

Five Weeks to Live

Finding a New Best Friend In Your Wife

Unedited Transcript

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Good morning, men. Please open your Bibles to Genesis chapter 2. As you're doing that, let's go ahead and do a shout out. I'm really excited about this particular group because I have a long relationship with one of the leaders, Marc Rader, and the other leader is Charles Orr. These are the "Missile Men of Redstone". They work at the Redstone Arsenal in the Missile Defense Agency. They have been meeting weekly there at 11:05 in Von Braun II at the Arsenal for four years. They are really passionate about giving the engineering mindset at the Redstone Arsenal, an opportunity learn more about God. I wonder if you'd join me in giving Marc and Charles and these guys a very warm Man in the Mirror welcome. One, two, three, hoorah! Welcome, guys. We're really glad to have you with us.

I'll make an announcement about the Bible study reunion. The Bible study thirty year reunion will be how long from now? Two weeks from today. We're going to have a wonderful hot breakfast that someone's helped to sponsor. We're going to make a special effort to honor the 85 men who have been table leaders over the years. They've received special invitations. Everybody has been invited that we can think of. I would just ask you, is there somebody from the past at your table who you can think of who would be disappointed to hear that we had a reunion and they never got the word? Then maybe you could just reach out to them and invite them. Maybe just think of one person you could do that with. That'd be great. Look forward to seeing you then.

There's really nothing in the world I enjoy talking more about than marriage. The title of today's message in the series Five Weeks to Live is Finding a New Best Friend in Your Wife. Now, marriage is the most wonderful institution in the world. At the same time, it's extremely difficult to execute because of the fall. Let's just take a look at Genesis chapter 2 here. Let's look at verses 24 and 25. I love 23 too. The man said, "This is now bone of my bone and flesh in my flesh. She shall be called woman for she was taken out of the man." I just love that. I was holding my son one time when he was a little kid and remembering this verse, I said, "John John, blood of my blood and flesh of my flesh and bone of my bones." He said, "Yeah, Dad. Gut of my guts."

Verse 24, "For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh." A mystery. "The man and his wife are both naked and they felt no shame." I love that.

We're doing this series Five Weeks to Live. My father-in-law is 91. My mother-in-law is 90 and they're both in nursing care. It's interesting because with however many weeks or months that they have to live, the older they've gotten, the more it is true that they only want to be with each other. That's what they want. They want to be together. If you had five weeks to live, then certainly you would want to take care of the spiritual side of your life. We covered that last week, finding a deeper personal relationship with God, the turning point of our lives is when we stop seeking the god or the gods that we

want and start seeking the God who is. That would be first base. Second base, though, is if you're married or your future wife, if you get married, would be to make sure that you are really in right relationship with your wife. Every man wants to have a great marriage and you can have one.

What's the problem? Oh my gosh, where do I start? What's the problem? Well, here's the problem with the problem. If you're trying to solve the wrong problem, you can only succeed by accident. It's just very easy to look at the data and come to the wrong conclusion. We need to make sure, if we're going to find a new best friend in our wife, that we're actually trying to solve the right problem. I believe this is the starting point: figuring out what your wife's greatest need is. What is your wife's greatest need? Because if you can meet your wife's greatest need, then you unlock something in the direction of finding a new best friend in your wife. What is a wife's greatest need?

Before we go there, though, let's just stop and think about your greatest need as a man. Every man, really, at the top of the outline for every man, and when I say every man, I mean almost every man, there's always exceptions, but it's the need to be significant. I want my life to count. I want my life to make a difference. I want to leave the world a better place. I want to do something with my life that's significant. I want to make a contribution. Let's just think for a moment about your greatest need. What is it that got you out of bed this morning? What juices you up? What amps you up? What ramps you up? Where do you get your passion from? That's your greatest need.

Now just think about the intensity with which you approach that greatest need. Now, watch this. Here's the flip. Your wife also has a greatest need and it's different than your greatest need. Watch this. She feels just as passionately about her greatest need as you feel about yours. Here it is. Genesis chapter 2 verse 18, the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Your wife's greatest need is for intimacy, to be able to sense at the deepest level that you know who I am and you accept me, that you care for me, because by nature, a woman is created to be with a man and a man is created to be with a woman. The man is sent off to do work and the woman is, by nature, designed to help the man. You just can't get away. Now, that doesn't mean that women don't go off to work and men don't nurture. The point is is that at the foundation is this desire, this need, for intimacy.

Now, we have a problem. The problem is the fall. In Genesis chapter 3 in verse 16, if you look there with me. For this reason, a man leaves his mother and father, united to his wife to become one flesh, but then we know that mankind fell. This is what God said to the woman as the consequence, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing. With pain you will give birth to children." Watch this, "Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you." Your desire will be for your husband, you see.

