

Let's have a word of prayer. "Father in Heaven, it's so true, we just want to dig a little deeper in the storehouse of Your love. We are asking as we open Your word that You will move in a marked and a powerful way. That our hearts will be warmed by Your presence, our minds will be informed, and that our lives will be changed. Lord we are asking that You would show up, that You would be here in Your Glory, and in Your grandeur and that we would have a sense of Your presence, and that You would now be our teacher. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen."

There was a track meet for Junior High students in Texas. And the young man I am going to tell you about, I don't actually know his name, so I am going to call him John. John either didn't listen or he wasn't well instructed, but he was excited to be in this track meet. The event was the mile race. And he lined up, and he was going to make his mark, he wanted people to know that he was swift of feet and he was really going to move out. On your mark, get set, the gun sounded, and off these boys ran. And John, I mean he took off. He took off for everything he was worth; he was going to win that race. And he ran, and ran and by the time he crossed that line, he was way out in front of everybody, and was so excited until he was informed there are 3 more laps to go, "3 more to go?" Well, John, though he may have not listened well, he was no quitter. So he started plotting along, but he was spent. Before long, the field passed him, before the race was over they would pass him again, and he was on the far side of the track when the young man that won the race crossed the line, and people clapped for him, and here came John, the only one on the track. He came by, and he had a whole another lap to go after he went through the finish line, and it kind of got the attention of the crowd.

There is something about humanity that we appreciate someone who doesn't quit. And we get in there and start cheering for them, and that's what happened on that day. The people took notice of it and they began to cheer for him. And those words of encouragement were almost like a wind blowing for him. So he is running. He is dead tired but he could hear the people cheering him on, and he comes around the back side of the track, and he can hear them cheering him on, so keeps going, comes around that final curve, crosses the finish line to a standing ovation, they are screaming and applauding him, much more applause than the actual winner of the race got.

You know, it's amazing what we are able to do when we are encouraged by other people. And I'd like to study that with you today. Our first text is found in Luke chapter 11. Encouragement can be so powerful. Luke chapter 11 verse 14. I have learned over 25 plus years of ministry that when ever God shows up, there is hope. God is a tremendous Encourager. But Jesus is embroiled in a conflict. In Luke chapter 11 beginning with verse 14 it says, speaking of Him it says, "And He was casting out a demon, and it was mute. So it was, when the demon had gone out, that the mute spoke; and the multitudes marveled. But some of them said, 'He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.' Others, testing Him, sought from Him a sign from heaven. But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said to them: 'Every kingdom divided against it self is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls.'"

A house divided will fall! Divide means, disunite. People get married to get united. A house divided is a house where it has been disunited. There is a problem in America; there is a problem in Christianity in America. It's not only attitudinal, but it's in reality statistically a problem and that is divorce. Now when I say attitudinally, there is a younger group of people growing up because of the influence of television in their lives, they don't see divorce as a terrible thing. Now I am not talking about the moral implications of divorce right now, I am talking about the reality of the stinging pain of divorce. You don't see that on TV. What you see on TV is sitcoms where somebody gets divorced and they are happier with somebody else. They even get along with their X and they are all one big happy family and everything is going along great.

That is not reality. When people divorce, it is utter hell on earth. It is pain beyond what I can describe right now. And we have kind of a flipping attitude towards divorce. Talk to a group of young people, ask them about marriage, "Yeah well, if it doesn't work out I'll get a divorce," it's not that easy! It is extremely painful. We were studying through the Book of Acts, and we came to the story of Ananias and Sapphira, and they died for not keeping their vow to the Lord. We realized that vows are important to God and we realized that well, keeping our marriage vows is difficult; keeping our baptismal vows is difficult. Half of us in our church, not this local one but our denomination, half of us that marry end in divorce, and half of us that baptize in 5 or 6 years are no longer in attendance. It's hard to keep those vows.

Jesus here is saying, and we are applying this to marriage, that a house divided can not stand. Divisions come the Bible says because of, well let's read it. Let's look at the 1st Corinthians chapter 1 verse 10. You see one thing is clear from reading the word of God. Satan loves divorce, God hates divorce. And one thing is clear if you read enough on it, the people who had been divorced almost all of them say, had they realized how painful it was, they would have worked harder on their marriage to begin with. 1st Corinthians 1 verse 10 it says, "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you."

