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## NEW MARRIAGE, SAME SPOUSE

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### Part 1 of Real Marriage

Pastor Mark Driscoll | January 15, 2012

### INTRODUCTION

Well sweetie, it was actually more than a year ago we started writing the book *Real Marriage*. Today it is done, it is out. The small-group curriculum has been released along with the study guides and today we kick off the Real Marriage campaign. And I just want to publicly thank you for being my girl and for writing the book with me. Which chapter is your favorite?

*Grace Driscoll: I would say the "Friend with Benefits" chapter.*

That was my favorite too. Which one do you think is going to get us in the most trouble?

*Grace Driscoll: The "Can We \_\_\_\_\_?" sexual questions chapter.*

Definitely. You said that one nervously, which was cute. What are you hoping and praying that God uses the series for in the lives of other people, singles as well as marrieds?

*Grace Driscoll: I just hope that it helps people see that honesty is the best way to go. We've tried to be really honest with our life and the baggage that we brought into our relationship, and have seen God do amazing redemption and I just want to help other people do the same in their marriage so that they can have the freedom from the sins from the past and the present and avoid things in the future.*

Could you just kick everything off by praying for my sermon and our series?

*Grace Driscoll: Absolutely. Dear Lord, thank you for everyone here. Thank you that you have used our life to witness to these people and I pray that you would continue to use what you've done in our lives, the redemption and just the story that you've brought about through our story. Lord, use it in these people's marriages. Lord, I pray that we would all continue to be honest and that you would just allow us to just have healing in all of our marriages, Lord. Thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Thank you baby, see you in a bit.

### A WEDDING TO A WAR

It's a great honor to teach, and I want to start where the Bible starts, and the Bible starts with a wedding. The Bible starts with a wedding, and it quickly moves to a war. How many of you have had that experience? The story of Genesis is that our first parents are married, and immediately Satan, the enemy of God, shows up, and he moves his war from heaven to earth, and from assaulting God and the angels to assaulting a husband and wife.

The truth is that marriage is in the context of war. A spiritual battle rages between the enemy of God and his people, and God and his people. And for those of us who are Christian, our marriages are on the frontline of that battle, and the closer you move toward ministry, it even intensifies, because Satan absolutely hates God. He hates God's people, and he particularly hates marriage, and he hates Christian marriage, because Christian marriage is a portrait of the gospel.

Paul says in Ephesians 5 that husbands should love their wives like Christ loves the church. And so he's saying that a husband and wife, in loving union, communion, and covenant are kind of like the relationship that Jesus has with the church; that as Jesus leads the church lovingly, and humbly, and sacrificially, so men are to lovingly, humbly, sacrificially lead their families. And as wives respect their husbands, they are showing something of the respect that the church has, or at least should have, for the Lord Jesus Christ, as the head of the church.

So Satan attacks marriages, because marriages are an illustration of the gospel; and, furthermore, if Satan can destroy a Christian marriage, especially a ministry marriage—those couples that are seeking to honor and serve God with their gifts in the marketplace, home, or ministry—then he knows that he can affect generations. He can have their children, and their grandchildren, and their great-grandchildren.

Some of you have personal pain and testimony about your family being part of that great battle, and maybe it was your marriage, or your parents' marriage, or your grandparents' marriage that sadly and tragically lost a great battle, and Satan was able to gain a great victory in the history of your family. It's a very serious matter to be married. It's a very serious matter to be married as a Christian.

And I knew this from reading the Bible, that Satan attacks families. What I find curious is that Satan didn't even show up to attack Adam and Eve until they were married. And for some of us, we have this naive notion that if we just get married, then our trials, and our troubles, and our temptations will go away. No, then our enemy will come, and the battle will, in fact, intensify.

And I knew this theologically, and I was aware of this biblically, but I was not prepared for it practically, and neither was Grace. And so our first date was March 12, 1988. Our wedding day was August 15, 1992. And we gave ourselves and our marriage to God, wrongly, naively assuming we would be like one of those fairytales that simply says, "And they lived happily ever after."

Well, the truth is it was not that easy for us, and the truth was that not only was Satan attacking us, but also we had done some things that had brought harm into our own marriage and given him plenty of opportunity. I'll share some of them with you.

And here's why I do so. We are very committed at Mars Hill Church to not just believing things, but living in light of them. What the world doesn't need is just another series of theological lectures on marriage. It needs some practical training, teaching, modeling on marriage. And we want to create, and for years we've been laboring to create, a culture in which we want people to be honest. When they're suffering, when they're tempted, when they sin, when they've been sinned against, we want there to be a culture of honesty—not a religious culture that confesses the sins of other people and talks about them in a gossiping and condescending way, but in a way that we each personally speak of our own struggles, and failures, and trials in a way that is humble and repentant and invites people in to speak the truth into our life and to remind us of the instruction of the Bible and the person and the work of Jesus, so that, by the grace of God, in community together, we can be a humble people pursuing holiness together.

And so, for Grace and I, when we share some of the more intimate details of our life in this series and in the book that we wrote and the curriculum that we shot, the goal is to invite you to do the same, whether you're single or married, the community that surrounds you, particularly, if you are married, the spouse who dwells with you, to be honest.

