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**Title:** *Love for a Lifetime - Posture #3*

**Scripture:** Matthew 19

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We've been in this series that we've called *Love for a Lifetime*. I had somebody ask me the other day, "When is the talk coming where you're going to say, if you have kids, send the kids to Kidzburgh?" I said, actually, there isn't one in this series. And if you've been around, you know, sometimes we'll say that.

I want to just say this. We have an awesome Kidzburgh program if you have kids. That is an awesome place for them to be anytime. But when I say that, and I'm not saying that today, when I say that, I'm not saying that the topic isn't appropriate for your kids. What I'm doing is saying there will be some elements that I don't want to introduce unless you want to introduce them to your kids.

I want you to choose when the conversation is. But if you have kids, the topics that we've talked about here, even when they seem like they might be mature topics, are actually pretty important because if you have kids. I can tell you that by the time they're in third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade, if not sooner, they are getting a worldview from TikTok.

And if you don't have them on TikTok, then they have friends who are on TikTok who are presenting a worldview to them that has something to say on every one of these topics. And the church needs to have a voice in that. And so, we try when the text that we're working through addresses things in a head-on way, to deal with them in a head-on way.

Today, we're going to continue just talking about what is the biblical ideal of romance. What we've done over these weeks is we've tried to drill into just a few concepts that are in Matthew 19. Matthew 19 is one of the places where Jesus interacts with some of his followers about divorce and remarriage. And I just know that over the years when I've looked at this passage, I've tended to look at it in terms of divorce and remarriage, which is part of the passage.

But there are some words here, some ideas here that Jesus presents that give us a picture, a vision of what romance can really be. And even when we're young or we get a little older, we have often a desire for romance. A desire to be connected in an intimate way with another human being. Certainly, this passage, a little later talks

about eunuchs. We stopped before we got there in the reading because I don't want to have to explain it every time. But if you've read through the rest of the chapter, it talks about eunuchs from birth, eunuchs that others have made, and then eunuchs by choice for the Kingdom of God.

And that's just acknowledging that not everybody maybe has that desire or some have chosen maybe not to make romance part of their lives. And that certainly is an honorable thing if that's where you find yourself. But for many, many people, if not most, there is a desire to say, I want to love and be loved. I want to be in a relationship that has a great intimacy involved in it.

And so, we've looked already at this idea of being face to face. This is in that little phrase "be united" that we saw. And then we talked about being shoulder to shoulder, which is the phrase "joined together," two different Greek words that use that. And today we're going to look at the phrase that has the idea of marriage or "be married."

The word marriage, you want to know what the Greek word is for that or what it means? Married. Last week we tried to drill down a little bit. This one's pretty straightforward. It means almost exactly what it appears to mean in our modern English rendition. Meaning, what is a marriage? It means two people make a commitment to one another in which they say, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, till death do us part, we will be together. And this was God's idea, I believe, from the beginning of Genesis, where God said, this is what we want.

Several years ago, Tiger Woods, a well-known golfer, had a car accident. And in the car accident, it became known that he had strayed multiple times from his marriage. Maybe some of you who are golf fans or read the news might remember this. And his wife at the time came out and smashed the back window of his car with a golf club. She said later she was trying to help him get out of the car. And evidently, this kind of led to the end of this marriage.

Then Nike came out with a commercial with Tiger Woods putting for a win. Here's what the campaign said just a couple of years after this. It said, winning takes care of everything. And there was a controversy at the time. You may not remember this, but people were saying, how could Nike say winning takes care of everything? Because clearly, whatever has happened here in Tiger's life, winning wasn't enough to overcome this. And there's certainly been a lot of things since that have come out.

Now, why do I tell you that story? Because the devastation that comes with the dissolution of a marriage is almost always more painful than anybody predicts or knows. And so, what I'd like to do here today is just talk about marriage in this passage in the Bible and what this really means. And to marry in the original language is the word "gameó." And it means to make a permanent, public, and pure commitment to somebody else.

We're familiar with commitments, at least contractual commitments in our society. And what a contractual commitment is, is something where you say I'll be committed to you or to this thing as long as it's good for me, and as soon as it's no longer good for me, then I'll search for a new provider. This is your relationship with your Internet provider, TV provider, or lawn care service. And what that means is you say, I am committed to my Internet provider until I have to do the negotiation every few years and threaten to leave to get them to lower their price.

