

Strengthening Marriage

Reflecting God's Love

SPEAKERS Rev. Dirk Poppe | Rev. Stephen 't Hart | Richard Suter

In the first speech, we saw a really interesting illustration. I love the image that Reverend Bouwman had of Adam standing there silent with his hands in his pockets. Clearly that was metaphorical. In so many ways that captures the culture of our time. So, silence when we know something is wrong. What are what are your thoughts and just jump in as you go.

I think it's not only pride that stops us from intervening in things. It's also sometimes fear that we don't know how to address something well. And there's other things that can impact that in the surrounding culture that we live in, whether it's appropriate to do that in the culture. But often it's the fear of what will happen if we do speak up. I'm thinking from a marriage perspective. I often hold back because I'm afraid of the repercussions of what I'm about to say. So it's useful to think about that before you speak, obviously. But that's some of the reasons that I would be silent in situations.

Yeah. Maybe. So, we had a girl in our church. She came from Indonesia. We had a conversation one time and she said to me, she says, "You northern Europeans, you Dutch Reformed." And what she meant is we're pretty stoical. And that's just part of who we are. I don't know if it has to do with the pain that we have as a you know, as a nation. The Dutch have suffered a lot.

And how do you deal with that? You go inside and you close the door and you deal with it on your own. And you do that in silence. And if you do that in silence, it's a beautiful thing on one hand because you don't share with the rest of the world all the stuff that you're dealing with and you're just dealing with it in faith with Christ. But on the other hand, it can become a real problem if you don't actually deal with it. If it just sits there and if it's not actually dealt with and then the silence can become a much more difficult thing and then there's a culture of silence that can come out of that. And sometimes I wonder if that's part of our legacy and if that's something we need to deal with.

Speaking about a culture of silence, when we think about that and we think about church leadership, so you spoke about it from a personal perspective of keeping things to yourself, but as church leaders, what can we do to bring the appropriate things forward so that people do get the help that they need, whether it be men in marriage or the wives in marriage or even just young people struggling. So what are the things that we can we can do?

Yeah, I think I think the first thing that I as a pastor need to be doing and elders also in a church is to seek to have a culture of vulnerability but also a culture of honesty. Where we do recognize that on the one hand we don't just say look everybody is like this or that everybody's marriage is falling apart or abuse is everywhere and so forth that's by God's grace not true and at the same time to recognize that we are in a fallen world and we are also fallen people and we have been redeemed in Jesus Christ, but we are works in progress and to simply acknowledge that I think both in our preaching in our prayers, but also in our personal conversations. I also think in our in our Bible study times and so forth as well rather than have a stoical outward expression where all we want to talk about is things in an arms length, we can be open and honest with one another. To encourage this sort of a culture is appropriate.

So how do you do that? If I think of myself, it works best with people that you have regular contact with. It's those people who you know and love, you can be more open with. And so when you meet together regularly with people and you open your heart together and you have a culture together with the people that you're with where you're more honest with one another. And so in families, in a community of the saints, you have a bunch of guys you work with. I'm a pastor and so as a pastor, you naturally work together with your consistory. And so you work together with the brothers. You you help and you love and you bless people and you have a lot of informal contact together with the brothers and that leads to a lot of blessing. So, you know, it's in it's in smaller relationships, but I really appreciate

what Reverend 't Hart says. It's really good to lean into that also in larger contexts that we can be somewhat honest about these things, you know, off the pulpit and in a speech like today and in different opportunities that we have. As a personal example, I'm a chaplain with the Moto GP and I meet the officials there twice a year. In there was a gentleman who works there that I had some passing relationship with and for some reason I asked him in a very casual talk, how's your marriage? And he said, oh it's fine, thank you. How's yours? Now there was a challenge to me in that question because 6 months before or nine months before my first wife had left me fairly unexpectedly and I'd been told that if I tell him the truth like if non-Christians found out that I'd been divorced that would nullify my chapency efficiency, but I disagreed with that and the answer to his question that I gave was actually I'm having it pretty tough because my wife left me whatever six or nine months ago and then he looked me up and down and remember this conversation had only been going 20 seconds and he said well actually last night I decided to leave my wife and child. So what had happened is he had evaluated what I had presented to him an honest opportunity to really share something deep and he'd gone back on his I'm not going to tell anyone anything because I'd changed the parameters for our conversation and I think that's how we do it as humans. We can set the stage for how people respond and interact with us in terms of that vulnerability.

