



## Twolgnite

### Part 4 – Helping a Friend or Family Member Through a Marriage Crisis

Pastor Ted Cunningham

Today, the message is as practical as we've ever gone on Twolgnite Sunday. We're going to talk about how to help a friend or family member through a marriage crisis. If you are brand new to our church, today is Twolgnite Sunday. We take the second Sunday of every month and we talk about marriage.

Next week, the teaching team launches a series called *To Know*. It's out of 1 John. We are going to be going, verse by verse, through the book of 1 John. But the second Sunday of every month, we will stop and talk about marriage.

Let me give you the pillars of Twolgnite Sunday; there are three of them:

**Honor Marriage** – The word *honor* means to esteem as highly valuable. So we believe marriage should be esteemed as highly valuable by every single, every married, every young, every old individual in this place. Hebrews 13: 4 says ***Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.*** So we paint a beautiful picture of marriage at Woodland Hills Family Church. We want to paint this picture as often as possible and we pause the second Sunday of every month to do that.

**Enjoy Marriage** - We also believe that marriage can be enjoyed. If you're coming in here in a stuck, broken, hurting, painful marriage, welcome to Woodland Hills; we're glad you're here because we are going to show you that you don't have to choose between life and a wife; you can have both at the same time. Some of you think you are ready to trade up. No, you don't need to do that. You don't need to go to farmersonly.com and find someone new. The city girl you married will be great. You just need to make the decision to enjoy life together.

Ecclesiastes 9: 7-9 says ***7 Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for God has already approved what you do.*** It's okay to enjoy life. We value enjoying life around here because God favors you enjoying life and sitting down to a good meal with your wife and enjoying time together.

***8 Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. 9 Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun—all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun.*** You don't have to choose between marriage and life; you can have both. We believe life can be grueling, difficult, and painful and God didn't give you marriage to add to that.

God gave you a spouse and a companion to go through the grueling parts of life together. And all God's people said... Amen. Those are the happy marriage, and all of the mean marriage said... No; don't say it.

**Prioritize Marriage** – Genesis 2: 24 says ***That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.*** We believe that's a parenting verse and a marriage verse. We believe that our children should leave home as adults, not on a journey to become one. So we eradicate the kid-centered home and with it, prolonged adolescence. We want our couples to know that the bond between a husband and a wife is to be stronger than the bond between a parent and a child. Our children need to know we love them and are grateful they are here, but we have big plans upon their departure. We are going to enjoy life together and we are going to have a life. Our gift to our children is going to be a mom and dad who love each other. And all God's people said... Amen.

So we have started something this year. We are a little over three months into #52IN15. We're taking this to a whole new level. We're challenging every couple in our church to go on 52 dates in 2015. I've been to several churches this year that love this idea. "Why don't you launch it at our church, but there's no way we're going to raise the bar that high; let's just do #15In15." I'm excited about #52IN15. When you see the hashtag, people are dating, people are prioritizing marriage. We believe when you date your spouse, you're honoring marriage because you are saying that your marriage is important. You're telling everyone around you that your marriage is important and it's worth the time you put into it. You're enjoying one another. You're prioritizing it by leaving the kids at home and going out just the two of you.

To date, about 90 days in, on all the social media that we can count, the total number of dates this year out of Woodland Hills is 1,250. Six hundred of these are the Larimores. They are creative. They are going for a cruise. You need to know we are giving away a cruise at the end of this year. You, as the church family, will vote on the number one #52IN15 daters in our church.

Yesterday, I was with a guy that is coordinating a cruise. I was telling him about #52IN15. I didn't know what he was doing with the cruise. He said "Next year, our organization is doing a cruise around the Greek Islands. Let me talk to somebody. Would you be interested if I could donate that to your church?" I said yes and we would need it for two couples because Amy and I will be joining the winners of #52IN15. It just depends on who wins. A week is a long time.

