



Twolgnite

Catch the Foxes

Pastor Ted Cunningham

We want to welcome you to Twolgnite Sunday. No matter what series we are in, we pause on the second Sunday of every month and we talk about marriage. We believe three things drive our marriage ministry here. We believe marriage should be honored, enjoyed, and prioritized. Hebrews 13: 4 says marriage should be honored by all and the marriage bed kept pure. So we believe, whether you are young or old, single or married, that every single follower of Jesus is called to esteem marriage as highly valuable.

I was asked this week where our church stands on marriage and gay marriage. I made it clear again that we take a strong stance on the biblical definition of marriage which is one man and one woman for one lifetime. I want you to clearly understand there as some here that struggle with same-sex attraction and they are asking a lot of questions about marriage. I want you to know you picked a good Sunday to be a part of Woodland Hills this morning because part of what we do the second Sunday of every month is esteem marriage as highly valuable. It's why we talk about it so often. We want you to see what God's word has to say about marriage.

We also believe that marriage should be enjoyed. Comedian Chris Rock said "You really only have two choices in life. You can be single and lonely or married and bored." I think he is wrong. I believe marriage should be enjoyed and that's Ecclesiastes 9: 7-9 where it says **enjoy life with your wife whom you love**. So grab a nice meal, enjoy life together.

Then we also believe that marriage should be prioritized within the home. Genesis 2: 24 says **for this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two become one flesh**. We believe it's the responsibility of parents, as we dedicated children this morning, that our children should leave home as adults, not on a journey to become one. We believe the quickest way to eradicate prolonged adolescence – too much privilege with not enough responsibility – is by eradicating the kid-centered home. We believe the best way to eradicate the kid-centered home is that mom and dad, husband and wife should have a regular date night.

We have provided over a thousand questions, fill in the blanks, conversation starters for you to download from our website, so that you can take to begin having guided conversations on your date night. My encouragement to you is to leave your children at home once a week. You say they cry every time you leave? That's good for them. Allow them to cry. There are a lot of reasons kids cry.

We are going to talk this morning about Song of Songs. If you have your Bibles, turn to Song of Songs or your translation may say Song of Solomon. Today we are talking about catching the foxes. So singles and teens, as we talk about this message... Every time we talk about marriage you think about how you're not there yet. This is the perfect message for you to zero in on as you begin to think through young budding love and as you begin to form relationships. Your vineyard of marriage is not yet planted, but as you head towards it, this is one of those messages with a simple point, a main point, one point to take deep into your heart and understand what the scripture teaches us today so that you will know how to guard your marriage and go the distance.

I want to start with three trends that we are seeing in the church today and in our country. These are three marriage trends. I talked about a couple of them at Love and Laughter last month, but it's very important for all of us to understand what's going on around us. I believe Satan is very crafty and he wants to keep us focused that the biggest threat to marriage in the church is the gay marriage issue and I don't think that's the only threat to marriage. I believe we have all these other trends that are taking place in the church.

I'm in a new church almost every week, doing some sort of conference or retreat, and I've almost sensed this "I've given up" mentality in pastors and church leaders. "It's just the way things are now, Ted. We can continue to encourage the couples that are still together..." These trends are impacting the church today and it's time that some of us stand up and start declaring that this is wrong. We want to begin to honor, enjoy, and prioritize marriage. I got pretty fired up and I'm going to try not to use humor in these trends to bail you out which I always do. It was so thick in the first service with these three trends. You could cut the air with the knife so I started making jokes. I don't want to do that. Because we believe we are all backup singers, I want to allow us to just take the time to process these trends. You are going to know these. You've probably seen these happening all around you.

Sliding vs Deciding

Sociologist out of the University of Denver, Scott Stanley, has this blog called *Sliding vs Deciding*. His passion is relationship formation and how young people today are forming relationships and how all of us are forming relationships. We don't like to make decisions anymore. We feel that if we don't make decisions about the relationships then we'll be safer. We don't make solid decisions with traditional relationship formation milestones which are where we make decisions about life and about dating and about marriage and about family. Young people today and couples today are just kind of sliding past all of those decisions.

