**A God-Pleasing Marriage**

**Proverbs 27:17, 19, 21**

**Introduction**

1. Interest: After Snow White and her Prince Charming were married, they lived happily never, never, after. The next day after their wedding, Snow White was frustrated that Prince Charming squeezed the toothpaste at the middle of the tube instead of from the end. During the honeymoon, Prince Charming was irritated that Snow White cried over every ant that she accidentally stepped on and died.
2. Need: Marriage is not a happy ending to a romance story. Marriage is all about the reality of life, you will have ups as well as down, joy as well as sorrow, sweetness as well as bitterness. The union of two Christians is not merely a celebration of your love, it should be a testimony to many. Therefore, pursuing a God-pleasing marriage is very important.
3. Subject: What is a God-pleasing marriage?
4. Background: Proverbs 27:1-21 are proverbs of the positive aspect of various dynamics in relationships. Firstly, there is a need for a true friend, then, it highlights the negative aspects of relationships that need to be avoided. Then it shifts smoothly into the positive aspects of various relationships.
5. Preview: Proverbs 27:17-21 are wisdom teaching on pursuing a positive relationship. Today, we will see how we can apply this godly wisdom in your marriage life in order that your marriage will be a God-pleasing marriage. A God-pleasing marriage is a marriage that builds godly character in each other, and God can use marriage to build godly character in you in at least three ways, i.e. through constructive criticism, through becoming self-reflective, and through pursuing your spouse’s recognition.

(Now, let us see how you can help one another to develop godly character.)

1. A God-pleasing marriage encourages constructive criticism. (Proverbs 27:17)
   1. There are two irons here, one is a whetting iron and the other is an iron sword or tool. An iron sword or tool can only be sharpened by the whetting iron. Similarly, without the iron sword or tool, the whetting iron would not be efficiently functioning. This proverb is likened to the sharpening of a man’s wit through an authentic friend. A true friend will not shy away from constructive criticism.
   2. In the context of marriage, your spouse can be your true friend, also a true spiritual friend.

Socrates said, “There is no possession more valuable than that of a good and faithful friend.”

When I took the course on spiritual direction and mentoring, I came across some quotes on the meaning of spiritual friendship. And I find some of Paul Stevens’ quotations very inspiring. According to Paul Stevens, friendship is “an uncalculating relationship of mutual enjoyment and enrichment.” And he defines spiritual friendship as:

“It invites us to live contemplatively or relationally in harmony with the God of love.”

“It invites us to live grace and forgiveness through faith, not interacting on the bases of function and performance.”

“It invites us to live worshipfully, in spiritual communion.”

“It invites us to live honestly and openly.”

Emmy, don’t you think that Wilson is the best person that can fit best into these criteria? Wilson, aren’t you always think that Emmy is the only person with whom you can pour out everything? I believe you both have many other friends throughout the years of growing up. But many friends come and go, and many friends see only one side or a few sides of you. Only your spouse would stay and only your spouse knows everything about you. Your spouse is the best person to make your best friend. You have to pursue this, to make your spouse your best friend, or otherwise your best enemy. The best enemy knows how to criticize you to push your buttons. The best enemy knows how to draw the worse out of you, so that, instead of saying “I love you,” you will learn to say “I hate you.” Therefore, take an effort to make your spouse your best friend.

* 1. Emmy and Wilson, you can contribute to developing godly character in your spouse by practicing constructive criticism.

Emmy, let's say you have gone through a really bad day. Everything that happens that day just makes you very frustrated. Then when Wilson comes home from work in the evening, you thought finally you could just tell him all the things that you have gone through. You need someone to talk to. Yet Wilson is not listening tentatively to what you say. Then you start blaming him for not understanding. But you know what? Wilson has gone through a horrible day in his workplace as well. And you Wilson, you would find Emmy’s grumbles irritating, but think again, why so? Do not critique one another just for the sake of critique, or just for relieving your emotion. A destructive critique not only will tear one another down, but it will also tear the marriage down. On the contrary, a constructive critique can build one another and build your marriage. This requires a lot of effort. It is much easier to react out of your selfish will and desire. To critique your spouse constructively, you must first put down your selfish will and desire aside, think first for the good of your spouse, and learn how to communicate. This task requires much self-sacrificial love. It is surely the will of God that through learning to be self-sacrifice we will be more like Christ. (ILL & APP)

(Communication is a way we can encourage your spouse to grow, next you yourselves must seek to grow in maturity.)

1. A God-pleasing marriage is a self-reflective marriage. (Proverbs 27:19)
   1. As water reflects a person’s image, a person’s behavior reflects his heart. This proverb tells us that in the context of a positive relationship, a person can evaluate his character by reflecting on his words and deeds. (v.19)
   2. In marriage, your true self is most exposed to your spouse, and your spouse’s criticism can be a good source for self-reflection.