## **OUR HONEST TESTIMONY**

The honest truth is that when Grace and I were married, the enemy had already won a number of great victories in our life that greatly damaged the early years of our marriage. I'll share some of them with you. Number one, before we met, we were not walking with Jesus faithfully, and we were sinning sexually. Number two, when we did meet in our early dating years, again, neither of us was walking with Jesus faithfully, and we began sinning sexually together. So, the relationship got off on completely the wrong foot.

The deepest intimacy of all is spiritual intimacy. And if you don't build a relationship on spiritual intimacy, with Christ as the center, invariably, it's going to be a weak and immature relationship, and it may feel close, and intimate, and exciting, but that's simply because of the presence of sin, not because the presence of the Spirit of God is really binding two people together.

Number three, for us, we were very different. I was the religious older brother. She was the rebellious prodigal son. If you know the story of the prodigal son, it is a story where a great father has two sons, and one is the religious, and he is self-righteous, and moral, obedient, compliant, and he doesn't necessarily rebel against the father, but he's also not humble. He's very condescending, very judgmental, very holier-than-thou and self-righteous. That was me, as a non-Christian. I believed in God, but I didn't know Jesus, and I certainly didn't love him, but I thought that I was better than everyone else because I kept a very moral checklist, and I was a man of great self-discipline. I was filled with the sin of pride.

Conversely, Grace, she was like the rebellious son in the story, who openly runs away from his father, and sins openly and publicly, and eventually comes to repentance. Well, that was her story. She was raised as a pastor's daughter. She grew up knowing Jesus. She grew up, as a little girl, sitting on a swing in her backyard singing Keith Green songs to Jesus, as a little girl. And then she grew up, and in her junior high and high school years, she wandered away from the Lord. She went into sin and folly, drinking, hanging out with friends and the like.

Well, we are a complete mess, because she is a Christian, not walking faithfully with God, and I am a non-Christian who's more moral than she is, on the outside, but absolutely religious, self-righteous, proud, condemning, and condescending on the inside. So, neither of us really was walking faithfully with Jesus.

## **A SECRET**

Number four, there was a secret. Grace and I dated for a while, and God saved me at about the age of nineteen in college, and she returned into a very vibrant relationship with the Lord. And we then had to restart our relationship. And God spoke to me audibly, and he said to marry Grace, preach the Bible, train men, and plant churches. He said to do four things. So, Grace and I have built a family. Preaching the Bible was Mars Hill Church, training is The Resurgence, and planting churches is Acts 29. So, since God spoke to me at the age of nineteen, I've been trying, by the grace of God, to be obedient and to do what he told me to do, and that's what my life looks like.

And it was when God saved me that I finally started going to church, and I started getting Bible teaching about God, and sin, and marriage, and Jesus' death for sin and his resurrection, that allows us to have new life through the Holy Spirit. And so Grace and I both came to a point of repentance: "We need to be in Christ together. We need to be in church together. We need to be in prayer together. We need to be in small groups together. We need to be in the Word of God frequently together."

And we were, and we were growing spiritually to the point where we were ready to get married. And we were between our junior and senior year of college, around the age of twenty-one, and met with our pastor over the course of many weeks in a premarital process that was very good, and he told

us, “You’ve got to share all your sin.” I was like, “All of it? What about the nasty stuff?” “You’ve got to share all your sin.”

We do the same thing at Mars Hill Church. We’ve got a very robust premarital process, and one of the things we make you do is confess all your sins to one another, so that you know who you’re dealing with, and you know what you’re getting into, and so that we can help you get a good start.

Well, Grace and I, I thought, did that. And the truth is that there was one thing that she didn’t tell me. We got married, and she got pregnant, and we were starting the church, and the secret came out. We talk about this in the book—she does. It’s her story to tell, and she’s bravely told it.

Well, at that point, I felt humiliated, and I think, to be honest with you, my pride was really damaged, being a very proud man in the worst sense of the word. Because had I known what she hadn’t told, I wouldn’t have married her. But now we’re Christians, and we’re married, and I’m a pastor, and she’s pregnant. We have to stay together. We have to stay together.

But at that point, I responded sinfully. I responded shamefully. I responded bitterly. First, I was bitter against God.

Now let me say this. As we go through this Real Marriage series, I’m going to ask you, and I’m going to ask you to ask your spouse, “What’s your secret?” Many couples have a secret, or many, many spouses have a secret, something they’ve not told you. And much of your marriage may be working around that secret; maybe sin you’ve committed or sin that’s committed against you. You may be wondering, “How come we’re not close? Why is it not working? Where is the joy? What happened to the friendship?” It may be that the secret has not yet been taken out of the dark and brought into the light.

Let me say that you need to tell the truth, not in an angry, devastating way, but in a humble and repentant way. Do you have a secret? Or let me say it another way: What secret do you have? What secret do you have? And until that secret, that shame, that sin is brought into the light, you’re not going to have fellowship or close intimate friendship with one another.

First John says it this way: If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, and we confess our sins to one another, we don’t keep any secrets, but we tell the truth, then we have fellowship with one another. Then we’re friends, and we’re actually close, and we know each other, and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all our unrighteousness. And that’s how it works. That’s the only way that it works.

## **BITTERNESS**

I didn’t respond biblically, humbly, graciously. I became bitter. I became bitter against God when the secret came out, and I thought, “God, you told me to marry her. And I’m a godly man. I read the Bible, I pray, I study, I serve, I give. Here’s my résumé. I’m a hard driver, big-time performer. Don’t I deserve better than this?” How many of you have never said that, but you’ve definitely thought it? “This is unfair. I deserve better.”