Many of you remember when you met the one you are with today. I remember meeting Amy on a blind date. I decided that night that she was the one. I told my buddy that I was going to marry her. I just made the decision. But then I had to make another decision and it was to get the guts up to ask her out on a date that wasn't a blind date that I didn't set up. So I made that decision and I asked her out.

Then as we dated a little bit, I decided to ask her to be my wife. I had to go back to Fremont, Nebraska... This is part of relationship formation. We want to involve our parents in these big milestone decisions. And all God's people said... Amen. So I had to go back to the Norwegian home of Dennis Freitag, who is a 6'2" full-blooded Norwegian, pretty much a Viking. I walked into his house and I said, "Mr. Freitag, I would like to marry your daughter."

To which he said, "You betcha."

I said, "Only under one condition and that is you allow me to pay for her senior year of college."

To which he said, "You betcha."

She had to say yes and that was a decision. Then we made the decision to set a date. We made all these decision.

That's not happening today. What's happening today is you're at dinner and you think he's cute or she's cute. You date a little bit, you have a few meals together, and then you decide to go home with him and sleep with him. Then you allow this to happen for a little bit. Now we are in the sliding part. Then you went to work enough times from his or her place so you decided it would just make sense to have a drawer. And then it was space in the closet and then a dresser, and pretty soon a year or two go by and you've bought a car together and signed a lease on an apartment together.

Whenever I work with a cohabitating couple... I know there are many cohabitating couples here; you are living together outside of marriage. Again, I'm asking that you put aside all of your beliefs and all of your ideas because it may be coming to light for the very first time that you just slid past all these decisions. The question that I would ask you is this: If you wouldn't have slid into all of these arrangements, would you marry this guy or girl? The answer I often get is no. They didn't put the time into investigating one another's character. This is why sex outside of marriage, sex before marriage, physical intimacy before marriage complicates things and it brings you to sliding.

Healthy relationships... Let me tell you that 67 years of marriage is a decision. It is a decision that they made and they have stuck with. So these are the milestones of adulthood: leave home, finish school, get a job, get married, start a family. Those are the five milestones that have been true of every generation. The only difference is their generation – 67 years of marriage – completed those milestones in a very short period of time if not in the same week. They were fast.

Now, with prolonged adolescence, we've stretched them out and we've told kids they don't have to grow up and become men and women. We have put them on this tract called *prolonged adolescence* and we tell them after they leave our home they don't have to become adults right away. We tell them to go on a journey to adulthood and try to figure out who you are. We use this term *independence*, but independence has become a socially acceptable term for selfishness. We are sending kids out of the kid-centered home to go live by and for themselves and they are just sliding past... We believe part of honoring marriage and prioritizing marriage, enjoying marriage is that we decide; we make decisions.

Dating While Divorcing

This is another trend that you see played out on Facebook almost every single week. This is a tough one. The divorce papers haven't even been drawn up or they've been signed but the ink hasn't even dried and now there is a picture on Facebook. "I've found a new man/woman." Maybe this person even caused the divorce. And now they want you, follower of Jesus, to hit the like button and support the new relationship. I'm telling you that I am one pastor who will not.

You may wonder when I will support that. Listen; don't bring a date to your wife's funeral. Don't bring a date to your husband's funeral. Your children are mourning the death of your marriage and for you to begin dating is no different than bringing a date to your spouse's funeral. The kids are trying to process it, family and friends are trying to process it. Then you go on Facebook frustrated with us for not supporting you. We are mourning a death and it's the death of the marriage.

When you read 1 Thessalonians 4, it says as followers of Jesus, we mourn with hope. Why do we mourn with hope? Jesus died and rose again. We believe that Jesus breathes life into dead people and we believe Jesus breathes life into dead marriages. So while you are running off, dating someone new, I'm still holding out hope for your marriage. I am mourning with hope.

A few months back, someone came up to me after a service at another church. He introduced me to the girl he was with. They were living together. He said, "We had an affair. I'm with her and I love her. I left my wife and three kids." I'm listening to the whole story and she isn't saying anything; she's emotional. He's saying he doesn't know what to do.

I told him it was easy. "I know exactly what you should do. I don't have to pray about it, I don't have to think about it." I told him "You need to leave this woman and go be reconciled to your wife."

This is why we have security. I backed away "Eagle One, Eagle One, needing some help here!"

