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Title: *Love for a Lifetime - Posture #2*

Scripture: Matthew 19

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I had on my feed recently an article pop up. You know how articles pop up in your news feed and there are things that are generally curated just for you where your news feed isn't like anybody else's? And my news feed is usually sports, a little bit of politics, and a little bit of investing. It's those kinds of things.

And then this article popped up and I had that moment where I was like, how is this popping up in my news feed? I'm not the kind of person who clicks on that article, and obviously, I'm the kind of person who clicks on this article or it wouldn't have been in my newsfeed. Here's what the article says - Divorced people who knew on their wedding day that they'd made a huge mistake and married the wrong person.

So, I clicked. Here's what a couple of these says. "I knew I was doing the wrong thing when I was offered money not to marry him, and I considered taking it. I remembered walking into the church for the ceremony and asking myself what I was doing. I was the woman who didn't want to hurt feelings. So, I went through with it. We were divorced a few years later."

"We've been together for four years when I proposed, and we scheduled our wedding for our five-year anniversary. That year of our engagement was really tough. I asked her time and time again to talk to me, to see a therapist, and to work through these communication issues, but she refused. And we got married at 7:00 pm on a weekday. I woke up that day and went to work just like normal. The entire day I kept thinking, what a mistake. She never took anything I was concerned about seriously. This will not last. And it didn't."

"Another person said this. I knew when we got on a plane for our honeymoon and the flight attendant asked him if he wanted to sit first class because it would be more comfortable for him, and he said yes and left. Not one word to me, or that we were on our honeymoon, or that we were together. Nothing. We were divorced within 24 months."

One more. "On our wedding day, one of his female friends turned up in hot pants and a crop top, and a necklace with my husband's name on it. Then she got

extremely drunk and said to all of her family that my husband was her third favorite man after her dad and brother. This was in front of her own husband. Then she declared that I didn't deserve him. We were divorced within a few years."

Now, why do I share that? Besides the fact that I clicked on it, I'm confessing because it's good for the soul. I share that because chances are, most people, when they get married, think this is a good idea, and this is going to work out. This is going to be something that I want in my life for a long time, if not forever. Or maybe there are a few of us who knew early on that we were in trouble.

Well, what we're doing over these few weeks is we're looking at how to cultivate a love for a lifetime. And we're using a passage in Matthew 19 which is Jesus' teaching about divorce. In fact, if you've ever read this passage and I've been guilty of this, of just looking at it through the lens of Jesus' teaching, with this exception clause about when divorce is allowed, but there's actually a lot more happening in this passage.

Now, last week we talked about one of the postures that this passage points to that we called face to face, what it is to intentionally turn toward one another, to voluntarily attach to one another over time. And we looked at the little word "be united" that appears in verse five. And it's a Greek word "kallao" that means to attach oneself or to turn toward. We explore what it is to live in a way that's face to face.

Today, we're going to look at another word that's used. And I'm not going to give you the Greek word that underlies this because it's a long word and you won't remember it. But it's a different Greek word than the word that's used in verse five about "be united." And it's this. It's in verse six where it says, "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

And this little word "joined together" this phrase "joined together" is a single word in the original language. It is used two times in our New Testament. It's used here, and it's used in the parallel passage in Mark, chapter ten, verse nine. So, what that means is there are only two occurrences of this word. So, I looked at this word and tried to say, what does this word mean? And so, what you do when you're trying to learn that from the original language, you look at what's called the lexicon, which gives all the range of definitions in its usage in classical language and in biblical language.

I have a couple of different lexicons and one of them is by this guy named William Danker. And I'm geeking out, I realize right now but hang with me. There's a point to

this. And William Danker writes the small lexicon that goes through all the biblical uses. And what he basically says is this word, which is a compound word, join and together, so "join together" has a root that is different from that exact word but it's legitimate, basically, to use this.

Now, the reason I tell you this is because in studying Greek, there's what's kind of an attribution error that can happen or really any language. And what attribution error is, is where you take a word and you say because the root or the original space of it is this, therefore I infer all of these meanings, and it's not there.