And then if they don't lower it enough, I have to switch to the other Internet provider in order to get the lower price and package deal for two years. And then I have to switch back two years later. That is a contractual type of agreement. And the idea of this word is that marriage is not where you say I'm in this as long as it's good for me but you're saying I'm making a covenant with you before God that says I will be permanently and exclusively committed to you. That is the biblical ideal.

And so, I want to talk about these three elements of marriage. The idea is that it's permanent, public, and pure. So first, marriage is permanent. And in parentheses, I'm just going to say almost. Now, that's kind of an oxymoron. I realize that. And the reason I say this is because right here in this passage, you get Jesus talking about divorce and talking about Moses and a certificate of divorce and the hardness of heart. And so even in this passage, Jesus acknowledges, when he says that you're joined together, that you're united, that you become one flesh, these towering phrases, he says but there is a time when a marriage can be dissolved.

The exception that Jesus used has been really something that people have debated for a long time. Here's what he says. Verse eight, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." So, Jesus gives an exception clause.

Now, excuse just a little background here for a moment. But this is important for us to understand because the NIV, which we use here, makes a translation decision for you by saying sexual immorality. The Greek word that's used there is the word "porneia." The word means sex before marriage. It means fornication in some translations. And we know that this doesn't just mean marital unfaithfulness.

Now, this version of the name of this is the one that came out in 2012, 2011, whatever year that was. The one before that said marital unfaithfulness. So, they had gone even further into the doctrinal translation here. At least they say sexual immorality, leaving a little vagueness to this word. And the reason that I'm saying this is a lot of people think that the exception is adultery, but I think that the exception is actually different than that because the word adultery is used right in this passage "moicheia."

So, if Jesus had meant to say that the reason that you can divorce is because of adultery, and if you divorce without that reason, you commit adultery, he would have used the same word, but he used two different words. And the word "porneia" is either a word that narrows the scope or broadens the scope.

You say, okay, that doesn't help me, but here's why I say this. It narrows the scope because in the New Testament when somebody was given a certificate of divorce, even Joseph and Mary if you remember the story about Joseph and Mary, Joseph gave Mary or was going to give Mary a certificate of divorce and put her away. And the reason that was given is that he thought she had been unfaithful.

There was a betrothal period in Jewish weddings that was a period where if somebody was unfaithful, they could say, I'm out. But once the wedding happened, it was thought that they could not do this. And some people have read this and said because the text basically uses this in Matthew, and Matthew was written for a more Jewish audience, this is actually a more restrictive thing than even marital unfaithfulness because it's pre-marriage.

Now, that is not the view that I take. I believe that this text is actually broadening the exclusion because "porneia" is a word that I think really can communicate the idea of any sexually deviant behavior that's persisted over time. And this means that it can include physical abuse, withholding affection, cheating, pornography, and all kinds of dysfunction that get put into this. And I understand that even in saying that there's a lot of people who like to say, well, you know, my wife, my husband, they yelled at me a couple of times. And that fits in this category. And all I would just say to anybody

who reads this is that the idea of simply saying abuse, if it includes “porneia,” has to revolve in some way around a persistent, dysfunctional kind of behavior.

Now, why do I spend time digging into this? Jesus here is saying there is a time for divorce and even goes back and says Moses allowed you because of the hardness of your heart. But the original vision was different. And this isn't a natural way that we think about this. We tend to think about things a little less in terms of how God has put this together. We start to think about this by saying, in essence, that we are able to make a choice to just get out whenever we want. But the idea of marriage is to say, I will be in this marriage unless there's this exception or the unbelieving person. First Corinthians seven chooses not to dwell with me even to the end.

Somebody sent me something, and it said that the idea of marriage is that it forces you to stay together until you remember why you fell in love in the first place. Being permanently committed to somebody almost. Meaning except for Jesus' exception clause is a way of saying this is God's ideal of a covenant, not saying I'm in it for now, I'm in it until I find something better, but I'm in this for the rest of my life. So, marriage is permanent, almost.

Secondly, marriage is public. And I'm going to put in parentheses here, always. Marriage is public, always. Here in Matthew 19, this word carries the idea of something that was done in public. And the idea is carried in other places in the New Testament of a public gathering, a celebration, or a feast where the whole community came to gather to recognize that two people were committing their lives, covenanting their lives together.