And I became bitter against Grace, and I held it against her for many, many years. The result was that we got stuck in our marriage, absolutely stuck. We had date night. We’re serving Jesus. The ministry is growing. You know, there’s not physical violence, or pornography, or adultery, or anything of that nature. It was just coexisting, finding a barely functional parallel existence with moments where the bitterness comes out, and then there’s conflict. And my tone would reflect my bitterness, and I would speak to Grace in a way that didn’t draw her out, but shut her down.

So, I want to be careful to say, as we unpack the content of the Real Marriage campaign, you need to tell your secret, and you’re going to need to deal with your bitterness, and these are the big themes of the book that we’ll deal with in the ensuing weeks. But for now, I’ll give you Proverbs 18:21. “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.” Is that true? It is. When you tell your secret, you can say it in a way that brings life or death to the marriage. When you respond to hearing the sins and struggles of your spouse, you can respond in a way that brings life and draws them near you, or death and pushes them from you.

I would say, for a decade, we were stuck in a very lonely place for both of us, where my words oftentimes brought death and not life. Meanwhile, I’m a world-famous preacher. And my tone started to become more chauvinistic and harsher, and it was all the bitterness in my heart, something I’ll always regret. And if you were at Mars Hill, I want to publicly ask your forgiveness for that, and I want to, by the grace of God, set a better example.

## **LEAVE MOTHER AND FATHER**

Another thing that we failed at, and the enemy used, was we didn’t leave father and mother. It says early in Genesis to leave your mother and father. This means physically leaving, emotionally leaving, financially leaving, spiritually leaving. It literally means just moving on, because your family, once you marry, is not just an extension of your birth family. It’s a new family.

But for us, this didn’t go real well for a long time. Some of you have very loving families, but they’re so loving that the line between your family and theirs is really blurred. So, you and your spouse and/or your children, if God should grace you with them, can’t have birthdays, or holidays, or vacations together. Instead, you’re a part of this big extended family, and you have to play by those extended family rules for better or for worse. Some of you have very dramatic, controlling, busy-bodying, over-involved families. You love them, but only because the Bible says you have to, right? Your in-laws feel like outlaws, and they keep crashing into your life, and your schedule, and your day off, and your home, and your budget.

Now, for Grace, it was very hard for her to leave father and mother. As soon as we’d have a fight, she’d call her mom. That never helps, right? Never get your extended family involved in your immediate family’s conflict. It never goes well. We had to work very hard to say, “Okay, we need our own traditions. We need our own family. We need our own holidays.” We do love our family, and, praise God, now our extended family on both sides are all Christians. They do love us. They’re gracious and kind to us, but we also need our own marriage and our own relationship, not just as an appendage to a pre-existing family system. But we didn’t do that well.

## A RANDOM HOME

We also didn't agree, early on, on how to organize our home. And so I hated my house, not the physical home, but I hated being at home. There are three kinds of homes sociologically. There's a closed home, an open home, and a random home.

In a closed home, it's run like a really tight ship. So, kids are up at 7:00, breakfast is at 7:15, there's a protein and a starch, you know? The kids have their shoes on at 7:27. Their water bottle is filled at 7:28. They're in the car at 7:29, and mom hits reverse at 7:30, unless she's homeschooling. And what happens is everything runs according to a very tight ship. Dinner is at 6:00, not 5:55 and not 6:05, 6:00. Tuesday is casserole night. Thursday, it's time for pork. Shut up and eat it. It's new covenant times. Praise the Lord. They couldn't do this in the old days. In addition, you know, go get your jammies on at 7:30. Brush your teeth at 7:35. Read your Bible at 7:45. Shut your eyes at 8:00, right? Otherwise, you will notice a large wooden spoon coming your way at 8:07, right? So, everything runs according to a tight ship, and there's a tight budget, and there's a schedule, and there are rules, and there's a chart, and somebody's got to do certain chores, and nobody comes by unless they call and schedule seven to twelve months in advance. All right? Closed home.

An open home is organized, but not that tidy, right? Kids are up around 7:00. Dinner is between 5:30 and 6:30. Friends can drop by unannounced, but not everybody. It's a short list. We do have some people stay the night, but we're not running a hostel, right? It's a little more open.

And then there's the random home, which is crazy. Kids sleep in whatever bed they want. You know, it's Mountain Dew for breakfast. There's not really a schedule. There's not really a budget. Things are chaotic. The family doesn't sit down to eat dinner together. It's just eat what you can, when you can, or the TV is always on. You go to bed whenever you want. People are coming by. They don't even knock. They just walk right in and get something out of the fridge. Kids you've never met are staying the night. It's a really random home.

Well, Grace grew up in a ministry home that leaned more toward random. People always over for dinner, lots of people coming through. Me, I also grew up in a bit of a random home. In our neighborhood, the families were very poor. My dad worked hard, and my mom stayed home with us five kids, so our home became kind of like the community center, where everybody hung out. So, all the kids were there all the time. Kids would just walk in. They'd put a coat on, because they didn't have a coat. My mom would buy extra coats. They'd get something out of the fridge. Sometimes kids would stay the night, because there was violence and abuse at their house. And it was a random home, but it was a random home for, I think, a very good reason.

