

Commitment: Are You All In?
Celebrating Our Differences
Romans 15:3 & Ephesians 5
3/5/17

- In case you haven't noticed, men and women are different...very different. How many have noticed that? This morning, we are going to not just talk about those differences, but we are going to commit to celebrate those differences.
 - o When we celebrate our differences, then we can really be all in, committed to our marriages and relationships with one another. Without this celebration, we will get frustrated to the point of breaking our commitment and walking away. Maybe you've been at that place before. Maybe even right now.
 - o So, to start our celebration off, I have a video this morning of a relationship expert to tell us the differences between how the brains of men and women work differently. It's a lengthier video. But, it's worth it. It's called "Tale of Two Brains."

- That video gives us a good set-up for looking at the differences we have between men and women.
 - o You would have to be kind of brain dead to not know that there are differences between men and women. Now, there are some very obvious physical differences. Then, there are some less obvious ones. Men have thicker skulls, thicker skin, more red blood cells and more muscle tissue. Women tend to be more resistant to heat and cold and outlive men by several years.
 - o Beyond the physical anatomy there are other differences. But, I don't want us to just acknowledge that there are differences.
 - o See, we need to understand that these are God given, God created differences. Knowing the differences and understanding the differences can save your marriage! So, this is the first thing we have to know about each other as men and women. There are differences in many areas that were God designed.

- The video showed some God created differences in the ways our brains function. Several years ago, this concept of two brains was taught by the senior pastor, Tom Whitesel of the Avon church where I was serving as youth pastor in Indiana.
 - o The way he explained it was that men are like waffles and women are like spaghetti. He actually got that analogy from a Christian couple who were both psychologists specializing in marriage and relationships. And, just like it takes the syrup a little while to get over the waffle wall to make it to the next box, it's the same for men. While women, with spaghetti brains, are all over the place, zipping here and there without having to transition.
 - o It is not simply that men are logical and women are intuitive, it is that men compartmentalize and women integrate. What that means is that women go

through life and make emotional connections with the things that are important to us.

- That is why women are good at multi-tasking. That is why women's brains never stop. That is why men need to transition from their sleep box to their awake box. That's why men need time to transition from their work box to their home box.
- When Pastor Tom was sharing this and we're all laughing just like we were during that video, I looked at Wil and he looked at me and it was like light bulbs went off! I had been raised with brothers. But, until that moment, I didn't understand my husband. Misunderstanding was causing us great distress in our marriage!
 - I didn't understand why he didn't want to talk as soon as he woke up. I didn't understand why he couldn't pay attention as I was telling a story. And, what was with the zoning out – it was the nothing box! So, it wasn't that my husband was brain dead, like I was originally assuming! He was just in his nothing box!
 - He didn't understand lots of things about me, either. Like, how could one person have so many words??
- Because God created us that way. Let's look at communication. From the first moment of birth, little girls have more lip and mouth movement than boys. In a Harvard study of hundreds of preschoolers, researchers found that 100% of the sounds coming from little girls' mouths were words, whereas only 60% of sounds coming from preschool boys were words. The other 40% were yells and sound effects like, "Vrrooom!" "Aaaaagh!" and "Toot, toot!"
 - Christian psychologist Gary Smalley points out, "This difference persists into adulthood. Communication experts say that the average woman speaks over 25,000 words a day, while the average man speaks only a little over 10,000. What does this mean in marital terms? Very often a man has already used up his 10,000 words at work... while his wife is just warming up!"
 - He goes on to write, "I have asked several thousand women how much time they need to spend with their husbands in meaningful conversation. A wife will say 45 minutes to an hour each day. What do their husbands sitting next to them say is enough? Fifteen to 20 minutes -- once or twice a week!"
 - Can you see how not knowing that difference and understanding that difference can lead to conflict in relationships and marriage? One woman, after hearing that women have twice as many words as men said, "Well, it's probably because we have to repeat everything!"
- When Pastor Tom was teaching on this, he said, "Women have 24,000, but men have under 12,000. What do you think I'm talking about?" His wife shouted out "brain cells!" He stepped into that one!
 - Yet, while we do have similar amounts of brain cells, the connections between those brain cells are different. Again, this was a God design caused by the presence of the male hormone testosterone that actually affects the way men think and process things.

