

UNLOCKING THE MARRIAGE MATRIX

“A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one. This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one.”

Eph. 5:31-32 (NLT)

“Don’t ever forget My words... They are the keys to life.” Pr. 4:21-22 (NCV)

SIX KEYS

KEY #1 _____

“Reliable communication permits progress.” Pr.13:17b (LB)

“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but only that which is good (and edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers.” Eph. 4:29 (KJV)

“Just say ‘yes’ and ‘no.’ When you manipulate words to get your own way, you go wrong.” Matt. 5:37 (Msg.)

KEY #2 _____

“You must learn to be considerate of one another, cultivating a life in common.”

1 Cor. 1:10b (Msg)

“Husbands, show consideration for your wives in your life together... so that nothing may hinder your prayers.” 1 Peter 3:7 (NRSV)

“Show your love by being helpful to each other.” Eph. 4:2b (TEV)

“We must be considerate of the doubts and fears of others... If we do what helps them, we will build them up in the Lord.” Rom. 15:1-2 (NLT)

“You must make allowance for each other’s faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.” Col. 3:13 (NLT)

KEY #3 _____

“A home divided against itself is doomed.” Mark 3:25 (NLT)

“People who do not get along with others are only interested in themselves.”

Pr. 18:1 (TEV)

“...Love does not demand its own way.” 1 Cor. 13:5 (LB)

“May ... God develop maturity in you so that you get along with each other as well as Jesus gets along with us all.” Rom. 15:5 (Msg)

KEY #4 _____

“The husband should not deprive his wife of sexual intimacy, which is her right as a married woman, nor should the wife deprive her husband.” 1 Cor. 7:3 (NLT)

“There’s more to sex than mere skin on skin. Sex is as much spiritual mystery as physical fact. As written in Scripture, “The two become one.”” 1 Cor. 6:16 (Msg)

“Let (your mate’s) affection fill you at all times with delight ...” Pr. 5:19b (RSV)

KEY #5 _____

“‘I hate divorce,’ says the Lord... ‘So make sure that you do not break your promise to be faithful to your (mate).” Mal. 2:16 (TEV)

KEY #6 _____

“...God’s secret is Christ Himself. He is the key that opens all the hidden treasures of God’s wisdom and knowledge.” Col. 2:2-3 (TEV)

“He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure.” Isaiah 33:6 (NIV)

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We're going to begin a new series today that I'm calling *The Marriage Matrix*." We're going to look at "Unlocking the Marriage Matrix" and a lot of the keys.

When the movie, *Matrix Reloaded*, came out, it broke all box office records as millions of people asked the question, "What is the Matrix?" I looked up the word "matrix" in the dictionary and discovered that the matrix is a dozen different things. It has over a dozen different definitions and usages. For instance, did you know that the matrix is the formative tissue around your toenail? I thought that was called fungus, but it's matrix. Did you know that the matrix is the solid matter in which fossils are embedded? That's called the matrix. The matrix is a metal plate used for old type style setting. The matrix is the primary metal of an alloy. For instance iron is the matrix of steel. The matrix is the connection between inputs and outputs of a computer.

But as I read through these dozen different definitions of the matrix I discovered several that sounded vaguely like marriage. For instance. "The matrix is an intersection of two opposites." That sounds like marriage to me! "A matrix is a relationship in which something new develops." That sounds like marriage to me! The matrix is a binding substance that keeps two things together." That sounds like marriage to me.

The Bible doesn't call marriage a matrix. But it does call marriage a mystery. Ephesians 5:31-32 NLT says "A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife and the two are united into one. [There's the matrix – united into one.] *This is a great mystery. It is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one.*"

Some of you think, "If marriage is a matrix is it real or an illusion?" That's really a pretty good question because in today's culture is it possible any more for two people to so love each other than they would spend their entire lives together? Is it possible that two could be so bound together, so bonded together in a marriage that nothing can separate them except death? Is that possible? We're going to look at that for the next several weeks.