What are the other things that you can do to create or foster a good understanding of what's going out there?

So you're talking about having good relationships, but there are a lot of people who they're in the church, but they're not involved in a big group. There are people whose circumstances change and we don't like what we see and then we tend to back off. What's your view there?

If I can speak for myself, I don't think I've always invested enough in male friendship. I think I get along with a lot of people. I know a lot of people well. But how many close friends do I have? I know there's a few here as well and thank you for every one of you who is but the amount of time that I've actually spent in investing in those friendships isn't really what it ought to be. And I think that could be and should be one way so that there are specific people then that I can share with where I can lean in and speak to them about what's going on in their lives more deeply and that the same can also happen to myself. And so there is a sense of accountability one to another. Outside of that, also within church, I just joined in a group on Wednesday morning, 6:00 a.m. It was more just a book study sort of a thing. We're going through El Stewart's book, *The Manual*, which is out for sale on the shelves down the back there from the bookstore. Excellent book to buy. But doing that and just getting together with other men and having that time of just reflecting on life and reflecting on relationships, praying together and so forth was a very powerful thing.

You asked how do you also reach the guys that are not wanting to talk. So my "hack" is that I pray a lot to God for those people. Pray for opportunities in God's providence. He sometimes gives opportunities. And the other thing that I do is you just need to engage in relationship with people. Sometimes I have a little birdie that tells me, "Hey, things are not really going so good over there." And so that's not something I can act on. I can't do anything with that. But what I can do is I can walk out of church and go talk to the guy and say, "Hey, how's life? What are you up to? And how's work and how's this and how's that and how's the next thing and when we talk about a lot of stuff then two weeks later all of a sudden my phone rings and the guy calls me up and he says hey reverend there's something going on I just really need to talk to you and now pretend you never heard any of this. So that's what you do as a pastor.

All of us as men see people in different relationships and all of us see people that may appear to be struggling. Is it just as true for them? Should they engage or should we keep at a distance because you never know what you might uncover. I think it's our mandate to go after the lost sheep. And we may not get on with everybody, but we can always ask somebody how they're going. "I've noticed that you don't seem to be as happy as usual" or whatever the circumstance is. Or even "I've noticed you're hanging on the edge. What's your name and what's your story?" I think that's our mandate as believers.

I think the other thing too for us to realize that when we are bruised, when we are hurting, we can also respond in ways which are less than godly and it's very easy then when we have a mate that we got on well with in the past but

that the wheels are falling off in his life and he's starting to say things and starting to do things that are really hurtful or you see that that's toxic or that's not helpful and so forth. And it's easy for us to say, "Well, you're on your own." Let's not give up on each other so quickly.

Just one more comment. By God's blessing, God has given us six children. And as my children grow up, one of the real blessings that I get is that my children is that it's less and less of a father-son relationship. And it's more and more of a brother and sister or brother and brother in Christ relationship. And so, my kids are becoming my best friends. And that's a really precious gift to God. You have a natural relationship that you get to leverage for having real intimacy and just having beautiful conversation. So that's a beautiful thing too.

Okay, I want to move on if I can. You used the term abuse earlier and one of you used it in your speech. We hear a lot about abuse these days. The word is probably the most abused word out there. Give me some thoughts on it.

I think it's the second most abused word. I think the first one is a narcissist. If you don't like someone, you look online and you find out they're a narcissist. And if they don't meet all the criteria you see online, then they must be a covert narcissist. And if they're not a covert narcissist, then you look further online and you'll find some other sort of narcissist that the person that you don't like is. Diagnosis like that are quite useless really. Including the word abuse. They carry they're a generic description of something. But if you want a meaningful conversation about either of those things, you need to find out the specifics. What are we talking about? What does it look like at its worst? How often does it happen? What are the consequences of it? Unless you're talking about specifics, it really is not a helpful conversation.

Yeah, I really appreciate those comments. I think it's really worthwhile to consider. On the one hand, we need to be careful that, you know, if someone says that they've been abused, you don't just turn and say, "Well, we've all been abused." That's not a healthy, helpful response. Because, it's minimizing the hurt that they are experiencing and some people truly have been abused in the most horrible sorts of ways. But at the same time, what Richard has said here, I think, is so valuable.

What do you mean by that? And, yeah, how do we respond to it then?

