

REVITALIZING A MARRIAGE

JUDGES 13:2-21

Once upon a time, a man married a nurse.

Early in their marriage she would make a fuss over his every ache and pain. His littlest boo-boo demanded her attention. But he knew the honeymoon was over the day he climbed up to fix the attic fan...

As he lifted himself from the wooden ladder into the attic he scratched his forehead on a crossbeam...

Crawling over the rafters splinters stuck in his hand...

As he changed the fan belt he cut his forearm...

Then on the way down the ladder, the last two rungs broke under his weight, and he twisted his ankle...

When the fellow limped into the kitchen, his wife took one look at him, and shouted, “**Are those your good pants?**” It was overwhelming evidence that the honeymoon was over... and the marriage had begun.

Every marriage reaches a point where the giddiness and delight of the honeymoon fades, and the realities of married life sets in – but even a seasoned marriage should retain traces of that *honeymoon happiness*.

All marriages should be sprinkled with its joys, and thrills, and sparks, and romance - and always a sense of partnership between a husband and a wife.

What’s sad is to witness a marriage that’s lost ALL its vim and vigor - a marriage that’s become stale and gone flat - that’s more a *burden* rather than a *blessing*.

If your marriage has lost its spark, its electricity, its passion - I want to show you how to get it back. How you can re-strike the match, and relight the flame.

There's a story in Judges 13 that contains truths if *taken to heart* and *put into practice* can revitalize a marriage. Judges 13 can turn a *fizzler* into a *sizzler*.

It's the story of Manoah and his wife – they were the faithful parents of God's strongman, Samson...

Now there was a certain man from Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had no children. And the Angel of the LORD appeared to the woman and said to her, "Indeed now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son.

Now therefore, please be careful not to drink wine or similar drink, and not to eat anything unclean. For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines."

So the woman came and told her husband, saying, "A Man of God came to me, and His countenance was like the countenance of the Angel of God, very awesome; but I did not ask Him where He was from, and He did not tell me His name.

And He said to me, 'Behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. Now drink no wine or similar drink, nor eat anything unclean, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb to the day of his death.' "

Then Manoah prayed to the LORD, and said, "O my Lord, please let the Man of God whom You sent come to us again and teach us what we shall do for the child who will be born."

And God listened to the voice of Manoah, and the Angel of God came to the woman again as she was sitting in the field; but Manoah her husband was not with her. Then the woman ran in haste and told her husband, and said to him, "Look, the Man who came to me the other day has just now appeared to me!"

So Manoah arose and followed his wife.

When he came to the Man, he said to Him, "Are You the Man who spoke to this woman?" And He said, "I am." Manoah said, "Now let Your words come to pass! What will be the boy's rule of life, and his work?"

So the Angel of the LORD said to Manoah, "Of all that I said to the woman let her be careful. She may not eat anything that comes from the vine, nor may she drink wine or similar drink, nor eat anything unclean. All that I commanded her let her observe."

Then Manoah said to the Angel of the LORD, "Please let us detain You, and we will prepare a young goat for You." And the Angel of the LORD said to Manoah, "Though you detain Me, I will not eat your food. But if you offer a burnt offering, you must offer it to the LORD." (For Manoah did not know He was the Angel of the LORD.) Then Manoah said to the Angel of the LORD, "What is Your name, that when Your words come to pass we may honor You?"

And the Angel of the LORD said to him, "Why do you ask My name, seeing it is wonderful?"

So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered it upon the rock to the LORD.

And He did a wondrous thing while Manoah and his wife looked on - it happened as the flame went up toward heaven from the altar - the Angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar!

When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell on their faces to the ground. When the Angel of the LORD appeared no more to Manoah and his wife, then Manoah knew that He was the Angel of the LORD.

Here's a story that progresses through six stages. Let me outline them for you... *First*, in verse 2, the story **starts with desperation** - this marriage is barren.

Second, in verse 3, **suddenly there's a visitation** - God decides to do something about the barrenness.

Third, in verses 3-5 an Angel **shares a revelation** - a message about what God wants to do in this marriage.

Fourth, verse 6-14 detail a **struggle for unification**. Mr. and Mrs. Manoah can't seem to get it together...

Fifth, in verses 15-19, the Manoahs put on a **show of dedication**. They pledge themselves to God, and declare their newfound commitment with a sacrifice.

And *sixth*, in verses 20-21, God provides a **sign of revitalization** in this marriage. A miracle occurs..