I know what some of you single adults are saying: "It's time for me to go to another church for a month." I beg you please don't do that for three reasons:

1. You know some married people who need this material and you could counsel them.
2. You might get married someday in the future.
3. Even if you don't, you still need to learn as an adult the relational skills that are applied to every relationship not just marriage. What we're going to talk about has application not just to marriage but to every single relationship in your life.

What I'm going to do today is, first, identify the six keys to unlocking the marriage matrix. This is kind of an index to where we're going in the days ahead that we'll be looking at in more detail. And two, I want you to do a little self-identification, self-evaluation. In physical health it's good to get an annual physical check up. In your finances it's good to do an annual review of your finances. In a job it's good to get an annual performance review. And even in government we get an annual state of the union message. This morning I want us to look at the state of *your* union, your marriage. I want you to do a little marriage check up. On each of these keys I want you to honestly evaluate yourself, "How am I doing? Does this need work?" Write NW next to the point. "Is this OK?" Write an "OK."

God's ideal for your marriage is harmony, unity and intimacy. But that's the ideal and most of us don't stay there. We go from the ideal and pretty soon marriage is an ordeal and eventually we're looking for a new deal and let's make a deal. But that's not God's goal. God's goal is you have these six keys that unlock the potential of your marriage for it to become all God wants it to be.

The first key we're going to look at in the marriage matrix is...

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Key #1: Communication

That's a given. All of us know that communication is important to every relationship but we also know it's a big problem. Proverbs 13:17 LB says, "*Reliable communication permits progress.*" If you want to make progress in your relationship you have to learn how to talk with each other. We know from studies that have been done 85% of all marriage problems include some kind of communication breakdown. You know in your relationship and I know it in mine. That reminds me of the guy I saw the other day wearing the T-shirt that said, "If a man speaks in the forest and his wife isn't there to hear him is he still wrong?" Communication is hard. It's exacerbated by the fact that in our culture the average person watches 46 hours a week of television but the average couple spends 4 minutes a day in conversation. It's a problem.

One of the things we have to work on if we're going to have a successful marriage is this whole issue of communication. We have to learn to put into practice good communication skills. Ephesians 4:29 "*Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth but only that which is good and edifying that it may minister grace to the hearers.*" That's a command to all Christians but it certainly applies to our marriages as well. We have to learn the skill of good communication. You've seen couples and I've seen them who before they ever get married they talk to each other all the time. They spend hours on the phone. They expend a lot of effort in communication skills. But as the years go by they talk less and less until you see them sitting in the restaurant eating their meals in complete silence without any meaningful conversation. The point is you've got to work at it.

We all have different styles. We all have different needs when it comes to communication. Often, men communicate in facts and women communicate in emotions. He communicate in sound bites. She communicates in mega bites. We have different communication styles and different needs. Someone has said that the average man speaks about 20,000 words a day. the average woman 30,000 a day. One woman told me the reason that's so is because she has to repeat everything so her husband will hear her. You need to set aside time ideally every day – at least several times a week – where you just debrief, where you talk about what's going on in your world, where you keep the relational connection. That begins with honest, authentic conversation.

Let me give you one word of warning. Speak honestly and communicate the best you know how. Because one of the things that causes problems in our relationships is when we begin to speak in riddles or send hidden messages. Occasionally someone, a woman will perhaps say to her husband, "I shouldn't have to tell you. You should know this by now." Ladies, can I just tell you? We cannot read your mind. You say, "Well, you guys can't be that dumb!" Let me assure you we are. We don't get it. Spell it out for us. Speak slow. Write it down. We just don't get it quickly.

Matthew 5:37 Msg "*Just say yes and no. When you manipulate words to get your own way you go wrong.*"

Take just a moment right there between point number one and write "NW - here's an area that needs some work," or "I feel like I'm pretty much on track with that." Go ahead and rate yourself on that. NW or OK

If the first key of unlocking the marriage matrix is communication, the second key is

Key #2: Consideration

You must be considerate of your husband or your wife. 1 Corinthians 1:10 Msg says, "*You must learn to be considerate of one another cultivating a life in common.*" Consideration means not thinking only of yourself.