Why were there divisions in the house of God? Here is a church that Paul himself had started in the city of Corinth, he brought some people from the Jewish faith, they accepted Jesus as their Savior. He brought some folks that were gentiles; they accepted Jesus as their Savior. They came from darkness into light, they are one happy family, they have a commonality, they want to go to Heaven and they want to serve God, they are helping each other. There is a common enemy, it's out there, and over time the enemy becomes each other in the church and there are divisions among them. And we are told here it's because of contentions. Contentions means, quarrels, wrangling, debate, strife, variance, why does contention come into sacred relationships? How can it come in?

The Bible tells us. Look at Proverbs chapter 13 and verse 10. It says here, "By pride comes only contention, but with a well advised is wisdom." Here we discover that the

seed of contention is pride; in this context it is self love. “I am interested in me, myself and I. And if I hurt you in the process, that’s too bad.” But it is being in love with yourself and in love with your opinion, in love with your side of the argument even if it hurts or harms the other person. That is what causes contention and that is what creates division. In Proverbs 17 verse 14 we read this: “The beginning of strife is like releasing water. Therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts.” Here we are told clearly that this is something we have a choice over. Anybody that has been married before knows when the water is dripping, they know when it begins to flow, and they know when it’s gushing. It wretches up. And here it says, stop it; stop it before the quarrel starts.

It is our choice. In Proverbs 18 verse 6 it says this: “A fool’s lips enter into contention and his mouth calls for blows.” A fool’s lips enter into a contention! Now in the context of Proverbs, a fool is somebody out of a relationship with God, out of relationship with other people; their life is out of balance. A fool is somebody who enters into contention. A stable individual serving God will seek not to enter into contention. And as we mentioned here last week, the focus here is on words. We talked about Kong fu fighting, but in marriage it is tongue fu fighting, and we are hacking each other to death by the words that we say. But I want you to know something. Encouragement can be powerful. Encouragement can be powerful!

Look at Proverbs 22 verse 10 it says, “Cast out the scoffer and contention will leave.” A scoffer is a derider, a mocker, a false teacher. The Apostle Paul says in 2nd Peter 3 verses 1 through 4 that in the last days there are going to be scoffers. How many of you believe we are in the last days? And these scoffers, these individuals who will be deriding, and mocking and false teachers will be going against the promises of God. They are scoffing against the promise of Jesus’ return. Well in principle, a scoffer, can be a married individual who believes in Jesus’ soon return, but they are not basing their life on the promises of God and they are dealing with problems at home in their own strength and ways. That is a scoffer, and that person will be a derider, he will be mocker, and their concepts and ideas will be like a false teacher’s.

Now let me ask you something? Marriage; do you want your marriage to work? If you are not married do you want to have a marriage that will work, if you are in a marriage do you want it to work? It’s our choice! Nobody is going to make it for us. It is our choice between us and God. And what God wants us to do is to build a team in marriage. In fact what is the purpose of marriage, anybody knows? If you were to answer that question in just a short answer, what would that be? What is the purpose of marriage? O, no, it’s not to get her away from her mother, no. It’s not to find somebody to help you put your socks away, no. Turn to Ecclesiastes 4, a passage here that is often read at weddings, and rightly so. It tells us why marriage is good, and what the purpose of it is, it says in Ecclesiastes 4, verse 9: “Two are better than one.” That’s the purpose for marriage. Two are better than one. It goes on to say why, “...because they have good reward for their labor.” And I know that in the context here it is talking about 2 people working together can produce more than one by themselves. But I also know it is applied this way that when you labor in your relationship you’ll have a reward. How many of you have ever heard, it takes work to have a good marriage, have you ever heard that? It’s true, it takes

decisions, it takes conviction. It goes on to say, "...for if they fall, one will lift up his companion, but woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone?"

