

Do Eden Anyway: Wife

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[0:00] To be able to address the creator of all things as father and know that Lord you are not simply! like a good father you are the perfection of all the virtues that indicate fatherhood Lord you are kind you are strong you are capable you are patient.

None of us have had a father like you. Lord God we pray that in your kindness Lord we pray that these with these truths these marvelous truths would land in our hearts and be ballast in our storms. God please you have so many good things for us to trust in and to hope in. Help them land in our hearts father. Even today as we open your word help it land on our hearts. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

You can be seated. We'll dismiss our kids to children's ministry and we are in Ecclesiastes chapter 9. This morning we've been closing out the book of Ecclesiastes with a little mini series we're calling Do Eden Anyway.

And we've identified that after running the experiment to see what is good for a man to do. The preacher philosopher Kohileth has decided that in reality with all of the unfairness and uncertainty and difficulties in this world in reality the stuff we ought to be doing is the stuff we know God made us to do all along.

[1:39] And that is to walk with God and worship. That is to do our work in the life that God has given us to be faithful to those that God has placed in our lives and to end each day to celebrate to be grateful in each day.

I call it crown each day with a sense of gratitude and accomplishment for what the Lord has done. So we're working through these four categories. Work or worship, work, wife, and wine. Wine is really going to be next week talking all about how to celebrate God's faithfulness, how to tend each day as a gift and so forth.

And today we are going to talk about wife. Wife here is a stand-in for spouse. The text that we're going to be working from is in Ecclesiastes 9, 7, I believe, uses the word wife.

But I'm not going to ask the ladies to do, you know, conversion math in their head all day today. So we're just going to use spouse. It's really just a reference for caring for the person that God has placed in your life in that respect.

Well, let me start out by reading a letter dated March 2nd, 1837. A father is writing to his son. The son's 18 years old. He's brilliant. He's already at university.

[2:59] Everybody knows that he's smart. And the father writes this to the son. Is your heart in accord with your head and your talents? Has it room for the earthly but gentler sentiments, which in this veil of sorrow are so essentially consoling for a man of feeling?

He goes on and says, And since that heart is obviously animated and governed by a demon, he just means a spirit. It's written in German originally. And not granted to all men, is that demon heavenly or Faustian?

He says, I can tell there's a spirit in you that's unique. He's like, I can't tell what of this spirit is an angel or the spirit of Faust.

And then he writes this. Will you ever, and that is not the least painful doubt of my heart, will you ever be capable of truly human domestic happiness?

Will you ever be capable of human domestic happiness? In other words, will you ever be able to do Eden anyway? Will you ever be able, as brilliant as you are, as complex as you are, will you ever actually just be able to have a happy relationship, a happy home life?

[4:29] Will you, he asks, be capable of imparting happiness to those immediately around you? and that's actually a letter written to Karl Marx from his father.

And if you want to know how that played out, the answer is that he was not capable of domestic happiness. The prettiest woman on campus who had many options of higher class in terms of socioeconomic class than Marx fell in love with Karl and she became his number one fan and he slowly bled her dry with a hard life, poverty.

That wife lived in the pawn shop trying to just get food for the kids and she gave him multiple children, all of her money, all of her devotion, everything.

He cheated on her anyway. So Karl Marx's home life is as you might expect. It's very parasitic. In reality, most of us are unfortunately more prone to feeding off of other people than we are feeding them.

And so for most of us, marriage, as we enter into it, at least on the front end, begins to be a question about who can I find that will make me happy? We take a very consumeristic mindset to marriage.

[6:03] And really, we have to see that that doesn't work and that the Bible is quite clear about this, actually. Now, Ecclesiastes 9, 7 through 10, let's read it first together.

Ecclesiastes 9, 7 through 10, Go eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a merry heart for God has already approved what you do. Let your garments be always white, let not oil be lacking on your head.

Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your petition in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom and shoal to which you are going. You know, the concept of enjoying life with your spouse, that single little concept I think is massively under discussed in church because in, for many respects, growing churches run on volunteers who are walking attention between home life and serving in the nursery or whatever.

And so there is not a lot of attention paid to just giving people fuel for contentment and emphasizing those evening hours as being the Lord's and for the development of a marriage and for the development of a home and these other issues, while important, are secondary to those things.

[7:36] Actually, I would say that domestic life is essentially uniquely loved in wisdom literature.

the home life, especially the marriage, is exceptionally revered, pointed out to, pointed to in wisdom literature.