Well, when we got married—I know it doesn't seem like this, but I'm an introvert. That's why we're not talking. I am, right? I'm an introvert. I'm an introvert, and I like silence and solitude. I like books written by dead people, and I like to be left alone; and God is laughing at me every day with the job that he's given me. And so I wanted my home to be a quiet place, where I could come home, read the Puritans, drink tea, and have my wife rub my neck until I felt like it was time to go to sleep. That was pretty much what I was praying for.

Instead, Grace had an idea that since we were going to do ministry, it had to be a random home. So, in the early years, we always had people living with us, interns, homeless kids. There was one year, between the Bible studies that we taught and the counseling we did, we had over two thousand people in our home, and she was determined to feed every one, and she was determined to cook everything from scratch, while she was working a full-time, high-stress job.

I was still working a full-time job, and we were doing ministry together on evenings and weekends. And then when she quit her job, she threw all her time into ministry, and I threw all my time into ministry. I think, for us, ministry became idolatry, and our priorities got completely out of order, and our friendship and our marriage just was basically a partnership. It wasn't really a close, affectionate connection.

And so we would fight, at times, over the course of years. "Why are they coming over? Why do you need to leave? Why can't they make their own lasagna? Why do we have to be involved in this? Not everyone who comes to the church needs to eat something you've cooked! Sit down, Martha, sit down." So—and then I would say it in a harsh way, and I would get frustrated, and part of it was my fault, because I didn't sit down with Grace and explain to her, "I want more of an open to closed home in another state on a mountain with no roads. I mean, that's really—"

## THEN WENT A DECADE

We were a mess, right, with a fast-growing church. No pastor for us, no mentor, no counselors. Some of you would say, "Why didn't you meet with counselors?" Well, we met with a few pastors, at least I tried. The first one I met with, in the course of—I just felt compelled early on, he's like, "Why do you want to meet?" I said, "Well, you wrote a good book on marriage, and I'd like to ask some questions. We're having a hard—" I looked at him. I was like, "Let me just ask you." I said, "Have you been faithful to your wife?" He said, "Well, no." "Well then this is going to be a very short counseling meeting. Really, you wrote a book on marriage that's a really good book, and you're cheating on your wife right now?" "Yeah." "Oh, my gosh."

So even the handful of people we tried to meet with, to be honest with you, didn't go really well, and some of it was really devastating. And we had friends who tried to counsel us and give us some advice, but to be honest with you, either we weren't listening, or it wasn't helping.

So we just decided, hang in there and hunker down. And then went a decade. Some of you are like, "Where's the happy part?" It comes later, right? This is the real part in marriage. For about a decade, now we've got five kids. Now the church is really growing. Now I'm broken physically. Adrenal glands are fatigued, and neurotransmitters are fatigued. I'm tired, and I can't think straight, but my job is to preach all day on Sunday while my critics try to see me make a mistake. Lots of pressure and stress. Things are growing very fast.

## THE ROOT

And we had, I think we had one of those make or break days in our marriage. We were sitting on a couch upstairs. These are all stories that—and some of you wonder, “Why is Mark telling us this? Is this really appropriate?” Grace wrote it all in the book, and I’ve never shared these things, because it’s her story, not mine, and I want to honor her, confess my own sin, but not talk about things in her life. That’s her prerogative as to whether or not she wants to do that publicly. And she’s very brave, and she wants to help people, and so she has decided to share these things now publicly for the first time.

But we had this evening where we were sitting upstairs on a couch, and our kids were in bed. We were just hanging out. And I would say that our marriage was not hostile, but it wasn’t warm. It was just more cool. And we were sitting on the couch, and I just started asking her some questions about previous experiences in her life and relationships. And this was an area we’d explored previously, but I just, for some reason, started asking questions again in that area.

And Grace, as her name would indicate, was gracious enough to answer them. And she explained some things that had happened to her. And she looked at me, and I’m bawling. At that point, I was not a crier. Now that I’ve gotten, by the grace of God, over my bitterness and repented of it as sin, and the Holy Spirit is making me more like Jesus, I cry a lot more, to be honest with you, especially when it comes to women and children who have been harmed. It’s real devastating for me, based upon what I’ve seen in my history and what I now know of my wife—and I mean not my personal history. I’ve never harmed a woman or a child, but what I’ve witnessed from other men.

And she looked at me. She said, “Oh, my gosh. I’m so sorry. What did I say wrong?” And I said, “You didn’t say anything wrong, honey. You’re a rape victim. You’re a sexual assault victim.” I said, “I didn’t know that about you. I’ve known you for—” Gosh, at that point, this was six years ago. We met in 1988, so this would’ve been in maybe 2006, five or six years ago. I’d known her for, what is that, eighteen years. I didn’t know. And to be honest with you, she didn’t know. She’d never really connected her story to the reality of what was done to her.

And I remember thinking, “Okay, it’s been a long time, but now I know my wife.” The truth is sometimes, when we’re dating, we’re playing a role like an actor or an actress, right, trying to appear as someone. And then once you’re married for a while, you figure out to whom you’re actually married.

