

The great thing about Jesus is that his whole point is to make all things new. Its all about grace and that willingness to begin again ... and that's where we're headed today. At the end of the message today, we'll be invited to recommit to our most important relationships ... to our spouse, children, parents ... I wanted to let you know what the end-game is so you can hear this message with that in mind.

They say that the only way to multiply your time is to invest it wisely. How are you investing your time? We learned this from Wayne Cordeiro ... that **80%** of the stuff we do every day, *anybody* can do. Just about anyone can read our newspaper, drive our cars. Another **15%** of what we do can be done by anyone with a little coaching ... our paperwork, our bills, our computer programs. That leaves **5%** ... and that 5% is stuff only *you* can do. We said two weeks ago that only you can grow yourself spiritually. Last week, we learned that only you can pursue God's dream for your life. And today, we're looking at our most important relationships. Only you can love your family. Only you can be a good wife to your husband or a good husband to your wife. Only you can be a good mom to your children or even a good friend to those who love and depend on you. No one else will give to your relationships what you contribute to them.

I want to talk this morning specifically about the marriage relationship, because it is what makes or breaks a family and families are what make or break a community. I know that not everyone in the room is married, but I'm thinking the principles we're talking about will work for any relationship. The ones with your kids, your friends, anyone who loves and depends on you. I hope you'll filter what I'm sharing through your own situation so you can get the most from it.

Here's the thing I notice about a lot of marriages. Tell me if this sounds familiar to you. A lot of us have kids, buy houses, get jobs, get involved with a whole package of activities ... and we sort of pack our lives out and before long we're treating each other like business partners rather than lovers. We get so involved with the 80% stuff of life that we almost never have time to get beneath the surface. Our conversations become about our calendars and our checkbooks and the kids' report card ... Does that sound familiar? Is that how God designed us to work?

I want to share a few thoughts (I didn't think these up ... most of them came from a teaching by Campus Crusade) on how to turn things around if you've gotten stuck living in the 80% and want to get back to what's important.

The first principle is this: **Show up for the marriage.** Listen to how God described the way marriage is supposed to be. He said (Genesis 2:22-24) - ²² *Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man* (in other words, there is a sense that the right man and the right woman are supposed to feel like two halves of a whole), *and he brought her to the man.* ²³ *The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."* ²⁴ (and listen to this part) *For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.*

This is how God designed us to work. God knew even before the first people became parents that there would be this tendency of men to compare their wives' cooking to their mom's cooking ... and this tendency of women to look for their father in their spouse. And God knew there would be this tendency for us to run when things get hard, even if we're only running mentally. And so God says, before it ever happens ... that the right order of things is to leave and cleave. In order to show up for your marriage, you have to leave the past behind. It is

about learning to leave not just our families of origin but anything that stands between us and a meaningful relationship with someone God has given us. Honor your parents ... yes ... absolutely. Honor your parents by making the most of the life they gave you. That's one of the Ten Commandments. The leaving is not about forsaking. Its about priorities.

I'm thinking there are all kinds of ways we fail to show up. Husbands, wives do not count it as showing up if you are talking to them only during the commercials. Wives, husbands do not count it as showing up if you're asking them to clean something. They do not, in general, consider cleaning together as a bonding activity. Who knew? Kids, parents don't usually count it as showing up if you are texting while you're talking to them. For some reason, grown-ups need you to look them in the eye. We also need to learn how to leave the office, the computer, the television, our cell phones ... anything that keeps us from showing up in the relationship.

I'm not saying that children should never use their cell phones in front of their parents, or that husbands can't get downtime or that the house never needs to be cleaned. But those are 80% things, and we're talking about what it takes to develop the 5% ... because only you can love your family. Are you showing up for your most important relationships?

2. Talk about something else.

I guess Steve and I had been married for ten or twelve years ... and it was our anniversary and we were living in Kentucky. I was in school and finances were pretty tight so for our anniversary, we went out to eat and decided to go to the bookstore and show each other a book we'd like to have. And I remember that night as being the most precious time, because Steve walked me over to the art section and showed me the kind of art he likes. And I have to be honest here. I'd been married to Steve for more than a decade and I didn't even realize he liked

art enough to buy a book about it. And I remember thinking that night that there is so much more to this person than I know ... and I thought I knew a lot.

When was the last time you and your spouse had a meaningful conversation about anything deeper than the calendar and the checkbook? The same question could apply to your conversations with your kids. When is the last time you asked them about something other than the state of their room?

