

A Sermon By  
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He Who Finds a Good Wife  
Proverbs 18:12-17, and 22-24

Hmmm, here we are in the Book of Proverbs again. It seems like we have been hanging around in it for several weeks now. We used Proverbs 6:20 for Mother's Day,

Children young and old, keep your father's commands  
And do not forsake your mother's teaching.

Then two weeks ago we used Proverbs 8:1-11 with its beautiful lines,

Does not Wisdom call?  
Does not understanding raise her voice.  
On the heights along the way,  
Where the paths meet, she takes her stand;  
Beside the gates leading to the city,  
At the entrances, she cries aloud:

"To you...I call out;

I raise my voice to all...

You who are simple, gain prudence;

You who are foolish, gain understanding. (Proverbs 8:1-5)

I used that passage because it was one of the four suggested scripture readings for that week.

And this week we returned to Proverbs again. All of the advise we read is good. But I want to pause on verse 22:

He who finds a wife finds what is good,  
And receives favor from the LORD.

I guess I shouldn't be surprised by my interest in this passage. Tomorrow Donna and I celebrate our 41<sup>st</sup> wedding anniversary. And I feel blessed, very very blessed to have found such a good wife.

Now I know to some of you 41 years of marriage doesn't sound like much. We are still newly weds compared to your 50 and 60 years of marriage.

And to others 41 years (actually 45 years if you count the number of years we've known each other)—to others 41 years seems like quite a feat if you look at the state of marriage in America today. Half of all marriages don't make it. Of course we need to be leery of statistics like that one. The figures *seem* to say that at least half of marriages don't make it. But what the statistic is really telling us that half of those who go through a ceremony won't make it. The statistic includes those who have gone through the ceremony two or three or four times. By including the multiple-marriage figures those who want to talk about how bad off marriage is can use the statistic to their advantage. But even if they didn't, we would still have to say 41 years of marriage is a feat in a society where a lot of marriages never make it.

Marriage does need help. So when I saw a book on marriage on the Best Seller list I was hoping “here is something to help middle aged folks and young make it.” I was disappointed. The book was Elizabeth Gilbert’s *Committed*. What I hoped would be a positive book about getting married turned out to be a book about a person who finally gives in to marrying her live-in-boy friend even when she thought she had major reasons to not to. I won’t go into all of what she said, but I do want to comment on several points in which she pulls out old arguments that get in people’s way even today: Marriage is slavery for the woman and you can’t be married and find fulfillment in life. Gilbert spends a lot of time on the popular view about men and women’s roles in recent history:

Men *got to* go to work (and find the fulfillment that work bring) while women *had to* stay at home.

The key words are *got to* and *had to*. It is never

Husband had to go to work while the wife got to stay home.

The argument has several assumptions that we really need to lay out and talk about:

Work is fun

Staying at home and raising a family is not

Is work fun? Is it always fulfilling? If my dad taught me one thing about work it is what you build may not be the thing that gives you pleasure. My dad rarely talked about the Scorpions or T-38s he helped build. No, what he talked about at dinner time were the people he worked with and the things they talked about, joked about, cared about.

Likewise, is staying and home and raising a family always drudgery? Our assumption that it is is a major reason we have not been able to embrace the idea that it is okay for men to stay home and raise families while women can work. Instead of seeing value in both options, we have bought whole heartedly into the value that once said “Men and women should be free to work or stay home” but quickly morphed into “Everybody has got to work to pay the bills.” Evil loves to promise freedom and give enslavement.

Gilbert’s second assumption is the belief that self fulfillment is the cornerstone of life and one can not find fulfillment with others dragging on you. You must be free to go and find fulfillment. Now Gilbert is talking my language: I believe finding one’s self is what life is all about. But I learned early on—I learned through my Christian faith—that Gilbert’s freedom is a delusion. We find fulfillment in relationship:

“You want to find your self?” says Jesus.

“Then loose it. Don’t focus on it. Focus on others. Love others. Give yourself and you will find it.” (Mark 8:34-37)

What is the great rule of life?

Love your neighbor as yourself.

Love your wife...

Love your kids/your parents...

Love the guy who has his radio on way past bed time—love ‘em...

Love...

Love doesn’t operate alone—it works in relationship. You want to find yourself—find others. Do you have to be married to find fulfillment? No. Marriage is just one of the relationship in which we are fulfilled, find fulfillment, and fulfill others.

Proverbs 18:22 says

He who finds a wife finds a good thing

And obtains favor from the LORD.

But I think it means,

He who finds a *good* wife finds a good thing...

Having added the word good to the sentence, I then want to render it in the language of the 21c:

The person who finds a good spouse finds a good thing...

I would say, Amen.

Now having gotten this far in my research I realized that I can be awfully dense at times. I thought "...obtains favor from the LORD" meant "find a good wife and you will find blessing for the rest of your life. I would certainly say that about the result of Donna in my life. But as I read some other translations of this second line, I began to realize I'd missed the point:

It shows that the LORD is good to you. (*Today's English Version*)

The one who finds a good spouse finds a good thing--

It shows that the LORD is good to you.

I believe that. Do you believe that? Say "amen."

Donna and I believe that God brought us together all those years ago. And God has kept us together all these years, including the tough ones; including the years of raising the kids and now that we are in the empty nest period, we find that we can't believe how wonderful our love for each other is—after all these years! The LORD *has* been good to us.

Marriages have trouble. But I think a lot of people would find greater happiness in marriage if they would allow God a hand in bringing them together with others instead of just feelings and hormones. Then they too would find the truth of 18:22

The one who finds a good spouse finds a good thing.

It shows that the LORD is good to you.

Let us take a few moments to reflect on what we've heard and seen this morning.  
Amen.