Marriage is the context where you can have the most room for self-reflection. In your workplace, your colleagues are exposed mostly to your talents, your performance, and maybe your leadership skill. In the church, brothers and sisters are exposed mostly to your attitude in ministry and your interaction with all other church members. But with your wife or your husband is exposed to your whole life. No critique from other people can be more honest, genuine, and authentic than the critique of your spouse. Your habit, temperament, strength, weaknesses, and even your sin—all these are exposed to your wife or your husband. Emmy, do you take it seriously that Wilson is watching you in all aspects of your life? Wilson, do you take it seriously that Emmy is watching you in all aspects of your life? Or do you take it for granted?

* 1. Besides receiving critique from your spouse, you can be more proactive through self-reflection. You can be a better person by becoming more self-reflective.

Wilson and Emmy, do not wait for the other party to do their part. Always take initiative to find out what you can do and what you must do to make your spouse happy. If Emmy doesn’t like you to squeeze the toothpaste at the middle of the tube, don’t try to argue with her and wait for her to change and adapt to your style. This is not a matter of life and death. You can take the initiative to change and to adapt to her. Emmy, if Wilson doesn’t like to eat bitter gourd, it is okay. This is not a matter of life and death. You can cook a sweet potato; it is healthy too. Take the initiative to reflect and think how you can serve your spouse better. This is the area where you must take servanthood seriously. (ILL & APP)

(We have seen now that, firstly, you should build one another through constructive criticism. Secondly, you should take initiative to grow by becoming more self-reflective. Finally, we will see that the true reward is your spouse’s recognition.)

1. God-pleasing marriage values recognition from the spouse. (Proverbs 27:21)
   1. A person’s reputation is determined by what praises he receives and who praises him. This proverb tells us that the praises we receive from the right person are as precious as silver and gold. (v.21)

If the head of a Mafia gives you credit, you are probably a drug dealer. If Osama bin Laden gives credit to you, you are probably a terrorist. If the principal of the school praises you, maybe you are the best student in terms of academic performance. If the prime minister praises you, maybe you are a hero who has made some great contributions to the nation. Who praises you and what praises they give you tell of your reputation. Besides, whose praises and recognition you pursue tell of what you value the most. (ILL)

* 1. You may spend your whole life pursuing the recognition of your boss, your colleague, your pastor, and everyone else except your wife, but all will be meaningless. Your life is meaningless if you gain recognition from the whole world except your spouse.

When our beloved Mrs. Karen McConnell passed away, Dr. McConnell made a very striking statement. He said, “Karen finished well.” Wilson, do you wish that one day when you leave this world, Emmy will look and your life and says, “Wilson finish well”? Emmy, if you leave this world before Wilson, do you look forward that Wilson would say, “Emmy finish well”? (ILL)

* 1. So what if you gain the whole world? Do not value all that is earthly with no eternal value. Do not value yourself by what you can do and what you can gain, but value yourself for who you are before God and before your spouse.

There was a once very rich Chinese businessman who went through bankruptcy. When he was interviewed and asked how he views life now, he wrote on a piece of paper, “I was once rich but my family was eating the best food with bitter faces. Now that I have lost everything but I eat porridge with the smiling faces of my family.”

Therefore, Wilson and Emmy, do not exhaust yourself in order that you can get a bigger house, better furnishing for your house, a nicer car, a bigger and better TV, the latest trend in IT, and an elite school for your children. Instead, invest your time and effort in nurturing your marital relationship and building a Christ-centered family. House, furniture, car, TV, PC, and all the material things will be gone, but a marriage or family that is Christ-centered would have its eternal value and rewards.

(Now we have seen the three main points of …)

**Conclusion**

1. Subject: What is a God-pleasing marriage?
2. A God-pleasing marriage is a marriage that builds godly characters in each other.
3. In marriage, you can build godly character through constructive criticism, through becoming self-reflective, and through seeking your spouse’s recognition.
4. Quotation from the book *Sacred Marriage* “What if God created marriage not to make us happy but to make us Holy?”
5. This wedding is not the happy ending of your romance story. This wedding is the beginning of a covenantal commitment, that in this marriage you shall strife to fulfill God’s purpose of putting the two of you together. The harvest is a long way to come, and it takes a lot of hardships and sacrifices in order that you may enjoy its fruits. You can be sure that there are great challenges ahead of you. But don’t lose your focus on Christ; don’t fail to trust in His love and His faithfulness. Let your marriage be a marriage with a godly purpose.

