

# Session 1: Marriage According to Jesus (Couples Conference)

by Stuart Briscoe

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*Stuart Briscoe discusses the biblical understanding of marriage as a divinely ordained institution essential for the health of society.*

**Duration:** 54:03

**Scripture:** Malachi 2:16, Matthew 19:3-6, Matthew 19:8-9, Mark 10:2-9, Mark 10:11-12, Ephesians 5:22-33

**Topics:** "Marriage Counseling", "Relationship Building"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the challenges that young people face when transitioning into adulthood. He suggests that many young people go off to college without a clear understanding of why they are going or what they will do afterwards. The speaker humorously suggests that he would prefer his grandsons to join the marines instead. He emphasizes the importance of learning how to relate to others and understanding that we are all different. The speaker also highlights the significance of male and female differences and the importance of healthy relationships. He concludes by encouraging the audience to learn to leave and cleave in their relationships.

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## Transcript

I'd like to direct your attention to a passage of scripture in Mark's Gospel, in the 10th chapter. This talk that I want to share with you this morning, for want of a better title, it's not particularly an imaginative title, I've called it Marriage According to Jesus. Marriage According to Jesus.

I think probably we all agree that there does seem to be some confusion on the subject of marriage at the present time. And I think part of the confusion is due to the fact that there seems to be a desire on the part of some people in America at the present time to redefine marriage. I think there's little debate about the fact that for centuries marriage has been defined as a union between one man and one woman.

Now the homosexual segment of our society is desirous of changing that. And the line of reasoning that seems to be in vogue at the present time is that we are a nation that rejoices in our freedoms. That is the term that when one comes to live in America, as Jill and I did 33 years ago, is perhaps one of the most striking aspects of the American ethos and American culture.

That this is the land of the free and the home of the brave. And accordingly there is a tremendous interest in freedom. Now I personally am very much in favour of freedom.

I like it. Particularly as my wife and I have had the opportunity of travelling in many, many countries around the world. And not a few that are communist countries or former communist countries.

In fact I've just spent two weeks in Cuba. I only got back about a week ago. We spent two weeks in Vietnam not long ago.

We've been in Laos and Cambodia. Many countries of the former Soviet Union. And so quite frankly I rejoice.

I rejoice greatly in the freedoms that we take for granted here in the United States. And so I can understand that because this country was founded on a unilateral declaration of independence, and we were on the other end of that, and we will not get into it right now. It's pointless.

You made your decision. Now you just have to live with it. But there is a question about this whole emphasis on freedom which I applaud.

And it seems to me that the understanding of many people in this wonderful country of freedom is that it means the total absence of limits and the absolute right to do whatever I want. That generally seems to be the way people look at it. The absence of limits and the absolute right to do what I want.

I think if we look at Scripture, and not just at Scripture, at society as a whole, we will discover that that is not the understanding of freedom. If you have a society made up entirely of people who have the absolute right to do whatever they want, the result is not freedom. The result is anarchy.

The result is anarchy. And if that is the case, then it stands to reason that there have to be some limits on this assumed freedom for the health and well-being of the society and the culture. In the same way, if we look into the Scripture concerning the understanding of freedom, the freedom that is offered as You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

Remember? Jesus promised that. So he is into freedom big time. But the freedom that he is talking about is not the freedom to do what I want.

It is the freedom to be what I ought. And there is all the difference in the world between the freedom to do what I want and the freedom to be what I ought. You see, there are impediments in our humanity to us being what we ought to be.

We have some in-built problems. And the freedom that Christ offers is an antidote to those in-built problems that will hinder us from being what we ought to be. He will set us free from those things.

Now it is not a case of doing what I want and being what I want. It is a case of being liberated from those impediments in order that I might be what I ought to be. So, for instance, in the passage where Jesus says, You will know the truth and the truth will set you free, in actual fact what he is talking about is the truth of what it means to be his disciple.

And to be his disciple means to come under his lordship. And to be his disciple, acknowledging his lordship, introduces you into an arena of freedom. But it is not a freedom to do what you want.

It is a freedom because of his saving lordship to be liberated from the impediments in order that you might be what you ought to be. So let's applaud freedom. Let's stand firmly for freedom.