So we want to highlight some of these. We want to give away gifts. Every month there is a winner and last month was the backup singers. We believe double dating is important because you need to surround your marriage with other voices that bless your marriage. Remember we talked about this. There are backup singers you need to mute and there are backup singers you need to turn up.

Today, we are talking about backup singers and how they can bless your marriage. Here's the first group. This is a triple date. This is date 13 of #52IN15. *This date was all about backup singing. The amazing Sarah Yocum sang backup while she watched five out of six of the kiddos. Her name is Super Woman. The evening was filled with great conversation and laughter.*

One of the couples was in the first service. James and Erika Grimmer, are you here? If you don't participate in our services, you're not getting a gift. That's all I can say. Dustin and Kimie Winans? If you are in The Chapel, we'll send it over to you.

Let's look at the next one. I love this one. *She's dressed up in a gown for our afternoon lunch date. This is what happens when you date your wife. Baby number three.* So, are Michael and Camie here? There they are! We're sending you to Carters with a \$50.00 gift card. You have two boys? Stephanie Watson made you two shirts this week that each says "Big Brother – #52IN15."

We gave away a gift to Grandpa, a backup singer. We want to celebrate some of the backup singers. Here is one of our backup singers. Amy Piatt writes: *My dad. We had another sitter tonight, so we got to enjoy an evening with my parents who are awesome backup singers for our marriage. We went with Thai Thai because Moe's was way too busy.* We gave Amy Piatt's dad, Robert, a gift card to Olive Garden in the first service.

We let you tell us about your backup singers. This is Carter. She is with Aiden, Adam Donyes' son. Adam is the one who had the passion to launch and ignite the #52IN15 idea. He says *Carter serves and blesses the children during The Fort time, during a lot of small groups, and she offers her services often to couples to go on a date at no charge.* I do want to make sure the couples of our church do not take advantage of this. Bless people who bless your marriage. Invest in people who bless your marriage. We're going to send her to Bath and Body Works with a gift card.

This is Sara Yocum. Clap if you know Sarah Yocum. Those are all people that have had Sarah watch their kids. She goes way out of her way to bless the marriages in this church. This is her with just some of the families and children so Mom and Dad can get away. She is a teacher in Branson Public Schools and she is an avid foodie. She loves to cook. Guys, are you listening? She is single and a good cook. She has a passion for Le Creuset which is a cookware that is kind of steep. We are giving her a gift certificate to the Kitchen Collection so she can go buy some Le Creuset. Sarah, I know you're in here. She's holding a baby. Come on up here, Sarah.

This next part, I had nothing to do with. There are a lot of single ladies in the church. Today, Adam Donyes gave me \$40.00. He told me to offer this to the first young man that will ask one of those women out.

Let's get focused. So what do you say and what do you do when you get the phone call from a family member or friend that says "We're getting a divorce." How do you deal with that? Here's what we've discovered. Most parents have no clue what to say when they hear that from their son or daughter. Most moms and dads just freeze. What if a brother or sister calls you? What if a co-worker shares with you that something is going on? What do you do and what do you say?

Today, we're going to look at the emotions, unpack the scripture, and then we are going to look at very practical talking points for you to jump into this conversation with family and friends. I'm going to put it in the context of phone calls. Phone calls are not the best, but it's better than text messaging and email. You might find yourself covering these talking points in text messages and emails. That's great. In our

opinion, the best is face to face. I'm going to share three phone calls with you today and build them out. Again, it's not like you are only allowed to share this much in the first phone call, but it's kind of a progression of backup singing with someone. So if it's over a dinner, instead of phone calls one, two, and three, it may be appetizer, entrée, and dessert. But you are encouraging, blessing, and supporting a marriage in crisis.

**Every marriage is a duet in need of great backup singers.** We are talking today specifically to the backup singers. As we've covered Honor, Enjoy, and Prioritize, we believe every follower of Christ should be equipped to do the work of marriage ministry. We believe you need the tools and the resources and what to say and what not to say and how to do it when you are speaking to someone going through a very difficult time in their marriage. Every spouse needs family and friends advocating for both spouses in the marriage. So if it's your son calling, it's not a bashing session on your daughter-in-law. If it's your daughter calling, it's not a bashing session on your son-in-law. It's not a bashing session on a brother or sister-in-law. We are for the marriage.