In other words, when the Bible writes a bunch of stuff about wisdom, it keeps pointing us back to the smallest unit of God's institutions, the family, the home.

It just comes up over and over again. In fact, I want to point you out to this. If you read the Bible canonically, and all that means when you're talking about reading the Bible canonically, and it's a good thing to learn to do, and it's just paying attention to the way that the books are ordered, pay attention to the way that the Psalms are ordered, pay attention to the fact that Ecclesiastes is essentially this great experiment run, what should man do?

And he says here in kind of the crescendo of the entire book, enjoy your wife. Right? So when you read canonically, you'll notice things.

[8:48] And what you'd notice in this case is that up against Ecclesiastes' crescendo, coming before it is Proverbs 31, and coming after it is Song of Solomon.

There is actually a quiet payload waiting for people who will slow down and pay attention, in which God, nearly the center of his Bible, says, worship me, do good work, and love your wife.

The entire book of the Bible, Song of Solomon, is devoted to just that. The entire chapter at the end of the wisdom literature is devoted to that in particular. And again, when I say wife, I sometimes, I mean spouse.

Now, if you'll go back to that text, I think it's important to understand that before we can enjoy our spouse, we have to develop our spouse.

This is a very interesting concept for some of us because we're used to just everything coming prepackaged, including people. Go back to verse 7, Ecclesiastes 9, and look. Go eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.

[10:04] Let your garments always be white. Let not oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the wife you love. Now, let's start at verse 7 and just start listing the objects of enjoyment.

Bread. Are there loaves of bread just waiting out in a field to pick up and enjoy? Are there trees that have wine taps on them?

I thought of this image, I thought, well, that would be really cool. Is there a chardonnay tree, you know? A muscato tree? No.

Are there just, like, vats of olive oil sitting around that you grab and put on your face that says to always wear white? It's just a celebratory kind of idea of, like, wear your nice shirt.

Is there just linen lying around? No. Well, every single one of these things that you're being called to enjoy require a significant amount of investment before they are the thing you're called to enjoy.

[11:12] There's an enormous amount of effort put into turning a grape into wine or some wheat kernels into bread or olives into oil. And so, the call to enjoyment is also the call to investment.

And the wife or the husband is no different. We have to come to terms with the fact that the spouse we would enjoy becomes enjoyable only when we express commitment, investment, and effort.

The thing we long for in our marriage comes the way that anything else in this list comes for.

Careful, thoughtful, wise, nurturing, tending, and investment.

I will just tell you this straight up. I've been married 31 years. My wife is a, I love being around my wife, but that is in large part because I have tended to that relationship.

And if you want to find a wife who's not enjoyable to be around, you can find them, actually. And they're the ones whose husbands didn't tend to the relationship. They're men who are enjoyable to be around, great men that their wives love being around, but those are men who have been invested in with commitment and care and thoughtfulness for years.

[12:40] So let's be clear as we start off that the call to enjoyment is built in with a call to investment. As I've mentioned before, you know, in the Bible there are places like this where you are told to do something, but you're not given the exact process for doing so.

We talked about this in Ephesians when Paul tells the thief, don't steal anymore, go get a job. Well, the how to go get a job section of scripture is a little bit more diffused and inferred than there's like not a straight like three verses on how to go get a job.

And so what I'm going to do today is I'm going to actually do the same with how to invest in your spouse, how to tend to your spouse like you would a vineyard. In fact, I think of a spouse as essentially a garden, which is point number two.

A spouse is a garden within a garden. That's not my metaphor. The Bible says it that way as well.

Song of Solomon is all about the garden language. The husband looks at his bride and says a garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden.

And she answers, let my beloved come to his garden. And he does. I came to my garden, my sister, my bride. The married couple in scripture talk to each other as if they are things that are tended to and cared for.

[14:05] And cultivated. What do you do with a garden? Well, whatever you get out of it is really just a downstream effect of what you put into it. You tend to it.

You look after it. You water it. You protect it. You pay attention to it. By the way, the sheer existence of a garden means that predators will come, predators and scavengers will come lurking.

So as you invest in your spouse garden, you have to understand that you've also got things lurking out there to try to take the fruits that you're trying to cultivate.

It's a whole thing. It's a whole job. Proverbs 24, 27 says, prepare your work outside.