Think of this, here is the picture of marriage. Two people, one of them falls, makes a mistake, took a risk and it failed. In marriage, the marriage God wants for us to have, you pick that person up. In most of the marriages we know, you step on that person, to remind them how they failed, and how they took a risk. And they are not the only one involved in this, the family is involved, and on, and on, and on, and of course you do a little grinding you know. And that's a human nature to do that, and that's destructive to a marriage. God is wanting you to create a team; you can't create a team that way.

And then it says, "How can one be warm alone?" She is in the bedroom bawling, and he is on the couch. How can they be warm when they are alone? It was cold the other night. We had our windows opened. I woke up in the middle of the night to a stinging pain in my back. My wife's two feet. She was warm. When two lie down together, they can keep each other warm. So I moved a little bit over to the edge, and so did her feet.

The picture here is a beautiful picture of building a team. I want you to turn to Philippians chapter 2, back over in the New Testament. Philippians chapter 2 verse 1 Paul says: "Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others." There is a balance, you look out for you own interest, but look out for the interest of others.

Now in a team; team, it's a wonderful thing to play on a team, to be part of a team. Right now we are in the baseball season. They are doing their championships for the American league and the National league, and then we'll have the World Series. And what I am going to say, I want to say it tenderly because there is a man over here from New York City, and I grew up in Michigan. And I don't know if any of you have read the news lately, but in 4 games the Detroit Tigers beat the New York Yankees. Now I am not going to mock. I'm not going to gloat, that's the word, I am just not going to do that. I will never be so law as to do that.

But why did it happen? Every expert said man for man, the New York Yankees was the best team in the country. Maybe, the best team in decades. They had a roster of superstars. Many of them will be in a hall of fame; many of them at the top of their game. They are the highest paid individuals in baseball. Why couldn't they win? They said the answer was, they were great ball players, but there were not a team. Because here is what happens: when you are on a team, every human being because of life and the way things are here on earth, every human being is going to hit a slump. And so when the batters were in a slump, and the crowd started booing, the team mates called each other out and in stead of throwing their arms around each other saying it will be all right man, keep

swinging, we need you, you can do it, come out of it! Encouraging words are powerful! They didn't do that. They stayed individuals and they lost.

Some of you have played on team sports, basketball or softball or something like that, and you hit a slump. You can't make a basket to save your life, can't hit the ball, can't catch, whatever is happening, team rallies around you because they're on a team, you only win when everyone wins! Are you with me? Now in marriage what happens is this: it's a strange thing. We go through the courting stage. Had a young man tell me, that's the best it's going to get. That's what he judges by. And you know he is right in many, many marriages. But I am telling you, a good marriage beats courting any day. But you got to have a good marriage, otherwise he is right, courting is as good as it gets. 'Cause, here is what happens. The girls want to be where the guys are, so they go to the softball game, they go to the football game, they go to where ever the guys are, of where ever their guy is. And they go there. They might not know the rules, they might not care about the game, they don't care. They want to be there to support him, they go in hopes there is another woman there who doesn't care about it either and they can talk together.

And a guy, you know, he wants to be with her, and, "Oh, oh, you are going shopping at the mall? I'll be happy to drive you there. Happy to spend the whole afternoon going from place to place, to place, and having you never make a decision. That, that's just fine, I just want to be with you, just want to be with you." That's courting. Those two get married, the games are over for her and he hates the mall. What happened to the team? You know in marriage, you have to learn to negotiate. The difference between children and adults is the ability to negotiate. So I've learned to negotiate with my wife. For every hour I spend shopping with her, I get to golf. Hey guys, it takes the sting off. It really does. She is looking at all this stuff, and I am thinking, "150 yards out, kind of rolls a little bit there, which club would I use?" You know, but I am with her.

Now building a team! In marriage many times instead of building a team, we become adversaries. My side, their side; I am right, they are wrong; arguments are to win or to loose. And issues are to win or to loose. Let me share with you an illustration from the book called, "The DNA of Relationships." One of the authors, there are two authors there, one of the authors said that he learned a powerful principle regarding relationships. If you have a win - loose thing in a relationship then everybody looses in a relationship and here is how he learned it. He is a father and he has a son who is a teenage boy, he doesn't say exactly what the issue is, but it's some safety issue, so I am going to say the kid wanted a motorcycle. He just wanted it desperately. And so they are in this debate, they are discussing it, or as my son once said of Karen and I talking, "They are disgusting it."