Show up. Talk about something else. And third ...

3. Heap on encouragement and praise. Because the general demeanor of a follower of Jesus is positive. Paul says (Philippians 4:4-8) - ⁴ *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!* ⁵ *Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.* (in other words, if you claim to be close to Jesus, it ought to show in your outlook. Let your gentleness be evident to all.) ⁶ *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, **with thanksgiving**, present your requests to God.* ⁷ *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* (and then Paul goes back to the mindset of a follower of Jesus) ⁸ *Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.* If we would apply that one verse (Philippians 4:8) to how we approach every person in our lives, it would change everything.

They say that in the absence of praise, women will tend to assume a husband's disapproval. A woman tends to think: "If I were doing it right, you would have said so. Since you are not saying anything, I must be doing it wrong." Men, on the other hand, tend to think: "If you were doing it wrong, I would have told you. If I am not saying anything, then everything must be

okay.” Does that sound familiar? I’m thinking just about the conversation about hair. I had someone call me last week. She said, “I need a hair warrior!” She said her husband never says anything about her hair, but she mentioned to him she might get it cut and he said he liked it longer. It was the first time he’d said anything at all about her hair so now she didn’t know what to do. This is the kind of very serious pastoral counseling women pastors get to do ...

The point is, sometimes it helps to know how we think. Maybe your wife needs you to say something positive rather than waiting until something goes wrong. Maybe your husband really does think things are okay if he’s not saying anything. But understand that men and women *both* are fed by encouragement. One great way to show up is to find something good and say something about it. As you look at your spouse or your child are you constantly searching them for whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable? And are you not just thinking it, but saying it?

4. Make a lifestyle of gratitude. Paul says (Philippians 4:4-6) - ⁴ *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!* ⁵ *Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.* ⁶ *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, **with thanksgiving**, present your requests to God.*

You know the old saying, “If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all”? I think the biblical standard is to find something *nice* to say. *Something* gracious. Isn’t that what God has done for us? The great truth of the universe and the great miracle of life is this: God is *for* us. God does not spend his mental time criticizing you. God is for us! This is amazing news, and it ought to change the way we see *everything*. Psalm 27:1 says, *The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?* And Paul says our response to that should be a kind of confidence that colors

everything. (Romans 8:31) *If God is for us, who can stand against us?* We don't have to defend ourselves, because God's got our back. And that ought to change the way we relate to people. We can come from a place of gentle confidence that understands that my worth is not connected to another person but to God. And God is *for* me.

That leads us to probably the most important ingredient in any relationship: grace.

5. Let grace abound. Paul says (Ephesians 4:31)- *Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.* Get rid of everything in you that is not grace. That's the relationship standard of the whole Bible. Proverbs 19:11 says - *A person's wisdom yields patience; it is to one's glory to overlook an offense.* Romans 14:19 says - *Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.* Jesus' sermon on the mount is all about grace.

Grace is the incredible ability let things go. And I have to tell you ... I am preaching to myself here. I know what its like to play those tapes for days or months or even years. I get what its like to hold a grudge. I know what its like to lose trust in someone who has been hurtful. I know what its like to want to protect yourself and to do it by not just guarding your heart but putting a wall up, with barbed wire ... and razor wire on top ... and a tower ... with a sniper. I get all that. Letting go is not easy. Trusting again is not easy.

I'm just saying that if you plan to follow Jesus, he will lead you up *that* hill ... to the cross ... where he will ask you (hear this!) to nail down your own self-hatred ... right along with all those grudges which are really just a mirror of your own self-hatred ... so you can show up again for the relationships that matter most. He's not asking you to do anything he hasn't already done himself ... and on your behalf. But he will ask you to walk the road of grace. To show up ... to go deep ... to say something nice ... to be thankful. To let grace abound.

It is all connected. What God has done for us, we are called to do for each other. Jesus showed up for us ... and put to death anything that stood between us and God. As we receive this grace, we extend it to each other. And that's where we are going to end this time together. Some of you need to recommit to your spouse or to your children or to your family or to someone who is important to you. I want to give you time to do that. Maybe there is a work of forgiveness that needs to happen in your life ... a work of grace. Come and take communion and then ... if you're ready and willing ... come and stand here at the front with your spouse or your child or your whole family ... or come by yourself if you need to ... especially if there is a work of forgiveness that needs to happen in you. Come and stand. And after everyone has received communion, I will pray a prayer over you and give you that opportunity to recommit.