I want you to be very careful that you understand that this Hebrew word that translates desire, it is, according to Keil and Delitzsch, it is best understood as a longing, a desire bordering on disease. In other words, it's such a deep longing it walks right up to the edge of being a corruption, of being a disease because of the fall. Yeah, your wife's greatest need is for intimacy but it's a desire for you that literally borders on disease. It's very susceptible to corruption in the same way your need to be significant is very corruptible to corruption. You know you can get off track and make idols and want to be somebody instead of being something. Well, your wife's desire for intimacy, her greatest need, her desire for you, it can also be corrupted. You know this is true because you know her susceptibility to be hurt easily, you know her susceptibility to be feel jealousy, you know her susceptibility that you can manipulate her easily. She wants to trust you. She wants to give herself to you. She wants to love you. She wants to trust. You know that you can work her.

Your wife's greatest need is for intimacy and it's a desire that can be corrupted easily enough. How do we solve this problem? Well, we Ephesians 5:25 her. Ephesians chapter 5:25. We Ephesians 5:25 her. Go Ephesians 5:25 your wife. "Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her." There's this idea of giving yourself to your wife equal to the way Jesus gave himself to his family, the church. Giving ourselves to our spouses, Jesus, as the Christ, prophet, priest, and king, to give yourself sacrificially to your wife, to be her prophet, to be her priest, to be her king, to lead, protect, and provide for her.

Now, I said where do we start? There's so many things to talk about. I said if you're trying to solve the wrong problem, you can always succeed by accident. This is the problem that we want to solve in order to find a new best friend in our wife. That is how do we help meet her greatest need? We said Ephesians 5:25 her. Here's the way to do that. Here's the Big Idea for the day. **After God, but before all others, make your wife your top priority.** After God, yeah, but before all others, make your wife your top priority. Why? Because everyone else in your life is going to phase in and then out, even your children if you get lucky. After God, but before all others, make your wife your top priority. That's how we meet the greatest need of our wives.

What does it look like to be your wife's best friend? What does that look like? Well, don't be an engineer. Engineers like to fix things. Best friends don't try to fix each other.

I heard a great story, joke, really. There were these three guys and they all had committed terrible crimes and they had been sentenced to die at the guillotine. One was a priest, one was a lawyer, one was an engineer. The priest came to the executioner. The executioner said, "Now you have your choice. You can be guillotined, looking up or with your neck facing down." He said, "Oh, I'm going to go looking up." They put him in the place, the yoke, and the guillotine was released and came down and just before it touched his neck, the guillotine came to a stop. They said, "Well, we must let you go because obviously this is a miracle." Then they brought the lawyer in and they said, "How do you want to be guillotined?" He said, "Well, I think I'll go with what the priest did, that looked like a pretty good deal." He laid down and sure enough, the guillotine came down and just missed his neck. They let him go. They said, "We have to let you go. This is clemency." Well, then the engineer came and they put him down in the yoke and they said, "How do you want to go?" He said, "Well, put me facing up too." They did. He looked up and he said, "Oh, I see the problem."

In marriage, you can always see the problem, right? You have you, unlike anyone else, certainly unlike her, your vision is not 20/20. It's 20/15. You can see things that other people just can't see. You know how to fix her. She tells you a problem and you say, "Look, just all you need to do is this, this, that, the other and everything will be okay." She starts crying. No, that's not what it looks like to be your wife's best friend. What it looks like to be your wife's best friend is to understand that what she is saying, she is saying this. She is saying that, "If you will understand me and love me and spend time with me and listen to me, touch me, show me some tenderness, pray with me, if you do this, then I will respond. I will be your companion. I will be your helper. I will respect you. I will love you. I will support you. I will be your best friend." It's simple as that. It's really as simple as that, men. It's really as simple as that.

Now, this doesn't mean that every day goes great because you're going to have Billy Graham days. Billy Graham was once asked if he ever considered divorce and he famously said, "Well, we've never considered divorce. Murder, but never divorce." You're going to have Billy Graham days. Family system scholar Edwin Friedman says that no human marriage, in practice, does better than 70%. Well, if you take 70% of seven days, that's 4.9. Let's call it five out of seven days. Five out of seven days, you can be

best friends. Two days, you're going to want to strangle her and/or she's going to want to strangle you. "I can't believe that I was so stupid to marry this woman." You all have those thoughts. "What was I thinking?" You all have those thoughts a couple days a week.