- There are actually more connections between the left and right hand side of the women's brain than in the man's brain because during the testosterone bath that happens to developing male babies in the womb, the connections are actually severed. The corpus callosum gets twisted and parts of it are changed. The woman's brain has about 200 million connections between the two hemispheres - and there are studies that suggest the vast majority of these 200 million connections in a man's brain are absent.
 - So guys do not do nearly as much cross-talk between the two hemispheres of their brain. It's not that guys are left brain and girls are right brain - guys can use either the left side of their brain or the right side of their brain, but ladies, we get to use both sides at the same time. Men do not have signals going from left brain to right brain the way we do.
 - That doesn't mean that men are dumber and women are superior. It just means we think differently and God designed us to think differently.
- See, when we know and understand the differences between us and see them as differences created by God, we can better deal with them and see each other as normal instead of from another planet.
- It's like when you are in conflict with your spouse over and over about the same things and you begin to wonder, "Is this normal? Are we normal to keep arguing about this?" And then, you get together with other couples and they are talking about their arguments and you find out that they are arguing about the same things you are arguing about. So, you breathe a sigh of relief because you realize you are normal and your arguments are normal!
 - Husbands – your wives are normal! To you, they are over-emotional or crazy or oversensitive. Rest assured – God made them to be emotionally connected. Wives – your husbands are normal! They aren't deliberately tuning you out or refusing to connect with you. The syrup needs some time to get from one waffle box to the other!
- And, when you understand that these differences were God created, you can begin to do something profound. It's something God tells us to do in Romans 15:7. Here's what it says: "Therefore, accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory."
- After understanding that there are differences, we need to accept the differences that God created in each other.
 - This verse applies in any relationship. It's one of the purposes for our church – accept other people. The Bible calls us to do this. How much more important is it to do in a marriage?
 - See, we might never fully understand what makes each other do something. There are still going to be times that your spouse is a complete mystery to you or you wonder "why in the world are you doing that?"

- So, men you will never understand what it is like to be a woman. Give up! You'll never go through monthly cycles or menopause. You'll never carry a baby around inside of you, or do any of those things that make women, women. You won't experience the spaghetti brain that we have. You don't possess the box big enough to help you fully understand women!
 - Women, we will never fully understand what it is to be a man. Our spaghetti brain isn't going to be able to think through enough to be able to understand how men can think of nothing. We will never know what it is like to have testosterone course through our system.

- We are not called to fully understand one another, but we are called to accept one another. We are called to understand that there are differences and then accept one another despite those differences!
 - And, that is some profound information on how relationships work. Relationships will work when we accept the differences. But what normally happens is we come into a relationship and we expect each other to operate the way we do - and we expect them to be strong where we are strong. But God designed us differently for a reason – we need our differences because our differences prompt our growth and help to balance us.
 - You see, if we do not accept each other with their differences, we will end up trying to change one another. And the things that first attracted you to your partner will become the things that pain you about your partner. Because without acceptance, opposites first attract - then they attack.

- Rather than bemoan how stupid our husband is or how ridiculous our wife is, accept them for how God created them. Get rid of the idea that they should be more like you and instead try to encourage them to be like what God made them to be.
 - So, replace 'I want to understand you so I can make you more like me' with 'I accept that this is the way God made you.'
 - When we accept our differences, then we can begin to celebrate those differences and enjoy the richness of those differences. Wouldn't that be something?

- That's exactly what God wants. He wants us to celebrate our differences. When we accept and celebrate our differences, then we can treat each other according to our differences.
 - We've established that our differences were God-created. We know that. Just because we are frustrated with the differences between us doesn't mean that they are any less created by God. We might question why God would make us so different.
 - Here's God's answer: we need to see our need for the differences.

- See, there are things in life that function best when they are single-focused and there are things in life that function best when they are multi-tasked.
 - There are situations in life that, ladies, we are not as equipped to deal with because they need single focus. We need someone who can get in a box and fix it, not analyze it to death!