They know the right thing, but where are the people standing up and proclaiming it. For some of you it's your kids. They want you to be happy for them. Advocate for their marriage, not just them. It's not about one guy here or one gal there proclaiming this and being prophetic in marriage; we need all followers of Jesus to be advocates for marriage.

If you are here today and you are divorced and you are in a new marriage, I don't want you to listen to this message and feel guilt. We just declared the gospel of Jesus; he breathes life into dead people. A marriage failed and you are in a new marriage. Take everything we are talking about today and you apply it to your marriage now. Don't take this message and go on a guilt trip with it. But I am one pastor who will not celebrate your new relationship while I'm still in mourning over the death of your marriage.

Greying Divorce

Do you think Grandma and Grandpa's marriage is safe? Nope. Fifty years ago in our country, the divorce rate for those over the age of 50 was 2.8%. In 1990, the divorce rate for those over the age of 50 was one in ten divorces. Today, it is now one in four divorces takes place in couples over the age of 50.

You probably saw this last year in the New York Times. It was in the Wall Street Journal. It's called Greying Divorce. For Grandma and Grandpa, the kids leave home and then they decide they are done and are going to find someone new. Now even the long-standing marriages are saying no and they are moving on.

Some ask me what I'm going to do after the kids leave home. You know exactly what I'm going to do. I'm going to Disneyworld. Amy and I have big plans. I have a journal. The kids ask about the journal and I tell them it's what I'm doing with their mom when I'm done with them. One day they will no longer be my responsibility. Should you leave them something? Yeah, write them one last check before you die. Just make sure it bounces.

This morning Carson and I were watching Greg Laurie from California. He's doing a series right now called *Happily Even After*. It's a message that fits beautifully with what our church believes about marriage. I leaned over to Carson... He had jumped in bed with me while everybody else was getting ready. We're the men in the house and only need five minutes to get ready. Our ladies need more time so we were just sitting there.

I go, "Carson, I just want you to know something. I plan on leaving you a little something when I die. But I just want you to know that I emphasis 'little something.'"

He goes, "Oh, okay." He couldn't care less about where this conversation was going because he gets everything handed to him on a silver platter.

I told him "I just want you to know I'm going to share and give the majority of it to your mom." I said, "We're going to have a good time."

So this is Greying Divorce. It's like the kids have left home and they've got nothing left. Welcome to Woodland Hills Family Church; we want to help you, resource you, equip you, and teach you in your marriage no matter how long you've been married. Before you give up and quit, stick with it.

So we are going to start in the Song of Songs 1: 4. It's the first time we see the daughters of Jerusalem in this text. If you are brand new to this book, this whole book of eight chapters is a duet between Solomon and the Shulammite woman. We don't know a whole lot about the Shulammite woman other than the fact that she is a simple country gal.

She comes in and she expresses deep, intimate, sexual desire, wanting to be with Solomon. She proclaims that and here is what the daughters of Jerusalem, the backup singers to this duet, proclaim. **“We rejoice and delight in you; we will praise your love more than wine.”** So I’ll just say, of the 240 times in the Bible we see the word *wine*, this is one of them. We see *vine* and *vineyard* 173 times. I’ll just say it again for my Baptist friends. The word *wine* is used 240 times. **“We will praise your love more than wine.”** It is the desire of Woodland Hills that every follower of Jesus in this place would be a backup singer to the duets all around them, even the duets not yet formed. So when your teenager comes home and says they are in love, it’s bad backup singing to say “No you’re not. You don’t know what love is.” The passionate mom: “I know what love is. Love is what your father and I have!” No, back down a notch when your kids begin expressing desire. Rejoice and delight in them and praise their love more than wine. This is tough for parents.

Let’s go into Chapter 2: 7. She says **“Do not arouse or awaken love before its time”**. When is it right to arouse or awaken love physically? It’s in Chapter 3. It’s a wedding. The wedding is when the marriage begins. It’s when the vineyard now gets to experience the physical aspects of marriage. But with the desire expressed... We have to be good parents.

I remember when Corynn was five. She came out of school and said, “I think so and so likes me.”

I said, “No, he doesn’t; he is of his father the devil and a child of darkness. You stay away from him. I don’t know him or his parents, but I’m sure they are no good for you.”