It's a really complicated thing because there are some people who have been badly mistreated. They've been really abused and they've experienced profound trauma in their lives and that has had an enormous impact on them. And where that happens, that's an obliteration of God's intention for their lives. That's not the way that God wishes it to be. And so we need the language to be able to talk about that and we need to address that and we need to put that onto the table and to be real about that. So if it's a more general thing, if more people talk about being abused and being narcissists and cohesive control and if the language is generalized then it does disservice to those people. The other thing that I think is just really important with this to realise is that when we hear that language, sometimes our natural inclination is to say well this is the world talking and these are all worldly ideas that get pressed on us and, you know, is that really biblical and is that the way that God talks? And then I think, you know, biblically the Lord does speak about these things and he's very clear about this, but the language he uses is different. So the language in the scripture for example is oppression.

I wrote down for myself Psalm 10:7.

This is about the abuser, the abusive man who kills and who hunts down, who takes advantage of other people. And it says of him, "His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression. Under his tongue are mischief and iniquity." His mouth is filled with cursing, deceit, and oppression. That's biblical language. Exploitation is biblical language. You know the prophets, they talk about that. Jeremiah 22:17, "But your eyes and your heart are set only on dishonest gain, on shedding innocent blood, and on oppression and extortion." And so that's the biblical language of abuse. That's the biblical language of selfishness. And I also think if you think of the Proverbs, in Proverbs, the Lord gives us a picture of a narcissist. It's not the language, it's the picture. The word is a fool. It is in Proverbs 12:7, "The way of the fool is right in his own eyes." You have a narcissist. You know what's the core issue? He's always right. It's always his way or

the highway. He presses his point through. Well, God says that man is a fool. Proverbs 13:20, "A companion of fools suffers harm." You're married to a fool and you're going to suffer. That's the reality of it. Proverbs 14:9, "Fools mock at making amends." You know, that's a narcissist. You go talk to the man and he just blows you off and he laughs at you and he rages at you. That's the next proverb. If a wise man has an argument with a fool, the fool only rages and laughs. He doesn't actually deal with the stuff. That's that's the kind of biblical language that we can use in order to describe these things. When these things happen, that's really appalling. And the Lord has language for that. He says, "Such a man is a fool." And he says, "Such a man doesn't share in his kingdom." The opposite of that is someone who fears the Lord and walks in the Lord's ways. It's good for us to call it out. It's good for us to realize that these are biblical concepts and that the Lord deals with that and he calls it out and he says what it is. And so I would say let's use the language of scripture, oppression, foolishness, exploitation and let's understand that these are biblical corollaries of the language that's used in our modern world.

Sometimes the desire not to make a scene stops us from saying what is true.

Because isn't that dishonoring the person? And my answer is no, it's not.

I spoke to a young guy who was concerned about the treatment that he had from his father, but he said, "I don't know what to do with that because it seems wrong for me to talk about my father like that. It seems like a breach of the sixth commandment." It's okay for us to tell the truth.

One of the problems I see that causes mental disturbance and other physiological impacts on the body is when there's an in-congruency between what we experience and what we're not allowed to express about that experience, not allowed to tell the truth. And so this conflict that goes on inside of us has not only mental but also physical aspects and detrimental effects. So it's imperative for us to tell the truth. In Philippians 2 that we saw earlier, it says, "Have the mind of Christ and humble yourself." In Philippians 3, it starts with, "Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil." And so, the two aren't separate. They have to be held together. In Hebrews 5:14, it says that the spiritually mature are those who through constant practice have learned to differentiate good from evil. And if we don't mention evil or talk about evil and we just suppress it like we talked about earlier, then we're not becoming spiritually mature and we need to be wise in these things. Human nature is not to look at it. There's a poster, have you seen it with the three monkeys? He no evil, see no evil, speak no evil. I hated that poster because I was a legalistic, self-righteous, proud idiot who didn't like the fact that monkeys were being used to represent humans. But 20 years later, I realized I was the three monkeys because I'd listened to John Wesley when he in the past obviously I listened to what he read to his pastoral students and he said, "Always put the best construction on everything." And I thought, "That's good. That saves me a lot of trouble. I'll just put the best construction on everything. If someone's nasty, it was just because they've had a bad day. And let the evil go. So I'd become the three monkeys that I so despised. It's important for us to become wise.

Well, we sort of spoken about the negative aspects there. I suppose we're kind of remaining there. But if I look at a room here, I don't see too many monsters. And there potentially could be. But there's a lot of younger brothers here too. We want to encourage them. And the concept of dominating in your speech, Steve, dominating your wife. Is it possible to do that without realizing it?