- Men, there are situations in life that don't need a solution, it needs an emotional connection. It needs to be processed and empathized with. The idea of "get 'er done" doesn't always work.
 - That is why we need each other.
- We need each other because we fill each others' gaps. None of us possess everything needed for every situation or circumstance or issue. We need the strengths of someone else to address things. Where we might be weak, someone else might be strong.
 - Ladies what we are weak in, God has made men stronger in. Men, what you are weak in, God has made women stronger in. We can fill the gaps for each other.
 - The challenge is to make those differences work for you rather than against you.
- That was God's design – that we complement each other. So, in order to treat each other according to our differences, we've got to follow God's design for those differences. God set up in His Word in a couple of sentences how we are different and how to treat each other according to those differences. It's in **Ephesians 5:33**.
 - If you are married or plan to get married, I would suggest you memorize this verse. Highlight it, underline, mark it somehow in your Bibles. This is God's design.
- Look at this verse for a minute... from what you find here, are husbands and wives given the same command? (No.) What are husbands supposed to do? -- Love their wives. What are wives supposed to do? -- Respect their husbands.
 - Does that mean that husbands don't have to respect their wives? (No.) Does it mean that wives don't have to love their husbands? (No.) The truth is that you can't love without respecting, and you can't truly respect without loving.
 - But because we are different, we have different ways of receiving what we need. And while men want to be loved, at the core of their being, they need to be respected by the one that matters most to them.
 - Likewise, while women want to be respected, we have a hard time fulfilling our life's purpose unless we feel loved by the one who matters most to us.
- So, ladies, I'm going to start with us. We've got to do this in faith and trust that God's design is right and that God will take care of everything if we trust him enough to follow his design. Don't do this because your husband deserves it. Do it because God commands it.
 - Ladies, we are strong. We live in a time when we are more empowered than ever. We pride ourselves in our strength. I'm right there with my strong sisters with my strong-willed self!
 - At the same time, our husbands need us to believe in them. If they aren't the heroes of our homes, then they aren't going to be heroes anywhere else. In our strength, we still need to respect our husbands and not just do our own thing because we can or because we feel we can do it better ourselves. When we stop respecting, we shut our husbands down.

- If you've stopped respecting your man, think about what first attracted you to him, pray about how you can regain that sense of respect, make a list of things you need to do if it will help you, but decide that you are going to respect your husband once again and then get about showing it to him.
 - o Phrases like these will really help: "I'm so proud of you. I believe in you. You do that so well." Women, we understand the feelings, so we should better understand their need to feel and be respected and how our words can communicate that.
 - o In addition, to respecting your man, remember that his brain processes things differently. He needs time to get from one box to another. You can't bombard him with subjects from different boxes and then get frustrated when he can't keep up! If you want him to open up and talk, respect him enough to find him in the box where he can best hear you.
 - That might mean that you prepare him by saying, "We need to make a decision about some finances. When would be a good time for that?" Bombarding him when you're emotional about something isn't going to work and it doesn't feel respectful to him. Respect his waffle brain, even if you don't get how it works!

- Guys, I must tell you that your challenge is bigger than the one I've just given to your wives. Again, at times you do it not because your wife deserves it and is being lovable, but because God commands it. You step out in faith and trust that God is right.
 - o But, your challenge is bigger because God says that she needs love, and that your job isn't just to give her spoonfuls of it. A few verses earlier in Ephesians 5, verse 25, God says, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave up his life for her."
 - o That, gentlemen, is a lot of love. Because women are emotionally wired, we need large amounts of love.

- So, men, take this by faith: your wife needs to know that you love her. She needs to hear it from you, see it from you, feel it from you, receive it from you. And the way she receives it best will probably be a way that you have never studied or trained or prepared for.
 - o Because the way she receives love best is to have you listen to her. Listen to her dreams and her feelings and her fears and her thoughts. If you will sit and listen, with full eye contact, and as much emotional engagement as possible, for 5 to 10 minutes a day, it will fill her more than you can know and reap more benefits for you than you can imagine.
 - o Now, when you listen to her, she does not want you to fix her or the problem. The way she gets fixed is to be empathized with. Men tend to listen for the problem to be solved. Your woman doesn't want you to solve her problem, she wants you to care about her. So, while she's talking, as best you can, try to listen for and understand what she's feeling.
 - o Here's something to remember, husbands...when your wife comes to you with a problem to talk about, remember that she is talking to you about it because she respects you. Love her spaghetti brain even when you don't get it!

- When we do all of those things in our marriage and relationships, do you know what happens? We become more like Jesus. Understanding that there are differences, accepting each other in spite of differences, celebrating differences and treating each other according to our differences helps to push us outside of ourselves and push us toward growth.
 - o A man and woman, together in relationship, best reflect the multi-faceted nature of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. They all function differently, yet they are One. They all have different aspects, yet they all work completely together.
 - o That is what God is pushing us toward in our relationships. He is always pushing us to be more like Christ. That is a result worth celebrating. And, it will keep you celebrating your marriage and your relationships through many anniversaries... 'til death do you part.

Prayer

Responsive Thoughts:

- None of this means that you don't have to work on your marriage. You can't just say, "I'm different, deal with it!" You still have to work to come together to reflect Jesus in your marriages by working on communication, conflict resolution, etc.
 - o We still have to work on areas of dysfunction so that God can transform them into areas of function and so he can transform us into functional people. But, we can't let our differences be what drives us to dysfunction. Instead, they were designed to drive us to growth.
 - o Where are you going today in your relationship? Toward dysfunction or toward growth. You can make a choice today.