So anyways, they are going at it. And it took quite awhile, but eventually the father convinced the son that it would not be a good thing to do, and the son said, okay. Sometime later that evening the father came and walked into the kitchen, and the son was sitting there at the kitchen table with the head in his hands. And right then, the author learned this lesson. He put his arm around his son, and he said: "Son I want to ask you a question. Do you feel like Dad won that argument?" And the Son said, "Yes Dad, you

won.” And then he said, “Then I lost.” And his son said, “What do you mean?” And he said, “Son, we are a team. And when you have a team, one doesn’t win and one loose, we both have to win.” And he said, “I failed.” And they ended up talking for two or three hours, and that’s when they had win - win at the end because they are a team.

Marriage will not last if you are in it to win. It’s not going to work. It’s like the father said to the son on the day of his wedding, “Son, I just got one word of advice for you, do you want to be right, or do you want to be happy?” There is a lot of truth to that. If you are determined to win in marriage, you are going to destroy your home. If you are determined to work through things, in an encouraging way so that you both win, that marriage is going to work. And that marriage will be a strong marriage and a happy marriage. In most homes what happens is this. We are going along okay until an issue arises. Who knows what the issue is, usually it’s not a big thing, but there is an issue, there it is. So the debate begins. And somewhere in that debate as the water was dripping, it begins to flow until it’s pouring. Each other has a fire house spraying, and will bring up past mistakes, will bring up the things we failed at, will bring up weaknesses, all these things then enter into this in a very destructive way, to destroy the team.

How would you like to live with somebody who knows you better than anyone on earth, and when you try to work through a problem, they keep bringing up your past? Would you like to live with that person? What if that person was God? Could you stand to have a relationship with God who knows you better than you know yourself, and if He kept bringing up your past, could you live in the relationship with Him? Well let me show you how God deals with your past, and it will be a lesson to us how we are supposed to deal with this in the context of marriage. Look at Isaiah chapter 43 verse 25; these are the words of God. He says, “I, even I am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake, I will not remember your sins.” Praise God! He doesn’t bring it up over and over again. When we go to God every day is a new day with God. The only thing that comes into today are the good times we had in the past with Him. Those bad times, they are gone! He doesn’t bring them back. He remembers them no more!

He says in chapter 44 verse 3, “I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry grounds, I will pour My Spirit on My descendants;” a powerful, tender picture of parched ground needing water. Does God curse the parched ground? No, He pours water on it. From time to time, somebody in a marriage relationship is going to be dry. They are going to need water. That’s the spouse’s responsibility, pour water on him; not stomp him so that the dust just flies all over him, criticize them for the dryness they have. Reach out in love, encouraging him.

Verse 22 the Lord says, “I blotted out like a thick cloud your transgressions and like a cloud your sins. Return to me for I have redeemed you. I have put a great expense into you,” God says, “and I want you!” We read in Jeremiah chapter 31. This is an amazing expression from God. Jeremiah chapter 31 verses 3 and 4, “The Lord has appeared of old to me saying, ‘Yes I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore with loving kindness I have drawn you. Again I will build you.’” Now He is talking literally about Zion, or the city of Jerusalem. “I will build you.” But in principle, it means how to have a

relationship with somebody else. Encouraging words can be so powerful. They build a mate. They build a relationship.

I read a book this week, called “Building Your Mates Self Esteem” by Denis and Barbara Raney. Chapter 1 is, “Giving Your Mate a New Image.” And it’s kind of a simple concept, but a powerful one nonetheless. That all through our lives we will struggle with self image, it just happens. That’s the way it is here on earth with our insecurity, and sin and all that. And our mate is a mirror. And as we look into our mate’s face, a big question arises. Do we see our weaknesses, do we see our faults, do we see our failures, are we constantly reminded of that? Or do we see someone who believes in us, someone who is building us, who thinks we are okay, who likes us, who is willing to live with us even if we take a risk, and it doesn’t work out. What do we see in the face of our spouse?