If you've ever seen the movie *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, the dad does attribution error with Greek words all the time where he's constantly saying the Greek word for this, and he'll take some random thing like the word Windex. It comes from these different words. And then he'll parse it all together and say, it's from the Greek word this and this is what it means. That's what attribution error is.

And rightly, there are a lot of people who would say don't do this. So, the reason I'm telling you all of this is William Danker, who wrote this little lexicon is actually the "D" in the top version of the lexicon, which is known as "BDAG," it's B, D, A G, which is Bower, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich. So, he's the "D" in this.

So, why do I tell you this? Because it's legitimate what I'm about to do, which is to show you two other places where this word is used. And this is the noun version of the compound verb version of "joined together." And here are the two places where it's used. One is Luke chapter 14 verse 19, and here's what we read in Luke 14 verse 19. It says, "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'"

The word yoke is the same noun version of "joined together" yoke. Okay? So, just tuck that away for a second. And then in Luke chapter two verse 24, we read this, it says, "and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons." And the word pair there is the same word for again "joined together."

Those are the two times that the exact noun version of this word is used. And again, based on the Greek scholar William Danker, says that this has the same root. So, why is that important? You are saying what does this have to do with anything? And here's what this has to do with romance. In my estimation, this word, this choice of word that

Jesus used, that the people of that day would have known, was used for a yoke of oxen, for a pair of turtle doves, because it would have been common usage in what he's doing. I believe is he's painting a picture of what romance is.

This is the posture that I'm going to suggest from this today, and that is that romance is to be shoulder to shoulder like a pair of oxen is yoked together. They work together, they're in a partnership. And like turtle doves, they play together. They're in part in companionship together. And so, the two aspects of shoulder to shoulder are to work together and to play together. Partnership, companionship.

So, let's take a few moments and just look at each of these. First, this idea of working together. I have a little video here that'll show you - oxen tied to a yoke. The way that oxen worked in that culture was they would be yoked together, and then a person would drive them to plow the field.

And what we know about oxen is that if an ox was plowing by itself, that it could pull about 6,000 pounds. But when an ox was yoked to another ox and they became a team, they could pull 15,000 pounds together. And when the two oxen were related, they could pull about 18,000 pounds together. What that means is that two are better than one.

Two can do more than one can do by themselves. And Jesus, in painting this picture is saying that marriage is two people joining together, he's saying, you work together, you plow together, you become a team, and together you can achieve more than you can achieve by yourself. Now, this isn't a hard concept, and it's one that most of us understand intuitively. We know that when we work with somebody, especially somebody in our life, that that we can do more than we can achieve by ourselves.

But here's the challenge of this picture, and that is unlike this little video where there was a person directing the oxen in a direction, if there are only two, what happens if you're yoked together and one wants to go one direction and one wants to go another direction?

Well, you start to pull and have a push-pull. You don't go anywhere and you start to chafe because this yoke that's on you will dig into your shoulder as you go one direction and the other goes a different direction. And this is one of the reasons why if you're single, it's important that if you're considering dating somebody, marrying somebody, that you understand.

One of the images that's used in the New Testament about marriage is this idea of being yoked together. Here's what Second Corinthians 6 verse 14 says, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?"

Certainly, that has a broader application than just marriage. But part of what this is pointing to is that if you think you're going to marry somebody who has different values, a different horizon than you, and you won't end up chafing with one another, that's not true either. You will conform, they will conform, or you will constantly be at odds. And so, one of the commitments you can make if you're single is to say, I'll only date somebody who shares my values, who shares my horizon.

And spiritually, that doesn't mean that you're saying I think I'm better than. But it says I don't want to be tied to somebody who doesn't acknowledge God the way that I acknowledge God in my life. And you make that decision before you're dating because once you're dating, you get into the whole, he's so cute, her eyes, they are so blue. You make the decision and say, I understand that this is why this is taught this way in the Bible because it matters.

Now, once you're married, the idea of working together is the idea of saying, how can you support one another? How can you help one another? In fact, in the Old Testament in Genesis two, there's a phrase that says God created man and then he created woman.

And do you know what it says that the woman is to be for the man? It says that she's to be a helper. The old King James says a helpmate, which who knows what that means exactly. But the idea of a helper, some people have heard that and they say this feels a little gender insensitive today. But the idea is that God actually calls himself a helper, and uses the same Hebrew word in his way of helping humanity. And so, this isn't a gender thing, the woman is like this helper, but it's acknowledging that we are made to complement each other.