Get everything ready for yourself in the field and after that build your tower. I want to challenge you this morning to understand that if all of the things that need tending to, the one you should put first always is your spouse.

[15:08] That's the garden that will keep feeding you while you do all your other work. The work put in first is the work on the thing that will feed you while you're doing it. The thing that will grow while you're doing all the work.

The thing that will feed you when you're done doing your work. And I will tell you as just pastoral wisdom, make your spouse your priority.

Make their soul your priority. Make their heart, their mind your priority. Tend to that garden first. I also would tell you and some of you think this and I'm just going to tell you I disagree.

If you think that you should have to wait to get married to get your house in order, no. The thing that will help you get your house in order is the spouse that you procure and invest in.

So no, don't, your spouse is there to help you get the rest of it in order. The garden that gets the central attention in our lives is that person that God has given us as a co-heir of grace.

[16:20] Now, let's move on to start talking about how to do that. What does it look like to tend to and cultivate and care for a spouse?

Well, I think one hint lies in Ephesians 5. In Ephesians 5, we're told explicitly how Jesus tends after the church. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. And then watch what happens in verse 26. I think the main way that we tend to our spouses consistently throughout the years is through our speech, through words.

Specifically, the word of God, the word of the gospel, but more than that also. What I'm saying, guys, tend to your spouse. It's the first priority, and it's the gift that keeps on giving.

Whoever tends to his spouse loves himself. To paraphrase another piece of Ephesians 5. And I'm saying the main way to tend to your spouse is what we see here with Jesus.

[17:28] Words. The word of God applied to your spouse on a regular basis is the thing that will make them grow into the person that you can enjoy for your whole life.

What kind of words do you use to tend to your spouse? Well, 2 Timothy 3. 16 through 17 tells us that all scriptures breathed out by God and profitable for teaching and reproof and correction and training in righteousness.

Those kinds of words would be a good start. Your marriage ought to be the one place where the word of God is constantly exchanged freely, consistently, thoughtfully.

You develop eventually if you build, both of you build your marriage on the word of God. And I mean a deep love of God, the word of God, by the way. What you'll find is that even your jokes start having scripture references in them, at least my wife and I.

Like, it's just inevitable. Build your garden on the word. It's the one thing that feeds every part of the soul.

[18:47] Build your marriage on the word. Specifically, though, I would tell you that if you look at how Jesus speaks to his church, he does issue words of admonition and exhortation.

He warns because he's watching and he knows. Shocking. Pay attention. Pay attention to your spouse's soul. He knows them.

He warns them. But overwhelmingly, the words that Jesus speaks to his church are just, I love you. And the Father loves you. The number one thing that every marriage needs more of in this room is that we would recite the gospel to one another and remind one another that they are loved and accepted by the God of the universe through Jesus Christ.

The gospel ought to be spoken between husband and wife and wife and husband. Before we get to love languages and affirmations and all these other things, the reality is this.

Every single person in this room both knows that God loves them in theory and struggles to believe it deep down and and all of your dumb things come out of this.

[20:04] The kindest, most consistent thing you can do for your husband is to remind them that Jesus bought their soul and that he who began a good work in him will carry it on to the day of completion.

the kindest thing a man can tell his wife is that the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end has taken up interest in them and has chosen them before the foundation of the world so that they could experience God's eternal kindness lavished upon them for eternity.

Speak the gospel to one another. That's how you'll tend to your garden spouse. Speak the gospel and believe the gospel for one another. Secondly, I would say promises.

Don't just tell them that God loves them. Tell them that God is faithful and he's trustworthy. I don't know if you guys know this about my wife but I have a very snacky wife.

The main thing I've noticed traveling with her for three decades is that the hour before the meal we will begin discussing plans for the meal.

[21:21] She just kind of got that hummingbird metabolism and she just kind of needs snacks. She's got to keep feeding the girl snacks as she works throughout the day.

And friends, I will tell you I've done a lot of marriage counseling and I will tell you that we need our spouse to feed us the promises of God all the time because in reality here's what's happening.

this is one of the main things I've done for my wife for 30 years. She knows that God is faithful and she needs to be reminded that God is faithful over this thing, over that thing.

She knows God is faithful. She needs it applied to every situation that we're developing. So words of love, you are loved and accepted, words of promise applied to particular problems and questions.

Even when we're trying to figure something out and it's fully our responsibility to figure it out, it is still good to season even those conversations with reminders. God's got this. We're just trying to figure out how to not be dumb on our side.

