

Fireproof Your Marriage – Song of Solomon 2:15

Introduction: In our study of Matthew, we have come to a section in chapter 19 that many people find controversial. I do not so much think of it as controversial as much as I think of it as relevant. **Matthew 19:1-6 (NIV)** reads, ¹ “When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. ² Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. ³ Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?” ⁴ “Haven't you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' ⁵ and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”

I'm going to be talking about how to fireproof your marriage this morning and wanted you to know that I've taken a lot of my content from a sermon that was preached by Michael Catt. Michael is the pastor of Sherwood Baptist Church, Albany, Georgia - the church that produced the movie I am basing this message upon today.

Now I usually don't promote movies from the pulpit. In fact, we preachers usually stand up in our pulpits and gripe about Hollywood. But this is something positive, and I am promoting this movie because first of all, it isn't from Hollywood, and secondly, I have already seen it.

“Fireproof” will premiere this weekend in theaters all across America. It is the third movie that has been produced by the Sherwood Baptist Church of Albany GA. Yes, I said it was produced by a church! Can you imagine what happened in that conference when that idea was brought up?

Member: I make a motion that we make a movie.

Moderator: You want to do what? How much money are you talking about?

Member: I figure we'll need about a half a million dollars.

Well, they did make three movies. The first two were produced with budgets totaling just over \$120,000, but grossed over 10 million dollars at the box office.

But for this church, it's not about the money – it's about changing lives. Senior Pastor, Michael Catt said “We have a goal of touching the world from Albany GA.” And Jim McBride, the Executive Pastor of the church

said, *“This is a church making a movie for the church.”* He said he hopes that churches across the nation will use the movie for outreach.

In fact, I want to do just that. We need to start a class for anyone who wants to fireproof their marriage. Why?

Because, let’s face it: Marriage and the traditional family in America is in trouble. Did you know that among more recent marriages, the divorce rate among Christians is as high as it is among non-believers?

For a lot of folks, divorce as an acceptable and justifiable solution to marriage difficulties. But it’s not God’s solution. God does allow divorce under certain circumstances. But what has happened today is that people have bought into the lie that marriage is an old-fashioned institution that needs to be adapted or done away with to fit the changing times. But I want you to know that when marriage is no longer compatible with the culture in which we live, it’s not the institution of marriage that needs to change, it’s the culture that needs to change. This movie won’t change the culture by itself, but I believe it will have an impact.

In “Fireproof,” Caleb, a fireman and Catherine Holt, a public relations director at a hospital have been married for seven years. They were once in love, but they’ve grown apart and find themselves headed for divorce. There are tension and arguments in every encounter. They point fingers at each other and exaggerate one another’s shortcomings to a fault.

In this clip, Catherine is talking with some of her friends and co-workers about problems in their marriage, while Caleb is doing the same with a fellow fireman. **Show Clip – Session 1**

1st Woman: *“Honey, I agree with you. You gotta get out. He doesn’t deserve you.”*

2nd Woman: *You can say that again. A real man’s gotta be a hero to his wife before he can be to anybody else, or he ain’t a real man.*

3rd Woman: *Catherine, do you need a place to stay? I can’t imagine living in the same house with that man.*

1st Woman: *That’s right girl! Stand your ground. Make him respect you. If there’s one thing a woman deserves...*

Caleb: *It’s respect. That’s the issue. That’s the problem. Our marriage has failed. She shows me no respect at all. And the saddest part of it is...*

Catherine: *He doesn't have a clue/ He thinks our marriage has been fine for the most part.*

Caleb: *Our marriage was fine until this year. Now all of a sudden, she goes off the deep end.*

Fireman: *Do you really think this happened all of a sudden?*

Caleb: *I don't know what to think. I don't understand her. She's emotional about everything. She's so easily offended and way too sensitive.*

Catherine: *(Crying) And he's so insensitive, you know. He doesn't really care about how I feel. He doesn't listen to me. Even if I say it over and over and over again...*

Caleb: *And then she starts nagging me and saying I don't listen to her...or something like that. It drives me crazy. I feel like I'm going....*

Catherine: *Insane! You know, he doesn't understand my needs. I feel like we're completely and totally...*

Caleb: *Incompatible. She's probably whining to her friends and making me sound like a criminal. I can see them all right now, crying and having some sort of...of group hug..*

All women: *(Group hug) It will be all right sweetie. It's gonna be alright. We'll get through this.*

Fireman: *So you think it's past the point of no return?*

Caleb: *I don't have a reason to return.*

Maybe you are here today, and you're dealing in some way with the tragedy of divorce or a failing marriage. And you've got questions about how to survive or how to avoid repeating the mistakes of my parents?