Notice, even in Matthew 19, what does it say that God made them? What? Male and female. We bring different things to the table that help one another be better and do things better than we can do them alone. And so, God's design is that there's a help, there's a way of partnering that helps the other person become and do things that they can't do by themselves.

In fact, in Ecclesiastes chapter four, this is said very explicitly, verse nine and following it says, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."

The picture that you will be stronger when you're partnered and that is part of Jesus' picture here when he says the two will be joined together. And so, what that means beyond just saying I'll support, I'll help, even if it feels like a protracted season, is that you won't just make unilateral decisions. You won't say, I'm making this decision, and that is my decision because that creates chafing. But instead, you'll come together and say, how is it that we can have the same horizon?

Certainly, if you are in a place of pulling when your spouse isn't able to pull, you know that that can be exhausting but it's also part of the design that when you're not able to keep going, your spouse can. If your spouse is resistant and just standing and has no desire to move, that might be a different story. But that is the picture, that you're yoked with somebody and the two of you can pull together and move things together over time.

And here's one of the dangers that I see, and that is people usually date and marry because they enjoy each other, and then they get married. And what happens is they can easily become business partners more than romantic partners. Does anyone know what I'm talking about? What I mean when I say business partners is that what you do is you start saying, listen, you can take care of this, I'll take care of that, and then we'll meet again today at the end of the day, and we'll talk about tomorrow. We'll go do it all again. And we'll just keep churning and churning all of the work out until we get it all done.

If you have young kids, this can feel especially acute because there are so many things coming at you that it's like you take care of the kids over here, I'll take care of them over there. And it feels like you're yoked together and all you end up doing is achieving things, plowing together. In fact, when I'm honest about my marriage, I asked my wife if I could say this by the way, when we're honest about our marriage, we do really well plowing together, working together, and achieving together. We don't do as well playing together.

And that's why these two pictures are important together because shoulder to shoulder doesn't just mean that you're yoked together and you work together. There's also a picture here of something else. And this is turtle doves that are pictured, a pair of turtle doves. Some scholars think that this is turtle doves. Some have maybe a different take. But I did a little research on turtle doves and you can find some different things.

What is true about turtle doves is often they'll mate for life. There are some that say a different kind of dove if it's in view, may mate every spring with different ones. But whatever the case is, every year there's this sense of the male doing this little dance where he struts, and then the female pecks back at the male, as if to say, I accept you. I want to be with you.

Now, here's part of what's in view. By the way, I'm not going to demonstrate the dance for you, but I've heard Pastor George does it really well. Here's what I think is in view. Certainly, there was work together for the two turtle doves. The female would lay eggs, and they'd work together to nurse the eggs along and give their birds flight and all of that.

But every year, every spring, the two would come back together, even if they had mated for life, and they would go through their mating ritual again with the male strutting, and the female accepting. What they do is they play together, they enjoy one another, and they have fun. I mean, I don't know that it's fun, but, you know, it appears like it is.

What would happen to those of you who are married if every year you said, what would it be like to have fun like we did when we first got together? Do you think that would have a positive impact on your romance and feelings shoulder to shoulder, or do you think that would just be a wash? Jesus, I believe used these words very intentionally when he said "joined together" knowing that people would know the idea of a yoke of oxen and a pair of turtle doves.

For some of us, it's easy to work together and for some of us, maybe it's easier to play together. We need the word to say be partners in life, work with one another, don't let the other person be alone in trying to raise the kids or take care of the finances, or take care of the house or whatever it is you're at. But some of us need this word about playing together and saying what would it look like to go back and pursue one

another and remember what it was like to strut and peck on a fence in order to connect deeply.

See some of us, what we'll do is we'll exclude the idea that our spouse and we could ever find anything fun to do. Maybe it's years of we have our own things. And certainly, there's some legitimacy to saying, I do this, you do that, I enjoy this, you don't. But sometimes part of playing together is saying, what would it look like to enter into the same space where we would journey together, be shoulder to shoulder on some of our joys in life?