Yeah, I can begin here. I think absolutely. On one hand to call things out and to recognize it at the same time to realize that this is a balancing act, for lack of a better word. It's the wrong way to think because you shouldn't be thinking in a balancing way, but it's sometimes difficult for us to see the difference for ourselves between what is an ungodly dominating sort of a role within our families, and to our wife, and what is a biblical leadership and headship. Very often I believe that it's also because we fail to think clearly that my headship comes out of my relationship with Christ and it comes out of an understanding of gospel.

I think that helps. But an example where we could we be doing this?

I'll give you two examples. Dirk, you talked about trying to keep your mouth shut, you know, for a good length of time when your wife speaks. This is something which I'm challenged with, and perhaps some of you here as well, that when someone begins to speak I'm very quick to chime in. Not just with my wife, with others as well. So tell me off when I do it to you. But instead of actually listening and not only listening to the words, but listening to the heart behind those words, it's become so easy for me to just jump in and either give my answer or else just to shoot off on a tangent, which wasn't really the point. And through that I think that we can begin to dominate in an ungodly way because we're failing to actually treat our wives with the kindness and respect that first Peter speaks about and we're no longer listening to them and as a result we can just say well I'm not hearing this, I'm just doing my thing anyway, and I'm just making the call without actually hearing my wife I thinks. That is that is dominating.

One other example, a very different one, I think it's really great that we now have banking apps on our phones where we know exactly where all our money is going and we can just go on there. We can go in there 10 times a day and just check to see how's my Westpac, my ANZ bank account going. This is great. This is helpful. It also means, however, that when your wife goes out shopping, you can know within five minutes not only how much they spent, but you can find out where they went. And you can also find out that they went to Glory Jeans and got a coffee on the way out or perhaps went and got a little bit of sushi. And then comes the questions. Why'd you do this? Why'd you do that? Why'd you do that? In a in an accusatory accusing sort of a way where actually you are seeking to use some sort of coercive control about your finances in a way which is unhealthy. I'm not saying you don't sit down together and be accountable to each other about how you're going to balance the books. You know, unless you're the government, you have to do that. But, well, that's another story.

But but having said that, there's a difference if you do not have the same expectations for yourself and the same accountability for yourself. Say, hey I can spend this here I can do this but you cannot. I think that's a dominating way.

I had a situation two years into my first marriage that I told you about where my wife came to me and said, "We need to talk about our relationship." And because of what I'd learned in my upbringing and the 'unnecessary feelings' sort of thing, I said straight up, "You don't have to talk about relationships. You just have to do the right thing and everything will work out." And I thought I was the Knight in shining armor helping my little damsel in distress there. And she saw it for what it was and she thought *he just flicked me off*. I didn't hear her at all.

You've got no stories of domination?

My dear brother Joe, when I first started dating or when I was first married, he says to me, "Dirk," he said, "you need to be really careful that you don't dominate your wife. You can talk her into a corner about anything; make sure you don't do that." And that was the best advice, some of the best marriage advice I ever had. And I would also say that often when we speak, we speak to win the argument, to win the discussion, to show our superiority. And we win the war but lose our wife in the process or our girlfriend or our friend. So there's lots of encouragements to heed what you said earlier about listening.

On the other side, the preaching we offer here about unity, living in peace, does it make it easy for us to avoid conflict in our homes or in our marriage when we really should be dealing with it? So I'm focusing here on abdication. So avoiding conflict, not speaking about a matter, not calling a matter out. What other examples do we got of that aspect of abdication?

Yeah, I am actually preaching about some of this stuff at the moment in my own church. I think that if that's the message that not necessarily the message I intend, but if that is the message that my congregation comes home with, that means that I just have to kind of bury it and I just have to, you know, do everything for the sake of peace and therefore I have to just let everyone down. There's something wrong with my preaching. That's not what the scriptures teach us. That's not what peacemaking is. That is a peacemaking model. The Bible is very, very clear about the need for us indeed to resolve our conflicts and to deal with them. Yes. In marriage, in our families, there are so many things we need to overlook every day and biblically speaking the book of Proverbs speaks about overlooking offenses and that is

good. You only do this and you can do this when this is something where you say it does not affect anything. It doesn't affect that person's, my spouse's, relationship with God. It's not a sin as such.