Exegetical Outline (revised)

Proverbs 27:17, 19, 21

Prologue

Proverbs 27:1-21 is a proverb on friendship. Though there is no explicit God-talk in this section, it must be interpreted in the framework of the book as a whole. The introductory chapters of the book, which highlight the fear of the Lord as the beginning of all wisdom, provide the framework through which the rest of the book should be read. Proverbs 27:1-10 concludes the need of a true friend. As the proverb continues to develop in 27: 11-16, it admonishes the ‘son’ to be wise in relationships by highlighting some relationships that he should avoid. This leads to a smooth transition into the positive aspects of positive friendships in 27:17-21.

Exegetical Idea

Positive character is developed through positive relationship.

1. The way positive character is developed through constructive criticism by true friends. (v.17)
   1. This proverbs likens the sharpening of an iron sword or tool by a whetting iron to the sharpening of a man’s wit through an authentic friend.
   2. Thus iron sharpens iron is an analogy inferring that a true friend persists and does not shy away from constructive criticism.
2. Positive character is developed through complete honesty with self and with others. (v.19)
   1. As water reflects a person’s image, a person’s behavior reflects his heart. In the context of positive relationship, a person can evaluate his character by reflecting on what he actually says or does to others.
   2. Meanwhile, others too can see what’s in person heart through his words and deeds.
3. Positive character is developed through seeking recognition of the right person. (v.21)
   1. A person’s reputation is determined by what praises he receives and who praises him.
   2. In this proverb, a person’s reputation is compared with a crucible that tests the purity of silver and a furnace that tests the genuineness of gold.

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**Sermon Outline (Revised)**

**A God-Pleasing Marriage**

**Proverbs 27:17, 19, 21**

**Introduction**

Interest: After Snow White and her Prince Charming were married, they lived happily never after.

Need: Need to face the realities in marriage, such as sharing of joy, bearing one another’s burden, be a comfort to one another, and accommodating one another.

Subject : What is a God-pleasing marriage?

Background: Proverbs 27:1-21 are proverbs of the positive aspect of various dynamics in relationships. Firstly, there is a need for a true friend, then, it highlights the negative aspects of relationships that need to be avoided. Then it shift smoothly into the positive aspects of various relationships.

Preview: We will see that God use marriage to build our character three ways, firstly through your spouse’s constructive criticism, secondly, through self-reflection, thirdly, through pursuing your spouse’s recognition.

(Now, let us see how you can help one another to developed godly character.)

1. A God-pleasing marriage encourages constructive criticism (Proverbs 27:17).
   1. This proverb likens the sharpening of an iron sword or tool by a whetting iron to the sharpening or a man’s with through an authentic friend. (v.17)
   2. Your spouse is your only authentic friends.

[ILL: Quotations on friendships.]

[ILL: Friends come and go, and they do not see the different sides of you; only your spouse stays

and knows everything about you.]

* 1. You can contribute to developing godly character in your spouse.

[ILL: An example of good communication skill that build one another.]

[APP: You have to put away your selfishness and take effort to understand your spouse and to

build good communication skill.]

(Communication is a way we can encourage your spouse to grow, next you must seek to grow in maturity.)

1. A God-pleasing marriage is always self-reflective (Proverbs 27:19).
   1. As water reflects a person’s image, a person’s behavior reflects his heart. Meanwhile, others too can see what’s in a person’s heart through his words and deeds. (v.19)
   2. Your true self is most exposed to your spouse, and spouse’s criticism is a good source for self reflection.

[ILL: A pastor realized that he’s capable of sinning when he spoke impolitely to his wife.]

[ILL: No one in a church would criticize a pastor except his wife.]

* 1. You can be a better person by being more self-reflective.

[APP: You need to practice servanthood that always seek to give than to receive.]

(Firstly, you should build one another through constructive criticism. Secondly, you should take initiative to grow by becoming self-reflective. Finally, you will see that the true reward in marriage is your spouse’s recognition.)

1. God-pleasing marriage values recognition from spouse (Proverbs 27:21).
   1. A person’s reputation is determined by what praises he receives and who praises him. (v.21)
   2. You life is meaningless if you gain recognition from the whole world except your spouse.

[ILL: Karen finished well.]

* 1. Value who you are before God and your spouse, not what you can do.

[ILL: A businessman realized that his family, especially his wife, is the most important person in his life after his bankruptcy.]

[APP: Invest in nurturing your marital relationship not home improvement.]

(Now we have seen the three main point of...)

**Conclusion**

1. Subject: What is a God-pleasing marriage?
2. A God-pleasing marriage is a marriage that builds godly character in each other through constructive criticism, through being self-reflective, through seeking your spouse’s recognition.
3. Quotation from the book *Sacred Marriage* “What if God created marriage not to make us happy but to make us Holy?”
4. Wedding is just the beginning, the harvest is a long way to come, and it takes a lot of hardships and sacrifices.
5. [Exhort: Let your marriage be a marriage with a purpose.]