That’s bad backup singing. Good backup singing is beginning to picture a special future for their marriage. It is beginning to say we will rejoice and delight in you and we will praise your love more than wine. So when a young person comes up to me and tells me they are getting married, my first response is not “Are you sure? That could ruin the rest of your life.” Do you know what I’m immediately going to do when you tell me the news? Before I even know your story, I will say “I will rejoice and delight in you and I will praise your love more than wine.” But then understand that right behind that will be a lot of questions. Before we head to a wedding, we are going to ask a lot of questions, probing deeply into your character. Character trumps chemistry when it comes to relationships. It’s not just about how well you get along; it’s about the character. Sixty-seven years doesn’t happen through chemistry. Sixty-seven years happens because of character; that’s where commitment flows from.

So let’s all be backup singers, no matter what your age or season of life. Whether you are married or single, preparing for marriage, or coming out of a marriage, we will begin to rejoice and delight and praise love more than wine.

Now you begin to see the word *vineyard* used a couple of verses down in Chapter 1, Verse 6. We see *vineyard* used three times in this book. This is the first two times that we see it. We see it used literally and then we see it used... This is what I love about Hebrew poetry. Hebrew poetry takes something literal and immediately, on the next line, turns it into a figurative statement, referring to her body. So we are going to see it used to speak of an actual planted vineyard and then we are going to see her use that same word picture to describe her body. She begins to speak of the insecurity that a lot of women have

with their body and their family history.

6 *“Do not stare at me because I am dark...”* In that day, paleness was beauty. In that day, the women didn’t go outside and work so the more pale they were, the more attractive they were and she is making that point right here: *“...because I am darkened by the sun. My mother’s sons...”* Now we get into the family history. *“...were angry with me...”* So now we have family tension, family conflict. All of us understand that. *“...and made me take care of the vineyards; my own vineyard I had to neglect.”* So she hasn’t taken care of herself. This insecurity comes out throughout the first chapter. Solomon has his pick of women. He can choose anyone he wants and she feels there is no way he is going to want her.

This whole book builds towards exclusivity. As you grow in your marriage and as you grow in your relationship formation, it should be growing stronger and stronger towards exclusivity in that “Baby, there ain’t nobody like you; you are the one.”

Then you go into Chapter 2: 15 and here is where we are going to spend our time this morning. We are going to see *vineyard* used to describe their marriage. It’s the third use of it: the vineyard as a marriage. *“Catch for us the foxes...”* Then we are doing good Bible study method here. Bible study method has three main parts. You have observation, interpretation, and then application. To observe this text well, we are going to see it’s not just catch any foxes, it’s catch *“...the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom.”* It’s this relationship that’s forming, this relationship that’s budding, and the vineyard that has been planted. We have to take care of that which could come in and destroy it because it is in bloom.

I think about the young marriages that are in here. They are like sprouts. Some of you have been married a few years and your vineyard is pretty well established but what we are looking at today is the wall around the vineyard and the predators that are seeking to come in and destroy the vineyard. In that day, the vineyards were protected by large stone walls so keeping out big foxes wasn’t an issue. You would just make the wall tall enough that no one could jump over it and the gates strong enough that the foxes won’t get through it. The idea here is surveillance. It’s going around the walls of your vineyard and finding the little openings that the little foxes can sneak through and begin trying to discover the damage that’s being caused early on. Here are the two main points behind this verse.

Marriage is a vineyard in bloom and it needs time and protection to reach harvest.

We want to enjoy our marriage and see our marriage become fruitful. We want to see fine grapes pulled... I know this will frustrate some of you, but we want a marriage that ultimately produces fine wine, but that takes time and protection.

One time, when I lived in Dallas, I went to Lowes and got that little pot with that one sprout in it for \$9.99 and I was going to grow grapes. I couldn’t believe it. I planted it at the right time and it took off. We had been married two years. I couldn’t believe it. I was a great husband because within two years of marriage, I was going to give her a vineyard. Grapes started coming out and it was awesome.

In Dallas, everybody has a privacy fence around their backyard and one day I was just weed eating along the fence line. I was a little obsessive/compulsive when I was weed eating. I wanted to get as close as I could to that vine without actually hitting it. Nope. I hit it and it was done. The vineyard was complete. I went and bought her a bottle of wine and that was it.