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You start thinking of “we” instead of “me” it means paying attention to what your spouse says. It means showing common courtesy. It means treating them with respect and with care.

Husbands, we especially need to work on this consideration. But all of us need to work on it together. One of the primary purposes of marriage is to teach you how to be considerate. Notice it says, “*You must learn to be considerate.*” Circle “learn”. You know why you must learn to be considerate? Because you are not by nature a considerate person and neither am I. By nature we are selfish. I think about my needs, my hurts, my wants. I’m not thinking about you. I’m thinking about me. One of the whole purposes of marriage is to teach us to think *we* not *me*. To teach us to be considerate because Jesus is considerate.

God’s purpose in your marriage is not to make you happy. That’s a benefit of it but it’s not the purpose of marriage. The purpose of marriage is not to make you happy but holy. Because when you get in a marriage you don’t get your way all the time any more. You have to learn to be considerate. So marriage is a school of consideration. Learning to be unselfish. You learn it there more than any other place.

Husbands, as I said, we especially have to work on this. 1 Peter 3:7 NRSV says, “*Husbands, show consideration for your wives in your life together so that nothing may hinder your prayers.*” Did you know, men, when you are inconsiderate to your wife God doesn’t hear your prayers? If you’re out bossing the family around and being selfish and being controlling and being manipulative or harsh and inconsiderate God says, I’m not going to listen to the prayers of a selfish man. You say, God, I need Your help on this business deal. He says, You’re too selfish. One of the primary goals of life is to teach us to be unselfish. The primary school is marriage. God says I want you to learn to be considerate.

The problem is the longer you stay together the more inconsiderate you tend to become. You were most considerate when you were dating. “After you... No, no. After *you!*” You’re very polite and you’re very considerate in the dating stage. Later it’s “Get it yourself!”

I read the other day of the five stages of a marriage cold. In the first year of marriage: “Baby, darling, I’m worried about that sniffle you have so I’ve called the paramedics to rush you to TDHospital for a checkup and a week of rest. I know you don’t like hospital food so I’m having gourmet meals brought in.” By the second year it’s “Sweetheart, I don’t like the sound of that cough. I’ve arranged for the doctor to make a house call. Let me tuck you in bed.” Year three it’s deteriorated to “You look like you’ve got a fever so why don’t you drive yourself over to the ER or the drug store to get some medicine. I’ll watch the kids.” Fourth year: “Look, be sensible. After you’ve fed and bathed the kids and washed the dishes you really ought to go to bed.” Fifth year: “For Pete’s sake! Do you have to cough so loud? I can’t hear the TV! Would you mind going in the other room while this show’s on? You sound like a barking dog.”

Two young lovers walked down the street.
She tripped and he worried, “Be careful sweet.”
Now they’re married they walk down the exact same street.
When she trips he says, “Pick up your feet.”

How do you show sympathy? How do you show compassion? How do you show consideration? Let me share three verses that give us three practical ways.

1. By being helpful.

Offering practical help. Consideration is seeing what your mate needs in advance and not having to wait for them to ask you for help. It’s being considerate. “Can I help you?” It’s you taking the initiative. Ephesians

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4:2 TEV says “*Show your love by being helpful to each other.*” That’s consideration. Just being practical and help each other without your mate having to ask you. That means bringing in the groceries even if it’s the fourth quarter. It means waiting until both of her legs are in the car before you shut the door. It’s common consideration. Thinking about what would be helpful.

2. Sympathize with their doubts and fears.

The Bible says in Romans 15:1,2 NLT “*We must be considerate of the doubts and fears of others. If we do what helps them we will build them up in the Lord.*” Have you noticed that my fears are always logical and rational? Your fears are stupid they’re dumb. They’re illogical. What I’m afraid of, what I have doubts about, are very reasonable. But what you’re afraid of you shouldn’t be afraid of. That causes a lot of problems. You’re being inconsiderate of the fears and doubts of others. Don’t poo-poo their fears.