I hope you'll pay close attention this morning. In this ancient story God communicates amazingly relevant insights that just might save a marriage or two...

We **start with desperation.**

This is a barren marriage. Verse 2 tells us, Manoah and wife were childless. Today, this is a difficult burden for couples to bear, but it was worse for Mrs. Manoah.

In ancient times, barrenness was viewed as a curse from God. A childless woman was scorned and ridiculed by her peers. She was treated cruelly. People didn't do much *care'n* for a marriage that was *barren*.

But there are other types of barrenness than simply childlessness... I know couples that suffer from an **emotional barrenness** - no expressions of affection or demonstrations of love. The wellspring has gone dry.

It reminds me of the foolish fellow who never told his wife he loved her. He explained to the marriage counselor, "I said I loved her the day we were married, and if anything changes in the future I'll let her know."

Other couples suffer a **relational barrenness**. They're no longer friends, but strangers They've stop sharing life. They lack common goals and objectives.

They've spun off into different orbits. A once happy couple devolves into two ships passing in the night.

Still other marriages endure a **spiritual barrenness**. Nothing is being communicated on the deepest level.

Sure they discuss trivial matters, but they've stopped sharing their relationship with God. Their lives have become mechanical. It's all about the routine tasks.

It reminds me of little Christy. She was playing in the floor with her dolls. At one point she staged a wedding. She picked up her teddy bear groom and said to the imaginary pastor, “Okay, you can read us our rights.”

Suddenly Christy shifted roles – from bride to pastor.

She said in a deep voice, “You have the right to remain silent, anything you say may be held against you, you have the right to have an attorney present.

And you may kiss the bride.”

Sadly, in a barren marriage taking vows and reading rights get confused. The silence becomes deafening.

What is said is used against the other person. The threat of an attorney is always on the horizon.

And not a lot of kissing goes on!

God created humans with a desire for intimacy, and a heartfelt closeness with another person. And He invented marriage as the venue where those needs can be met. God wants our marriages to be fruitful, not barren. Marriage was intended to be a *hotbed for intimacy*. He wants the flame lit and burning brightly...

Which is why God pays Manoah and his wife a visit.

We're told in verse 3, “And the Angel of the LORD appeared to the woman...” We *start with desperation*, then **suddenly there's a visitation**. An angelic messenger appears with a promise for the woman...

“And (He) said to her, “Indeed now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son.” He promises her offspring, fruitfulness.

No longer will Mrs. Manoah be barren.

I believe God desires for all marriages to experience a degree of *spiritual* and *emotional* and *relational fruitfulness*. For Manoah and his wife it meant a son...

For you and your spouse it *may mean a diffusion of tension - or a restored trust - or a new sense of partnership - or the ability to relax and laugh and have fun again - or a willingness to forgive and start over - or harmony in a major decision – or a renewal of romantic feelings - or the desire to talk and communicate – or a rekindling of sexual expression and fulfillment...*

Rodney Dangerfield said of his notoriously sorry marriage, “*My wife and I eat apart, we take separate vacations. We never talk to each other, or even see each other. We’re doing everything we can to keep our marriage together!*” Now that’s a barren marriage!

Yet it grieves me to see marriages where that’s the couple’s strategy. Rather than seek an intimate relationship - the goal is to stay out of each other’s way. God desires better for you and your spouse. He wants to visit your marriage and create a fruitfulness.

If your marriage is in a state of desperation don’t give up! In the darkest hours of World War 2 Winston Churchill told the battle-weary British people, “*Wars are not won by evacuation.*” Neither are good marriages.

Suddenly, instantly - God can pay your marriage a visit and create a bounty where there was barrenness.

But not only does God, through the angel, pay this marriage a *visitation* He also **shares a revelation.**

God speaks a message about His plans for their home - a word about the promised child. He explains that the child they will sire will be a Hebrew **Nazirite**...

Remember Samson, he lost his superhuman strength when Delilah gave him an unwanted haircut.

Of course, there was nothing magical about his long hair. If so, your average rock musician would be a tough guy. Long hair was the sign of the Nazirite.

This was an order of Jews who took a special vow of dedication to God. Part of that vow was to drink no wine - this is why the Angel tells Mrs. Manoah to lay off the grape soda, or she will defile her child.

In Numbers 6 we learn that the vow of the Nazirite was three-fold - **no wine, no haircuts, no touching anything that was dead.** And this took the Nazirite out of normal circulation. It separated him from the world.

