

# “Renew Your Vows and Finish Strong!”

## Genesis 29:13-20

**Intro.** – In summer of 2000 CBS television network introduced America to a whole new type of programming – “reality TV.” This groundbreaking show was called *Survivor*. It pitted sixteen men/women against each other and nature while on a deserted island in the South China Sea. Participants in this and subsequent seasons of the series were challenged to outwit, outthink, outplay, outlie and outlast the others. The last one standing after each week’s “tribal council” would win the million dollar prize and declared the survivor...

This series has lost its punch according to recent ratings, but there is one *survival* series that never ends. It’s called *marriage*. You see, like the stars of *Survivor* the show, a husband and wife have to hack out their relationship in a hostile environment. True, most couples don’t have to make life on a wild and deserted island, but they do have to establish a home in an adversarial climate that doesn’t treat marriage or family kindly.

Present statistics tell us that close to half of those who get married in America are headed for marital disaster. Significantly, almost the same rate holds true for those who say they are Christians.

Here’s my point – without question, the number one problem in America today is the breakdown of the home. When marriage and the home come apart, it scars not only the couple involved, but the kids, the in-laws, the grandparents, friends, neighbors and even the local church. You’d be more than hard-pressed to name one of society’s ills that can’t be traced to the breakdown of the family. Thus, is it any wonder that God says He hates divorce (Malachi 2:16)?

What then is the key to survival? The answer is in the topic of this message: *Renew your vows and finish strong!* You see, God is *the God of the second chance*. He begins every day by renewing His mercies to us. Lamentations 3:22-23 “*The Lord’s loving kindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Thy faithfulness.*” God delights in making new that which is damaged, hurting and left for dead. In short, He is a God who delights in renewing.

Most marriages get off to a shaky start, at least this is my observation. Faulty foundations often are relied upon in starting off in married life. This is why so many are willing to throw in the towel and give up. Don’t do it, brethren and friend. You and I can and must begin again in our marriages.

*Purpose: to see how renewing our vows will enable us to finish strong in wedded bliss.*

To accomplish this I want to look at a marriage that got started shaky, to say the least and then make application with six practical steps to renewing and finishing strong:

### I A MARRIAGE WITHOUT A CHANCE

#### A. A Man Who Lived Up to His Name

1. “Jacob” literally means *supplanter* – i.e. con-artist supreme...
2. He lived up to his name deceiving his brother Esau and his Dad Isaac... while running away, he meets a girl with whom he falls madly in love... Jacob approaches her dad, Laban, who was Jacob’s uncle, asking for her hand in marriage. He said, “Sure, but be nice if you’d work 7 yrs...”
3. Finally, wedding came... but next morning found out consummated marriage with Leah not Rachel. The con had been conned. The cheater was now the cheated... Ended working 7 more yrs for Rachel...
4. So Jacob ended up with two wives, but wait, things got even more complicated. Laban gave Leah and Rachel their handmaids. So, Bilhah and Zilpah. Let’s see that equals 4 women in household.
5. Soga continues – Jacob loved Rachel more than he loved Leah. Leah was evidently pretty ordinary (weak eyes... name means “weary, dull wild cow”)... but Rachel was “a looker” (i.e. she *had it*) Bible says she was shapely, full of zip, glow, charisma and chemistry.
6. God saw Leah was “unloved” (v 31) and opened her womb, but Rachel was barren... This led to the handmaids being brought in to bear children... So Jacob is now living with four unhappy, competing, bickering women... plus kids! Could anyone come up with more dysfunctional home?

#### B. Bad Beginning but Solid Ending

1. Surprisingly this marriage that got off to such a lousy beginning, had a solid ending.
2. Genesis 30:1-2 gives us our first clue *“Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she became jealous of her sister; and she said to Jacob, ‘Give me children, or else I die.’ Then Jacob’s anger burned against Rachel, and he said, ‘Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?’”*
3. Later in Genesis 31:4 we find Jacob consulting with Rachel AND Leah, but what really shows the development of the relationship between Jacob and Leah comes at the time of death.
  - a. Rachel died during a family journey and Jacob buried her by the side of road near Bethlehem.
  - b. Leah died, Jacob buried her in the Cave of Machpelah (family plot where Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah buried).
  - c. Jacob could have relocated Rachel’s body but never did. Place beside him in death = Leah.
4. Most noteworthy is the fact that it was through Leah the Messiah would come. It was through the lineage of Judah, the son of Jacob and Leah, that Christ would come into this world.
5. The account of Jacob, Leah and Rachel demonstrates this important principle: bad beginnings are not decisive in the outcome of marriage.