Let's take up the cudgels on behalf of people who do not have freedom. Let's speak out about their right to be free. But let's make absolutely certain that we understand what freedom is.

It is not the absolute right to do what I want. It is being freed from the impediments that would hinder me from being what I ought to be. Now, none of that is what I was going to say to you this morning.

But I feel a lot better now I've said it. But I think it would be relatively easy to segue from that into what I wanted to talk about this morning. Because if we look at what Jesus said about marriage, we will see that he has outlined certain principles in order that in our marriage experience, we might not do whatever we want, but we might have the freedom to be what we ought.

And the question then is, well, in my marriage, what ought I to be? What ought I to be? Well, I'm glad you asked. Now let's look into Mark chapter 10. The opening verses of the chapter.

Jesus then left that place, went into the region of Judea and across to Jordan. A great crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them. Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? What did Moses command you? He replied.

You notice Jesus' technique? He had a difficult question. Answer it by asking a question. They said, Moses permitted.

Now notice the difference. What did Moses command you? Jesus asked. They answered, Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.

It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law. Now, just a little word on the background here. It is not a superfluous piece of information with which the chapter is started, where it says where Jesus was when this particular discourse took place.

It was in the region of Judea across from the Jordan. The significance of that is that at that particular time, King Herod had a castle there, and incarcerated in that castle was John the Baptist. And John the Baptist was there because he had taken on the king and said that his marriage was illegitimate.

And through stubble he got thrown into jail. And so there was a huge argument going on about marriage and divorce at that time. And the people who were testing Jesus, notice, they came that they might test him.

They choose their time and their place very, very carefully in order that they might back Jesus into a corner. Because whatever he says is going to be wrong with somebody on this particular issue. So he gives a very cagey answer.

And what he does actually is say, hey, before we talk about divorce, and I'll do that, but before we talk about divorce, let's talk about marriage. Incidentally, in my pastoral ministry, that has been a rule of thumb. I've had lots and lots of people, far too many people, come and ask me, what does the Bible say about divorce? My response has always been, if you tell me what it says about marriage, I'll tell you what it says about divorce.

And very, very often they don't know. I said, okay, well, before we talk about divorce, let's find out what it is you're not sure what it is, you maybe wouldn't want to, you know, maybe you'd just change your mind and not want to get out of it. And so, that's what Jesus does.

And before he gets into a discussion of divorce, which is a very, very legitimate discussion, incidentally, he says, let me tell you first of all about marriage. And that's what he proceeds to do in verse 5. It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law. Jesus replied, but.

Now, the word but is always a critical word in the scripture. Shakespeare said, but me know but. Does anybody know where Shakespeare said that? I have not yet found anybody who knows where Shakespeare said that, and frankly, I have no idea either.

But I read a book on preaching recently which said that if you can, try to incorporate a quotation occasionally. So, there you have it. It's a very nice one, a very nice quotation.

Actually, the word but, in this sense, spelled B-U-T, it's that but I'm talking about, it's an adversative, which an adversative means that it is going to take, if you like, an adversarial position, an opposite position. And so what Jesus has been talking about is now turned 180 degrees by the little word but. What's he been talking about? He's been talking about divorce.

But, now let's talk about marriage. At the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.

So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate. When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this.

He answered, anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery with her. If she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery. The point there is that if somebody divorces their partner in order to marry somebody else, that is simply serial adultery.

That is simply serial adultery. But that's not our subject right now. Alright, now let's look at this very, very brief statement of Jesus.

At the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one.

Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate. And that is marriage according to Jesus. Now, that's basically what I wanted to say this morning.

But I do have a few minutes left, so let me amplify some of these things. Notice, first of all, that Jesus predicates everything that he has to say on creation. But at the beginning of creation, God made male and female.

Now, this is a very, very important aspect of Jesus' teaching on marriage. It is, in a nutshell, this, that marriage is a divinely ordained institution from the beginning of creation. That is fundamental.

Marriage is a divinely ordained institution from the beginning of creation. Now, I want to stress that, not only because that's what it says here, but because in our culture at the present time, there is an

increasingly common alternative understanding to marriage. A number of years ago, our daughter, Judy, was doing a PhD at New York University.