For here's what makes the world go round...

Go to any strip mall and you'll find a liquor store - a hair salon - and a funeral home isn't far away...

Folks love *physical pleasure*. They like to take a **nip**.

People strive for *outward beauty*. They like cool **clips**.

And people attend funerals. They're reminders of temporal importance - life is short. You better get all you can, while you can. After life it's **RIP**, *rest in peace*.

The world is about **nips, clips, and RIPs**. Here's another way to say it, this world is all about *feeling great, and looking great, and thinking you're great*.

And God established the Nazirite to stand opposite. His life was a contradiction to the values of this world.

He lived for *spiritual fulfillment*, not *physical pleasure*.

He cultivated *inner beauty*, not *external looks*.

He was about *eternal life*, not *temporal importance*.

Real pleasure, and real beauty, and real life - is found in God alone, not in the pursuits of this life.

The revelation from God to Manoah's wife was that their offspring would be a holy child - a child set apart for God and His purposes. Samson would be God's champion - fight God's battles - serve God's people.

You can look at this way...

The cure for this couple's barrenness was holiness. Let me say this again - it's a revolutionary concept - *the cure for this couple's barrenness was holiness!*

Of course, this is not what we've heard. We've been told that if we want to get back the spark in our marriage - *add a little spice after the rice* - then we need to turn to worldly ways and fleshly techniques.

Feeling great will rescue a marriage... a candlelight dinner... a weekend away at a posh hotel... a Caribbean cruise... a gift certificate to Victoria Secrets... *physical pleasure* will rekindle a marriage.

Or perhaps *looking great* will restore passion to a marriage, and recapture your spouse's attention... a new haircut or make-over, or if I *slimmed down and shaped up*, or perhaps a new wardrobe will do the trick. We look to *externals* to enhance our marriage.

And some folk assume *being great* will cure their marriage... once he succeeds in his career, and gets a big salary, and we buy our dream house... then we'll be happy. *Temporal success* will improve our marriage.

We've been told that *physical pleasure, external beauty, and temporal success* are the ways to improve a marriage, but we've been sold a false bill of goods...

The ultimate cure for a barren marriage is not more *worldliness*, but *holiness!* To light a fire in your marriage that'll burn long after the honeymoon is over - you need to dedicate your life and marriage to God.

The tension in a marriage will *lessen* only when you begin to receive God's *bles's'n*. Give Him your heart!

What happens when you get tired or sick, and *don't feel great*? If I remember, the vows say, "**for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health.**"

Fulfillment in marriage comes when a husband and wife have forged a spiritual bond. They're connected soul to soul - *despite how they feel physically*.

What happens in a marriage when you *no longer look great*? When crows feet land on your forehead? When wrinkles take the place of curves? When tight skin and firm muscles turn into *bags and sags*?

Hopefully, when that day comes you'll realize that the most powerful attractiveness is *internal* not *external*.

Happily married couples get excited about each other because of *who they are*, not just *how they look*.

And what happens if you *never become great*?

Or worse, that you become great and realize there was nothing to it? What really glues my *life* to my *wife* is the joy of knowing we're serving the Lord together.

We have a common call – a mutual mission. Our lives and our marriage are counting for all eternity!

Here's a profound revelation - [the cure to barrenness in a marriage is holiness unto God](#). The closer two spouses grow to God the closer they'll grow together.

Years ago someone showed me an illustration I now use whenever I counsel a couple. Take a triangle - put a husband and wife at the two bottom corners, and place God at the top. Now slide the husband and wife up the sides of the triangle. The closer they get to God, the closer they get to one another – but likewise, the further they get from God, the further they get from each another. It's so true! A marriage relationship is really all about both person's relationship with God.

Maybe you've tried the Caribbean cruise and the posh hotels - you now live in that big house - but you're still lonely, and your marriage still languishes.

Stop with the *worldliness* and give *holiness* a try!

If you want a sparkling, thrilling, electric, sexy, stimulating marriage - put love for God at the center.

Pray together. Study the Bible together. Find a way to serve the Lord together. Work on the spiritual side of life, and watch it resuscitate intimacy in your marriage!

Mrs. Manoah received a *visitation*, and a *revelation*, but she soon found herself **struggling for unification.**

The Angel appeared to her - not to her husband.

Why God chose to visit her first we're not sure. Maybe she was more spiritually sensitive than her husband... Maybe he needed to be humbled...