No matter how badly a marriage may have begun, they can finish strong if God is allowed to heal/renew!

## II APPLICATION FOR RENEWING AND FINISHING

- borrow the idea – think of these as the Vitamin A’s of marriage – all six begin with the letter “A”:

### A. Acceptance of Your Mate

1. Romans 15:7 *“Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.”*
2. Where would each of us be in relationship to God without *acceptance*? Similarly, without acceptance no marriage could survive the differences that
3. If husbands and wives are going to succeed in their marriages, they are going to have to accept each other completely and unconditionally.
  - means looking at your mate’s flaws/idiosyncrasies and realize because Christ accepts that person in spite of those matters so should you.
4. God created each of us as unique, one of a kind individuals; yet, we are all created in His image
  - when we look at that person we call our mate, how can we do anything less than accept one another and love one another just as we promised we would when we exchanged our vows?

### B. Attention to Your Mate

1. 1 Peter 1:22 *“Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart.”*
2. This is addressing the need to put action behind the words of “I love you.”
3. Not at all complicated – ATTENTION – nothing communicates love like attention.
4. Illus. – watch little kids go through all sorts of gyrations when around adults and peers = attention!
5. Men in particular need “tutoring” on this subject –give compliments... give gifts... go out of your way to express thanks for even little things... speak words of encouragement/praise from others!

### C. Alterations for Your Mate

1. 1 Corinthians 13:5 *“Love...does not seek its own...”*
2. Too many get married thinking they can change their mate – those little flaws, irritating traits/habits, and quirks. So they threaten, coerce, cajole, manipulate or use some form of pressure the change the undesirableness of their mate... husband and wife alike work this like pro!
3. Again, you *cannot* change your mate... instead, you both must learn to adjust/make alterations – you, yourself must make the change through the presence of God in your life
4. You see, God is in the changing business. He alone can help you find ways to adjust your own heart/mind to your spouse’s needs, desires and goals. As result, your mate will be changed!

### D. Amnesty Unto Your Mate

1. Ephesians 4:32 “*And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*”
2. Forgiveness is at the very heart of Christianity; thus, its at the heart of any healthy marriage.
3. Using the word *amnesty* because this word comes from Greek word meaning *forgetfulness*.
  - a. forgiveness means paying all debts... Jesus Paid It All...
  - b. amnesty is forgiveness – the debt has been paid...
4. Far too many marriages are stymied because of holding grudges... While marriage isn’t easy, the road can be far less challenging by simply learning to forgive your mate.

#### E. Appreciation in Your Mate

1. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 “*Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing.*”
2. This verse reveals two keys to appreciation:
  - a. *encourage* = from two Greek words 1) *walk beside* 2) *calling received* = encouraging simply means receiving a calling to walk beside someone – in marriage you are called to walk beside your mate, fulfill them as a being in the presence of God.
  - b. *build up* = from Greek *to build a house* = when we encourage and build up our mates the end result is like buying and building up land – it appreciates in value... mates appreciate in value i.e. expressions of appreciation help our spouses grow into the persons ought to be....
3. Hebrews 3:13 says “*But encourage one another day after day...*” every time we see something worthy in our mates to praise and buildup!

#### F. Affection upon Your Mate

1. Ephesians 5:25 “*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.*”
2. Men, we are to heap affection upon our wives like Christ heaped His affection upon the church.
3. Affection is a fundamental need of every human – We express affection in many ways, from a simple touch on the hand to the act of marital intimacy. Point is, make a point to do this!

**Conclusion:** You know his name, Sir Winston Churchill. One historian described him as follows: “He transformed cowards into brave men.” History does record that because of this one man, Britain actually began believing they could not only survive the onslaught of Hitler and Germany, but they could actually prevail.

After five grueling years of war, on May 7, 1945, Germany surrendered to the Allied forces. How did Britain show their thanks to the man who single-handedly restored their resolve and determination? On July 25, 1945, not quite three months after Germany’s surrender, Britain showed their thanks by voting Churchill out of office. Churchill was rejected by the very people he helped to save. When his wife told him that defeat may in fact be a blessing in disguise, Churchill responded, “If it is, then it is very effectively disguised.”

Churchill was hurt. Perhaps you are hurt or have been hurt in your marriage. Let me use this illustration to urge and encourage your need to renew your vows, your promise before God that you will commit yourself to the welfare and prosperity of your mate, that you will never, never, never give up. That you will finish strong!