**What to say and do when you hear "We're getting a divorce."** Where do you even start with that? I see my friend back there, Joe Rouse. He called me this week. Joe, I returned your call yesterday. His voice mail is priceless. I've never heard this before. First of all, Joe, your phone rings ten times before your voice mail kicks in. We didn't have anything pressing; there was no emergency. I was returning his call. Here's his voicemail: "Hi, this is Joe. I'm not available. If this is an emergency, you can leave a message." Do you know that's on there, Joe? He's like "You're darn right I know that's on there; leave me alone." It's like if you have something super important to say, you can leave a message. If not, don't leave a message.

I had no idea how to respond to that. I go "Hey Joe, it's Ted. I'm kind of stuck right now. I'm leaving you a message..." The message is like four minutes long because I don't know if it's really that important or if it's an emergency. I was struggling with what to say, but I thought it was brilliant.

I'm thinking of changing my voicemail. "Call another church, leave us alone. We've got enough people here with problems. First Baptist is 417-266-3489; bug Neal for a little bit." Think about this for just a second though. You get to these points where you get these phone calls and you don't know what just happened. If you don't take notes, don't worry about it. We are going to put these notes in some sort of form that you can download online this week so you can have it there. Fold it and stick it in your Bible. Have it somewhere handy. Don't be like the person in the call center who was just trained on how to take your call. The point is you put this in your words; you put this in your context. Whether it is written... I prefer it not be written, but if that's all you have, go with it. If it's a phone call... For most, I discover it's a phone call, but for some it's like "Son, come over. Let's have a talk."

Here are the emotions of it. It starts with **shock**. When you get "We're getting a divorce," it's a shock. I'm working with a family member right now that it was shock for this family member and shock for us. We never saw this coming.

Then we start into **confusion**. “Where did this come from?” “How did this happen? The last time we were with you, things were great. For the last however long, it has been great.” Then we start asking the questions that we have no answers for.

Then we’re **angry** when we don’t get those questions answered. It shouldn’t be happening. Then we start getting frustrated. You may come in on this emotion. Remember the phone call may come at any one of these stages. If you’re close with your family member or friend, they will bring you in immediately when they get the news and your processing shock with them.

A lot of them won’t call you until they are at the angry stage. Be very careful at this stage not to jump in with them and join in with the toxicity. “I never wanted you to marry him anyway! Honey, I just want you to be happy. No one should have to put up with this. You’ve tried everything. You’ve been dealing with this for this long. Come on; it’s time enough. You didn’t see this coming?”

You have to watch your heart through this whole process because after anger then it moves to **disconnection**. Some of you get the call that she moved out or he left. I’m brought into the disconnection stage a lot.

A lot of us get brought in through the emotions and after disconnection, then we move to **divorce**. There it is over, they are at the end.

So let’s unpack the scripture today. In the Song of Songs, we get the idea that **every marriage is a duet in need of great backup singers**. It comes to us from the Song of Songs 1: 4. I’ve highlighted the words which should be the tone of your backup singing. It should be the idea of your backup singing. You’re not adding toxicity to a bad marriage, you’re not encouraging the bad marriage, and you’re not going to add fuel to the fire of a bad marriage. You are going to **rejoice, delight, and praise**. This is the first time we see the daughter of Jerusalem.

The Song of Songs is this beautiful book between Solomon the shepherd king and the simple country gal, the Shulamite woman. These two come together and they start dating and courting in Chapters 1 and 2. They get married in Chapter 3. They have a honeymoon in Chapter 4. We are going to pick up in Chapter 5. The first time this duet starts to come together and they are building toward exclusivity in marriage, we see a third group of characters, the daughters of Jerusalem. They come in as they see this love starting to blossom, this young, budding vineyard of love starting to take shape, and they say **We rejoice and delight in you, we will praise your love more than wine**.