Pretty liberal faculty, although liberal in the best sense of the word. They had a very open attitude to Judy, who was a very straightforward, convinced evangelical Christian. They were very open to her, very interested in knowing what she had to say.

In fact, gave her a forum where she could talk about psychology and evangelical Christianity and how the two cohered in her life. I was very interested in what she was studying there, so I read quite a lot of the textbooks that she was reading. One of the things that was very striking to me was that in academia, she was doing this doctoral work, I suppose, almost 20 years ago now, but in academia, 20 years ago, it was just normative for them to be looking at marriage as follows.

Marriage is a human institution that is going through an evolutionary process. That was normative in academia 20 years ago. Marriage is a human institution that is going through an evolutionary process.

Now, what that meant, in actual fact, was this. They were saying that if you look at the history of human sociology, there obviously have been sexes, there have been an ongoing battle of the sexes, and over the great periods of time, the sexes have tried different ways of getting along with each other. And human beings at different stages have had different ways of doing it.

Now, at some stage in human evolutionary development, this is what academia was teaching, at some stage in human evolutionary development, somebody hit on a good idea called marriage. And for a long time, it worked very well indeed. But it was a human idea, and it was going through an evolutionary development.

Now, in recent years, it has become very obvious, says academia, that marriage is under increasing pressure. So there are many unhappy marriages. In fact, 50% of marriages end in divorce.

And therefore, it is obvious that human ingenuity needs to be brought to bear upon this humanly devised institution called marriage, which is obviously beginning to fray at the edges. And because it's an evolutionary process, we are gradually evolving into something, listen, higher, nobler, and better. And we should not be worried about this, we should embrace it, and look forward as human beings who are more mature, and more sophisticated, and more civilized, and embrace all the new ways that people can relate to each other.

This was academia 20 years ago. Now, you should not be surprised, therefore, at what is happening in the grassroots of society, because it usually starts in academia. Now, what does the Christian say in response to this fundamental idea that marriage is a human idea that is going through an evolutionary process? The Christian answers, wrong.

That marriage is not a human idea, it is a divinely ordained institution, and it is not going through an evolutionary process, it was factored in as a creation ordinance. And there the lines are drawn. There the lines are drawn.

And we have to ask ourselves, which do we believe is correct? Is marriage a purely human idea that is going through an evolutionary process, or is marriage a divinely ordained institution that was factored in as a creation ordinance? Now, what do we mean by creation ordinance? Well, if you look at the physical world, there are certain laws that obtain in the physical world. And these laws are there for our good. And if

we embrace them, they will do us good.

But if we abuse them, they will do us harm. So, for instance, the law of gravity is a very, very nice law. Unless you decide to step off the top of the Empire State Building, and then it becomes very messy indeed.

Now, in the same way that there are physical laws that were creation ordinances, so in the area in which human beings live, that is, the area of relationships, which is a major factor of the universe of which we are a part, there are creation ordinances as far as laws of existence and laws of experience are concerned. And what are those laws? We would say this, that one of the fundamental laws as far as human behavior is concerned is the institution of marriage, which becomes the bedrock upon which family, which is the smallest unit of society, is built. And as marriage and family go, so goes society, and as society goes, so goes culture.

So, we have a very straightforward dichotomy here. And I don't know if you've ever taken the trouble to think through your position on this, but I think that scriptures are unequivocal. From the beginning of creation, God made them male and female.

Now, you may say, well, what's the big deal? Why is this so important? Well, let me make one or two suggestions to you here. I believe that the creation ordinance of marriage, that is, monogamous, heterosexual, faithful marriage, let's define our terms here since they've been redefined for us, monogamous, heterosexual, faithful marriage, I believe this was ordained as a creation ordinance, first of all, for profound psychological reasons. Now, it is well understood that when people develop psychological aberrations in their development, very often there are one of two reasons for it.

Either they have not learned how to appropriate love, or they have not learned how to express love. If people have a problem in either of these areas, very, very often they will have very, very severe difficulties in understanding who they are, in recognizing what they are, in having a healthy self-image, etc., etc. We need to know what it is to be loved.

We need to know what it is to express love. Now, we come into this world 18 inches of scream and squelch, and we don't know diddly. We don't know diddly.

