was raised in resurrection power.

Romans 6:5 (NKJV)

⁵ For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness of His* resurrection,

The only hope for marriage is the cross—we must die to self before the Holy Spirit can fill us with the power to live the resurrection life.

If husbands and wives loved each other sacrificially by going to the cross and dying to self (selfishness and pride)—marriages would thrive and flourish and couples would enjoy a supernatural, ‘resurrection life’ marriage—in short, they would know the joy of their marriage being all that God desires and created it to be.

So how do we fight in the spiritual sense against the enemy for our marriages?

2 Corinthians 10:3–5 (NKJV)

³ For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, ⁵ casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

The Word of God and prayer is how we fight.

- *Pray for humility.*
- *Examine your heart honestly.*
- *Maintain a strong devotional life.*
- *Pray together.*
- *See yourselves as allies not enemies.*

We must abide in Jesus if the effects of the Fall and curse are going to be overcome in all of our human relationships—especially in marriage.

→ Close using the triangle illustration with God at the top and couples on the bottom moving upwards towards God and as they do they move closer to each other!