This is the tone of a marriage advocate. I want to bless what God is doing. I want to bless what God can do. This is my tone with college students. I feel college students today are being told by parents and church leaders and campus leaders “Don’t, wait, quit, stop it. Don’t even think about marriage until you get closer to 30.” I want to be an advocate that comes in and says you can get married in your early to mid-twenties. But if you do choose to get married at age 22, you need to surround yourself with great backup singers. You need someone who can come in and tell you... If you are working in a box office in Branson, you can’t buy a 4,000 square foot home. Not yet. You are actually going to have to wait until you own the theater. You need many voices of reason that help you flourish in that new, budding

relationship. Every time you see the daughters of Jerusalem in the Song of Songs, they are advocating for the marriage. They are blessing the marriage. They are blessing exclusivity. They are blessing oneness. They are saying "rejoice, delight, praise... We want you two to do well together."

We are going to jump ahead. So they dated and then in Chapter 3, they had a wedding and in Chapter 4, they had a honeymoon. We are going to pick up in Chapter 5 when they have their first fight. After they get back from the honeymoon, we see their first conflict play out. This is the Shulammite woman, the Shulammite bride who is now married.

**2 I slept but my heart was awake. Listen! My beloved is knocking...** That's Solomon, the shepherd king. Now she is going to quote him and if you're brand new to Hebrew poetry, we are going to unpack this today for you because Hebrew poetry is beautiful to read, rich in detail, and we can relate to it today. We can understand how it applies to our lives today. So she is ready for bed, she's in bed, and Solomon has been at work. He's a busy shepherd king. Now she's going to quote his request. This is now Solomon speaking, but she's the one quoting him.

**"Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my flawless one."** This is pet talk. We're building up to something. There is a Hebrew term; it's one word. It's a long Hebrew term to describe all of this right here. Do you know what it is? It's bowbowchickychickybowbow. That's the whole Hebrew term for that right there. I know there are young ears in here, but that's what he means when he says "Open to me." He wants to be with her physically.

So it just builds. ... **my darling, my dove...** And then this is a good one: **my flawless one.** He's telling her she is perfect. You need to understand this in Chapter 4 when for the first time, the Shulammite woman exposes her naked body. I'm not going to go too far. In Chapter 4, when she exposes her body to him, what does he respond with? "There is no flaw in you. You are perfect." And he is saying all of that right now because he's been at work and he wants to come home and she ain't having none of it. She's like "Are you kidding me? You're going to go all day and not speak to me, not be with me, and then you want to come home and get a little something, something? I don't think so. You want me, go do the dishes. You want me, you could call me. You want me, you could cuddle with me on the couch and watch a movie. You want me, you could just hold me."

He keeps going with the request. **"My head is drenched with dew, my hair with the dampness of the night."** "I've been out, but now I'm home and I want to be with you." Now I imagine she says this with a tone. I may be wrong. When you read a commentary, there is no tone in it, but I think there is a tone.

**3 I have taken off my robe—must I put it on again? I have washed my feet—must I soil them again?** In other words, she is ready for bed, she's done for the day, and he will not be her last task. I think that's what Hebrew poetry is saying right there. She is saying no through rhetorical questions.

There is the source of the conflict and now we keep reading. **4 My beloved thrust his hand through the latch-opening; my heart began to pound for him.** She begins to have second thoughts. She's in the chambers and he is going to leave a sign of sweetness at the door to say "I'm leaving, but I'm going to leave something as a reminder."

***5 I arose to open for my beloved...*** She has had a change of heart. ...***and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with flowing myrrh, on the handles of the bolt. 6 I opened for my beloved...*** She has changed her mind and now she is willing and open to being with him. ...***but my beloved had left; he was gone. My heart sank at his departure.*** She realized that was not a good interaction, not a good conversation, and she is wishing they could go back and do things differently. ***I looked for him but did not find him. I called him but he did not answer.*** So she goes out into the city looking for Solomon and he's gone. She runs into the daughters of Jerusalem, her backup singers and watch what they do.