Maybe some of you grew up in a home in the country where you never ever locked any door. Even when you went away you never locked the house. You often left the door open all night just to get a breeze because you didn’t have air conditioning. And the door didn’t even have a screen on it. So you weren’t used to safety features.

On the other hand, maybe your wife was raised in a home where the moment the sun goes down you pull up the drawbridge, you fill the moat, you release the alligators, you turn on 500,000 watts of light shining on your driveway. You shutter all the windows and you triple lock the doors and then you’re safe... maybe.

So in your marriage, you’ve had this battle over and over, “Did you lock all the doors?” He really don’t think about locking the doors. It’s not in his character. And usually he get in bed and she reminds him, “Did you lock all the doors?” Well, you get the picture. Are you considerate? God wants to teach us to be considerate.

3. Forgiving their mistakes.

You’re imperfect and you married an imperfect person and it’s impossible for two imperfect people to have a perfect marriage. There’s no such thing as a perfect relationship because sinners marry sinners. We’ve all blown it. So marriages need massive doses of forgiveness. The Bible says in Colossians 3:13 NLT “*You must make allowances for each other’s faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember the Lord forgave you so you must forgive others.*” Forgiveness is one of the primary building blocks of marriage. And it’s a way of showing consideration.

The Bible tells us in James 3:17 that being considerate is a mark of wisdom which means when I’m inconsiderate I’m a fool. I’m stupid. I’m dumb. I’m foolish. Anytime I’m inconsiderate, not just to my wife but to anybody – to clerks or anybody else – I am being unwise. Wisdom is shown by being considerate of the needs of other people, that includes offering forgiveness.

Evaluate yourself on this one. Put an NW next to it that means Needs Work. Or put an OK if you’re in denial and a The third key to unlock the marriage matrix is ...

Key #3: Compromise

If you’ve been married longer than a day you know that every single marriage has conflict. There are just some things you’re never going to see eye to eye about. You’re never going to agree on everything. When you have two people who agree on everything, one of them is unnecessary. The reason God has given you a spouse is so

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you would look through a different set of lenses. Sometimes it's because of our background, sometimes it's just because of our personality and how God has wired us, sometimes it's about our own world view that we just have a spouse that brings a different perspective of how we should see life. As you begin marriage you know there are thousands of things that over the years you learn to compromise on – to meet in the middle, to be flexible, to be willing to give up and yield your own rights.

Example: Dad has daughter who is seventeen and prom is coming up in just a few days. So over the last couple of weeks they've been in prom crisis. The crisis involves finding a dress. So virtually every day the wife and daughter would start off somewhere to go anywhere in Central California to find the perfect dress – the perfect style, the perfect size, the perfect color. So one morning after many unsuccessful trips the wife comes to her husband and says, "We're coming back with the dress. How much can we spend?" He said, "Fifty bucks." She had the same reaction you did. He gave a higher figure and it still wasn't enough. She said, "Let me tell you what we're going to spend." He said, "Yes, dear." So he compromised and did what she wanted.

But on big things and small things if you don't learn to compromise it will lead to destruction. Look at Mark 3:25 NLT "*A home divided against itself is doomed.*" If your marriage is going to be successful you have to learn conflict resolution, how to negotiate. Most of us didn't learn that in the models we watched in our own families or people around us. We certainly didn't learn it in our schooling. So we often learn it the hard way.

Virtually all those conflicts can be traced back to one issue. It's the issue of selfishness. In fact the Bible says this in Proverbs 18:1 TEV "*People who do not get along with others are only interested in themselves.*" Ouch! In fact, when you go to the New Testament we discover when Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13, the love chapter, he basically says that the mark of real love is compromise. Verse 5 LB "*Love does not demand its own way.*" Time and time again in every relationship you have to yield your rights to having your own way. And rather deferring to your spouse and meeting their needs and being willing to meet in the middle, being flexible and compromise. That comes in a thousand different forms in every relationship.