That is, as far as God's creation ordinance is concerned, it does take, it doesn't matter how much redefinition you engage in, it does take a male and a female to produce another. Now, in the ideal situation, in the principle that God has ordained, you have got a male and a female in a loving relationship that is secure, into which is introduced another little human being who has two overwhelming needs. What it means to be loved, and how to appropriate it.

What it means to express love, and how to demonstrate it. And where does that little thing that doesn't know diddly learn it? You tell me. Well, I'll tell you, just in case you're not sure.

It is in a monogamous, heterosexual, faithful relationship that is the bedrock of that family, and it's called marriage, according to Jesus. Now, here's another reason. When these little human beings begin to grow and mature, it's only a matter of time until they are thrust out into society.

Now, in America, it seems to be that they go off to college, whether they have any idea why they're going to college, or what in the world they're going to do when they get there, except party. But, that seems to be a rite of passage. Now they are going to join the real world, which is as phony as you can imagine.

But anyway, that's by the way. I prefer to put them all in the Marines. In fact, I have told my grandsons who are 18 that if I could get them in the Marines, I would volunteer to go back as their drill sergeant for six months.

And they're not at all enthusiastic about it. Anyway, be that as it may. The simple fact of the matter is this.

These little people grow up and eventually take their place in society. Now, if you're going to take your place in society, you need to know how to relate. And one of the first lessons you need to know is this.

You are not the only pebble on the beach. Another lesson you need to learn is this. The world does not revolve around you.

In other words, we are required to learn fundamental social skills, right? Now, have you ever met some people who have not developed fundamental social skills? We call them sociopaths. And we have to lock them up eventually. But that's the extreme.

There are many people who we can't lock them up. We would like very much to lock them up, but we really can't. We have to tolerate them.

And they are either, at best, little brats or, at worst, people who are totally disruptive. What's their problem? More often than not, their problem is this. They are the products of a broken home.

You may know this to be true. We have carefully studied the young people in our junior high and senior high programs. And the simple fact of the matter is this.

That when you find kids who are struggling sociologically, very, very often there is a direct cause and effect between their sociological struggles and the broken home. Why is this? Because, you see, if you begin to understand that God ordained that the basis of our society was going to be solid families based on solid marriages, but they don't have a solid family and they don't have solid marriages, then something has thrown a wrench in the works. And we look at the situation and we see, you know, God has some very good ideas.

He had some very good ideas. And one was that it would take a male and a female to make another human being. And that being the case, the ideal situation in that little human being could begin to take his or her place in society would be a loving, caring, faithful relationship between a man and a woman in which that child would develop healthy psychological balance and would learn fundamental sociological skills.

It's a no-brainer. It's a no-brainer. But then there's a third reason.

Psychological, sociological, theological. Why did God ordain marriage as a fundamental principle? For psychological, sociological, and theological reasons. Theological? What's that got to do with it? If you look in the New Testament, one of the great themes of the New Testament is the relationship between Christ and His Church, which is a rather abstract concept.

Now, when we try to teach somebody an abstract concept, we usually do it by building a bridge between a concrete similarity and link it to the abstract concept. The abstract concept is the relationship between Christ and His Church. The concrete reality is what? The relationship between a husband and his wife.

We'll look into this in Ephesians 5 later in the day. Now, if we begin to lose out on this idea of marriage being what we've already pointed it out to be, one of the very serious consequences will be that we will not have the concrete example of this very, very important abstract concept. And we will not really understand what a Christian needs to understand.

And that is the relationship between Christ and His Church. Because the analogy is being lost. In the Old Testament, one of the dominant themes there is that God, the great, mysterious, remote, transcendent Creator, an awesome, fearsome force, who is utterly dynamic and separate from sin and awe-inspiring in His holiness, incredibly incorporates into His transcendence immanence, which means the one who is remote comes near.

And the picture of Him coming near is that He makes a covenant with His people. Now that's another abstract concept. The high and holy remote God making a covenant with people.