In Chapter 6:1, the daughters of Jerusalem say: ***1 Where has your beloved gone, most beautiful of women?*** Where is he? What happened? This is what a good marriage advocate does. Tell me what's going on? Why are you crying? Why are you emotional? What happened last night? Honey, for the last couple of months, you've just seemed down. I get this a lot. When your marriage gets into crisis, your children, who are also backup singer, begin to ask "Mom, what's the matter?" "Dad, you haven't been yourself for a long time; what is happening?" A good backup singer asks more questions than they give answers. They want to know what is going on.

***Which way did your beloved turn...*** "Which way did he go because we are not going to sit here and go at him. We're not going to sit here and run him down." "We're not going to sit in the break room and listen while you tell us he came home late last night and wanted to be with you and you said no." "Well, I would have said no too. Nobody should be treated like that. He's a pig." We can start to go there, but they say ...***that we may look for him with you?*** "We are going to be there with you. We are going to help you through this. We are going to work to bring this marriage to a healthy place."

Let's look at this in practical terms for us. Here are the talking points on how to advocate for a marriage in crisis if it is a family member or friend. I break it down this way. Again, it's going to be phone calls, but you can apply it to a dinner gathering with appetizers, entrée, and dessert. You can apply it to texts and emails. But the first phone call for me is the most important because it determines whether or not you're going to get more phone calls. It determines whether or not you will be able to advocate for this marriage a year from now or two years from now.

I just want to share because I'm talking to parents about their children and then children about their parents and grandparents can apply this to advocating for their grandchildren. But there is a group in here right now that says "I can't do this because I went through a horrible divorce myself years ago and now I'm remarried." Do not go on a guilt trip. I realize that almost half of the marriages in here could be remarriages.

My encouragement to you is let this be your last marriage. Make this marriage a great marriage. When some calls you... And a lot of times they will call you because they know you have gone through what they are going through right now. When they do, be honest about your past. Be honest about what you are dealing with. Be honest and be a good advocate. If you are in a second or third marriage, you still get to pour into the marriages all around you. You are needed in the advocacy of marriages in our church and in our community.

## **1<sup>st</sup> Phone Call: *Advocate and Validate***

You have one simple goal. You are going to advocate for both spouses. You're going to make it very clear "I know I'm talking to you right now, but I am for both of you."

I met with a couple this week from out of state. They came to meet with me and as I shared with them and poured into them, it didn't go well. That's all I can say. I got emails back from both of them. One of them said he wishes he would have done things differently. I told him I didn't have a lot of time to follow up with this right now with getting ready for the weekend, but I would next week. "But I want you to know that at this point, all you need to know is that I am 100% for the both of you. I haven't picked a side. I haven't chosen one version of the story that I think is better than the other. That doesn't matter to me. I want to advocate for both of you. You're both important to me."

I know this is hard because you're son-in-law has treated your daughter so poorly for so long and you're supposed to say you are for him? Yes, because people can change. Don't paint a picture of your son-in-law on things he said and did when he was in his twenties. Does anybody here want to be judged by things you said and did in your twenties? You don't want to be judged by things you said and did in your twenties, but some of you, when you get the call in the thirties and the forties, you're still holding an in-law hostage to things they said or did and damage they brought to the marriage, but at this point, the first phone call, you're going to make it very clear that you want both of them to win.

**Focus on Feelings Not Issues.** If you focus on issues, lines will be drawn and you will pick a side, even if you don't want to. I've had my words twisted on me about 4.6 billion different ways. They will go home and say "I met with Ted today and guess what? We both agree that you..." I didn't say that I was picking her/his side. That's just not how it happened at all because I don't allow issues to be the issue. That's something Gary Smalley has taught for years. It's part of the National Institute of Marriage. If you've been to a marriage intensive, you understand that money, sex, in-laws, jobs, careers are not what's driving your marriage for better or worse. It's what's going on inside of you.

