

**Study Guide for the Week of: Oct. 26, 2008**

**Steve Schibsted**

**Week 1 of the Series – Marriage Matters**

**“The Best Thing You Can Do For Your Marriage”**

Deuteronomy 7:6-9

6 For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. 7 The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. 8 But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh King of Egypt. 9 Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands.

Ephesians 5:1-2

1 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

**Notes:** This is the first of a series of messages on marriage. It is always a good idea to talk about marriage from time to time because marriage is one of God’s great gifts to humankind and can bring us tremendous joy and fulfillment. Marriage can also be very difficult and when a marriage is struggling or ends in divorce, there will be deep pain. Much of the difficulty in marriage today can be attributed to confusion about what love and marriage is all about. In this series we hope to get a better understanding about God’s plan for marriage.

**Questions for Further Reflection and Small Group Discussion**

1. What does Deuteronomy 7:6-9 tell us about God?
2. What is the definition of covenant?
3. What is the big idea of Ephesians 5:1-2? What is the connection between the command to love and what Christ has done for us?
4. What do these two passages have to do with marriage?
5. Steve said that the best thing we can for our marriages is to experience God’s love for us. He then gave 3 reasons why he believes this is the best thing you can for your marriage. The first reason he gave was that knowing God’s love helps us to love our mates out of abundance instead of need. What difference does loving out of abundance instead of need make in a marriage?
6. Steve quoted one of his professors from seminary, Diogenes Allen: Alone, none of us is complete. The love of another person can give us a quality of life that is marvelous, and the early stages of love can promise to give us utter bliss. But such love cannot give us utter fullness and completeness. To seek from a creature what can be only found in God is forbidden because the search is futile. Only God has unlimited abundance and, as I said earlier, to seek from a creature more than it can give is to lose even the good of which it is capable. Do you agree or disagree with this quote? Why or why not?
7. How does having a “low love tank” affect our relationships with others?
8. How can love help us to avoid legalism in a marriage? How does “keeping score” hurt a marriage? What is the opposite of keeping score? What’s the difference between a covenant and a contract?
9. Why is forgiveness an important part of a healthy marriage? How does knowing God’s love for us help us to forgive others?
10. What difference has God made in your marriage?

# MARRIAGE MATTERS – #2

## “THE LOVE THAT CAN’T DELIVER”

1 Corinthians 13:1-8; 1 John 3:16-18

### THE BIG IDEA

Romantic love is everywhere! Our culture is enamored with the idea. We see romantic love in movies. We hear about it in popular songs. We read about it in magazines. But the crippling truth is that the myth of romantic love causes misery for millions in their marriages. Yet, many of us try to build our marriages upon this notion. In order for a marriage to succeed and thrive as God desires, we have to see romantic love for what it is: a myth. In turn, we are called to build our marriage upon another type of love: the love that we find described in I Corinthians 13 and other passages of scripture.

### OPEN WITH PRAYER

### GETTING STARTED

1. What is one of your favorite movies that has romantic love as its theme? Why do you like it?

### LEARNING & APPLYING GOD’S WORD

2. If your neighbor asked you to describe the myth of romantic love, what would tell him or her?

Together, read **1 Corinthians 13** and **1 John 3:16-18**.

3. How does Paul describe love in 1 Corinthians 13? What does he say love *is* and what does he say love *is not*?
4. How does Paul’s definition of love in 1 Corinthians 13 compare to the notion of romantic love?
5. What does the passage in 1 John tell us about love? What is at the heart of the love described in these verses?
6. “Feelings” of love are the basis of romantic love, yet Steve said that the love described in these passages of scripture is based on decision, not feelings. Is it possible to decide to love someone even when we may not “feel” like loving him or her? Can you think of some examples of this “decision” type of love from your marriage or your other relationships?

7. In his message Steve gave an example of a man approaching author Stephen Covey at a seminar and asking him some advice for his marriage. The man said that he and he wife were no longer in love, that they no longer had feelings of love for each other. Covey told the man, “Love is a verb. Love—the feeling of love—is a fruit of love, the verb. So love her. Serve her. Sacrifice. Listen to her. Empathize. Appreciate. Affirm her. Are you willing to do that?” In your marriage or primary relationships have you defined love as primarily as a noun or a verb, as a feeling or as an action?