The big foxes are easy to spot; catching the little foxes requires scrutiny and diligence.

The big foxes are what take you into counseling. The big foxes are “We just had a train wreck.” With the big foxes, the vineyard is completely destroyed... gone. But good counseling shows you the little foxes that started years back that led you to these big foxes. The idea here is catching the little foxes with scrutiny and diligence.

It’s our security team at this church. You can tell who they are; they are always looking around. Some of them are ready. They are hoping something goes down. They are hoping someone gets disruptive and they can pull out their laser gun. But they are always looking, constantly walking around and checking things out. That’s the idea behind this text that you and I would, with time and protection, with scrutiny and diligence, we would be invested in our marriage and be identifying the little foxes and catching the little foxes before we are sitting somewhere with a marriage vineyard that is done in by the big foxes.

I’ve never dealt with little foxes, but when we first moved to the Ozarks, I dealt with another little critter. We bought a house about five miles down T Highway 12 years ago. It was on a bluff overlooking Taneycomo and we thought it was awesome. We were lying in bed one night and the lights are off and we were about to fall asleep. All of the sudden, we hear this flapping sound. We were quiet for a moment and then we heard it again.

Amy asked “What was that?!”

I, like a lot of men, live by this philosophy that says if you act like you didn’t hear it, it’s not really there. The third time we heard the flapping noise, its closer and we felt it go by.

Amy goes “What is it?!”

I wanted to say “I think it’s a sparrow?” But I said, “Amy, I’m going to tell you what it is, but I need you to remain calm. I think it’s a bat.”

Under the covers she goes. She takes all of the covers for herself, leaving me fully exposed to the bat. I jumped up and raced into the bathroom. I turned the lights on and peered through this little crack in the door, feeling safe.

Amy goes, “What are we going to do?!”

I said, “What are we going to do? I’m protected! You have a problem!” But then I walked out and I killed... I’m sorry. I caught the bat and relocated him to a forest preserve down the road. No, I

murdered him pretty bad. I murdered him horribly. Have you ever tried to catch a bat? They are not the easiest critters to catch and I think they have everything: salmonella, rabies... everything.

Well, months later, an exterminator came out and we got the news that there 160 bats living in our attic. My first thought was *Don't tell Amy*. We were actually moved out before the exterminator came. But here is the amazing part... This part just fascinates me. All 160 bats were getting in through a hole the size of my finger. I told him to just plug it up and let's be done with it.

He said the problem was that we had a big layer of fecal material in the attic. It was bad. I never went up in the attic. How many of you have an attic you haven't been in, in more than five years. We live by this idea of just don't go up there and everything is fine. I have a crawl space and it's a door on the side of our house. How many of you have crawl space you haven't been in, in over five years? Stay out of the crawl space and everything will be fine. No. We want to go into the crawl space... Living in the Ozarks, I do this every couple of months and I'm looking for two things: moisture and termites. I want to catch it early. I don't want the guy coming out to my house and going "Hey, I took care of it. The termites are gone, but it's going to be about \$20,000.00 to fix all the damage they have done." If I catch it early, if I deal with it early, I won't have this issue.

I want to deal with the little fox. Many of us have to be bold enough to start having the conversations about the little foxes. I came from a church that focused on the biggies. We were always talking about the biggies. We were talking about don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't wear shorts, don't smoke, don't drink, don't chew tobacco, don't date girls that did any of that either. That was our list. So long as you did that list... It's why we had our series in Galatians. We are free in Christ. We don't have a list that we go by; we are free in Jesus. But it was that big list. I was 27 years old before Gary Smalley came into my life and taught me about the little foxes. He asked "Didn't anybody ever teach you about your heart and that which leads to this massive, chaotic problem that you are dealing with right here?" I said I preferred not to talk about those.

Jesus dealt with big and little foxes. When you go to Matthew 5, he deals with murder and adultery. He deals with anger and lust. Here's what it says. ²¹ ***"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder...'"*** So we can all pat ourselves on the back as good Christians because we have not murdered anyone. ***"...and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment."*** ²² ***But I tell you..."*** Let's get to the little fox. What causes the murder? What leads a person to the murder? ***"...that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment."*** So we need to deal with the anger in our heart and the anger in our life, the bitterness, the resentment.