I'll give you one example from our marriage. We have to compromise about how we like to watch TV or what kind of movie we're going to rent. One time I watch the home make over show with her. Another time she watches the ballgame with me. We rent one action packed movie & one romance variety.

You're going to learn to compromise about how you raise your kids, where you spend your holidays, how much time you spend with the in-laws, how your house is decorated. You're going to learn to compromise in lots of different issues even the issue of making love in your marriage. Some of you are wired like a microwave. Some of you are wired like a crockpot. You have to learn how to compromise in terms of how you do it and then even *when* you make love. It's all about learning to compromise. And really, at the end of the day, it's about learning to be unselfish and maturing. Romans 15:5 Msg "*May God develop maturity in you so that you get along with each other as well as Jesus gets along with us.*"

Rate yourself. How are you doing? Are you flexible? Do you compromise pretty well? Put Key #2 into practice, be considerate. If your spouse put "OK" and you know they need to work on it, Just make that a point of discussion later. But take a moment and rate yourself

The fourth key to unlocking the marriage matrix.

Key # 4: Contact

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It takes communication, consideration, compromise, and contact. I'm talking about physical touch, physical contact, affection. You can call it cuddling, caressing, whatever. You must touch to keep in touch. As a human being God gave you skin for a reason. You're not just a spirit. You have a body and skin is meant to be touched. And all of us – everybody – married or unmarried – need human contact, physical contact. Hugs, pats on the back, handshakes, high 5s.

Everybody needs physical affection. Everybody does. That's why in our church every week we touch each other near the beginning we say, "Turn around and greet someone you don't know, Turn around and shake hands with somebody and often that includes a hug. Babies can die from a lack of touch. Failure to thrive syndrome. If they're not stroked and touched enough they can die. And so can marriages. In fact, I read this last week – I'm not making this up – UCLA did a study and discovered that if you hug your husband at least three times a day you can increase his life span up to three years. Some of you are going, "Tough luck, honey! Been nice knowing you." If you're too busy to date your mate, you're too busy. If there were more courting in marriage there would be fewer marriages in court. The problem is what you did to *win* your mate's love you haven't continued to *keep* your mate's love. Before you got married you couldn't keep your hands off each other. You're hugging and kissing and walking arm in arm and holding hands. Now that you're married you never hold hands any more. And the touching and the tenderness slowly fades away. And when that happens the devil has won a victory in your marriage. He's setting you up for failure.

I know the old excuse. I've heard it many times. "I just don't feel affectionate." There could be a lot of reasons for that. Maybe you're just too tired. Maybe you're too busy. Maybe there's a health issue. Maybe you've got unresolved resentment. There could be dozens and dozens of reasons that you're not interested in affection or sex or anything else. There's lots of reasons that you could deal with and discuss. But I will tell you this: It's easier to act your way into a feeling than it is to feel your way into an action. When you say, "I'm going to wait until I feel like it to act romantic," it isn't going to happen. The devil will make sure you never feel like it. You have to act romantic even when you don't feel like it. And when you do the feelings will come. In fact, I guarantee it. Because feelings always follow behavior. If you act in a loving way, you act in a romantic way, you act in an affectionate way, the feelings will come back. Don't wait for the feelings. Just do the right thing. And never let a day go by without some kind of physical contact.

An attorney told this story. He said a woman came into our law office seeking a divorce. She said, I not only want a divorce but I want to hurt him badly because of all the times he's ignored me. So the attorney said, "Ok, go home and compliment him every day until I can get the papers drawn up. Tell him all the good things that he does and especially smother him with affection every day. Act like you really adore him. And then we'll file for the divorce and it will devastate him." A month later she called back the attorney. She said, "Cancel the divorce. We've both fallen in love with each other again."

It's easier to act your way into a feeling than to feel your way into an action. Physical affection is as vital to your marriage as communication and consideration and compromise and all these other keys. They're all important.