### LIVING OUT “REAL LIFE”

8. How would your spouse or key friends say they would want you to show action love toward them? What is one way you can express love as an action to them this week?

### THE “EXTRA MILE”

9. If you’re **married**, follow Covey’s advice by showing *action love* to your spouse. Each day choose one way to serve, affirm, or appreciate your spouse. See what happens!

If you’re **single**, show *action love* to a significant person in your life by following Covey’s advice. Each day choose one way to serve, affirm and appreciate the other person.

### SHARING AND PRAYER (Prayer Requests)

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

“The myth of romantic love is a dreadful lie. Perhaps it is a necessary lie in that ensures the survival of the species by its encouragement and seeming validation of the falling-in-love experience that traps us into marriage. But as a psychiatrist I weep in my heart almost daily for the ghastly confusion and suffering that this myth fosters. Millions of people waste vast amounts of energy desperately and futilely attempting to make the reality of their lives conform to the unreality of the myth.”

Scott Peck, from The Myth of Romantic Love in *The Road Less Traveled*

# MARRIAGE MATTERS – #3

“Two Becoming One”  
Mark 10:6-9

## THE BIG IDEA

What is the purpose of marriage? There are many different opinions about this. Scripture tells us that the purpose of marriage is two persons becoming one, or *oneness*. It's a great purpose and a high view of marriage because it is a clear reflection of the oneness of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—three persons yet one God. Yet, it's not always easy for a husband and wife to become one.

## OPEN WITH PRAYER

## GETTING STARTED

1. What is one of the most unique things about you?

## LEARNING & APPLYING GOD'S WORD

2. If someone asked you what one what one thing that spoke most to you through this sermon, what would it be?

Together, read **Mark 10:6-9**.

3. What would the average person in Chico say the purpose of marriage is?
4. What is the purpose of marriage according to this passage of scripture?
5. Jesus offers a warning about marriage in this passage. What is it? Why does he offer it?
6. What does two becoming one mean? Does becoming one in marriage mean that both spouses must give up their own individuality?
7. Steve said that when you marriage is going well, all the rest of life can be going badly and you can still make it. On the other hand, if all the rest of the things in life are going great (career, hobbies, other relationships) but your marriage is struggling, then life is difficult. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? What does this tell us about marriage?

8. There are two priorities that are important to making marriage work:
1. The priority of the heart.
  2. The priority of time.

What do you think it means to make marriage a priority of the heart? A priority of time?

### LIVING OUT “REAL LIFE”

9. What in your life competes with your spouse for your heart and time?

### THE “EXTRA MILE”

11. This week make one change to make your marriage with your spouse a greater priority of your heart and/or your time. Cut something out or add something that will move your marriage toward “oneness” this week. Here are some suggestions (but don’t be limited by these alone...be creative!):

- Each day this week have a regular 10-15 minute time to talk with your spouse. Consider making this a daily tradition.
- This week try going to bed at the same time as your spouse.
- Plan a weekend away without kids.
- Go on a date night.
- Cut out an appointment or other commitment and spend that time with your spouse.
- Help another couple have a date night or weekend away by offering to watch their kids for them for free.

### SHARING AND PRAYER (Prayer Requests)

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

“The oneness of communion in Christian marriage is not mutual absorption, so that two people become one person. Rather, their oneness is the creation and participation in a common life, which is made possible by each person sharing themselves uniquely in a state of marriage. Each is to respect the irreducible independence of the other, and to seek the other’s good.

- From *Love* by Diogenes Allen

# MARRIAGE MATTERS – #4

## “The Gift of Sex”

I Corinthians 7:1-7; Genesis 2:21-25

### THE BIG IDEA

Sex is God’s idea! Sex is good! It is one of God’s good gifts to us and is an important part of a marriage relationship. As with any gift that God gives us, we are called to care for the gift of sex and use it properly—not to limit us, but so that sex can be enjoyed to its full in a healthy way that pleases God and is best for us.

