



ONCE UPON A TIME

fairy tales and falls

Week 5 Group Guide | Message by Eric Parks

Start

To get things started, let's go around the circle and answer this question:

Romantic Comedies are music to the ears of some and curse words for others. Regardless of your enthusiasm or disdain, name one that you would consider the best one ever made.

Share

Welcome to our series called "Once Upon a Time – Fairy Tales and Falls."

Fairy Tales...when we hear those words, there can be very differing reactions. For some, there is excitement, hopefulness and wonder. We think about the stories of struggle, overcoming great odds, finding our true potential and seeing justice prevail. It's when the good guys win and the bad guys lose. Fairy tales speak to a much deeper part of the heart, where we understand that there is this epic struggle going on in life and it's something we can all relate to. For some of us, our motto is "being optimistic isn't always being happy. It's about taking what the world throws at you and saying 'I'm not going to let this get me down.'"

For others, when we hear 'Fairy Tales,' we have a very different reaction. Our initial thought is that fairy tales are dumb. Instead of hope, we feel despair or even anger. The stories of redemption just make us feel worse about our lives and remind us just how far we are from any type of fairy tale ending. Deep down, we know there is no happy ending. To compensate, we become masters of sarcasm and are card carrying pessimists. For those of who view them this way, our motto is "if everything seems to be going well, you have obviously overlooked something."

Throughout this series, we are going to look at relationships and how all of them are intertwined and connected to a greater story. We are going to talk about adversity, how we get back up when we fall, unconditional love, and finding real redemption. The good news is that this greater story is not a made-up fairy tale, but a true story with a real fairy tale ending.

In this week's message, Eric talked about the beauty, joy, and difficulties we can face in marriage. As in the movie "Jerry Maguire" many of us believe that if we just have the right relationship or find the perfect spouse, we will be complete. The truth is that only God can complete us. There is no person on this planet—even with the best intentions—who can live up to completing another person's life. Marriage is

a gift from God; we don't deserve it. Marriage is a blessing from God and it symbolizes something even deeper than a lifetime commitment to a spouse; it is a holy picture of God's commitment to us. It is a picture of the one true never-ending love of God for each of us.

Let's read Ephesians 5:25-33

Growing up in the family you did, what did you learn about marriage—good or bad?

What is one mind game that you deal with in relationships or your marriage? (*Examples: they must have a perfect marriage / I'm just not loveable / this will never get better / I will definitely screw this up / no one else deals with this, etc.*)

According to these verses, what do you think it looks like for a husband to love and give himself up for his wife?

In the same way, what does it look like for a wife to love and respect her husband?

Grow

Expectations matter.

When we have lofty, over-inflated expectations of a spouse, it sets us up not only to be harshly let down, but puts an unbearable burden on the husband or wife that they were not designed to carry. Imagine the pressure any one of us would feel knowing our job was to make another person whole! It is an impossible task. Only God can carry our burdens. Jesus invites us to cast our cares on him and to come to him. In Matthew 11:28 Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." For that to happen, we must be willing to look to God to take our burdens because he is the only one who can give us real rest.

The reality is that relationships are not always easy and the last thing we need is the added pressure to force the other person to play the role of God for us.

Marriage is not easy ... for the same reason that no relationship is easy. It involves two sinners. ... the only force that will hold sinners in relationship is grace.

– John Ortberg

Let's read Colossians 1:17 and James 1:17:

In the *James Vol.36*, K.A. Richardson reiterates how important it is that we grasp that God is the giver of true and perfect gifts.

James proclaimed God as the true giver of "every good and perfect gift." This means that everything with God as its source is good. God is not involved in the evil we do when we are tempted; instead, he is only the source of good in our lives. He is the source of the good fight within us that resists temptation, recognizes what the law of Christ shows us about ourselves, and firms our resolve to pursue the works that belong to faith. The gifts of God are good because they never foster evil desire or sin. The gifts of God are perfect because they are the fulfillment of his will for his people.

Every good and perfect gift does not come from a boyfriend, girlfriend, husband or wife, but they come from God. We can certainly be blessed and enriched by these relationships, but the source of all of our God-honoring relationships is only God. As elementary as that might seem, it makes a world of difference when viewed through the right lens. When we view our relationships as God-given gifts, we can then care

for those relationships rightly. Instead of demanding perfection from them, we look to God to help us love, serve, and pray for them. By looking to God as the source of all perfect gifts, we go to him for our fulfillment alone. For those of us who have gone through the pain of divorce or have had difficulty navigating singleness, we can look to Jesus who is more than able to meet all our needs. It is the same God who completes us whether we are single, married, divorced, or widowed.

How does it change things for you when you think of your relationships as gifts from God?

How do you actively give grace in your marriage or friendships? If it is not easy for you to do, what makes it difficult?

Move

One of the things Eric talked about in this week's message was the myth of "It's Not My Fault." At some time or maybe many times, any relationship with two humans in it will experience an argument. Inevitably we get defensive and naturally say "it's not my fault," or "you started it." It seems that when seeing faults in other people, our vision is crystal clear; but it's much more difficult to see anything we need to own.

Read Romans 12:3 and Matthew 7:3

Jesus made it clear that the truth of the matter is that it is far easier to see clearly when we first allow God to deal with our vision. Once we have the log removed from our own eye, things might actually look much differently. Seeing things clearly makes all the difference in the world. There are no perfect marriages; we are all imperfect people pursuing a perfect God. So let's see things clearly. It should not startle us to realize that we fall short of perfection. We need to give and receive grace in our relationships. Freedom is found in accepting our flawed self and flaws in those around us without shaming, blaming, or belittling them.

We need to ask God to help us be grace-givers in our marriages and relationships and instead of playing games of "one-upmanship," we should strive to play a game of "one-downmanship." That is, how can I put my spouse or others before myself? Marriage is a gift from God, help us, God, to view it that way.

We all experience conflict in relationships. When you have conflict in your marriage or friendships, how do you typically deal with it? (*Avoider, escalator, aggressive, passive-aggressive, etc.*)

How do you think God might be challenging you to rely more on Him when it comes to your relationships?

Pray

As a group, spend some time praying for each other, especially for the situations that people might be facing today. If you are in a co-ed group, we suggest breaking up into guys and ladies groups to pray more openly.

To Go

Proverbs 30:18-19

There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a young woman.