It's also not something there which is going to affect our relationship. I can just let that go and keep going. My wife does it all the time. I'm very thankful for that. But every now and then, yeah, there's a good time when she just reminds me that shoes should be cleaned up and socks should be put in a wash when they're pulled off my feet. But yes, there are plenty of things there where we do overlook. But when it comes to matters of substance and matters where actually this is affecting our relationship biblically speaking that needs to be addressed and our preaching should make that clear. Proverbs 17:14 starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam. So drop the matter before a dispute breaks out. So, our kids love going to Shelley Beach down in Albany because there's a little stream that comes in and you build up a nice little dam there and when it's nice and high, then there's some kid that gets to stick his finger through the top of it and it just washes away the whole dam in about 30 seconds. And I often think about that in my own relationship with Amanda.

I try by God's grace, I try really hard to pick my fights. There's a lot of stuff that goes under the bridge. And my take, Steve, do I always deal with things? My take is always, is it worth it? And do we need to deal with it? Do we have to put it on the table?

It is the glory of a man to overlook an offense. That is the glory of a man. And so if you can do that, and if you don't stew over it, you don't dwell on it, you don't think about it, it doesn't affect your relationship. If you're able to put it away, then put it away and do it again and do it again and do it again. We are like Christ. We're Christlike. She's not Christlike. We are. And so it is our job to be like Christ. Well, Christ deals with all our stuff. We put all our sins and all our weight on him and he bears it for us. And so there's a calling for us as men to bear something for our wives. So pick it up and carry the burden and do it for your wife and love her. Carry her through. Just one question on that. It's not important to you. What about if it's important to your wife? Yeah, for sure. Then you deal with it. Then we got to talk through. We need to figure it out. We need to talk it through. But that won't be an easy conversation, probably. And it can rise from the simplest of things and I think if you don't deal with them then they do well up and they will burst out and then what do you do? The culture that we're in tells us a lie that men can't understand women. There was a book that was printed, *Everything That Men Know About Women*, and it was that thick. And a guy bought it and took it home and he opened it up and every page was blank. And that's a c that's the sort of joke that comes out of a culture that says and pushes you can't understand women. But as we heard this morning, you can understand your wife. It's very simple. You ask her a question.

Sometimes we'll feel flooded when we're hit with something that we don't comprehend, that we don't like, and we want to get rid of it. But those conversations are absolutely necessary for our relationships to go forward because how do we know? What I discover as a counsellor is that people have patterns of communication and often they're death loops. So the way I respond to something will trigger something in her which triggers something in me and it's a feedback loop and it's just disastrous. And unless those things are identified and you can build a narrative about what's happening, they will continue to be damaging to your relationship. But if you can take time to calm down and then say, "Let's talk about what actually happened there." Because when I said this, you immediately did that which made me feel like this and it was just destructive. Unless you can sit down and have that conversation, then it won't it will never go away. But when you have that conversation and you have a narrative for it, then you have a stepping stone to the next level of relationship is where you understand what's happening and you can say, "Ah, is this what happened last time and could I do this differently or could we deal with it differently?" And then you have a stepping stone to the next level until one day you walk in or instead of an argument, you look at all the situations. You know, five years ago, this would have been a massive argument. You look at each other because you've talked it out. You've got the language for it and you just smile at each other. And that's a goal worth achieving. That's the smiling eyes.

Thank you. Very briefly, there's a lot of young men here. What one word of encouragement do you have? And I don't mean literally one word, but just not one minute.

Yeah, let me think. If I could just go back to what I had to talk about and the topic which I was given, if we can think about biblical headship in terms of law or gospel in a different sort of way than sometimes we speak about law or gospel theologically. If you think about headship in a sense of *this is how to lay down the law*, you've got headship wrong. What we need to understand instead true biblical headship is *how I am to live before my wife out of the gospel*. And if we get that right, I believe that many of the questions about how should I lead become evident.

My word of encouragement would be shining eyes. Brothers, shining eyes. You need to look at the Lord Jesus and you need to keep looking at him and the more you look at him, the more glorious he becomes. It's God teaches us you become what you worship. So if you worship Christ, you become like him. That if you are like Christ, then you also carry your wife. And you carry your wife and she's got shining eyes.

Get some good resources. Don't be afraid to ask. You know, there's men with the experience who will help you and want to help you. There's some great books out there from Pro Ecclesia. They've chosen their books. Well, very good. A very good plug there, by the way, brothers, because they brought a lot of books and I don't think they want to take them all home. So, please use your time at the break to get some good resources.

And thank you, brothers.