Having a proper set of expectations is extremely important to being your wife's best friend. It's just not going to be a moving script. Well, actually movie scripts are so dark now. Let me say a movie script from 50 years ago. It's just not going to be like that. Plan for Billy Graham days. On those Billy Graham days, don't be an engineer. Don't say, "Let me tell you how to fix that." Just don't do that. Just let it go.

My wife and I have an arrangement that saved my marriage, I think. I let you be you and you let me be me. We both say it. we both feel that way. Really, I had to say it a long time until I really believed it, but that's okay. It's a habit. It's now a part of my worldview. You understand me and accept me and all these things, then I'm going to love you, I'm going to respect you, I'm going to be your best friend. How do we do that? How do we get her to sense that? Big idea: after God, but before all others, make your wife your top priority. Actually, this is the only thing you need to remember, the big idea. Everything we're saying rolls up into this. I'd love to have you remember everything I said but since that's not going to happen, try to remember this: after God, but before all others, make your wife your top priority.

Let's talk about some deposits that you can make into her emotional bank account in order to roll out more of this making her your top priority thing. The emotional bank account, just to review, I'm sure most of you have heard of it or all of you, the idea is that every human being has an emotional bank account into which we make deposits and from which we make withdrawals. You also have an emotional bank account and your spouse is making deposits into your emotional bank account, and occasionally, two days out of five, she's making withdrawals from your emotional bank account or maybe she's not but you're just you're on a tare and so you're accusing her, it just feels like a withdrawal.

Let me give a couple of examples how it works. You've had a bad day. Things haven't gone your way. You're angry. You're frustrated. You come home and you have a traditional way of letting everybody in your family know that you had a tough day and you don't want to be troubled by the problems of the family. You put the garage door down, you go in and you slam the door a little louder. Then, as you're walking over to your favorite chair, you let out a loud grunt imitating a large zoo animal, plop down in your chair, pick up a newspaper, rustle it real loud, sending the signal to my family, "I've had a rough day and I want to be left alone." Now, is that a deposit or withdrawal of your wife's emotional bank account? All right. You get the picture. That's a withdrawal.

Let's just say the next morning you just feel like such a jerk that you were such a bad guy the night before. You decide to bring your wife breakfast in bed. What's that? Not possible. What's that? That would be a deposit. She might be a little suspicious, by the way, but do it anyway. It's a deposit into her emotional bank account.

Let's just review some of the different deposits. I do a one hour deal on this, or at least I have in the past. I'm getting ready to do it again. In the book Man Alive, there's a chapter in there to love and be loved. These deposits, there are ten of them there. They're sort of fleshed out a little bit. The ones that would be important to know about, of course, would be to spend time together alone.

John deButts, when he was the chairman of AT&T, after he retired, he had a leg amputated and he would later tell a reporter, he said, "You know, it was interesting. In spite of all that money, all that power, all that prestige, all that influence, I had this leg amputated when I was retired. Do you know that not one person sent me a card, gave me a phone call or came by to visit? But there at my bedside, tending to my needs, day-by-day, was the woman that I had ignored for 30 years." Spend time with her alone. It's a huge deposit into her emotional bank account.

Words, encouraging words. I love the way you fix your hair. Have I told you lately how much I love the way that you are with our children? You're such a great mom. Thank you for keeping the house running so smoothly. Encouragement is the food of the heart and every heart is a hungry heart. Time alone, encourage her with words, physical touch.

There's just something so powerful about physical touch. I'm talking about non-sexual touching. Time for that too. Non-sexual touching, little pats, hugs, squeezes, sitting next to each other when you're watching TV, close enough so you're touching each other. It's like recharging a battery. You have to connect the whatever they call those things. There's Biblical precedence for this too where the woman that came up behind Jesus and all she wanted to do was touch the hem of the robe of Jesus. What happened when she did? Power flowed out. Physical touch is a tremendous deposit. I don't think I do it as often as I used to do it, but my normal practice is to, when I walk by my wife, Patsy, is just to reach over and lightly touch her head. By the way, the top of her head feels a lot different than the top of your head.

Physical touch, listening deeply without giving an overly quick reply. The normal way, at least for me in the early days, used to be my wife would bring up something, you know, a little spat that one of the children were having. I'd say, "Okay, okay, okay. Let me tell you what you need to do. Let me fix it. I'm the engineer." I learned this principle from Paul Tournier. Understanding Each Other is the book. The idea of not giving an overly quick reply and just listening deeply. I would resist the desire to give this overly quick reply. The most amazing thing happened when I did that. My wife began to open up and start talking about deeper things, deeper thoughts, inner feelings.