I stay focused on the feelings because I'm not drawing lines with that. I'm not going to be forced into a corner to pick a side. I'm going to stay focused. Tell me what you are feeling. Then when I hear what you are feeling – this is important – I can validate what you're feeling without validating your choices. This is where it gets very confusing for a lot of us. Someone can tell me "I feel so controlled by her."

"I get that. I understand the feeling of control. Let's talk about the feelings of control."

"Well, it's when she does..."

"I don't want to talk about what she's doing or not doing. I can understand you being frustrated. I can understand you're hurt. Let's spend the time there. Right now, I don't even want to talk about the choice you're making to stay or leave. We will talk about choices is just a little bit, but we are going to stay focused on this, as hard as this is."



Guys, this is very hard for you to stay focused here for a little while. It's hard for you to spend some time here. But I can validate the way a person feels. I just tell them "Let's make sure the decisions you are making are not aligned with what you are feeling right now. Let's be very careful with that."

I had somebody twist my words a couple of weeks ago to say "Well, after talking to Ted, he completely understands what I'm going through and it just validated all the more the decision I've made..."

"No; I want you to know that your decision is a knucklehead decision." Again, you don't say that on the first phone call. We are advocating and validating. If you are a strong personality, to bite your tongue, to advocate and validate in a conversation is very difficult when you see stupidity laid out right before you. It's very much a challenge. This is so much common sense, but we are not dealing right now with common sense; we are dealing with deep seeded feelings that many have dealt with for years and they've never been able to express them.

Then the good part is showing them how they can express their feeling and emotional communication. You can share this freely with your spouse at any given moment in the day in a judgment free zone. You have to be careful here. When you son calls you and says "Dad, the way she spends money is driving me insane."

Dad, at that very moment, you have to bite your tongue because you're thinking *Let me tell you about your mom. About all I can say is you're going to need to get another job.* Again, with this, let me encourage you. The less you say the better. Post a guard at your mouth. "With what I'm dealing with right now, may I not allow the words out. I just want my son, my daughter, my brother, my sister, my friend to know I love them, I care for them, I understand the hurt that is in them."

The goal of the first phone call is to get a second phone call. You want your son or daughter in a marriage crisis to hang up the phone and say "I'll call my dad again. For twenty years, I've never heard my dad cry. I've never seen my dad emotional, but when I shared with him that my marriage is coming to an end, he started thinking about the grandchildren... I could tell he was taking that on. He was loving me through that."

A church that a lot of its DNA is flowing through our church is Northpoint Community Church in Atlanta, Georgia. It's led by Andy Stanley. It's the second largest church in the country. They are successful, reaching many people. When I do marriage events there, they remind me that of all the people... This is shocking to me, and it's a Thursday night marriage event, but they say there are 4,000 people here tonight and for 40% of them, it's their first time on Northpoint's campus. They are brand new to this church. They are saying that because the goal of their service at Northpoint... Again, not the purpose of their church, but the goal of the Sunday morning experience at their church is to create environments and experiences that people leave and say "I want to go back there next week."

If you grew up in a Baptist church, one of the goals of a Baptist church with the altar call was... I didn't know this. It wasn't really the case in the church I grew up in, but it was in the first church I served. The goal of Sunday morning was to preach an evangelistic message and to give the gospel to get people to respond. You had to do that every week, but then Bible churches came along and said here's the

problem: 95% to 98% of the people standing in your small Baptist church during that invitation already made a decision for Christ. So your whole service is geared around 2% to 5% of the people that are visiting. So what we are going to do is preach the Bible verse by verse and disciple the 95% to 98% of the people gathered.

These are just goals that churches wrestle with and pastors wrestle with. Some of you think the first goal is better because that's what you grew up with. But the goal at Northpoint is to create an environment and experience where people leave and go "That was a safe place. I will go back there again next week." That's what we want the goal of the first phone call to be. "When I called my parents, it was safe. I felt refreshed. I felt like somebody understood what I was going through. I don't have all my problems solved, but I will call them again."