Because marriages are in trouble and because people are searching for solutions, I want to try to give you some answers from God's Word today. I want to communicate to you that divorce, though it is a solution, is not the only solution. Divorce may be an easy way out, but it's not the only way to deal with a troubled marriage.

I know we live in a day when many couples get married with no intention of keeping their vows. In many circles, marriage isn't seen as a life-long covenant-based commitment any more, but rather a convenient arrangement, or a contract that can be broken very easily. Instead of saying "*till death do us part,*" couples say "*as long as our love shall last.*"

Ruth Graham was once asked if she ever considered divorcing Billy. She responded, "*Murder yes, divorce no.*" At least some people still believe that a marriage is forever.

But seriously, there is nothing more powerful today than a Christian home built on Christian values. A powerful home is a home where Christ is the head, and where each other's needs are valued above one's own.

I want to read you a passage that will help explain why so many marriages are in trouble today. In **Song of Solomon 2:15 (NIV)** we read, "*Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom.*"

You might be asking, "*What does that have to do with marriage?*" Well, when we talk about "*little foxes,*" we're not talking about Jimmy and Susan's grandkids. This passage is referring to the little foxes that get into vineyards to feed on the grapes and destroy the grape vines, and the gardeners have to prop up the branches so the foxes can't reach them.

So, think of the "*little foxes*" as things that can creep into a marriage and destroy relationships. It only takes little things to come in and destroy something great. Most marriages fall apart because little things become big things.

Philippians 4:8 says that we are to think about positive things that are "*true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy*" But too often, we dwell on the negative things that are impure and unhealthy. So we constantly have to prop up the good thoughts, or the little foxes will come in and eat them up. What are the "*little foxes*" that can creep in and destroy a marriage? First, there is:

1. The Non-communication Fox. I can't say enough about the importance of communication in a marriage. Before I perform a wedding, I always try to counsel with the couple. Before the very first wedding I ever performed. I told the couple to always keep the communication lines open, and even put that in their vows. Several years later, I received a phone call from the husband, telling me that they had gotten a divorce. He said, "*You told us to keep the communication lines open and we didn't do it.*"

One report I read said that the typical married couple only spends four minutes per day in meaningful conversation with each other. The only way your spouse can know your feelings is to communicate with them. They can't see your heart or read your mind. But don't just talk about what happened at work, or about what all needs to be done around the house, take time to communicate values or pray and talk about spiritual things.

Another little fox that can creep into a marriage and ruin it is:

2. The Disrespectful Fox. When you're out in public, how do you treat your spouse? Do you build them up or tear them down. Are you praising them or putting them down. What about at home, in private? Do you speak kindly to your mate, or do you treat them like a piece of furniture. If we're as disrespectful to our friends and co-workers as we are to our spouse, we'd be lonely and out of a job. We need to regain the sense of mutual respect for each other. If we don't that little fox of disrespect will eat up the marriage. Then there's:

3. The Discourteous Fox. The word "*discourteous*" has the word "*court*" in it. Do any of you remember when dating was called "*courting*." When a man "*courted*" a lady, he was a gentleman. He opened the door for her, allowed her to go first, and pulled the chair out for her. He was a perfect gentleman in all circumstances. Those were great days of valor, when the man threw his coat across the mud puddle for the lady. Those days when women were women and men were men. Everybody understood that and weren't ashamed of it. Those days were when women were proud of their femininity, and taught their daughters the same. And men were proud of their masculinity, and there was a respect and courtesy between the two.

But today that has changed. Today, it's more like everyone for themselves, and instead of pulling the chair out for her, he'll pull the chair out from under her.

"*Court*" has another meaning. When there is no courtesy, the divorce court becomes an easy option. The "*little fox*" of discourtesy can turn what started out as a beautiful courtship made in heaven into a divorce courtroom from hell. The little fox of discourtesy opens the door for bigger things to come along.

Other little foxes that can eat up a marriage include:

4. The Gripping and Complaining Foxes. Now before you men start punching your wives, I've known a few men who are pretty good at it too. The Bible calls it murmuring. Try to say that with a smile. You can't do it. Gripping and Complaining are like kissing cousins. And can easily become a part of our lives. If we don't get what we want, we just keep nagging until we either get it, or we get conked on the noggin. The result is the children learn this from their parents, so they also become whiners.