We don't know, but what we do know is that after the visitation this couple struggled to get it together.

Understand, when God first visits your marriage don't expect instant harmony. His visitation will kindle a new love, and fresh feelings, and clearer priorities – but it doesn't instantly resolve all your differences.

Even in a good marriage unification is a struggle...

Recently, I read startling statistics. Did you know, “54% of American women don't know that a touchdown counts 6 points. 70% don't know that a safety counts 2 points.” That shows how far apart men and women are.

When I hear that a couple is getting a divorce on the grounds of incompatibility I laugh! The mere fact one's a man and one's a woman make them incompatible.

Every couple has to struggle a bit and work at unity and good communication in a marriage. It's hard work.

Recently, researchers discovered 1300 previously unpublished letters that were sent from former President Harry Truman to his beloved wife, Bess.

Everyday Truman was away from his wife he penned her a letter. You'd think the most powerful man in the world would have more important duties than to write his wife a note - but Harry Truman realized the value of working at communication in his marriage.

Did you hear about the California surfer? He found a bottle on the beach. He rubbed it. Out popped a genie.

The genie promised to grant him one wish.

He looked across the ocean, into the distance, "I've always thought it would be nice to have a freeway stretched over the water from Long Beach to Hawaii."

The genie balked, "Do you realize the thousands of pillars you'd have to sink? And the lives that would be lost sinking them? I won't do it. Make another request."

The surfer thought, "Well, I've always wanted to understand women. Maybe you could teach me everything there is to know about the opposite sex."

The genie thought for a minute and said, "Four lane, or six lane?" Realize men and women think differently, and this makes unity something we have to work at.

In verse 8, Manoah acts like a typical husband.

His wife has just received a visitation and revelation from God, but rather than listen to her and study what God said to her; he asks God to appear to Him.

He refuses to take a woman's word for it. He wants to see and hear these spiritual revelations for himself...

He prays in verse 8, “O my Lord, please let the Man of God whom You sent come to us again and teach us what we shall do for the child who will be born.”

God just gave those same instructions to his wife, but he was too proud to listen to Mrs. Manoah.

And I love what happens in verse 9, “And God listened to the voice of Manoah, (God heard his prayer, and read his attitude) and the Angel of God came to the woman again as she was sitting in the field; but Manoah her husband was not with her.” God does it to him again! He appears to his wife, *without Manoah*.

Verse 10 tells us what happens next. His wife rushes to get Manoah – and a humbling statement is made in verse 11, “So Manoah arose and followed his wife.”

Other Bible passages teach that the wife should follow her husband, but here a husband follows his wife - *and for good reason...* I’ll go ahead and say it, for 99% of the time, it’s true - the greatest hindrance and hurdle to unification in a marriage is the man’s pride.

Get over it guys. Remember James 4:6, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” It’s true!

Eventually Manoah will take the leadership role in his marriage, but first God has to humble him, and prove He can speak to his wife as well as to Manoah.

When God visits a marriage often times one member of the partnership gets a little ahead of the other.

Perhaps the work begins in the husband’s heart, and he sweeps up his wife in his enthusiasm. Or maybe God does a work in the wife’s heart, and the husband comes

along out of curiosity. The partner with the head-start has to learn they're not greater than the one lagging behind - and the partner who's a little behind has to believe God will enable them to catch up.

In other words, *the key to unity is humility.*

Ephesians 5:22-33 is the controversial passage that outlines the marital roles for men and women - *men should lovingly lead and women should willingly follow.*

But before the first word is mentioned about wives and husbands, a general rule is applied to us all. Verse 21 says, *“submitting to one another in the fear of God.”*

There should be a mutual submission in a marriage.

Both partners need to humble themselves, and acknowledge God's authority over their lives and relationship. A good marriage starts by bowing your knee to God, before taking each other's hand.

Yes, there's a *struggle for unification*, but it culminates with a **show of dedication.** Manoah and his wife offer a sacrifice of commitment to God.

And here is where a desperate marriage turns the corner – *when it's presented as a sacrifice to the Lord.*

Don't misunderstand, I take very seriously the vow I made to my wife, and she places great importance on the vow she made to me - but what keeps us pressing on, working at our marriage in the good times and the bad is the realization that we not only made vows to each other, but we also make a promise to God.