What we need is a concrete example, similarity, from which we can build a bridge to this abstract concept. What is the Old Testament concrete example that we come to us all the time? Over and over again, it's the analogy of marriage. And I submit to you, if we begin to fray around the edges in our understanding of marriage according to Scripture, we will lose two fundamental theological concepts that are absolutely basic to our understanding of God's dealings with humanity.

One is the concept of covenant. The other is the concept of the relationship of Christ and His church. Now most people, their eyes will glaze over when you talk about that, but if they've taken any trouble at all to begin to think seriously about what it means to be God's people and God's earth, they will take seriously the concept of covenant and church.

So much then for this opening statement. From the beginning of creation. What are we learning from this? That marriage is a divinely ordained principle, institution, ordained from the beginning of creation.

Now here's the second thing. Verse 6 again. At the beginning of creation, God made male and female.

At the beginning of creation, God made male and female. Now you may probably have noticed that that is what God did. It is a very, very fascinating thing that God did.

And there's so much we could say about that. A few years ago, there was a movement called unisex. And the idea seemed to be to blur the differentiation between male and female.

And then, I don't remember exactly what happened. I haven't studied it very carefully. I need to sometime.

But somewhere there was a 180 done on this thing. And the big thing was to show how different male and female really are. The simple fact of the matter is this.

That there are similarities between male and female. For instance, in Genesis chapter 1, we are told that God created man in His own image. But then it's very specific about this man whom God created in His image.

It says that this man was created male and female. So the word man, obviously, can be used in two senses. It can mean the masculine, or it can mean humanity as a whole.

Humanity as a whole, that is divided into masculine and feminine, is created in the divine image. The second thing that we notice in Genesis chapter 1, is that male and female, both created equally in the

divine image, were both given responsibility under God to act as God's regents or agents in this world. That they were required to oversee creation on behalf of the Creator.

Both male and female. So anybody who says that there are marked similarities between male and female is absolutely right. Anybody who says that male and female are fundamentally the same, in those two senses, is absolutely right.

Both male and female are created in the divine image. And we could explore that all over the place. Male and female are also commissioned to have dominion in this world.

Having said that, however, it is rather obvious that there are differences between male and female. Now, one of the reasons that we have difficulties in marriages, I've already talked about. And that is, we don't understand that marriage is a divinely ordained institution from the beginning of creation.

And we respect it as such, and embrace it as such. But the second reason is this. That very, very often we get into difficulties in our marital relationships, because we haven't taken the trouble to learn the differences between male and female, and embrace the differences.

And enjoy the difference. Vive la différence. Now, what do we mean when we talk about the differences? Well, I picked up a book the other day.

I don't remember exactly the title, but it's something like, *Why Men Never Get It, and Why Women Always Need More Shoes*. It's a wonderful book, it borders on the scatological at times, so I can't recommend it to people, that's why I didn't give you the exact title. Well, that's one reason.

The other reason is, I can't remember it. But anyway, it's really quite fascinating. It asks questions like, *Why did it take Moses 40 years to come to the wilderness?* And the answer is, because he was a man and wouldn't ask directions.

You see, just a lot of very helpful information like this. Now, there's no question about it, that there are differences between men and women. It's very helpful if we understand them, because God, for reasons known only to himself, created males male, and females female, and never the two shall be totally the same.

Now, Deborah Tannen, who is a linguist, wrote a book some time ago, dealing with the difficulties that men and women have in conversing with each other, talking to each other. Now, one of the obvious reasons is this, women are multi-task people, so they can do a whole lot of things at once. Men are more focused, they do one thing at a time.

So, for instance, when a woman is having a conversation with a woman, both of them will talk at the same time, and they know exactly what the other one is saying. Men cannot do that. Men are more focused.

So they have a very strange way of having a conversation. One man will talk, and the other will listen. And then he will respond, and the other one will listen.

A totally foreign concept to women. OK, we are made differently. Deborah Tannen, this brilliant linguist, did research in this area, and she noticed all kinds of difficulties that develop when men and women have conversations.

For instance, she gave an example. Obviously, if it was an instance, she gave an example. It's a good thing I was listening to my own redundancies.

A husband says to his wife, I've got a splitting headache. The wife says, Oh, honey, I had a migraine yesterday. Oh, it was awful.