But listen, nothing eats away at a marriage like bad words and bad attitudes. When the home becomes a place where all we do is pointing out each others' flaws, the little foxes are eating away at the good things. Another little fox that creeps in is:

5. The Financial Fox. Money problems are one of the leading cause of divorce today. I'm talking about debt, out of control spending, and people living above their means. When you see the movie, you discover that this is one of the major arguments between Caleb and Catherine – the way they handle their money.

Preoccupation with money and a carefree attitude about money are two extremes of the same problem. Families have to learn the proper way to handle their finances, or it will become a little fox that will to eat you up! Another little fox is the:

6. The Ungrateful Fox - Besides *"I love you."* *"Thank you"* ought to be the most used phrase in the home. *"Thank you for all the meals you've prepared."* *"Thank you, for cleaning the house and ironing my shirts."* *"Thank you for taking care of me, loving me, and accepting me. "Thank you for just being you."*

But in a lot of relationships, *"thank you"* has almost been eliminated from their vocabulary. I know it's just a little thing, but hey, we're talking about little foxes. Instead of *"thank you"* all you hear in some homes is, *"It's about time you took out the garbage or did the dishes, or made up the bed."*

One more little fox. What about:

7. The Time Waster Fox – What about the things that occupy our time: hobbies, TV, video games, computers, and phones?

Now, this one really hits home because I know I spend way too much time in front of the TV. But at least I don't watch the trash that's on these days. Give me the days of *"Leave It to Beaver,"* where Ward Cleaver always made the right decision, and June Cleaver always wore a dress and pearls when she cooked supper, and Wally and the Beave were always polite.

TV programming has changed over the years, but even if it hadn't, even if it were a totally wholesome form of entertainment, it can still become a poor substitute for quality family time. For many, watching TV is easier than talking to each other.

Back during the blizzard, how many of you had to do without TV? We did, and it was wonderful. It was uncomfortable and awkward at first, but before long we started talking to each other, and playing games together, and working jigsaw puzzles together. And during those few days, we rediscovered each other because we weren't controlled by the TV.

The same is true for the other time wasters. They can easily become poor substitutes for family time, for talking, for sharing, and for passing down family values.

Now, I'm not suggesting we all give up our hobbies or throw away our TV's and computers. But I am suggesting that once in a while it would be good therapy for the family to get away from them and talk to one another and communicate as a family.

Elaine and I have been married for 34 years. We've had our moments like everyone else, but I can honestly say that 99.9% of the time, it's been wonderful. And that .1%, well, it was my fault. I was either inconsiderate, or wasn't communicating, or I was preoccupied with something else, or I was discourteous, or ungrateful, or disrespectful.

But through it all, we're best friends. We do almost everything together. I've learned to love her even more today that I did when we first got married. Now, I don't always like what she tells me, but she's honest and I appreciate that. She's honest because she loves me.

How can you fireproof your marriage? Here are a few suggestions:

1. Plan a weekly date night. Guys, court your wife the way you did when you were dating. For that matter, anything that was important while you were dating should still be important.

2. Be courteous. Men, open the door for your wives. Ladies, say thank you when he does something for you. Write each other notes. Give flowers or gifts for no reason other than "*just because.*" Be understanding of each other's personal needs. Let him play golf with the guys once in a while. Let her go shopping with the girls every now and then. And never criticize each other in public, but compliment each other always. Say "*Thank you*"

3. Never go to bed angry with each other. Someone wisely said that "*Nobody wins an argument...it's not a competition.*" Instead, settle your differences in a calm manner with the goal of a peaceful reconciliation.

4. Model the fruit of the Spirit in your home. Exercise love, joy and peace, patience, faithfulness, gentleness, goodness, kindness, and self-control. Guess what you're kids will learn?

5. Turn your finances over to the Lord. Learn the joy of tithing and giving yourself away.

6. Turn off the time wasters and have some real wholesome and spiritual conversation. Learn to give each other your undivided attention regularly

7. Worship and pray together so that you can put down roots and have stability in your home. Learn to love each other the way Christ loves you. Make a commitment to build a godly home, and it will go a long way toward fireproofing your home.

8. Make your home a Christian Home. If you are not a Christian, you need to give your heart and your home to Christ. There's a line in the movie where Caleb's Father says, "*Son, you can't give away what you don't have.*" Do you have Jesus in your heart today? Without Him, not only is your marriage on shaky ground, but your life is doomed as well. So, not only should you fireproof your marriage, but fireproof your life as well.