Well, now I knew my wife, and I knew what the root of our struggles was. Yes, I had bitterness. Yes, we’d had a secret. Yes, life was complicated. Yes, we didn’t have a pastor. Yes, we didn’t have a lot of good counsel. But the real problem was that my wife had been sinned against and that, as a result of that, anytime I would become angry, or irritated, or my voice would denote such an emotion, she would shut down and become very fearful, which makes absolutely perfect sense and is quite reasonable. And it indicated why I knew that she loved me, and I knew that I loved her, and I knew that we wanted to be together, but it was so hard for us to have that real close intimacy that we felt was possible as Christians, and now I knew why.

And so in the book Grace has got a whole chapter on that experience, and what she learned, and how to help others. It’s why we do Redemption Groups at Mars Hill Church. Some of you may ask, “Why were Redemption Groups created, and why do we put such an emphasis on women who have been assaulted, as well as men?” That’s why, because there weren’t the kind of resources that I felt would be most helpful for my wife. And so, as a church, we rallied support and wanted to help create a church that could help people and to provide those resources to other churches.

Well, at that point, everything really was in a very raw, fragile, dangerous place in our marriage. And I remember thinking, “If now that we know everything that we need to know is out, if we deal with this, things could get better, but it’s going to be years. And if we don’t, things are going to get worse, and it’ll be like that for the rest of our lives.” And so I remember praying over Grace, and I remember us having multiple conversations— These kinds of conversations, whatever the issue is in your marriage: adultery, infidelity, pornography, fornication, emotional affair, bitterness, fear from family of origins, whatever it is, it’s not a conversation, and you move on. It’s going to be a series of conversations, and those conversations could be very painful, and they could be tear-filled and hard, and they could be frequent, and over the course of years, they may become less frequent. But the truth is it’s a life process called sanctification, which is together, as friends, learning to be like Jesus and learning to be like Jesus to one another.

## IDOLIZE AND DEMONIZE

And what I realized at that time is that at the root of much of my sin against Grace, at least the sin I’d carried in my heart, was that I had idolized Grace. I had made her into an idol. The Bible says in Romans 1:25 that God alone is to be worshiped, and we’re not to worship any created thing, and that would include our spouse. Jonathan Edwards, the great American theologian, said, “If you idolize, you will demonize.” That’s a good insight. It’s a good insight. That’s why the Ten Commandments start with, “There’s one God. Worship him alone.” Because ultimately all sin comes out of idolatry.

God deeply convicted me that what I wanted from Grace was I wanted her to be the perfect friend. I wanted her to never leave me nor forsake me. I wanted her to encourage me when I was down and to correct me when I was wrong. I wanted her to be Jesus. And when she wasn’t Jesus, I went from idolizing her to demonizing her. And what that caused in me was tremendous selfishness, judging Grace and the way she fell short, rather than loving Grace and looking for the ways that I was falling short and by the grace of God could be a better friend to her.

I don’t think that’s uncommon in marriage, but I think, in the church, it’s unspoken. And I told Grace at that point. I mean, I apologized, repented. We cried and prayed, and I told her, “Here’s what we’re going to do. We’re going to do everything different.” Because at this point, it was not put together well. This was not a plan for, “Fifty years later, they’re best friends, and everybody sees it.”

The truth is I would’ve never been fired from ministry, because there was no disqualifying sin: no pornography, no emotional adultery, no physical affair. There was no disqualifying sin. Like so many Christian marriages, we had ourselves in a place where we couldn’t really get disciplined, but we

really didn't have delight. We want so much more for you than just to be in a place where you can't be disciplined. We want you to be in a place where you have delight.

And I told Grace, "Okay, our priorities biblically, because we're hardcore Bible people, are: Jesus, our friendship with Jesus, number one; number two, our friendship with each other; number three, our friendship with our kids; and, number four, my job as a pastor and your job as a wife and mother. And we're going to put our life together in a way that our schedule and our emotions actually reflect the convictions that we have, based upon the teaching of the Bible."

What that means is other people are going to be really inconvenienced and really unhappy, because here's what we found when we started to make changes in our life to say, "Sorry, can't do that. Sorry, can't go there. Sorry, the answer is no. Sorry, things have changed. My wife needs me, and I need her." When the Bible says it's not good to be alone, it included us. What we found was other people idolized us, and as soon as they didn't get what they were accustomed to, as far as relationship, and intimacy, and access, and emotion, they demonized us as well.

Let me tell you this. If you are going to make Jesus and your spouse your first priorities, other people are going to get angry. Other people are going to get upset. Your family members may have all kinds of judgments. People who work close to you and are put in another position relationally, "You can't call. You can't drop in. You can't text. You can't e-mail. Right now, I'm really focusing on my friendship with Jesus and my spouse, and those are my first priorities." It's amazing how other people want you to be their idol, and they want to be your idol, and they want to cut in line for the priorities that God has given you.

But it's worth it, it's worth it, because God's way is always the best way, to do whatever it takes, in the grace of God, to get closer to Jesus and closer to your spouse with Jesus. And by the grace of God, we did. We made massive changes, massive changes. And what happened was we started to have more time for each other, good time. We started to have more emotion for one another. Rather than just trying to figure out who's going to pick up the kids, we had real conversations. We started really focusing on building our friendship. We'll talk about that in the next sermon, and it's all of chapter two.