Of course, in marriage that includes sex. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 7:3 NLT "*The husband should not deprive his wife of sexual intimacy which is her right as a married woman. Nor should the wife deprive her husband.*" God doesn't intend for your marriage to be boring and lifeless and passionless and pleasureless and dull. But sex has profound implications for your marriage. In fact, God gave sex to cement marriages together. The primary purpose of sex is not to have children. The primary purpose of sex is to cement a husband and wife together in a spiritual union and a bonding that is exclusive to them that involves nobody else in the world.

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That's why God says, Don't have sex out of marriage. It has profound spiritual implications. It is meant primarily for bonding a husband and a wife together.

1 Corinthians 6:16 Msg *"There's more to sex than mere skin on skin. Sex is as much a spiritual mystery as a physical fact. As it is written, the two shall become one."* There's a spiritual connection there.

I saw an article entitled "The Yuppie Dilemma: Too Tired for Sex." That's sad. When marriage deteriorates into simply a business partnership or two roommates living together to save on the bills then Satan has won a major victory. Because that is not what God wants for your marriage. That's not what God designed for your marriage and you're setting your marriage up for failure.

If you are having problems with your sexual relationship in your marriage, please, please, *please* get help. It is available. There are counselors, there are a lot of good books. It is unnecessary for you to suffer in silence in this area. It just isn't necessary. You can get help for all the possible causes if you will be honest.

Rate yourself on Contact. How do you rate yourself on daily physical affection? Are you too busy? Do you have at least a weekly date? A date night. Do you need to touch more in order to stay in touch? Give yourself an NW – Needs work or OK.

The fifth key we want to talk about this morning is...

Key #5: Commitment

If you're only going to take one word that would best summarize the whole marriage relationship it wouldn't be the word "love." It would be the word "commitment." Any two people given the right circumstances, the right environment could develop romantic, loving feelings toward each other. But that's not really at the heart of marriage. In fact, the difference between marriage and just living together is commitment. God expects us to keep that commitment. In fact, look at the verse in Malachi 2:16 TEV, the last book in the Old Testament. They're very strong words, *"I hate divorce," says the Lord, 'So make sure you don't break your promise to be faithful to your mate.'"*

Divorce is a reality in our world and there are people in our church who have been through the painful experience of divorce. Thank God for His grace and His forgiveness. But let's be honest. It's not God's ideal. God wants every man and every woman who stand together and make marriage vows to stay together for life no matter how hard it gets or what happens along the way. You will never build strong, intimate marriage relationship when divorce is always an option. There are many people who carry around secretly this little escape hatch. In their minds they think, "If it gets really hard or things don't go like I thought or if I get really unhappy I've got this little key to the escape hatch that will always allow me a way out." The reality is that in our culture it's become far too easy to run away.

So let me encourage you. If you're married, if you're here this morning, throw away that key. Don't leave yourself that escape hatch. Don't leave yourself that option. When you said, "Till death do us part," that was a lifelong commitment. Don't leave it as an option.

Here's one of the things that people often don't realize. Commitment somewhere along the way will mean being willing to be unhappy for a while. Somewhere in your journey in marriage your commitment will require you to be willing to be unsatisfied or unhappy for a season until things work out. There are some people who

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have this attitude, “If I could just get out... If I could just be with that person... If I could just get this kind of relationship...” the whole idea of the grass is always greener over there. The grass is greener where you water it. And it starts with your commitment. No matter where you are right now or what’s going on in your relationship, that you are committed. I cannot begin to understand or relate to some of the pain some of you must be going through in your relationships right now. But stay committed.

My wife and I this summer will celebrate our 45th anniversary. We got married when we were twelve. But honestly, in the early years of our marriage I didn’t know much about how to be a good husband. But even through those early learning years Judy never threatened to leave me. She never threw up divorce as an option. We were committed to each other. I can tell you now that after 45 years it’s richer and more rewarding and more fulfilling than ever before. But it started because we had a fundamental commitment.