[22:36] We want to take our responsibility seriously, but ultimately God has this. Speaking that over and over and over again transforms a person. We need to hear it over and over and over again.

So we need to tell our spouses that God loves them. We need to tell our spouses that God's got this. And then we need to remind them that we are part of that same covenant.

You can tell your spouse something like this. God loves you more than me, but just barely. That's obviously heresy, but what you ought to be able to say is something like this.

I'm not just telling you I love you. I know what love is because I'm a student of the gospel of Jesus Christ and by this we know love. You should be demonstrating consistently that you understand the love of God and that you apply it to her and that you are experiencing God's love for her even consistently.

And so I don't think it's at all by the way. I don't think I think you need to understand Song of Solomon is after Ecclesiastes because fundamentally if you want to do the things you're called to do as a human being you need to spend a lot more time saying good things to your wife or your husband.

[24:00] It needs to be a very intentional exercise. And the romance language in Song of Solomon is not accidental peripheral or optional.

Speak the gospel. Speak your own personal love. Also communicate actual desire for your spouse consistently. And if you communicate those things you're tending to a garden and that garden will grow and it will feed you and you will be so glad that you invested in it.

But if you fail to do these things don't come to me ten years later and ask why isn't my marriage what I want it to be? Friends, like people say follow the money the truth is follow the work.

Everything that isn't what you want it to be today I would always ask what did you do about it? What can you do about it? What should you have done about it?

And there's usually a lot there's not always but there's usually a lot of answers there. The final thing I'd encourage you to realize is that the praise in Proverbs 31 it's essentially this you know this verbal cathedral to feminine glories and I want you to know that it's an acrostic it's an A to Z in other words this wasn't just some kind of thing that overflowed in fact it was from King Lemuel's mom that it originally came forth but what I want you to know just generally about language in the Old Testament in particular is people sat down and made an effort Proverbs 31 is an effort it starts with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet and it continues and moves and moves and moves and it's listing all of the glories of this wife according to the Hebrew alphabet in other words this is the kind of thing you sometimes just sit down and do you sit down and you put forth effort to let your spouse know that you love them that you desire them that God loves them that they are safe that God's promises are not in vain toward them effort effort effort tend to the garden a couple qualifiers here number one never flatter another time many marriages are really broken because somebody has been flattering somebody for a very long time the truth has been withheld and even active lies have taken place

[26:36] I just want to remind you that Proverbs 26 28 says that flattering lips work ruin flattering lips work ruin you think you're just being nice and passing on this or that well maybe you need to be gentle maybe you need to be positive maybe you need to be careful and so forth but avoiding hard conversations and saying untrue things about your spouse is just actually working ruin it'll just come later and I also want to remind you of 1 John 3 18 never be a word only person I believe that words are biblically I think there's kind of levels of this being obvious biblically use words use words to bless your spouse but the Bible is also careful to say things like this little children let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth meaning don't only be a word person your words won't matter at all if you don't actually live a life that backs up those words so I would tell you that as a resource we are just consistently finding that almost everybody benefits from reading studying and applying the book

Practicing Affirmation by Sam Crabtree it's absolutely a resource I'd point you to it's just something we struggle with how to affirm encourage those closest to us and so that's a book I would totally look up and buy and just have handy and read and reread now the outcome of all of this investment is as our text says enjoyment we're actually told to enjoy and so let's talk a little bit about what that

looks like finding a spouse is a tremendous treasure not only because your spouse gives you someone to do the work with but mostly I think you have your spouse as someone to do the celebrating with Lewis in his book on the Psalms was wrestling with a question that bothered him why does God keep commanding everybody to praise him and while chewing on it he noticed something about how joy actually works he noticed that the world rings with praise lovers can't shut up about their beloveds readers about their favorite authors hikers about the view fans about the game and he realized that that's not a decoration that's the terminus the ending point of enjoyment praising something is the end of the enjoying process delight isn't finished until it's shared with someone else and then he describes the other side of the ache and you guys have all felt this you've read a book and you had no one to tell or you've been around a bend in the road and saw something beautiful and there's no one to share it with had a great meal and the people that you wish you had that meal with weren't there if you've ever traveled on business you know exactly and you're married you know exactly what this is like you're seeing all these things you're experiencing all these things you're like man the person that I tell oh look at that that's cool or look at that that's weird or look at that that's gross that person isn't with me you know when when God looked down at Adam and saw that he was alone and said well that's not going to work it was in part because he needed a partner to fulfill the mandate