We vowed to God that we'd be faithful to each other and to Him. There's a higher authority at work in my marriage, that holds both my wife and I accountable for how

we treat one another. I'm sure that if my wife's commitment to me was all that was at stake, there'd be times when she would've wanted to toss in the towel!

Over the years I've done some bone-headed stuff that's hurt her deeply. There've been times when I didn't deserve her love - but she's remained loyal to me because she made a vow not just to me, but God!

Our marriage is more than an earthly partnership between two people – it's a divine union made up of three people – Kathy, myself, and our Lord Jesus!

Today it's popular to draw up a pre-nuptial agreement prior to marriage. I read of one such contract that contained 16 pages of specifications.

Outlined in the agreement were details concerning how often the couple would have sex, what time they'd go to bed, what brand of gasoline they'd use in their cars, how they'd handle the laundry and other chores.

The bride-to-be made the statement, [“This is the plan we think will keep us married for 50 or 60 years.”](#)

I'm sorry, but that kind of commitment won't keep you married 50 or 60 days! You need a godly reason.

For marriage to work it has to be grounded in a commitment to an authority greater than either party.

I've taken a vow to God, and I'm responsible to the Almighty for what kind of husband I am regardless of what Kathy does or doesn't do... And she too has taken a vow to God, and shares the same responsibility.

When Mr. and Mrs. Manoah offered their *sacrifice of dedication* God provided them a **sign of revitalization.**

Look at the amazing finale' to this story...

Verse 19 tells us, “So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered it upon the rock to the LORD. And (the Angel) did a wondrous thing while Manoah and his wife looked on - it happened as the flame went up toward heaven from the altar - the Angel of the LORD ascended in the flame of the altar!”

The prophet Elijah ascended to Heaven in a chariot of fire. This angel doesn't even wait for the chariot.

He jumps into the flame that's lapping up the sacrifice, and surfs it all the way in to the heavenly shore. It must've been an amazing sight to behold!

Bible scholars point out that often in the OT “the Angel of the Lord” is none other than a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus. It's possible that's the case here.

In fact, the Angel calls Himself, “wonderful.” The name Isaiah gave to Jesus was 'Wonderful Counselor.'

If the Angel that appeared to Manoah was actually Jesus it makes for beautiful imagery. When he and his wife stoke the fire, and offer up their burnt offering, a sacrifice, Jesus jumps into the midst of their fire.

And this is how you revitalize your marriage - how you rekindle the fire! You rededicate yourself and your marriage to God - then watch Jesus join your flame!

And when the Lord jumps in, it's like pouring gas on a fire. Jesus acts like STP gas treatment - or maybe like a little nitrous oxide... He aids the combustion.

When Jesus joins a couple's flame their marriage fires burns cleaner, and hotter, and longer!

It reminds me of a wedding at the First Presbyterian Church of Spokane, WA. Just as Craig Looper planted a kiss on the lips of his bride the fire alarm sounded.

A fire elsewhere in the building triggered the alarm.

Afterwards, a friend joked, "Wow, that was one hot kiss!" Well, when Jesus joins the flame of your marriage you can expect lots and lots of hot kisses!

Notice in verse 20, finally Mr. and Mrs. Manoah are in harmony. But notice how it occurs, **When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell on their faces to the ground.** They're united - **on their faces before the Lord!**

This excites me. To hear some marriage experts talk there's no hope for my marriage... Reconciliation and rekindling is too complicated and complex for us...

There are weeks when our responsibilities keep Kathy and I from having a date night with each other.

With a kid in college the budget for romantic get-aways can be lean. We might as well face it - *we don't always **feel great**, and I no longer **look great**, and I'm sure neither one of us will ever be **considered great**...*

But I can do the most important thing to keep my marriage fires burning... I can humble myself, get on my knees with my wife, and together we can dedicate our lives and our marriage to the purposes of God.

We can seek and share and serve the Lord together!

Maybe your marriage is filled with **desperation**, but this morning God is at work - a **visitation** has occurred.

He's provided you a **revelation** of His will. Remember **the cure for barrenness is not worldliness, but holiness**. Seek God together! And even though you might struggle a bit for **unification** it doesn't have to stop you from **dedication**. You don't always have to see *eye to eye* to stay *knee to knee*. Humble your heart and offer up your marriage as a wonderful sacrifice to God.

And as you do His Spirit will join your flame. God will bring about a **revitalization** within your marriage...

Today, Jesus wants to join your flame, and turn your barren marriage into a fun and fruitful marriage again!