And what happens a lot of times in our day and age is people will say, well, this is really something that's private. And what they mean by that is I'm going to marry you in my heart or something like that. Just so you know, I don't think that's really a thing, at least not in the word, in the Bible. And when that's the mindset, what somebody is actually saying is, I want you physically, but I don't want you socially, I don't want you emotionally, and I don't want you economically. I don't want all of that burden. So, let's have a private agreement that the two of us just have, and we marry each other in our hearts, and then we go about doing our thing.

Now, I'm not suggesting that there's never a time where you say the government piece of this and the God piece of this aren't necessarily on the same timeline. But

what I'm saying is, as soon as somebody says this is a private commitment that you and I make, they're not acting in the biblical sense of what marriage is.

I've tried in these weeks to have something that's really clear for those of you who are single. So let me say this to you. If you are single and somebody in your dating web says, you know, let's just get together now and we'll make it official later, run. Now, you may think that's too harsh, but here's why I say this. Because if they're only committed to you, not to God, not to God's ways, what will happen is sooner or later, somewhere down the road, the idea that the two of you can make it through anything will actually become something that isn't enough.

Ask almost any married person, and there will be some season where they said I stayed committed because I had a bigger commitment than just to you. And so, if somebody's commitment isn't to say, I want to follow God in the steps before marriage, then there's little chance that they'll want to stay in the marriage because of God. And now you are in a contract where as long as it's good for you and good for them, you'll stay in it. But as soon as it doesn't appear to be good, somebody says, I'm out. And so, marriage is public always.

And then finally, marriage is pure. And here's what I'm saying, absolutely, and what I mean by this in totality when I say absolutely. Hebrews 13 verse four says this about marriage. It says, "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral." By the way, the word "moicheia" and "porneia" are the same words used in Matthew 19.

So, Hebrews 13 says marriage should be kept pure. Now, when you go back to Matthew 19, what you get is the disciples, after Jesus says this about this exception clause, have this question. They say this, in verse ten, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry. Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given." And then he goes into this statement about the eunuchs here.

And what Jesus, I believe has done is he's set a standard that is so high that when the disciples understand what it is, they say, who could ever keep this? And Jesus had already taught the disciples in the Sermon on the Mount about looking at things. And so, he said, if you look at somebody in lust after that person, it's the same as if you commit adultery.

So, they're probably at this point saying, this is crazy. I shouldn't marry somebody because if it's not pleasing to me, then I can't get divorced. And if I get divorced, I can't look or think about somebody. Who can do any of this? In fact, probably some of us, if we're honest, are asking the same question right now. Here's what I believe is happening, is Jesus is raising the bar again on this law and convincing everyone that no matter where they've been, they need a savior.

See the law, meaning the standards of God, isn't just a technicality where you go, check, check, check. I've kept it. But Jesus always drives to the heart. And He says even if you've looked and thought about something else, even a single time, you're an adulterer in your heart. And what that does is it takes us to the grace of God and saying there's a God who has loved me, even when I haven't acted in an honorable way, is completely in my life.

That doesn't mean that you can just simply say, well, whatever, then it doesn't matter because Jesus is saying the best way for you to think about this is to say basically that you are making this commitment that is complete and total. Hebrews 13:4 with this language about letting marriage be undefiled is saying that what you're really called to do is to say, I am giving myself fully to this person.

And here's what's true, this starts before you even get married. This is another word if you're single. You may think, well, one day when I get married, I'll commit myself to that person. But here's what happens for a lot of people, and that is, they think that they'll do that, then they marry and realize that there are still some frustrations, and they bring with them some of what they've brought from the past. And then they bring hurt and devastation into the relationship because they're constantly saying that I have a need. I have something that isn't being fulfilled in this relationship.

What we want to do is understand that if you want to go out and run a marathon, unless you're already in great shape, running a marathon doesn't start with just the desire. It starts with saying, I'm going to start training ahead of time. Or maybe another way to think about this is when we say, well, I'll get pure when I get into a relationship. It's a little bit like opening your Christmas gift too soon or buying your own Christmas gift if you have kids.

You know what it's like when your kid asks for a gift or you have somebody in your life who asks for a gift. Imagine that you go out and say I'm going to get a great gift for

one of my family members, somebody I love, who's asked for a gift. And so, you get a gift and you go way above and beyond what they've asked for. And then the week before Christmas, they come home and they have bought an inferior version of what you have already bought for them. What happens inside of you at that moment? I'm not sure, but I wonder if that's a little bit of how God sees this area in our lives. Not with anger, not with disdain, but with a sense of saying, I offered you something so beautiful, so good, and what you did is you went ahead and opened this, got it for yourself, and tried to make this happen your own way, on your own timetable, and now you haven't experienced the beauty that I had for you.