God had given him but I believe it's also because he knew that we need a partner to praise with we need a person to celebrate with we need a person to say oh my goodness look at God and look how good he's being to us and look how faithful he's being to us and this is the final piece of counsel I want to share related to enjoying your spouse you must keep a close watch on the negative talk in your home there are so many layers of this that you might not even notice some people try to differentiate how hard they've worked by how tired they are or how hard the job was you know we all have hard jobs we do I don't need my home to be full of accentuations of the negative of course if things are difficult we talk about them but we always even then remind ourselves God is faithful

God has been good to us God has been kind but by and large especially men as you manage homes that are growing with kids negativity grumbling complaint you're allowing your home to be filled with gases that aren't good for your people's souls you were probably almost certainly joined together with the person that you're with to do good work together and the main good work is to praise God I'm going to be as cheesy as possible here because you'll remember it but that person that you're married to is your praise partner your main thing out of all the things you can do together your main thing is to be co-heirs of the grace of life your main thing is to say God is so good your main thing is to praise with one another that's how

Peter challenges husbands and he's writing actually to husbands and wives in this section but he uses the phrase that I believe if you would just meditate and act upon is all the marriage counsel you'll ever need and that is co-heirs of the grace of life if you want to know what it means to be married in the way that God wants you to be married it's that you have this person that you're doing life with and you're both moving toward death going to die it's going to be it one day and then you're going to face your God and the absolute dream of every Christian spouse in this room ought to be Lord may that day when they face their maker be a better day because they were married to me that's the heart of Ephesians 5 and Jesus laying down his life and washing his bride with the word the heart of that is so that he might present her to himself pure and unblemished and without spot and so if you would just reorient what a wife is for and what a husband is for as this

[33:17] God give me a person I can love and tend to like a garden who will of course take care of me in all the ways that gardens do but Lord ultimately is it possible that you would allow me one day to present my wife or my husband to you as someone who loves you more as someone who is more confident in you as someone who grew and expressed her God given or his God given calling is it possible that you would give me someone that I could help become more and more like you year after year after year of our blessed union and in this way one day be co-heirs of the grace of life as Jonathan Edwards was slowly succumbing to the disease that would take his life he was too far away from his beloved wife to talk to her couldn't call her

FaceTime wasn't around yet but he's lying perishing and his daughter one of his daughters is present and he says would you give my wife a message and he said of course dad and he said would you tell her that our marriage has been deeply spiritual it has been a spiritual relationship and I trust that that spiritual part will continue after this life is over in other words you have been my soul

friend you have been a friend to my soul we have partaken in Christ together we have partaken in grace together we have partaken in the promises of God together and now one day when we pass from this life to the next all of that investment will keep producing dividends as we stand together before our maker let's pray father god thank you for the gift of marriage it is absolutely tremendous blessing but it also calls us to become selfless caring attentive nurturing people it calls us away from all the worldliness that is baked into our hearts it calls us away from selfishness selfish ambition or it calls us away from so many things it calls us away from lust it calls us away from fault finding it calls us away from accusation it calls us to patience and kindness and all the fruits of the spirit there's really nothing like it and lord if you if we will cooperate with your spirit and love that other the way that you love them we will find a garden of delight waiting for us for years to come so father god please give us faith in you and your word that we can invest in good godly pursuits and trust you with the return lord i pray for anyone here who's single and doesn't want to be i ask god that you would also expunge any worldliness in their hearts that is keeping them from understanding that this most fundamentally this marriage thing is fundamentally about you and for you and ought to be processed that way let there be a repentance of making marriage about self that's a terrible way to start a marriage and it won't last in any good sense please god make through your holy spirit i'm trying to say things here but your holy spirit can just make those things true so we just pray that you would absolutely bless us in this area lord however our hearts need adjusting we pray god that you would do that adjustment in jesus name we pray amen well standing on all of this is the great gospel of jesus christ that we'll celebrate today he has offered himself for us so that we can not only know that our souls are well but that we can get into the reconciliation business and lead others to the lord every day we're called to lead that person we wake up with back to the lord every day and so we're so grateful for this time of the table where we get to be remembered that god is constantly reminding us of the gospel he is constantly reminding us of the gospel so if you are a follower of jesus christ this morning would you come and grab the elements return to your table and we'll partake together may may
Thank you.