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Phone Call: *Answer Questions***

If you're having dinner, this may be the entrée. You showed safety and now you get to answer questions. Continue to listen to questions and ask questions, but get to a place where you can give answers because they know you love and care for them and you want the best for them.

I put it this way: Wait for questions. When they start asking questions, you can answer them. As parents, we do this with our kids. This is why we play games we don't want to play. We play games because I want Carson to ask me that one simple question that might just pop out of his mouth in the middle of playing Infinity on the Wii. If you've ever played Infinity on the Wii, you know it's one of the most frustrating, exhausting things on planet earth. You have two controllers in your hands and there are 42 buttons on each controller and you have to do it just right or you won't move the guy. It frustrates Carson because he's ready to get to the next level and I'm still trying to finish the first. I can't do it. He goes "Here, let me have it." He takes it and finishes it for me.

Let me tell you about a game called Frogger. I loved Frogger. It had one joy stick that you moved up and down. If you were really skilled, you went to Pac Man where you also moved from side to side. We didn't need buttons to make ourselves feel better. But I go through that frustration of those games that I'm not coordinated enough to play so Carson will go "Dad, what do you think about...?" Why do I jump up and down on a trampoline in my back yard, next to my inflatable swimming pool? I do that so while we are playing Crack the Egg, the kids will ask me questions. This is why we play with our kids. It's why we even date our kids. It may just be one question, but I want to be there. I want to be ready to pounce on that question. That's what you are doing as a marriage advocate.

For some of you, you start preaching as soon as they call you. You probably won't get a second phone call. When you just go at them the whole time, they're like "Okay, good talking to you, Dad. I've dealt with this for twenty years; I don't need any more of this."

You advocated and you validated and listened and you understood and now the questions come in and you can answer. You can begin to move into guidance and instruction.

**Focus on what is true and avoid rewriting history.** “He said this... Has he always felt this?” I don’t believe that. “He says he doesn’t love me. He’s never loved me.” Do you see what you just did there? You just took the last couple of months of your marriage or maybe the last couple of years of your marriage and now you’re painting twenty years of your marriage with that brush.

We were in the thick of it this week with a couple. When you go through a marriage crisis... I said “You’re feeling worthless right now.” Because that’s what happens. When you’re going through a crisis and someone is telling you “I don’t love you,” I don’t know how much lower you can go as a person than when you start hearing that over and over again. You start believing it. You start to sink pretty low. You begin to create a negative narrative in your head that he/she is saying this, so it must be true. You feel like you must be unlovable. You begin to put this in your head and sit on this for a while and then you begin believing it.

Dad, Mom, Brother, Sister, Friend, look right at your child and remind them, as I did my friend this week. I looked right at him and I said “I want to remind you of something. You were created in the image of God. You are a follower of Jesus, so you are called a child of God. You have worth and value. You need to understand that.”

Let me tell you something. I doubt there is a dad in here right now that could look into the eyes of their child at any time, for any reason and simply make bold statements like that to them without your lower lip quivering out of control. When you speak truth over a person, when you speak value over a person who feels devalued, watch what happens. “I’m not going to allow your history or what you’re being told right now to let you believe it’s true. It’s not true.”

As you are answering question and as you are spending time with the person on the phone, you need to remind them what is true. “I’ll never be successful at marriage.” Not true. “I’ve always been this way. What is it in me that...” Not true. We are going to focus on what is true.

Keep in mind you never know the whole story. You have to function in that vein. You have to understand you don’t know everything going on right now so you have to do the best with the information you have before you. You have to focus on what is true.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Phone Call: *Hope in Jesus***

This may be dessert. This may be at the end, but it’s about hope in Jesus. “Ted, he’s never going to change.” Well my hope isn’t in him/her. My hope is not just floating somewhere in your marriage. “Ted, we were taught by a counselor to look inside.” We look inside to validate feelings and emotions, but we are not about cuddling your inner self. Oprah taught you how to cuddle your inner self and she was wrong. Your inner self is a mess. Your inner self is flawed by sin. Your inner self is nasty and if you go looking to your inner self for answers, you won’t find good ones. But when you go to Jesus looking for the answers, you will find truth. He didn’t say you were the way and the truth and the light. He said “I am. Come to me.”