And to illustrate this powerful point, in the book they quote from Dr. Paul Brand. Now Dr. Paul Brand was a surgeon in London during WWII. He became famous back here in the United States for his work at leprosarium in Southern Louisiana. Some of you may have read about this man? But I want to read to you what he wrote. This is Dr. Paul Brand, the surgeon in London during WWII. “Peter Foster was the royal air force pilot. These men were the cream of the crop of England, the brightest, healthiest, most confident and dedicated, and often the most handsome men in the country. When they walked the streets in their decorated uniforms the population treated them as gods. All eyes turned their way. Girls envied those who were fortunate enough to walk beside a man in air force blue.

However, the scene in London was far from romantic for the Germans were attacking relentlessly. 57 consecutive nights they bombed London in waves of 250, some 1500 bombers would come each evening and pound the city. The RAF hurricanes and spit fires that pilots like Foster flew, looked like mosquitoes pasturing the huge German bombers. The hurricane was agile and affective, yet, it had one fatal design flaw. The single propeller engine was mounted in front a scan foot or so from the pilot, and the fuel lines snaked along side the cockpit toward the engine. In a direct hit, the cockpit would erupt into an infernal of flames. The pilot could eject, but in the one or two seconds it took him to find the lever, he would meld off every feature of his face; his nose, his eyelids, his lips, often, his cheeks. These RAF’s heroes many times would undergo a series of 20 to 40 surgeries to refashion what once was their face. Plastic surgeons worked miracles, yet what remained of the face was essentially a scar. Peter Foster became one of those down pilots. After numerous surgical procedures what remained of his face was indescribable. The mirror he peered into daily couldn’t hide the facts. As the day of his release from the hospital grew closer, so did Peter’s anxiety about being accepted by his family and friends. He knew that one group of air men with similar injuries had returned home only to be rejected by their wives and girlfriends. Some of the men were divorced by wives who were unable to accept this new and outer image of their husbands. Some men become recluses, refusing to leave their houses.

In contrast, there was another group who returned home to families who gave loving assurance and acceptance and continued worth. Many became executives and

professionals, leaders in their community. Peter Foster was in that second group. His girlfriend assured him that nothing had changed except a few millimeters thickness of skin. She loved him, not his facial membrane. She assured him. The two were married just before Peter left the hospital. "She became my mirror," Peter said of his wife, "She gave me a new image of myself. Even now, regardless of how I feel when I look at her, she gives me a warm, loving smile, and tells me, I am okay."

Encouragement is powerful in relationships. Encouragement! Satan and his followers, demons, do all they can to get us started in a fight. And if they just get us in adversarial relationship with our spouse, they can wonder to next house because we'll do the damage ourselves, they don't even have to be there anymore. In marriage we are a team. And the team wins when both win. That's the only way that it works. When you look into the face of your mate, what do you see? And what is far more important, what do they see when they look into your face? What are you saying? You see, Jesus wants us to become like Him. He takes broken, scared, burned lives and says, "Not only is the past, past! Not only do I concenter you blameless, but you are beautiful and you are exciting, and I love you."

Don't you want a relationship with Jesus like that? And don't you want a relationship like that with your spouse? Have you become a team? Or are you fighting against the wrong enemy? That dear woman, or that dear man that you are married to, is not your enemy. The enemy is out there, and he is wanting to come in your home and to destroy your home. He does it many times by simply developing an adversarial attitude between the two in the home. And instead of a home, they feel like they are inmates locked together in a struggle.

God wants you to take your problems, husbands and wives. Be open, be honest, but to be kind and considerate, and to solve those problems in a Christ like way. And to encourage one another to the point where in the marriage we have a picture of the plan of redemption, where our past is past. We are not continually blamed and we are told we are beautiful, that we are liked, that we are loved, and that we are a person of great worth. Now if you would like to experience that with Jesus, and if you would like to be that type of person for other people, I am going to ask you to stand.

"Father in Heaven thank You that Your words are of love, forgiveness and encouragement. And when we look into Your face, we see ourselves more beautiful than we ever could imagine. Now help us Lord to be that type of spouse. We pray this in Jesus name, Amen."