In the I Corinthians passage Paul is writing to the Corinthian church to instruct them about marriage. Because of the sexual immorality and confusion prevalent in their culture, some Christians were wondering about the goodness of sex and whether they should abstain from sexual relations. Paul helps them—and us—learn how to celebrate and use the gift of sex in a way that pleases God.

### OPEN WITH PRAYER

### GETTING STARTED

1. Finish this sentence: “Sex is...”

### LEARNING & APPLYING GOD’S WORD

2. What was one idea that was most helpful for you from Steve’s message on Sunday?

Together, read I Corinthians 7:1-7 and Genesis 2:21-25. If you have a copy of *The Message* version, read the scriptures from that paraphrase as well as from either the *New International Version* or *New Revised Standard Version*.

3. What does Paul mean in verse I Cor.7:3? What is the spirit of verses 4-5?
4. How does sex contribute to the oneness that is talked about in the Genesis passage?
5. What are some possible reasons that God wants sex reserved for the marriage relationship? How does the covenant relationship of which we spoke in an earlier sermon have an effect on the sexual relationship?
6. Sex is important because it acts as both a **thermostat** and **thermometer** in the marriage relationship. Sex acts as a thermostat because it can increase the emotional temperature, or intimacy in a marriage. Sex acts as a thermometer because it reflects the state of the marriage relationship. Do you agree with this idea? Why or why not?

## LIVING OUT “REAL LIFE”

7. In his book *His Needs, Her Needs*, Willard Harley says that the number one need for a man in marriage is **sexual fulfillment** and the number one need for a woman is **affection**. He also says this:

*“The typical wife doesn’t understand her husband’s deep need for sex any more than the typical husband understands his wife’s deep need for affection.”*

Do you agree or disagree with Harley’s statement?

What’s the difference between sex and affection?

How have you found this to be true in your marriage or relationships?

## THE “EXTRA MILE”

If you’re married, set aside some time this week to talk with your spouse about your relationship. Here are some questions to ask each other:

- Are your needs being met in the areas of sex and affection?
- What can I do to help you feel more loved in these areas?
- How can I specifically serve you this week?

## SHARING AND PRAYER (Prayer Requests)

# MARRIAGE MATTERS – #5

## “A New Attitude”

### Philippians 2:1-11

#### THE BIG IDEA

Many different factors make a good marriage. But perhaps, more than anything else, the one key that makes marriages (and any relationship for that matter) work is for the husband and wife to possess an attitude of *servanthood* that they bring to the relationship. As Eugene Peterson writes in *The Message*, “Marriage is not a place to ‘stand up for your rights. Marriage is a decision to serve the other.” Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, helps us gain a clear picture of what servanthood is by asking us to look at the example of Jesus the servant. As we learn from the humility of Jesus we may just find the key to good marriages and relationships!

#### OPEN WITH PRAYER

#### GETTING STARTED

1. Who is someone, other than Jesus, that you feel is a great servant. Why?

#### LEARNING & APPLYING GOD’S WORD

2. What is one thing from Sunday’s message that you hope we talk about as a group?

Together, read Philippians 2:1-11

3. What do you think are two or three main ideas from this passage?
4. What do we learn about Jesus in verses 6-11?
5. How would your marriage (or any significant relationship) change if verses 3-8 marked your relationship?
6. Why is it hard to us to have an attitude similar to Christ’s?

#### LIVING OUT “REAL LIFE”

7. Steve gave some examples of things we might give up in our relationships if we are to take on the role of a servant, such as the need to be right all the time, the need to have everything to be fair, the right to have things “just so” all the time, etc.

What are some things that you could “give up” to help your marriage or significant relationship?

### THE “EXTRA MILE”

8. If you’re married: what are some ways that you can specifically serve your spouse this week?

If you’re single: what are some ways that you can specifically serve a significant person in your life this week?

### SHARING AND PRAYER (Prayer Requests)