

HIGH FIDELITY – FAITHFULNESS ACROSS THE BOARD

SUBJECT How do you measure faithfulness in marriage?

COMPLEMENT A common (and overly simplistic) measurement of faithfulness in marriage is keeping the seventh commandment: not committing adultery. A more comprehensive and useful measure of faithfulness judges fidelity to all the clauses of the typical marriage vows. A look at “fidelity” in each of the seven clauses of the marriage vows helps identify:

- Goals for growth in marriage.
- Identification of common struggles.
- Diagnosis of the root causes for infidelity.

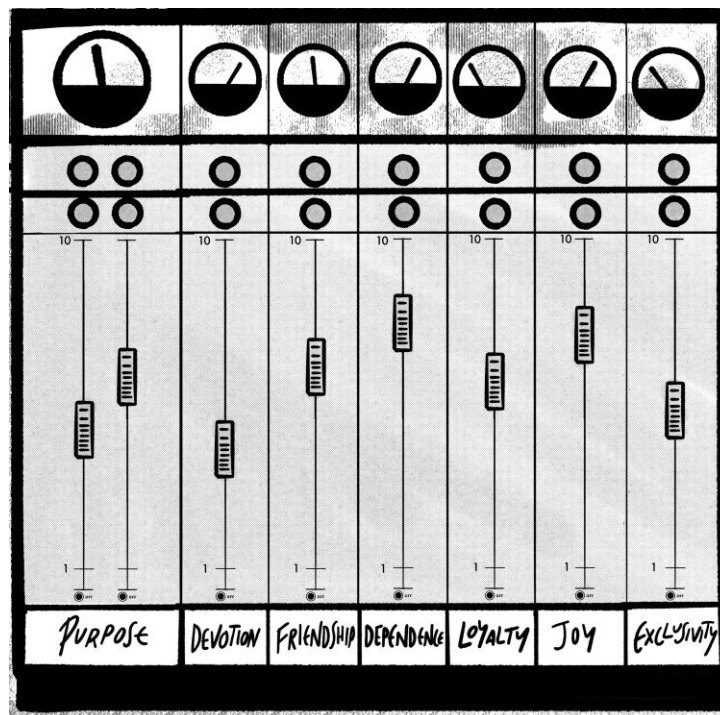
IDEA What does your marriage “sound” like?

I. INTRODUCTION

A. What does your marriage “sound” like?

B. *After a person’s personal relationship with God, marriage is the single most important commitment two people can make. Why?*

C. **Overview of “High Fidelity.”** Observe 7 faders on a mixing board. Each represents one of the clauses of the marriage vows. It is unlikely that anyone has them all turned up to “10.” In this series, I utilize this to illustrate how the vows are inter-dependent and help us consider what often goes both right and wrong in marriage relationships.



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D. The Vows and an Overview: The outline for the series follows the typical marriage vows:

*I GROOM, take you BRIDE/ to be my wedded wife,/ to have and to hold/ from this day forward,/ for better, for worse,/ for richer, for poorer,/ in sickness and in health,/ **to love and to cherish**,/ according to God's holy ordinance,/ as long as we both shall live."*

- 1. THE TRIUNE US (PURPOSE).** The first clause: "*I GROOM, take you BRIDE/ to be my wedded wife... according to God's holy ordinance...*" highlights marriage as a holy calling in which both the husband and the wife are each individually stewards of the corporate union, **which belongs to God**. A biblically grounded marriage will reflect a humble attitude and conviction that our marriage belongs to God; it is neither mine nor my spouses to "spend" as I wish. **A good marriage will crush self-centeredness.**
- 2. DEVOTION.** In the second week, we look at the second clause of the vows: "*...to have and to hold/ from this day forward... as long as we both shall live.*" We see that all that you own is shared. There is no one and no thing that you consider above your spouse or exclusively your own. It is attachment in every area such that your spouse feels secure and never doubts your love for them. **The test of DEVOTION is how you handle conflict.**
- 3. FRIENDSHIP.** Wanting the best for your spouse presupposes **you** as his or her best friend. "*... For better, for worse...*," you go through it together. Constancy, transparency, and common passion define a great friendship. As sinners, we must work to value that friendship over ourselves, putting down criticism, contempt, and defensiveness. **A friend loves at all times.**
- 4. DEPENDENCE.** Marriage "for richer, for poorer" reflects a commitment and trust of one another when it comes to money and material things. We also learn that true riches are not found in material things, but in people, especially lifetime relationships with family and friends. DEPENDENCE upon one another reflects our dependence upon the Lord. ***It is the blessing of the Lord that makes rich, and he adds no sorrow to it.*** (Proverbs 10:22)
- 5. LOYALTY.** When a couple lives in LOYALTY to one another, they reflect the gracious, compassionate, steadfast **hesed** love of God. Each wants the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual best for the other, while being gracious and sympathetic for the weaknesses and changes that time inevitably brings to a person and to a marriage. **In a life-long marriage, "till death do us part" – and every change until then - is an accepted reality.**
- 6. JOY.** The clause "to love and to cherish" in the typical marriage vows echoes Ephesians 5:22-27 and must be understood in light of the Bible's unique responsibilities given to husbands and wives. True love and the JOY of marriage results from God's created design for men and women, husbands and wives. **Let your marriage reflect true love and the JOY which follows it.**