## A TESTIMONY, NOT A BIOGRAPHY

I tell you all of this, because this is a testimony, and we want you to have a testimony. The difference between a testimony and a biography is this: a biography is about me, and a testimony is about Jesus. A biography is about, "Here's the changes I made in my life, and now I'm happy." A testimony is, "Here's the sin I've repented of, and now I'm more like Jesus, whether or not I'm happier." A biography is about what we do. A testimony is about what Jesus does. In a biography, we're the hero. In a testimony, Jesus is the hero. And you can be Christians who even have a good theology of marriage, but don't have a good marriage, because for you, it's just theology and not testimony.

I started by saying that Satan proceeds from a wedding to a war in the first book of the Bible, and then the last book of the Bible tells us how we defeat our enemy. And Revelation 12:11, it says, "They have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony." You want to defeat Satan in your life and marriage? Here's how you do it: the Lamb, the blood of the Lamb. Jesus, as that substitutionary sacrifice, Jesus is the one who dies for sin, so that you don't have to kill one another, or your love, or joy, or trust, or marriage; that Jesus dies for your sin, so you could put your sin to death, including sins of selfishness, and idolatry, and bitterness, like me.

Because of the blood of the Lamb, there's a testimony, and the testimony here is that we need to talk about why the Lamb died, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Our testimony can never just be, "Jesus went to the cross and died for sinners." It has to be, "Jesus went to the cross and died for my sins, and here they are, and the blood of the Lamb literally was shed in my place for my transgressions and my guilt, to bring my forgiveness, to cleanse my shame, to remove my filth, so that I would have a testimony, talking about the victory of this triumphant warrior Lamb." It's amazing imagery.

What's your testimony right now? Or is your life just a biography? "I did this, they did that, so we're stuck here." Or is your story actually God's story? "I did this, they did that, Jesus died, so we have hope, we have forgiveness, we have life, and we have Christ." And I'm not just talking in a theoretical, theological way. I'm talking in a day-by-day practical way. I'm talking in the integration of the living, resurrected Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world in the hard stuff of daily life; not just the ethereal, theological, theoretical, but the practical and the painful. That's a testimony.

Grace and I have a testimony. The biography was not great, but the testimony, though it's really hard for me, to be honest with you, because I like being a leader. I like being respected. But more than that, I like God to be glorified. And I can't be of any help to you unless I'm honest with you, and you can't be of any help to each other unless you're honest with each other.

And if we say that Jesus died for sin, but we don't talk about our sin, what we're saying is we don't really believe that his death was for us, and we don't believe that his resurrection is the hope for our new life together. We have a lot of hope for you. We tell you our testimony, not because that in and of itself would make a great book. It wouldn't. It would make a great horror film. But because you may be in a place that's not great, and what you don't need is another preacher and his wife just telling how everything is great, and if you buy their products, yours can be great, too. I think what you need is two repentant sinners to tell you that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, and together with him, you can have a testimony, and to invite you to him together to have that testimony. If the story of your life and marriage was concluded right now, would it be one you'd be happy to have your great-grandchildren read? If not, then get Jesus involved and keep writing that story, by the grace of God.

## A NEW MARRIAGE WITH THE SAME SPOUSE

A few things I want to hit, as well, and that is that in our testimony, God has given us a new marriage with the same spouse. That's the language we use for chapter one. As we've taught this content and shared it with people, we've had a lot of people come up and say, "I need a new spouse." Well, first of all, you need to be a new spouse. Don't just judge your spouse, but judge yourself first. And, number two, you don't need a new spouse. You need a new marriage, and you can get a new marriage with the old spouse. If Jesus changes you, and Jesus changes them, you can have a new marriage with the same spouse. That's our story.

Grace is different, I'm different, the marriage is different. I'll be honest with you. We're really happy. She thinks I'm funny, right? So, I say crazy things, and she's got the biggest laugh I've ever heard. I can't wait to get home. I'm texting her throughout the course of today. I just want to be connected. I hate traveling more than ever, because if I can't be with her, I'm grumpy, and I'm moody, and I'm frustrated. I look forward to getting old with her. We love this season when the kids are little. It's really great, and we have great kids, and we praise God for them, but, you know, when they grow up and leave home, that'll be cool, too. You know?

Like, right now, Gideon just started school, so the kids are in school at least for the first half of the day. We could have coffee together. We could visit together. We could go for walks together. I even go to the grocery store with her. I hate the grocery store. I don't like to go to the store. But even sometimes now, I'll be like, "Hey, where are you going?" "I'm going to the grocery store." "Well, hold on, I've gotta go, too." She's like, "You don't go to the grocery store." "I know, but you're there, and I just want to be wherever you are." I like being with her. One of her greatest ministries to me now is just her presence, just having her there.

We want you to have a testimony. Our testimony is that he's forgiven us of sin, and he's allowed us to forgive one another. I can tell you that there is no bitterness in our marriage, but there is Jesus. He's given us the Holy Spirit to live new lives. We're not loving one another with the love that we have. We're not serving one another with the power that we have, that the Holy Spirit really is God. He really is alive and well, and he really is alive and well in us, that Jesus really has been a perfect friend to us both, and so that perfect friendship is taken care of, and he's helping us to be better friends to one another.

He's also brought into our life some people who've been through some very difficult and hard things, and they've learned some lessons, and they've been gracious enough to share them with us, sometimes in counseling, or in friendship, or traveling, or teaching. We're really excited to share our testimony and their testimonies with you.