I got all this aura, I got these flashing lights, I just had to close my eyes, I had to lie down, I was so nauseous. And it went on for nine hours. I just had to lie in a darkened room.

My head felt as if people were stomping on it. It was unbelievable. He, listening to this, gets very irritated with her.

She senses that he is getting very irritated with her. She gets very hurt. OK, let's go back over this.

Her husband says, I have a terrible headache. The woman says, Oh, I had a migraine yesterday. And she begins to elaborate upon this migraine.

He, because she elaborates on this thing, gets irritated. She, because he's got irritated, gets hurt. Now, what's gone wrong here? I mean, it's just a headache for crying out loud.

Well, what's gone wrong is this. He is a male, and she is a female. That's all that's wrong.

But the problem is this. When he says, I have a headache, she, being a female, immediately wants to empathize. And how does she show her empathy? By saying, Oh, I understand perfectly.

I had the most awful migraine yesterday. I know exactly what it feels like. I am so sorry.

But you see, he never hears that, because he's a male, which means he's a competitor. Now, he says, Oh, you see, my problem is I just had a headache. She had a migraine.

Oh, he's got to go one better. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what I get.

She knows better. She's had it better. So he gets irritated.

She gets upset. Now, is there just the slightest little grain of truth here? Shame on you men. All right, let's reverse it.

Woman says, I've got a splitting headache. Take a couple of aspirins. Doesn't take long, does it? Well, actually, it does.

Because she then says, Does this big, dumb ox think that I don't know of aspirin? All I am looking for is a little TLC. And what do I get? Take two aspirins. He's off on the next thing now.

I mean, in the minute he said take two aspirins, he's thinking, next? What's the problem here? Well, the problem is that God made males male, and females female. And when he made males males, he made a certain kind of humanity that looks at life as a series of problems to be solved. A series of issues to be fixed.

So, the little lady's got a headache. Fix it! That didn't take long. Boy, I thought it was going to be a hard one this long.

Well, these are humors, examples. We can enjoy them, but the simple truth of the matter is this, that if you get an accumulation of this sort of thing, of fundamental misunderstandings, we don't understand that we are wired differently, I promise you, all kinds of stresses and strains will develop. And they do.

And they do. Now, remember that God intentionally made males masculine and females feminine, and he intended them to be different, and for them not to be competitive, but for them to be complementary. And that requires a considerable degree of maturity and a considerable degree of understanding.

Read on. At the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother.

For what reason? For the very simple reason that God made males and females. He built into males and females the desire for them to come together and be united to each other. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife.

It is really quite clear, isn't it? A man being united to his wife. From the beginning of creation, God created them male and female. Now, if we want to totally rewrite the thing, go right ahead, but we must remember that we are totally rewriting what has been normative for generations from the beginning of creation.

Now, notice this idea of leaving the father and mother. The way it operated in the Jewish community, which is what Jesus is addressing, of course, is this. That when a couple got married, the man would leave his own area and go and live in the area where his wife lived.

Because if he were to die, she does not have social security, she doesn't have insurance, but she does have a father and brothers and uncles who will look after her. And so, the men in those days waited a long time until they got married. They often married women who were very young and they were considerably older themselves.

And there was a very good reason. If they got married, they had to go and live with their mother-in-law. And so they said, we'll wait.

There's no hurry. Okay. Well, that's what it says, you see.

For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife. This idea of leaving. A third reason that marriages get into trouble, I've identified two of them for you.

A third reason marriages get into trouble is this. That sometimes people choose voluntarily to get into the married estate, but they want to retain the blessings of the single estate. They don't leave it.

They don't leave it. And it is not uncommon now to find couples who are divorcing after four years for no other reason than one of them simply says, I just don't want to be married anymore. There's no particular animosity.

There's nothing basically gone wrong in the relationship. It's just that they never left the single estate and they want all the blessings of the single estate, and there are many, no responsibilities, etc., etc. They want to go back to that, but they would like very much to have a lot of the blessings of marriage.

And so that is why so many people now will not go through marriage and establish a home. They will simply shack up together because they're keeping their options open. They're not willing to leave, and as the old version of the Bible put it, leave and cleave.

Leave and cleave. I remember a couple coming for counselling one time. It was obvious that they'd had a tremendous row, fight on the way over.