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7. **EXCLUSIVITY** (sexual faithfulness) is affected by our fidelity to all the other marriage vows: PURPOSE/ TRIBUTE, DEVOTION, FRIENDSHIP, DEPENDENCE, LOYALTY, and JOY. When we struggle in those other areas, we will find it increasingly harder and harder to remain faithful to our vow to remain sexually faithful. Conversely, true sexual fidelity enhances the quality of all of the other vows. **Let the marriage bed remain undefiled.**

II. GOALS OF HIGH FIDELITY

1. **Reminder (2 Peter 1:12).** We all drift and need occasional reminding about biblical marriage and things we already know. This short series will do that.

2 Peter 1:12–13 - ¹²Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities [regarding salvation, but the principle applies to marriage as well], though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. ¹³I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder...¹

2. **Identify and overcome barriers.** Each spouse's personality, personal history/ experiences/ relationships, culture, sin nature, spiritual warfare, even God's providence – **often result in personal habituated selfishness developed in response to these things.** Married partners, individually and jointly, must work to overcome personal habituated selfishness to keep their covenant promises. This series will help you identify those barriers and habituated self-centered responses.
3. **Common marital struggles.** Though not comprehensively, this series will seek to integrate practical insights into the various lessons. All married couples struggle in areas such as:
- Knowing **and submitting to** God's purpose for marriage.
 - Love versus selfishness.
 - Attitudes of honor versus manipulation.
 - Communication (Honesty and openness)
 - Conflict.
 - Oneness and sexual intimacy.
 - Age and adapting to the stages of life.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*, 2016. Crossway Bibles.

1 - HIGH FIDELITY – Purpose/ The Triune Us

SUBJECT	What is the “triune us” and why is it a key factor in a marriage?
COMPLEMENT	Because marriage was created by God, your marriage is a holy calling to which you are both individually, and as a couple, stewards. We are responsible to God not only for how we treat our spouses, but for the quality of our union. A biblically grounded marriage will reflect a humble attitude and conviction that our marriage belongs to God; it is neither mine nor my spouses to “spend” as I wish.
IDEA	A good marriage crushes self-centeredness.

I. INTRODUCTION

II. WHAT IS THE “TRIUNE US” AND WHY IS IT A KEY FACTOR IN MARRIAGE?

A. PURPOSE: FIDELITY TO THE TRIUNE “US.”

1. **VOW:** *“I (groom/ bride), take you (bride/ groom) to be my lawfully wedded (wife/ husband)... to live together according to the Word of God (or “according to God’s holy ordinance...”).”*

2. **PRINCIPLE(S):**

a. Marriage belongs to God; it is neither the husband’s nor the wife’s to “spend” as they wish.

b. Scriptures:

Genesis 1:26–28 - ²⁶Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” ²⁷So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Matthew 19:4–6 - ⁴[Jesus] answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, ⁵and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? ⁶So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

c. **A holy calling.** Based on the above Scriptures, marriage is **a holy calling** – both as individuals but more so **as a couple** - to God’s stated purposes, which can be summarized as follows:

(1) **Image.** As individuals **and as a couple**, you bear the image of God. In marriage, **your union** becomes a primary identity. (See also Ephesians 5:32 “Christ and the church.”)

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- (2) **Stewardship.** You are called to be stewards of that which God has given you and to “rule” it for his glory. Everything, including your marriage, is not yours own individually - or even as a couple. It all belongs to God.
 - (3) **Fruitfulness.** To be fruitful, bearing children as God gives ability. Your marriage is to be characterized by fruitfulness in other areas as well: Morally, spiritually, relationally, and as God gives ability, materially.
- d. **A Christian Marriage is a triune union:** Husband, wife, *and Christ*. Knowing that the “lord” is neither the husband nor the wife, but Christ, a Christian marriage is characterized by **humility, service, and sacrifice**. Neither husbands nor wives should seek the perfection in their spouse only found in Christ. Neither should they elevate their personal preferences as marital entitlements.
- d. **Biblical authority.** In a biblical marriage, devotion to the “triune us” pursues a conviction that you are under God’s authority and **the words of Scripture mean something**. They are meant to change you from a self-centered orientation to an other-centered orientation. The gospel frees you to love and trains you in love. Marriage is God’s perfect laboratory for change.