I know what I would probably have done if my kids had gone out and bought their own gifts. I probably would have been like underwear and deodorant for you. And I wonder sometimes if that's how we often live, saying, I'm just going to pursue what I think I need. But here's what I know is true, and that is if you're in the dating scene thinking about this, you don't hope that you meet somebody in the next few months who says, you know, I've been with seven or eight people in the last year or two, and you'll do as number nine. What you want is you want to meet somebody who says, I've been saving it for you, I've been waiting, and I can't wait until we can do this in a way that is honoring to God.

And if you're married already, you may think, what's the harm in looking, thinking, or having some other thoughts that are in your head? But the harm is that what you're doing is instead of pursuing the relationship, you're letting some kind of thought life substitute for real intimacy. And so, the picture of marriage, again, is permanent. You can't end it without separating something. The idea of this one flesh is that when you are one flesh, you don't just separate. There's violence almost to the separation. It's public. And then it's this idea of pure.

But in Hebrews 13, there's something that shows us why this is sometimes hard in our lives today. In fact, I would guess the two of the hardest areas for any of us to bend our knees to what Jesus says are the area of our relationships and the area of our resources. Hebrews 13:4 says, "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral." Then it says this verse 5, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have."

Now that feels like a non-sequitur, right? Here's marriage, here's money. And then there's another non-sequitur. And here's what it is. "Never will I leave you; never will I



forsake you" is what this says. That's a quote from an Old Testament passage. What's cool, in the original language, even though this is translated never and never, there are actually five negatives here, which is a way for the writers of the original language to add emphasis. And so, it's not never will I leave you. It's never, no, never will I leave you. Never, no, will I leave you.

Now, why is that here with money and relationships? I think the reason it's here is what many of us do in our lives is we believe that our significance and our status and our security rest either in our relational world or in our resources. And so, what we do is we go through life saying, if I can get enough resources to take care of everything that I need, then I'm secure, I have status. Or if I have a relationship and the relationship is everything that I think I need, then I'm secure or I have status and significance.

And do you know what frees me, frees you from loading everything into our marriage, into our relationship status, into our resources? It's saying there's a God who has promised that he will never, no never, leave you, and he will never, never leave you.

And some of us are in heartbreaking relationships right now. We might even be assessing whether or not we have a biblical reason to step out of the marriage. And that's a good set of questions to ask. But what your heart needs more than even an answer to that is the assurance that God is at work in your life, and that He'll never leave you.

As you understand who God is in your life, what God has done in Jesus Christ in coming and becoming your Savior, if you've made that step of faith, what's happened is you have come to a point where you can say, I am free to love because my significance and my security is rooted in something so much better than how this relationship goes. And what that means is you don't have to fight to keep it if it isn't something that's worth fighting to keep or biblically required to keep. And you don't have to be defined by it in a sense if you say that this isn't going the direction that I want it to go.

See, the message of Jesus Christ, the inability to keep the law pushes us to say, I need a savior. And that very knowledge frees us to experience a little bit of what it is that we crave in human relationships. I started by just saying that these are important conversations and our world offers a different view. Do you know what our worldview is? Marriage is for a season, and until it's no longer good for you, you can get out.

Marriage is negotiable. It's just about your relationship status online or whatever it is that you decide or however you define it. You don't need a public declaration. It's pure-ish, you know, kind of in its thing. But as you see this word and its fullness in this text, it paints a picture.

My guess is even if you're a person who says, I'm not sure about faith, I'm not sure about God, I'm not sure that I like any rules or standards around anything, my guess is there's a piece of you that says, but what I really do want, if I'm not a eunuch either from choices made for me or choices I've made, that what you really want is you want somebody who will be committed to you through highs and lows, through good and bad, better or worse, richer, poorer, sickness, and health. And ultimately there is a God who is doing that for you. And that is the picture that God wants us to live out in our human marriages. And you and I can live that out better when we live in the fullness of what God has done on our behalf.

Let's pray. God, I know that in any gathering this is an area with a lot of pain for a lot of reasons, even in good marriages, there are always some things that could be better. And God as we're gathered this weekend and thinking about what it is to be arm in arm, to make a commitment that says our arms are locked, whatever we face, wherever we're going, I pray that the picture, the vision of it that you have would be captivating and motivating and freeing rather than our culture's definition around what a relationship is. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Have a great weekend.