

In 1932 physicist Ernest Rutherford discovered that when lithium atoms were split, immense amounts of energy were released. This nuclear energy had the potential to transform energy production for great good. In 1945 the world witnessed the catastrophic destruction of life and property caused by that same nuclear energy. The damage caused still impacting the world today. Marriage is the relationship equivalent of nuclear energy. Instituted by God for his glory and for the future health of his world. Tragically, the misuse and mishandling of this God given state of life leaves all of humanity bearing the wounds and brokenness of marriage lived out in ways other than God intended. For many, the wounds are superficial. For others, the wounds are so deep they have not yet healed. The scars are evident. One's very spirit is crushed and the weight of living each day with the impact is a burden that sometimes is too heavy to carry alone. Each of us live within that spectrum. We have heard the Lord speaks to us about the grand vision of marriage he instituted. He also speaks about dealing with the brokenness of marriage. He does so as our loving gracious Father, who says to us, *'So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.'* **Isaiah 41:10**. The grand vision of marriage is neatly captured in the words of Christopher Ash, *'It is the same in marriage: we enter a state in which security has been pledged without conditions, and in this safe state we live out the calling to which we are called, to build a relationship of growing sacrificial love.'* The harsh reality falls far short of this God given intent. In **Genesis 3** God reveals the underlying cause of the harsh reality. It describes 'The Fall' and its consequences. That moment when human beings disobeyed God; doubting his goodness, failing to trust his word. The Fall significantly impacts marriage. These beautiful words capture the deepest level of husband and wife openness, ease and oneness, *'Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.'* **Genesis 2:25** The outworking of God's intent for marriage. Man and woman, equal but different, united as one flesh in the service of God displaying God's image to the world. After the Fall, we read these shocking words of fear, shame, broken fellowship with God and between man and woman. *'Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.'*

Genesis 3:8-10 A dark shadow is cast over the first marriage. That same dark shadow hangs over all marriages ever since because we share the sin of Adam and Eve. We experience the impact of God's judgement on the first marriage. *'Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.'*

Genesis 3:16b The shattering of harmony between husband and wife. As one writer explained, *'The essential and harmonious complementarity between maleness and femaleness has been fractured. They will continue as one flesh, but they will struggle against one another to determine 'whose' flesh they will be most like. The woman's default reaction will be to try to make them both live in conformity with her sinful desires. In comparison and reaction, the man will seek to dominate his wife. His default attitude towards her will be to try and make them both live in conformity with his sinful desires. The man will seek to force the woman to be 'the kind of woman' he wants. The woman will seek to manipulate the man into being 'the kind of man' she wants.'* Brothers and sisters, how then do we live in the light of this brokenness? Some thoughts shaped by Scripture and pastoral experience. First, acknowledge the truth that to some extent each marriage will involve struggle. If you are married ask God to show you the nature and expression of your manipulation or domination and repent. As a husband or wife renew your commitment to living out the biblical teaching on marriage. Take a step back and look at the dynamic and goals of your marriage. Is it a marriage summed up by one Christian counsellor as a 'tick on dog' relationship? Each party clinging to the other for the purpose of getting what they can from their partner instead of lovingly giving. Ask a tough but fundamental question, is the goal of my marriage to make each other happier or to serve God in the marriage. It ought to be the latter. I recognize the deep complexities of this when only one partner is committed to doing so. Ask God to help you be faithful and obedient in these areas. Second, recognize that some marriages will break down. Because of humanity's hardness of heart, God makes provision for divorce. Unless someone has experienced divorce they are unable to fully appreciate the hurt, the sense of failure, the anguish of letting God and others down, the feelings of shame and condemnation, the cost and ongoing consequences. From the Bible it is clear God allows divorce when one partner commits adultery and when a non-believing spouse walks out of the marriage. No woman, or man, has to stay in a marriage where there is domestic violence that threatens them or their children. Some people walk away from marriages for other reasons

often too quickly before genuine opportunity for healing and renewing of the marriage can take place.

Third, whatever the circumstance of divorce the refuge that is the grace, mercy and forgiveness of God is the haven to which I urge you to turn. If you carry the wounds of broken marriage, of domestic violence, of your own sense of failure find comfort, hope, forgiveness and healing from the Lord. These words from **Psalm 32:1-5** are worth meditating on and responding to, *'Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." And you forgave the guilt of my sin.'* Sisters and brothers, remember the impact of God's forgiveness; it doesn't matter anymore; in God's eyes it is as if it never happened in the first place. Fourth, in our brokenness we must not lose sight of the truth and goodness of the biblical vision for marriage. Pray for marriages to demonstrate that. Desire that marriages succeed and blossom even if that has not been your experience. If you have been hurt and damaged by a failed marriage don't dismiss the possibility of remarriage to another Christian. Fifth, remember that some people are never married or live for long stages in their life as a single person. The challenges of that deserve the attention of a future message. Lastly, whatever our present situation, hurt or need God has given us the gift of each other. We belong to a fellowship of Christians, the local church. Each member is broken and flawed. The local church is God's instrument in bringing healing to broken people and communities. So, love one another, listen to each other's pain, walk alongside one another, bless the lonely and alone with the gift of loving relationships, be a family to each other where families are fractured and damaged. In other words be Christ to each other. As we do we will grow and heal. We will be strengthened and encouraged to honour marriage as God intends.