Therefore, *any* Scripture which speaks to godly behavior and relationships applies to marriage! For example:

- (1) **1 Corinthians 12:1-26**, which speaks of the diversity of members within the unity of the body of Christ. “If the foot says, “because I am not a hand...but now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as he desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be?” (vv. 15, 18-19).

How might this apply to a marriage relationship?

- (2) **Romans 12:1-21**, which encourages us to “not think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (v. 3), and defines love: “Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good, be devoted ... in brotherly love, give preference to one another in honor...” The context defines love as diligent, fervent, serving, rejoicing, persevering, praying, generous, hospitable, and so on.

How might this apply to a marriage relationship?

- (3) **Many other texts!** Study these on your own and consider them in terms of love in marriage: Matthew 5-7, 1 Corinthians 13, Ephesians 4:17-5:21, Philippians 2:1-15, Colossians 3 (pretty much any passage of Scripture!).

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3. **MAIN/ MASTER:** The HIGH FIDELITY MIXER illustration shows PURPOSE/ TRIUNE US as a master controller. An increase/ decrease here will affect all the rest.

Notice also that this fader has **two sliders**. Both the husband and the wife each have individual relationships with the Lord. Yet as a couple they have a corporate “slider” as well. There are lots of variations!

Based on the illustration of the mixer board, what are some general conclusions?

4. **ANTITHESIS:** *What would you say is the antithesis of godly purpose, or fidelity to the “triune us?” Give ONE specific example of what a marriage looks like when this fader has been turned down too low, or has been cancelled?*

B. HELPFUL SIDEBAR 1: A MERCIFUL MARRIAGE

Few Christians would argue with the importance of the “Triune Us.” Our struggle is that you live with a sinner (both the one wearing your clothes and the one wearing your ring)! Mercy and forgiveness are essential qualities.

1. **You received mercy.** Every sin you commit in your marriage is primarily against God. So, our primary status and identity is that of a forgiven sinner who has received mercy from God.
2. **Eye-log.** Our great handicap is that we often **see ourselves as less a sinner** than our spouse. For example...
 - “I have a right to be angry.”
 - “I can’t believe you did that... again!”
 - “It’s about time!”

Moral superiority = smugness \neq mercy.

3. **Better than an enemy.** God relates to his enemies (sinners) with mercy and forgiveness. He expects us to do the same with our spouse... who is not the enemy!

Luke 6:27–28 - ²⁷“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

If we are to love our enemies, we must certainly love our spouse who is not the enemy!

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4. **Agape.** True love is defined by words like longsuffering, forbearance, compassion, grace, patience, and kindness. All these describe the loving response to someone else's sin.

Colossians 3:12–14 - ¹²Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

5. **THREE QUALITIES OF A MERCIFUL MARRIAGE.** Dave Harvey (*When Sinners Say "I Do"*) describes three qualities of a merciful marriage:

- (1) **Kindness.** "Kindness is applied compassion in thought, word and deed." It **does not respond sinfully to someone else's sin.** Kindness is caring for someone in spite of another's sinfulness. It is not conditioned upon their repentance. We can do it because our heart has been tenderized by the gospel.
- (2) **Covering.** We **cover their sin with mercy** and make it a non-issue. We don't say it is not sin, rather we choose to overlook it with a gospel orientation: *Jesus already paid for their sin, I don't have to make them pay for it too.*

Proverbs 19:11 - ¹¹Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.

1 Peter 4:8 - ⁸Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

We do not want to enable sin, but so often **the issue is not sin but personal preference.** They are not like us! This does not mean we never confront (more in future lessons) serious sin, but recognize that "the confrontation of a merciful person carries more weight than a harping nag."

Covering is also not the same as stuffing or withdrawing! Stop ruminating and forgive them!

- (2) **Patience.** This issue is not one of sin, but weakness. Their humanity is showing! For example: *Forgetfulness. Fearful of heights. The ravages of age (or having children). Doesn't like watermelon. The husband may never communicate the way she wants. She may never be as organized as he.* Your spouse is not a burden but the person whose burdens you bear!

1 Thessalonians 5:14 - ¹⁴And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.

In mercy, *the goal is not to manipulate change in our spouse, but to obey Christ* who showed mercy and forgave us. What we have received, we must share, and if we don't share it with the third party in the "triune us," we can hardly say we are sharing it at all.

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III. HOMEWORK

A primary aspect of the “triune us” is that of a couple should reflect the “trinity” of the Godhead in their marriage. Without negating your individual identities, over time a couple assumes more of a corporate identity. This week have a conversation about this.

- *What does that look like at “street level” (everyday life)?*
- *Has your marriage begun to look like one person more than the other?*
- *Is it possible for the two of you – as a couple – to resemble Jesus more than anything else? What does that even mean and what would it look like... this week?*