For some of you in a second marriage right now, that bitterness and resentment towards an ex-spouse is the little fox you need to start dealing with. The anger and the frustration that you have with your parents is a little fox. I promise you that if you don't deal with it, if you don't resolve that anger, if you don't offer forgiveness, it will turn into a bigger issue and it will impact your marriage. This is something very interesting about the difference between a big fox and a little fox. A little fox can't destroy a vineyard overnight. As we walk around the vineyard, we want to spot that damage early on before the whole vineyard is destroyed. For some of you, you don't understand why being angry and hating your parents is a big deal, but it's going to destroy your marriage vineyard. It's a fox that has snuck in. It's a

fox that you must deal with. It may be toward and ex-husband or ex-wife or a sibling, but you need to deal with that little fox.

27 ***"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'" But, Ted, before you pat yourself on the back because you've been faithful to Amy, look closely at your heart and if you are dealing with this issue and then what are you doing to run the little foxes out of the vineyard. **28** "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."*** That's what we need to get out on the table.

You've heard me tell this story, but when Amy was in bed one night, seven years into our marriage, reading that book on how men think... It's not a really thick book. She asked the question "Have you ever struggled with lust towards another woman?"

Let me teach you something. You start by acting as though you didn't hear the question. "What'd you say?"

"Have you ever struggled with lust towards another woman?"

Then you act as if you didn't understand the question. "What do you mean?"

But then I knew we were going there. For a week, she was in mourning in our home. She was finding discipleship and listening to everything she could. I can't tell you how many tapes of Beth Moore we listened too. We talked and had painful conversations about this little fox. But let me tell you something. Having that conversation about the little fox called lust was the greatest thing that ever happened in our marriage.

Amy said "I will be your fantasy." This is exclusivity. "I will be your only fantasy. Now that I know this, we are going to take care of business."

"Yes, ma'am."

This is why my technology is available to my wife and children. I will not allow something as stupid as a cell phone or a computer or a cable channel to destroy my marriage. I just won't allow it. I love when the cable company calls me and wants to give me certain channels for free. I say no. Nothing is free. This person hasn't been through the type of training she needs to deal with this customer because I launch into "I will not sacrifice my marriage..." I get bold and passionate just to have some fun. I get bored; I just need you to know that. So when I talk to these people, I say "I won't destroy my marriage with that channel. I won't let the little fox in." You can hear her flipping through the training manual on the other end of the phone.

When I go to the mailbox and get out the catalogs... We get roughly four to six hundred catalogs a day in our mailbox. I never look through them. Some of them are pretty expensive. I throw away the really expensive ones that will cost me a lot of money if Amy finds something in them that she likes. Those get thrown away, but I don't go through them. I will scan them sometimes. The Victoria Secret catalogs get shut right up. I immediately go right into Amy and hand her the catalogs. It's just a little fox that I don't

want to deal with. By the way, when you start dealing with that... And men are tempted, but do you know why I don't thumb through that catalog? It's because I've enjoyed my wife that week. For some of you who don't want to have this conversation, it's a great conversation to have. Be open and honest.

There are some of you who are fully addicted, so you are dealing with addiction right now and just like neurochemical tolerance... For the same reason an alcoholic no longer gets drunk on one beer and it now takes a case a beer and then it takes adding hard liquor into that... It's the same thing that happens with pornography. You got started and you fell for the lie that it isn't hurting anything; it's no big deal. It's a little fox that turns into a big fox that destroyed your vineyard.

I'm dealing with this right now with a friend of mine who started with the little fox and now literally thousands of people are impacted because he didn't deal with this little fox. When pastors don't deal with little foxes in marriage, it just destroys lives. Have the conversation.

I've met with the couple that say "Ted, explain to me how a third person ended up in our bedroom. How did we get to a point where we invited a third person into the bedroom?" It started with the little fox. "We'll just spice up our marriage by bringing a little pornography into the bedroom." You saw this as an opportunity to have something great in your marriage, but it was a little fox that was destroying the vineyard and you didn't even see it. My dad still questions why I would ever have to tell Christian couples not to view pornography together. It's something in our mind that says when we view it alone, it's sin, but when we view it to spice up our marriage it's okay. No, it's sin and sin always takes you farther than you want to go and keeps you longer than you want to stay. Deal with the little fox before it destroys lives.

