

GUARD YOUR HEART – GUARD YOUR MARRIAGE.

Jeff reads scriptures:

Exodus 20:14 - Sermon text of The Ten Things That Matter Most

¹⁴ “You must not commit adultery.”

Matthew 5:27-30

²⁷ “You have heard the commandment that says, ‘You must not commit adultery.’ ²⁸ But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ²⁹ So if your eye -- even your good eye -- causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your hand -- even your stronger hand -- causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.”

vss. 29-30: Take whatever drastic measures are necessary to guard your heart. Do you think that Jesus was a might bit serious as he gave this warning? “If I have not love, I have nothing...” (1 Corinthians 13:1-8)

Insert HS Reunion Skit 7 video here...

Laurie: As you listen today, please do not listen with these thoughts in mind:

- I hope my spouse is listening.
- I wish so-and-so was here to hear this.
- My marriage is too messed up for this.
- I’m not even married, so I’ll just take a nap.

This message applies to each of us. We are all called to demonstrate **God’s love** for us by generously sharing it with others.

Jeff

I Corinthians 13: 4-7 God’s definition of love [Highlight and Expound as necessary]

⁴ Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵ or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. ⁶ It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. ⁷ Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

This agape love is the Christian standard for all relationships. It is not restricted to marriage, but the marriage relationship is a showcase for God to display this standard. Although some of the points we discuss today will refer specifically to marriage, **many of them apply to all Christians**, regardless of their marital status.

I John 4:20-21 ²⁰ If someone says, “I love God,” but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is a liar; for if we don’t love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see? ²¹ And he has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their Christian brothers and sisters.

John 13:34-35 ³⁴ So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. ³⁵ Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.

Laurie: So, what's the big deal about marriage? Why does the Bible say God hates divorce? Doesn't he want me to be happy?

Jeff: (*respond with something along these lines*) First of all, you cannot believe you are okay with God and have a hard heart towards your spouse. Remember (**I John 4:20-21**) you can't say you love God and hate your brother... Secondly, while it is true that marriage can be a tremendous gift, marriage is not just about your happiness. **Marriage** was designed by God to vividly display His relationship with His bride, the church. When we don't do it well, we mess up His metaphor (God's primary example and visual aid). This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one. (**Ephesians 5:21-33**)

Laurie asks: So the question before us today is how well are we illustrating Christ's relationship with His church in our marriages?

Jeff & Laurie both say a few things here

Jeff and I are an example of God's redemptive power to take a marriage that was not accurately displaying His love and change our hearts. [Expound on personal testimony – be brief – remember your time]

Guard your heart = Guard your marriage.

Jeff: If you don't think there is a need to guard your heart, consider that the divorce rate among Christians is no different than the average among non-Christians. Obviously, newlyweds do not plan for divorce, yet can we agree that adultery in thought or deed does not occur suddenly in a void? It occurs in an atmosphere of an unguarded heart. Here are just a few points from Scripture regarding the outcome or case of the unguarded heart...

Jeff & Laurie alternate reading these passages (*all passages should be projected on big screen*)

- **Proverbs 4:23** – “Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.”
- **Matthew 15:19** – “For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander..”
- **Matthew 19:3-9 – (vs 8)** “Moses permitted divorce only as a concession to your hard hearts, but it was not God originally intended.”
- **Ephesians 4:18** – “...Their minds are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against him.”

Laurie asks: So, how do I practically guard my heart?

Jeff: There are many conditions that contribute to this. Here are a few: (Or simply start in naming some.)

Jeff/Laurie -We can alternate back and forth with these:

Jeff: Boredom; Apathy; Ambition; Misplaced priorities; Discontentment; Comparison; Busyness

Laurie: Loneliness; Disappointment; Unfulfilled expectations; Unforgiveness; Bitterness

Provide
Examples
as needed

Jeff: Recognize the danger of these conditions. They all lead to a hard heart. Recognize that sinful, earthly things lurk within all of us. (**Colossians 3:5, Jeremiah 17:9**)

Laurie: Recognize the danger of well-meaning friends who do not view your situation from God's viewpoint. (**Matt. 16:23**) Notice that the dangers are not necessarily things you do, but can be simply things you don't do.

Laurie asks: So, again, how do I practically guard my heart?

Jeff/Laurie - We can alternate back and forth with these; Jeff gives point and Laurie gives example:

Guard your heart by:

1. Guard your relationship with **God**. (*Keep God as your number one priority*)
2. Find your **fulfillment** in Christ. (*Release your spouse from unreasonable expectations*)
3. Extend **grace** to your spouse. (*Colossians 3:13*)
4. Don't abuse the grace your spouse extends to you. (*Laurie provide example*)
5. **Simplify your life**. (*Evaluate your priorities. Busyness will destroy your marriage*)

Jeff: Conclusion – Today is the day to respond; when you “hear” (sense) that God's Holy Spirit is speaking to you, now is the time to allow your heart to be changed. This is the first step to guarding your heart; responding to God's invitation to change. **That is why the Holy Spirit says, “Today when you hear His voice, don't harden your hearts...” (Hebrews 3: 7-8)**

ACTION STEPS – TO APPLY WHATEVER THE CURRENT CONDITION OF YOUR HEART

Laurie asks: Okay, someone is likely out there thinking, I don't want to harden my heart, but if you only knew what my spouse is like, you would understand. What would you say to them?

Jeff: Choose to **extend grace** in your relationships – displaying God's agape love – err on the side of grace. Agape love is our standard; don't think of it as a goal. Remember 1 John 4:20-21.

Laurie asks: What about the couples with young children, busy careers, aging parents, you know, life?

Jeff: If you are currently married, take deliberate action to **guard** your time, energy, and emotions regarding your marriage relationship. (Simplify, simplify, simplify... Our tendency is to complicate and clutter. Avoid this at all costs.)

Laurie asks: Okay, those are good answers so far, but what if I have no love left in my heart for my spouse? What if the love we shared is long gone? Then what?

Jeff: (*Nothing is impossible with God illustration*) If your heart is already hard, ask God to **change** your heart. **Psalm 51:10** (Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me.), **Jeremiah 3:22** (I will heal your wayward hearts), **Ezekiel 11:19** (And I will give them singleness of heart and put a new spirit within them. I will take away their stony, stubborn heart and give them a tender, responsive heart.) Don't believe the lie that it is too late for your heart to change or that you can't control your feelings. God can change hearts. It's what He does!

Laurie asks: What if my marriage is already broken beyond my ability to repair it? (Expand this)

Jeff: If your marriage is broken, please remember that divorce is not the unpardonable sin. God does not **condemn** a repentant heart. He is a God of redemption. He takes each of us at our place of surrender and He begins to form us in the image of His Son. His grace begins where we are today, and leads us forward, not backwards.

Laurie asks: These steps to guard your heart are completely independent of your spouse's response. You can not justify an ungodly response based on your spouse's actions. You can accurately display God's love in your marriage, regardless of your spouse's cooperation or lack of it.

Jeff: Don't expect your spouse to change overnight simply because you begin to make changes. Remember it took awhile to get to this place in your relationship. Change may not take place overnight. Do not make the mistake of defining timelines or parameters to healing of your relationships. The application here, or take home, is patience and perseverance. Don't give up. Failure is not an option... This is the attitude you must have when guarding your heart. Remember agape love is our standard (see again 1 Corinthians 13; "love never fails.") **Jeff closes with an offer for a time of reflection/prayer/etc.**