

# ***My Crazy Family***

## **2. Marriage Traps**

**November 11-12, 2017**

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Good morning. It is great to be with you this morning. For those of you whom I have not met, my name is Mike Arnold and I serve as the Cranberry Campus Pastor at Crossroads Church. Today we are continuing our series “My Crazy Family” by looking the center of the family unit which is the relationship between a husband and wife. Often in the busyness of life we can lose sight of this relationship. Today we are going to look at three common traps that can hurt our marriage and how to avoid these.

For some of us today these traps will be all too familiar. As we walk through these today you’ll think, “I hit that one” or “boy that one hurts.” However, today there is hope. Whether you are married or single today we are going to see God gives us direction in the most difficult relational moments.

On November 20, 1999, I pulled off the greatest upset in human history. Let me tell you how it happened. Living in Akron, OH, I heard about a tall blond beauty from Western, PA who was on campus for graduate school. I was serving as an intern in a church at the time, but I was not the only one who noticed. I shared an office with two other interns who were also very interested and had already asked her out! What formed next is not a love triangle, but a love square!

I first saw Rachelle at a conference featuring Christian apologetic speakers Ravi Zacharias and Hugh Ross. This is the kind of place pastors pick up wives, I guess. When I asked her out on a date, she told me she would go for a meal but she wanted me to know that she was already dating Jesus and didn’t have time for another man. This, if you don’t know, is Christian dating talk for “I don’t know if I like you.” It also may be just the perfect way to let a pastor down easy!

So there we were, 3 pastoral interns, Jesus, and one beautiful girl. Our love square had just become more complicated. Over the next months, a great friendship formed between Jesus, Rachelle and me and on November 20<sup>th</sup> 1999 we were married.

Maybe you can relate to this story in some way. Many marriages start off with bang. You can remember the place you first noticed each other or the place you first talked. As a pastor, I have yet to do a wedding where the bride and groom don’t love each other! That is because **God’s design for marriage is true intimacy.**

If you have your bibles, please turn to **Genesis 2:21-25**. In this passage we see the first relationship on earth. It, too, starts out good!

*<sup>21</sup> So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs<sup>[a]</sup> and then closed up the place with flesh.<sup>22</sup> Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib<sup>[b]</sup> he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. 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."<sup>24</sup> That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. <sup>25</sup> Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.*

In this passage, we see that Adam and Eve are close. So close, that the language speaks of them as one! "She came out of him" and "they became one flesh," giving the image of upmost closeness that is not just expressed physically but emotionally and spiritually. The husband and wife are in sync. Perfectly.

I share my house with three ladies. One of the things I have noticed is that we have personally different tastes in television. One of their favorite shows is *Dancing with the Stars*. From time to time, I watch this with them and I have learned a few things about dancing: the work that it takes to stay in step; the time that it takes to learn the steps; that you need to know the steps from each other's perspective; and when you get it right it is graceful. It looks effortless. All can see it and say wow! That is amazing.

The same is true when marriages are truly intimate. The steps are graceful, the beauty is undeniable, and both help each other through the steps. They don't expose each other and there is no shame.

So, if this is God's plan for our marriages, why do so many marriages look less than graceful? What we see next is that this relational dance is exactly where the evil one likes to attack. In scripture, we see this is the first place he strikes. **Genesis 3:1-10** *Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" <sup>2</sup> The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup> but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" <sup>4</sup> "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. <sup>5</sup> "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*

*<sup>6</sup> When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. <sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.*

*<sup>8</sup> Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup> But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" <sup>10</sup> He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."*

Today we are going to look at **three traps that hurt most marriages**. **Trap 1 is Hiding from our problems.** When the dance of intimate marriage is disrupted, the first trap is to hide. In this passage, Adam and Eve sin and notice that they are exposed. They hide their bodies from each other and hide from God.

We can do the same thing in our marriages today. Husbands and Wives, have you ever hidden in work rather than address an issue at home? Have you ever spent countless hours zoned out on television or your smart phone to decompress from the stress of the day? Do you ever drink to take the edge off or escape? Do you put your children in the center of your family so you don't have to address the space between each other? If so you may be hiding.

**Trap 2 is the Blame Game.** *<sup>11</sup> And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" <sup>12</sup> The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." <sup>13</sup> Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."* Many may fall into this trap. This is a destructive cycle of pointing the finger at someone else when you know that some of the responsibility is yours.

In their book *Mistakes Were Made (But Not By Me)*, social psychologists Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson describe how a fixation on our own righteousness can choke the life out of love.

"The vast majority of couples who drift apart do so slowly, over time, in a snowballing pattern of blame and self-justification. Each partner focuses on what the other one is doing wrong, while justifying his or her own preferences, attitudes, and ways of doing things. ... From our standpoint, therefore, misunderstandings, conflicts, personality differences, and even angry quarrels are not the assassins of love; self-justification is."

**Trap 3 is the Tug of War and Battle for control.** *<sup>16</sup> To the woman he said, "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." <sup>17</sup> To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. <sup>18</sup> It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. <sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until*

*you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”*

Here we see consequences for Adam and Eve. Woven into the pain that they cause was the third trap we will look at today. It is the Battle for Control. God says that her desire will be for him and he will rule over her. There is a scar now on their relationship. She will have a longing for him to fulfill something that he cannot fulfill and his instinct will be to control her, to put her in her place. And the stress of work is now in the picture for both of them. Work is now difficult; it will take time, focus, and energy. It will affect their relationship.

My wife and I are aware of this trap right now and maybe you can relate. Both of us have demanding careers that really have no boundaries unless we make them. Rachelle is a nursing home administrator who truly cares for her staff and residents. She can often come home after a long day physically and emotionally drained. Being a pastor, we must work without boundaries as we care for those in our campus and lives.