## FOR SINGLES TOO

A couple of other things I wanted to say in closing. For those of you who are single and even hearing, "Oh, we're doing Real Marriage, oh, the misery of it all, the reminder that I am single." Some of you have already bristled and pushed back and said, "I'll see you in eleven weeks. I'm taking that time off to read Lamentations." A few things for those of you who are single.

Number one, this series is about biblical relationships in general. You have relationships, so some of these principles will be helpful.

Number two, the study guide that Pastor Brad wrote, and you'll be using in your Community Groups, he wrote questions for those who are married and single. For the first time in the nation's history, the majority of adults eighteen and over are single. We have not omitted you. We love you.

Additionally, more than nine out of ten of you, statistically, will marry. So, this is preparation. Take it from a guy who found the landmines by driving over them. A little teaching up front goes a long way.

Number four, it will help you to counsel others. Some of your friends are engaged, or dating, or getting married, or married. And just because you're single doesn't mean you don't have wisdom. Paul was single. He talks a lot about marriage. Jesus was single. He talks a lot about marriage. Just because you're single doesn't mean you have to be unwise. You can give good counsel.

Number five, it helps you to evaluate your family of origin, looking back and asking, "What kind of marriage or relationship did my parents have or not have, or my parent's parents have or not have? How has that positively or negatively affected me, shaped me, molded me, maybe even harmed me?"

Number six, it allows you to investigate your idols of independence and dependence. Some of you are single and you have idols of independence. "I don't want to get married. I don't want to be tied down. I want to come and go as I please. I want to do my own thing. I like being independent." Some of you have idols of dependence. "I cannot be alone. I have to have a date. I always need to be in a relationship. I'm terrified of being alone." Jesus says he'll never leave you nor forsake you. You're not alone. And Jesus is God, and your whole life is put together by him. You're not independent either. It allows you to examine those twin idols of dependence or independence.

This series will also help you, we hope, deal with the sins that have been committed against you. We deal a lot with sex and sexual sin, and sexual assault, and I know that with a high percentage of singles in the country and in Mars Hill, some of you have done things that you regret, and you don't know how to experience healing, and hope, and wholeness from it. Others of you have had sins committed against you, like my sweetheart, and you need help, and we're here to help. It's why we do Community Groups. It's why we do Redemption Groups, because, quite frankly, when we were in our toughest spots, we didn't know who to talk to, and we want Mars Hill to be that place for you, by the grace of God.

Number eight, it will help you to learn how to live a full life as a single person. We worship a single guy named Jesus, never did marry, but he lived a full, perfect life. The best life that's ever lived is God incarnate, and we want you to see, through Jesus, that you're not less or sub, because you are

single.

And number nine, you might even find a spouse. Right? Now just think about it. I'm talking about marriage, and single people are coming to hear. Some of them, theoretically, could meet. And you men need to know, if a woman is coming to Mars Hill, and listening to me talk about marriage for eleven weeks, she obviously has a high threshold for pain. She would be a great wife.

## **YOUR TESTIMONY**

So here's what we're going to do. The sermon isn't done, because, quite frankly, I need you to finish it. I've told you our testimony. You need to, by the grace of God, together, if you're married, or in your own life, if still single, you need to be working on your testimony. Where does Jesus need to be invited in? What's the secret that needs to be told? Is there bitterness that needs to be addressed? Are there idols that need to be crushed and smashed and taken down?

I don't want you just to say, "Wow, they have an interesting testimony." I want you to have an interesting testimony of the change that Jesus makes daily, practically in the life of someone who invites him in, not to part of life, but all of life, to the dark places, the shameful places, the lonely places, the devastated places.

Some of you are fearful and timid to do that, because you think it'll get worse. You know what? It might. And some of you say, "But if I tell the truth, my spouse will leave me." They may. Our goal is not to destroy you, but our goal is to bring Jesus in and then see what happens, and that's what faith is all about. We want you to take the risk of being honest with Jesus, and being honest with one another, and to see what Jesus does, and to see what ultimately the testimony is, to see him finish the last chapters of the story of the life that he is living with you, for you, in you, and through you, together.

## **GOD INITIATES, WE RESPOND**

So, here's what we're going to do now. We're going to invite you to respond. And the story of the Bible is that God initiates, and we respond. And so I'm going to ask the ushers to take their position and those who are the offering stewards to collect the offering at this time.

And as we collect it, I want you to think of us, Mars Hill Church, like a bride, together. Individually, there are testimonies being written. Your life is a story of the grace of God; but collectively, as well, we have a testimony, and our testimony is, according to the Bible, that, collectively, the church is like a bride, dearly loved by our groom named Jesus. And at this point, we're going to respond corporately to Jesus, like a bride does to her husband.

And so that will include now giving generously financially, saying, "Jesus' relationship is the most important relationship in my life, and I want this to be a church where others meet Jesus and find hope, and help, and healing, and I want this church to grow and multiply, and I want others to come to know Jesus, and I want to see the testimony in their life, the difference that he makes." And we give for that reason, because we love Jesus.

If you are engaged, your testimony now must include premarital process at Mars Hill Church. You don't know what you're doing. You don't. You don't. You say, "Yes, I do." No, you don't. No, you don't. You need someone else to ask the hard questions, to bring you through a process to help you. We have hundreds of weddings a year at Mars Hill. If you are engaged or nearing engagement, your testimony should now include getting into the premarital process.