If you have been married 25 years or longer would you stand up right now and stay standing. Before you sit down let me ask you a couple questions. How many of you would say, We’ve had some major conflicts in those 25 years or more? How many would say, Sometimes I felt like giving up? That’s what I thought. I want to say to you. I honor you. I honor you for understanding the meaning of commitment in a world that knows nothing about commitment. Can we celebrate these couples who have stayed the course for 25 or more years!

Here’s the sixth key to unlocking the marriage matrix. It takes communication and consideration. It takes compromise and contact and it takes commitment. But most of all...

Key #6: Christ.

It takes three to make a marriage stand. Not two – three. You, your spouse and Christ. God never meant for you to go through your marriage just with the two of you working on it. Marriage is a three-legged stool. It takes three legs for stability. You’ve never seen a two-legged stool. A two-legged stool will fall over. It has no stability. And if all you’ve got in your marriage is each other, it isn’t enough. You need you, your spouse and God. It takes a three-legged stool to stand up to stability. Jesus Christ is the key to all the other five keys in the marriage matrix.

Colossians 2:2,3 TEV says this “*God’s secret is Christ Himself. He is the key that opens all the hidden treasures of God’s wisdom and knowledge.*” We live in earthquake country. We all know that if you don’t have a strong foundation, when the earthquake comes, your home is going to fall. In the same way your marriage must have a solid foundation because you’re going to face a lot of earthquakes in life. You’re going to have some health earthquakes. You’re going to have some financial earthquakes. You’re going to have some emotional earthquakes. You’re going to have all kinds of different problems and stresses and earthquakes in your life and if you don’t have a solid foundation for your home it’s not going to be stable.

What is the foundation? Jesus Christ. Isa 33:6 NIV “*He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge. The fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure.*” What’s the fear of the Lord? It’s respecting God for who He is. God, You’re God, and You have a right to be number one in my life, in my spouse’s life and in our marriage and we’re going to build our marriage around You.

The best thing you can do for your marriage is open your life to Jesus Christ. If you want a strong marriage become a godly man. Do you want a strong marriage? Become a godly woman. How do you do that?

First you open up your life to Jesus Christ. Second, you commit your life and your marriage to Jesus. Third, you get involved in a small group where you’re going to get the support your need. Fourth, you talk about these

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six issues. Communication, commitment, contact – all of these issues – compromise. You can read your Bible all you want and pray all you want and your marriage isn't going to get any better. It takes more than reading your Bible and prayer. You've got to work on the things that God tells you to work on. But if you will both love God with all your heart, and if you will both do what He tells you to do in marriage – these six keys to unlocking the marriage matrix – you can have an outstanding, incredible, great, strong, healthy marriage no matter what the past has been like. It's your choice.

I challenge you to commit your life to Christ. Then commit yourself to these other five keys. Good marriages don't just happen. They are intentional. These are the keys in the next few weeks we're going to look at them in detail.

Personally, in all the things I've done in my life and I've done a lot of things, the most challenging challenge in my life has been my marriage. Without a doubt. The hardest thing I've had to work on in my life. Building this church is far easier than building my marriage. But it has also been the single greatest source of growth in my life and it has also been the most rewarding thing in my life. What you put into it is what you're going to get out of it.

Prayer:

Today could be a fresh start for your marriage. Would you like that? Would you say, "Yes, I'd like some of the barriers to come down that have never fallen. I'd like to work through some of the hurt, the pain, some of the issues we've never talked about. I'd like to build our marriage." If you'd say, "I'd like to work on our relationship and make it better during the weeks ahead you might as a sign of intent just reach out for your husband or your wife's hand and squeeze it and hold it as we pray together. Pray this in your heart: "Dear God, help us to learn to communicate better. Help us to be more considerate of each other's feelings. Help us to compromise in areas of disagreement. Help us to forgive each other. Help us to make contact with each other every day in some way. Help us to deepen our commitment to each other and to You. Help us to show affection. Jesus Christ, we need You in our lives. In your name, we pray, Amen.