Maybe for some of us, it's really to not kind of resist what our spouse finds enjoyable. And I know some of you are saying, well, we have kids. We can't find any time to do anything. I mean, kids, it's our whole world. But let me just ask you, how many people do you know who when their kids are grown and gone, look at each other and say, we have nothing in common because all they did was plow and they didn't play together along the way.

Now, sometimes you need to work together before you can play together. If I come home at the end of a day and my wife's mid-project and I say I have a great idea, let's go do something fun, drop your project, let's go. That doesn't land very well. It's much better if I say, hey, I was thinking about this. Can I help you finish whatever is on your agenda so we can get to this? So, sometimes we need to work before we play. But these two things are part of the elements of having a shoulder to shoulder relationship where we plow together and we play together and we can't lose track of either one.

But here's what I want you to also get, and that is in the Bible, the wisdom that Jesus gives here about relationships isn't just limited to this simple idea of try harder to be shoulder to shoulder. Do you know one of the primary images that God uses for his relationship with you and with me is that of marriage? Some of us may not understand that or be in a sense, married to Christ because we've never come to Jesus as our Savior.

But listen to these words in Revelation 19. This is toward the end of the Bible. This is how the Bible comes to a culmination in Revelation 19, verse 6. "Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride

has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.)"

See, the lamb, Jesus Christ here, who was slain so that those of us who believe that he paid the price for our sinfulness with God, the picture that God gives is of a wedding, not just of us somehow transitioning into some future space.

Here's the implication of this. Have you ever been to a really fun, happy wedding? It's a party, and it should be because you're celebrating something. Here's what God is saying. The culmination of all things is when Jesus Christ is the bridegroom and those who believe in Jesus Christ have a relationship with God, through Jesus Christ, are the bride. It's a party.

And here's what else is so cool about this, and that is what is true about the lamb, Jesus Christ as a bridegroom, and that is that He pursues you and pursues me when we don't pursue him. And He loves us when we haven't loved him back. And here's why that's so helpful when it comes to marriage because I know right now some of you are sitting here, especially if you're in a marriage, where right now you say, I'm working, I'm doing all the pulling. My spouse doesn't pull in the same direction or I've tried to play, and they just are into their own thing.

How does Jesus' wedding help me in this? And I wish I could say that if you do what Jesus did, then your marriage and your romance would just be perfect. But that isn't exactly what's at stake here. Marriage is intended to point to the reality of God's love. So, when you and I understand God's pursuit of us, what it means is we can pursue our spouse even when they're not shoulder to shoulder with us.

Certainly, this passage addresses divorce. We'll talk about that. So, there's a time to say they're never pulling in the same direction, this isn't sustainable, but in most cases, the issue isn't that you just need to try harder to get your spouse to do more. The issue is coming and saying, how can I pull in your direction? How can I bring joy and celebration to bear in our life?

If the wedding of the lamb and the culmination of all things is a party, a celebration, what it means is your marriage, your wedding, and your romance is intended to be enjoyable and fun. And that is freeing when you understand that is the picture. And when you or I say, okay, God, I am going to choose to be shoulder to shoulder to

work together and play together, not just so that they'll give me more, but instead, as a representative or imitating your love for me, you're able to give more.

I know one of the things that don't work in marriage is if you say, well, I'll give 50 and you give 50 because you know what happens? Your perception of 50 and your spouse's perception of 50, they're not the same thing. Do you know what works? I'll give 100, you give 100, I'll give everything I have. You give everything you have.

You can't control what your spouse does. But what you can do is say, I want to partner with you, pull in the same direction. I want to celebrate what we have together, just as God with the wedding of the lamb will celebrate me when I haven't deserved it. And that will bring healing to romance that feels like it is not shoulder to shoulder.

Let's pray together. God, I ask today that you would work in every situation that's represented here, whether it's bringing conviction to somebody single right now and open or wherever they are, just about the kind of person they would be with. God, whether the relationship is hard or easy, you would let your love for us, your giving to us, motivate us to give in our most important relationship. And God, even at this moment, I pray we'd be reminded that faith is not ultimately about what we do, but it's about what you've done through Jesus Christ. And that as we savor that, it would give us motivation for our most important relationships. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.