If you're not a Christian, your testimony should now include becoming a Christian, giving your sin to Jesus, accepting his forgiveness and righteousness, inviting him in as the hero of your story and the writer of your testimony, as the Lord of your life.

For those of you who are disconnected, we want you to connect by getting in a Community Group and/or a Redemption Group. Life does not work alone. You do not have all the wisdom, spiritual gifts, insight, energy, and counsel. You need, not only the grace of God, you need the church of God. And we love you, and we want to connect you and help you to walk in community with other people.

And you need to repent, and repenting is acknowledging your sin. What is your secret? What is it that you've never talked to God about, you're too ashamed of? What is it that you've never told your spouse? What is the secret? You need to tell them, and they need to tell you, and you need to do so soon, otherwise, all you are doing is lying with your life. You're not dealing with who you've been or what has been done to you. You're just pretending that you're someone you're not. Let Jesus deal with your sin, let Jesus deal with your spouse, and let Jesus write the testimony of your life.

We're also going to take Communion, where we remember the broken body and shed blood of Jesus, and we're going to sing. So, when we transition to sing, think of it in this way. Anytime there is someone glorious and something glorious, we sing. That's why we sing at weddings. That's why the bride doesn't walk down the aisle to total silence. There must be a soundtrack when there is love, and the beloved is present, and something wonderful is happening.

Well, Jesus is our beloved, and he is present here with us, through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, and he's doing something wonderful. He's changing people. He's defeating our enemy. He is rewriting our legacy. And so we're going to sing together, and as we sing, I want you husbands to hold hands with your wife, and I want you to raise the other hand in surrender to Jesus, and I want your wife to see you worship someone other than yourself and someone other than her, and I want you to, together, worship God as forgiven sinners, by the grace of God.

## **THE VOW**

And lastly, I'm going to ask you men to take a vow with me and then do something for me. First the vow. For those of you men who are Christians and



are today willing to publicly commit yourself to loving your wife, like Christ loves the church, no matter what, to leading your family in the glory of God, no matter what, I would ask you to stand, just those men, married or single, and to take a vow with me today, a sacred oath in the presence of God and his men. It's not just a sermon that I'm trying to present you, but a legacy where Jesus is the author of your testimony.

And so for you Christian men, I want you to stand, and I want you to identify yourself publicly with Jesus Christ. And if your wife is with you, and/or your fiancé, I want you to now hold her hand, and I want you to repeat after me, and I want you men to repeat loudly:

My church will be served by me.

bq. My wife will be loved by me.

bq. My wife will be served by me.

bq. My family will be led by me.

bq. My wife will be prayed over by me.

bq. The Bible will be opened in our home by me.

bq. And my grandchildren will worship the same God as me, because my children will worship the same God as me.

Men, I'm going to pray for you now. As the head of our household, as the leader of our family, God has given us a wonderful opportunity to be Christ to our wife and to our children, should he grace us with them. I'm going to pray for you, and then here's what I'm going to ask all of you married men to do. You are going to pray over your wife. In front of all the other men, you are going to lay hands and pray over your wife.

Some of you have never done that, because you don't know how, or you're embarrassed, or you're insecure. Your wife desperately needs you, wants you, longs for you to lead your family spiritually, and it starts by you praying over her and inviting Jesus into your relationship. You can't stay bitter at a woman you're praying for. You can't stay angry at a woman you're praying for. You can't stay separated from a woman you are praying for.

As you pray for her, if you don't know what to say, start with this. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry that I don't do this all the time. I'm sorry that I don't do this in front of the children, but starting today, I will." I'm going to pray for you, and then we're going to take a few minutes, and I want you men to turn around and to put hands on your wife in a loving way. Okay? It's not date night. In a loving way and pray over her, and thank God for her, and tell Jesus why you're grateful for her.

And then when you're ready, you can partake of Communion, and I want you husbands to serve your wives. I want you to take the bread, which denotes the body of Christ, dipped in the wine or juice, which denotes the blood of Christ, according to conscience, and I want you to first serve your wife, and I want that to be a way that you are publicly saying to her, "Jesus will be the center of our marriage, and because of him, we will have a great testimony, by the grace of God." Will you do that? And then you can hold hands with your wife, and we'll sing.

Father God, I pray against the enemy, his servants, their works and effects. God, I thank you for the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. God, I publicly confess that I have sinned against my wife, that we have lived years that were not all that you would have us to be, and it read more like biography than testimony. But, God, I thank you for the Lord Jesus. It is indeed the blood of the Lamb that takes away the sins of the world and the sins in our families. And, God, I thank you that, through Jesus, we have a testimony, a testimony where Jesus is the hero, where Jesus is the Savior, where Jesus is the friend, where Jesus is the one who reconciles sinners and makes them allies in a great war against their enemy. Jesus, I pray for these men, that they would humbly, lovingly lead well. I pray for these wives, who, right now, are hoping, and trusting, and praying that this commitment would stick, that by the Holy Spirit's power and their encouragement, it would. And, God, I pray for those men who are single, that they would not sin, and they would not settle, but they would strive to love one woman as Christ loves the church. And, God, I pray for our legacy, that our children and our children's children would look back and say that things changed when on that day, that man with my last name devoted himself and our entire family lineage to Jesus, in whose name we pray. You men can now pray for your wives, then take Communion and sing.

*Note: This transcript has been edited for readability.*