One thing that we are learning is the discipline that is needed to create emotional space for each other and our family. Let me ask the husbands and wives: do you come home completely spent from the day? Do you give your best to work and the left overs to your spouse and kids? Do you both get frustrated because you expect the other to meet your physical or emotional needs? If so, you may have hit this trap!

So, I have a question for you today. Have you ever hit one of these traps? You know it is easy to keep these issues at an arm's length! We think about fig leaves and forbidden fruit, but when these traps are sprung into our lives, it is not a pretty sight. It is painful, ugly, and destructive.

When the traps are sprung in our marriages, it can look pretty bleak, however, the good news today is that God offers a way through these traps and can help us rebuild our marriages if we have set them off.

**God's Plan to avoid Marriage Traps** **Ephesians 5** <sup>21</sup> *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.* <sup>22</sup> *Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.* <sup>23</sup> *For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.* <sup>24</sup> *Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.* <sup>25</sup> *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her* <sup>26</sup> *to make her holy, cleansing<sup>[b]</sup> her by the washing with water through the word,* <sup>27</sup> *and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.* <sup>28</sup> *In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.* <sup>29</sup> *After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—* <sup>30</sup> *for we are members of*

*his body.* <sup>31</sup> *“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”* <sup>[c]</sup> <sup>32</sup> *This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.* <sup>33</sup> *However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.*

I know this passage, in many ways, has been misused and misunderstood. If we are going to apply this to our marriages today, I am going to start with Husbands. Husbands put your wife ahead of yourself. Men, in this passage the scripture gives a clear picture of what it means to love your wife. In this passage, we are challenged to love our wives like Jesus Christ loved the church. We know today that Jesus sacrificed everything; even His life for the church. In the same way, as husbands, we are commanded to put the needs of our wives ahead of ourselves.

How well do you do that today? I propose a **4 Week Challenge: Three practical ways to make your Wife First.**

First, ask your wife on a date two times per month. A recent USA today study interviewed 1100 married women who have two or more children. They found out that 75% dated their husbands less than once every two months! One of the best ways to love your wife is to spend time with her!

Second, surprise her once a week! Find one way to surprise her (in a good way) a week! Buy her a gift, take a chore off her list, cook her a meal. But find a way to surprise her weekly!

Third, pray for her daily. Make some time daily for the two of you to pray together. Ask her what you can pray for and do this every morning or evening. When I ask my wife what I can pray for, I know her deepest needs and fears. I also can take them to the One that can handle them.

There is a second step to this dance that is just as important: **Wives respect your husbands.** In this passage, ladies, you are challenged to submit yourself to your husbands like the church submits to Jesus Christ. Some have found this teaching to be difficult or unfair and it has been used to inappropriately lord over women. There is, however, a very powerful image here that is often missed. When one understands their need for Jesus, submitting to His will is good because we know that Jesus loves us and wants what is best for us.

Ladies when your husband loves you with sacrificial love. When he puts your needs ahead of his. The challenge for you is to notice it, respond to it and respect him. Here is a **4 Week Challenge: Three practical ways to make your Husband First.**

First, thank\_him specifically two times per month. Find something big or small that he does that you appreciate. Find a creative way to express your

thanks. Write a letter and mail it to his work, leave a voice mail or say it to his face.

Second, give him your undivided attention weekly. We live in a culture of multi-tasking. We very rarely give our full attention to one person or thing. Protect some time weekly to give him your full attention. Look at him in the eyes and have at least one great conversation each week.

Third, pray for him daily. Make some time daily for the two of you to pray together. Ask him what you can pray for and do this every morning or evening together.

When these steps are lived out again and again, it produces a beautiful dance. Both are caring for the needs of the other, more than themselves. It reflects the love of God and the traps of Hiding, Blaming, and Control are stepped right over. They are not even issues.

On my wedding day, one of the Pastors that performed my wedding has been a lifelong mentor. He said something to me that has stuck in my mind ever since that day. He said, "Mike, when it comes to marriage, your relationship will always be moving. Sometimes we get this thought that our marriages stay the same, but this is not true. At times, we will hear of people who have fallen out of love, but know that this is rarely a sudden movement.

When it comes to marriage, I like to think of it like a spiral. All couple are either moving up or down on this spiral. If they are putting each other's needs ahead of their own needs and loving and respecting each other they grow closer to each other and to God. But when selfness creeps in and you hurt each other, you will spiral down."

Then this pastor said, "Michael I am putting you in charge of monitoring the spiral. There will be a time when you know that you are moving down. As the husband, it is your job to own this; to start loving your wife with sacrificial love and start moving in the right direction."

You know, he was right. Rachelle and I have used this illustration again and again. There have been times when we have sprung every one of these traps: hiding from the issues at hand, blaming each other, and struggling for control. In seasons like this I have to say, "Babe, it feels like we are spiraling in the wrong direction." This has been a code for us. It is a cue that it is time to change direction; that I need to ask for forgiveness and sometimes she does too; and that we need to start serving each other's needs ahead of our own. When we do, the movement changes.

If you were to monitor your spiral right now which way is it moving? Are you growing closer today than yesterday? Are you serving each other? Have

you sprung a trap in the last couple of days? There is hope. The dance isn't over. Today you can turn it around.

I've never watched a full season of *Dancing with the Stars*, but I hear that the most impressive part of the show is watching the improvement of the dancers. Some couples start by kicking each other in the shins, but after 15 weeks, they learn to move gracefully across the stage. The same is true in our marriages today. Maybe this morning you might think your dance is pretty awkward: we keep hurting each other and we keep stepping on each other's toes. Keep working on it. Love and respect each other and over time, your dance will improve.