This just happened yesterday. She was wanting to talk about her 91-year-old father and 90-year-old mom. You can imagine there are quite a few problems. They're in nursing. Some things happened yesterday that were traumatic. Every day there's something happening that's traumatic. She mentioned the top of the outline and it would be easy then to move on to the next thing. Instead I said, "Well, gosh. How did that make you feel?" Wow, we had an unbelievable twenty-minute conversation. "How did that make you feel?" An unbelievable twenty-minute conversation.

Then, praying with and for your wife, of course, is always something that I'm going to mention. Praying with your wife. A friend of mine, Sean, in Bozeman, Montana, had a group of eight guys. He said one day, "How many of you pray with your wives?" Only one of them did so they decided to hold each other accountable and they did for a year. A year later, he sent me this note with the results and it was astonishing because the comments were like, "I can't believe how deeply we communicate with each other now. I can't believe how much of a better friend my wife is now," just all kinds of these very interesting comments because they were praying with their wives.

By the way, it doesn't have to be a long time. Here's what Patsy and I do. We pray for one to three minutes in the morning. I'm usually the one that prays. Praying out loud is not her thing. She'll do it but that's not her thing. She really would rather have me do it. Generally speaking, I do it. Every now and

then, I say, "Why don't you pray today," because I feel like it's one of those two out of seven days. That's not true. That just seemed to be out there for the taking so I took it. No, no. I just say, "Why don't you take it today?" One to three minutes. We pray, always pray for our children, of course, and our grandchildren. We pray about looking back and thanks and gratitude and then looking forward in supplication. Then we pray over meals together. We have dinner together usually and then we pray at dinner. It doesn't have to be a lot, you see.

Then, praying for her. On your table, again, we'll do this frequently from time-to-time, are these marriage prayer cards and I just encourage you, everybody maybe get one of these. You may already have it. That's great, but why don't you pick one up. Hey, who am I talking to? You, pick that up. Who doesn't have one? I dare you not to have one. I'm going to embarrass you in public. Seriously, if you have it for you already, why don't you think about somebody that you know that looks like they could benefit a little bit if they were to pray for their wife? You know, it's 68 words. It captures the essence of what the Bible teaches about marriage. We won't go over it any further than that today. That just covers the spiritual side. Those are a few deposits. I think just the biggest deposit of all is really just being her best friend, just say, "I want to be my wife's best friend."

This happened to me at the thirteen-year mark in my marriage when I realized that something was very amiss with our deal. We were just drifting. We were doing our things. We had kids. We were doing our things. I was doing my greatest need and she was doing her greatest need. She was directing that at nurturing children at the point because I was over there chasing a business dream. One day, I just remember praying, "God, what has happened here? I can remember when I first saw that woman walking down the street and I remember how my heart would thump and I would feel like it was going to pound out of my chest. I remember how my knees would wobble and my legs would feel like I was going to buckle." I said, "God, I want to have that feeling back again. What can I do?" God spoke to me. He said, "Why don't you make Patsy your best friend?" I said, "God, I'll do that, but God, I have a problem. I have no idea how to do that."

After praying for a couple weeks, the idea came to me one day. After the children leave the dinner table and go off to do whatever kids do, why don't you hang around at the dinner table for about twenty minutes and just talk, listen without giving an overly quick reply, but just talk about not balancing the family checkbook, not doing family business, but just really getting to know or re-know this fragile flower that has been entrusted to you, vulnerable to a desire for you that borders on disease. Why don't you just spend time? I did. I started hanging out at the dinner table. You know what? Praise God she stayed. It was just a few months later, one day I came home from work and she had brought me a present. It was a little plaque. I have it on my desk. I was looking at it this morning. It says, "Happiness is being married to your best friend."

Men, the party will be over soon. The crepe paper will be drooped low. The party hats will be strewn all about the room. All of your golfing buddies will move down to south Florida to live in little condominium pods and drive around on streets made for golf carts. There are only going to be two rocking chairs sitting side-by-side, one for you and one for her. Five weeks to live, doesn't it make sense to invest today in the woman who's going to be sitting next to you then, the woman who's going to say when she's 90 years old, "I just want to be with Ed." The Big Idea today is this. **After God, but before all others, make your wife your top priority.** If you're in a reset mode on this, maybe you're divorced, maybe you are thinking about getting a divorce, maybe you're separated, whatever the situation, I pray God will give you the opportunity to be able to execute on this big idea. After God, but before all others, that you would be able to make your wife top priority.

Let's pray.

Our dearest Father, this is the highest order of human relationship, marriage, and there isn't even a close second. Father, we pray with five weeks to live that we would be able to find a new best friend in our wives by really making her a top priority. I just pray that you'd help each of us figure out how to apply this idea to our own lives, be there for our wives or our future wives. We ask this in your loving name Jesus, amen.