So here's what we do with hope in Jesus. This is a good time to go back to where we were last week. Share the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. I love using this story with couples. I love sharing with them about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and the power of Christ available for their dead marriage.

I say this with all reverence, but I want you to try this in the next conversation you have with someone going through a marriage crisis. I want you to drop the name of Jesus into the conversation and watch what happens. Jesus is still the name above all names and there is power in his name. When it has escalated and the conversation is going, I say "Let me tell you something. Jesus was raised from the dead and according to the scripture, the power that God used to raise Jesus from the dead is the same power available for you today to raise your lifeless soul and your dead marriage."

Ask them if they believe that. You're not going to get a lot of people saying no to that. Drop the name of Jesus into the conversation and watch how it takes the flow away from the spouse. Drop the name of Jesus into the conversation and the center is no longer the one person who seems to be taking all the blame for the marriage. We are now focused on Jesus at the center to bring life back to this marriage.

We looked at this passage last week. This incomparable great power, exceedingly great power that goes way beyond what we can think or imagine for us who believe; that power is the same as the mighty strength God exerted when he raised Christ from the dead. This is the power and the energy we are talking about. It raised Jesus from the dead and it can raise your marriage. We believe, here at this church, that Jesus breathes life into dead marriages and we hold out that hope for you. We want you, as you talk to family and friends going through a marriage crisis, to remind them of that truth. Keep coming back to that truth and I will promise they will not argue too much with you. I haven't had a lot of people argue with me, saying they don't believe in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. "Of course I believe that, Ted."

"Do you believe it was a miracle?"

"I do." .

"Do you believe that same power is available for you and your dead marriage?"

There is a pause, but it's hard to work yourself out of that when your heart is so much into it emotionally.

The happiness you are looking for outside your marriage is more than possible and even better inside your marriage. We can show you how to do that. We know the skills and the tools, but we want to talk about your heart changing. We believe you don't have to go on a dating site to find someone new. You don't have to put it out there on Facebook that you are in a bad marriage and see which friends respond to it. "I'm sorry you're going through that pain. What are you doing later this week?" It's happening. People think *We don't have fun anymore. We don't enjoy each other anymore. We're not together on the same page anymore, so let me go find someone I can have all of that with.*

It's completely and totally unnecessary. Be the backup singer to the duets around you that say "No, honey, I'm going to work with you. We are not going to abandon you. We are here for you. My phone is on. I will take your text any time, day or night. I will call you any time, day or night. We can meet any time, day or night."

We have advocates in this church that are so passionate. I've watched them get on planes to go be with their kids who are going through a crisis. I've watched this and the power of this and I've seen marriages changed and healed. Can I just ask, as your pastor, for some of you going through the crisis, resisting the backup singers, to confess your prideful arrogance before your Father in heaven? Receive the love and support of the backup singers that are available to you. Don't isolate from them; lean into them. Let them be a part of a marriage that you never dreamed possible.

Father, it's in the name of Jesus that we thank you for our time. We thank you for marriage. We thank you for your heart for marriage. We thank you, as we celebrated last week and into today, for the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. May marriages in here feel that as well. May moms and dads leave here today feeling equipped and challenged to bless the marriages in their family. May we be ready and willing and jumping in on phone calls and in one-on-ones to help the marriages that are hurting.

We are grateful for what you continue to do in this church. Bless all the events this week, from Coffee Conversations through Fearless this weekend with our sons. We are grateful for what you are doing here. Continue to bless our community and each family. I ask that you cover them in the blood of Jesus and protect them from evil and fulfill your purpose in their lives.

It's in the name of Jesus that everyone agreed and said... Amen