So I knew that this had to be dealt with with considerable sensitivity, and so I said to them as I took their coats and hung them up, you had a fight on the way over, did you? And she immediately burst into tears and he said, no. Well, it was obvious they had. And so I'm delighted you had a fight because in premarital counselling one of the things we try to do is to show you how to fight clean.

You can have fights, you can have arguments. If you don't have arguments, one of you is no longer thinking. So it's just learning how to do it properly.

And so I love in premarital counselling to look at the anatomy of a marital spat. And if you hadn't had one, I said to this couple, I would have precipitated one. So she said, you won't believe what he just told me.

I said, I will. I promise you. I'm unshockable.

I've been in this business a long time. I've heard them all. I was wrong.

She said, he just told me that ever since he was a little boy, born, raised in Wisconsin, he's never missed a deer hunting season. Now you have to understand, in Wisconsin, there are two equally important state religions. The Packers and deer hunting.

Deer hunting is a special time of year when everything stops. Grown men put on orange suits, head off into the wilderness and shoot everything that moves. They really do.

Farmers hurriedly put their stock in barns. If they don't have a barn, they will paint on the side of their animals in large white letters, C-O-W. And they say, this is great.

And they take their kids. They say, it's wonderful to get out there. And this is wonderful sport.

Now, I have discussed this sport with my friends for the last 33 years. And they're very patient with me. And they explain to me over and over again, Stuart, you need to understand.

If we don't kill those deer, they will die. The male population of Wisconsin operates. That is their irrefutable logic.

Now, OK, back to the story. I can see what's coming. He's just told me that ever since he was a little boy, he's never missed deer hunting.

And now he told me on the way over tonight that our wedding day is on the opening day of deer hunting. And he expects us to spend our honeymoon deer hunting in the Wisconsin wilderness. Well, now he joins the conversation.

He says, I go to the symphony with you, don't I? I couldn't see the connection here. But he could. I go to the symphony with you, don't I? So I said, well, just let me get clear about this.

You like symphony, you like the symphony, do you? You like classical music? She said, yes. And you like killing things? Yeah. I said, and you want to be married? Yeah.

I said, well, look, I said, I can understand if you've never missed deer hunting season that you wouldn't want to miss one now just because you're getting married. So, turning to her, I said, do you have a boon

box? She said, yeah. I said, do you have Beethoven on CDs? She said, yeah.

I said, well, couldn't you take that up into the woods and play Beethoven while he's killing things? And he, he was thinking clearly by this time. He said that would frighten the deer away. He was a fine figure of a man, this one.

That would frighten the deer away. I said, okay, well, I'm just trying now. I said, well, let's try another way.

You like the symphony and you like killing things. Why don't you go to a symphony concert and take your gun and see if you can't bag a cellist? That didn't work either. But what did work was what I was hoping.

You know, eventually they started to laugh and they started to laugh at themselves. And I said, listen, listen, if you're not willing to leave something just for the sake of the other, why in the world do you want to be married? Stay single for goodness sake. But if you want to be married, make this new relationship so important that you will actually do something unthinkable called concede.

Because if you won't, I won't give you four years. You're going to have to learn to leave. And then you're going to have to learn to cleave.

You're going to have to learn to cleave. The word cleave actually in the English language is a little awkward because the English language is awkward because it was invented by awkward Englishmen. The word cleave, well you can get a cleaver.

What does a cleaver do? Chops wood in two. Or you can get something to cleave which means you get two things to stick together. All the wonders of the English language.

Cleave can mean either to glue together or to split apart. Well in the old version of the Bible it used to say, for this cause a man will leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. Leave and cleave.

I like to retain that as long as we know what we're talking about here. The word in the Greek from which this word cleave comes is the word for glue. It's the word for glue.

And what it means is this. When I'm married, I choose to leave the old life because I prefer this new relationship and all its potential for rich experience as God intended. And in order that this might develop to its full potential I make a commitment.

And it is that through thick and thin from hell or high water I will cleave to you. Glue. And I often finish a wedding service by explaining this to a young couple and I say, what this means in simple terms quite frankly, is this.

Young man, you stick to her. Young woman, you're stuck with him.

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