I met a sweet couple this week. He walked up to me at an event in Iowa City, Iowa. He says "You don't stop doing what you're doing. You keep it going." He was really passionate. His name is Lloyd.

I said, "Alright, Lloyd, I will."

He goes, "Everything you're saying that comes from God... It's true!"

I always love asking guys who have been married a few years to tell me about their marriage and the secret to a smokin' hot marriage. Lloyd invited me into his marriage story. Here is what I learned. I got to walk through it. This is a picture of Lloyd in 1945 in a bunker in France. He was smitten. It was young, budding love with this young lady named Jean. He said "Man, I was head over heels. I wanted to marry her, but I had to go to war." He couldn't wait to get back from whatever they were doing and get to that bunker and write her a letter.

Here's what he told me and I think it's a great secret for all of us and it fits perfectly with what we are talking about today. He said, "Let me tell you something. Everything was on the table. I just put all of my thoughts and all of my heart out there. There was nothing hidden. I just poured out what I was thinking and feeling."

This is something cool they did. I just want to throw that in there. He didn't give me this picture, but I stole it after he pointed it out to me on my phone. He asked me to pull out my phone and show him a picture of stars. I pulled up the big dipper and the little dipper.

He said, "Before I left, we picked this star." It's the star that's circled. He said, "We picked that star and we just said that was going to be our star. Every night I would come back and as I wrote the letter, I just kept looking up to the star, knowing she was looking at it too." That's fantastic.

Here's what is fun about writing letters during World War II. There was actually a whole department of the military that would read every single soldier's letter. I would have loved that job. Their job was to sensor the letters and cut out things that shouldn't have been there. Lloyd let me read one of the letters and you could see a piece that was cut out by one of the sensors. Lloyd said it was probably good stuff. Just so you know, he said he couldn't bring all his letters to me, but he showed me one box of a few of the letters he wrote to Jean. These are a few of the letters he let me read.

He said, "This is our life. There was no stone left unturned. We dealt with it all. We talked about it all."

To me, this is the secret. Guard your marriage. Get to harvest. Here is a picture of Lloyd and Jean. They've had 69 years of marriage. I was grateful that they were able to come to a marriage conference and learn something from me. That's a joke. He has nothing to learn from me. This man is walking with Jesus. He loves this woman. This was the best part... I didn't get a picture of this; I wish I would have. But they have matching canes. They walked out together just in love.

I told Amy that I couldn't wait for that day. Have you seen the commercial with the folding canes that fit in the purse? I said I want two of those. When we are done eating, we're going to flip them out and off we go out of that restaurant.

Father, it's in the name of Jesus that we want to take seriously the time and the protection that's needed for all of our marriages to reach harvest. We know for them to reach harvest, we not only have to give them time, but we have to give them that protection and we have to identify the little foxes that could destroy the vineyard. We want to catch those.

I pray for the marriage advocates in this church. I pray for every Marriage 911 counselor that we have here that you would bless them, that you would encourage them as they do their work with couples who usually show up with vineyards that are destroyed. We know that Jesus breathes life into dead people and we know that Jesus plants brand new vineyards and returns what the locust have stolen, returns what the fox have taken away. We believe this.

I pray for the work Ryan Pannell does around here and how he works with couples and works with spouses and as he is able to show them how the little fox grew to a place where it destroyed the vineyard and that just over time, the vineyard was taken out. I just pray for the work of those who do this ministry every single day.

I pray for the moms and dads right now who are raising children and they've got many vineyards to be thinking about in their children. I pray that Mom and Dad begin having these conversations as they begin to encourage their young people, as they rejoice and delight and praise the love of their young people, and that they would teach them about these little foxes.

I pray for this congregation that we would continue to be a church that is light in darkness, that we would be that salt and light that says we see what's going on and we are not just going to cower away from it and back down, but we are going to speak right into it. May we continue here at Woodland Hills to honor, enjoy, and prioritize marriage.

And it is in the name of Jesus that everyone agreed and said... Amen.