

According to the calendar, there are four seasons every year each lasting three months. But all of us living in Michigan know that the winter season last a little longer. It even affects the way we think. You know you live in Michigan:

- If you define summer as three months of bad sledding
- If snow tires come as standard equipment on your car
- If your idea of the seasons is road construction coming, road construction going

We use the seasons to describe a lot of different things. This morning we want to think about the seasons of marriage. God wants our marriages to last for a lifetime. When Jesus was asked about marriage, He said, **“Let no one split apart what God has joined together.”** (Matt. 19:3 NLT)

Let's begin with the next video clip from the movie, *“Fireproof”* in which Caleb tells his friend Michael that his marriage is probably through. [Clip #3, “Love For a Lifetime”](#)

Caleb and Catherine's marriage is going through a tough season. All marriages go through seasons. Despite how fairy tales end, people don't get married and live happily ever after, at least not without making some real adjustments and renewed commitments.

The first season of marriage is “Romance,” or “Being in Love.” During the romance season everything is right with the world. Songs like “When a Man Loves a Woman” put it this way:

**“When a man loves a woman, He can't keep his mind on nothin' else.**

**He'd trade the world for the good thing he has found.**

**If she is bad, he can't see it, she can do no wrong.**

**He'll turn his back on his best friend if she puts him down.”**

Love is blind, at least at this stage of the game. But it doesn't last. When the romance wears off you're left with “Reality,” the second season of marriage. Reality clarifies what romance conceals. It is at this point that couples have to discover how to choose to love. This is the point where married people begin to ask themselves, “What have I gotten myself into.”

It may not take long for reality to turn into “Resentment,” the third season of marriage, when guy begins to think, “I thought I was marrying Julia Roberts, now I wish she really was the runaway bride.” The object of your affection now becomes the target of frustration.

It is during this resentment phase that character is tested and the need for Christ like love comes into play. The Apostle Paul describes that love this way in Colossian 3:12-14 (NLT).

**“Clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.”**

If this kind of love is not practiced, the marriage doesn't make it through to the next season and gets stuck in a perpetual winter of resentment or dies with a divorce. All marriages have the seasons of romance, reality and resentment. Some get to experience the springtime of rebuilding.

Before I go on to the fourth season, let me pause here to say something that we all need to hear. I know that a number of you have experienced divorce either as a child or as an adult. Sometimes people get the impression that divorce is an unforgivable sin. It is not! God's ideal plan is for marriage for a lifetime. But God is a realist. He knows that marriages sometimes don't get out of the season of resentment, that we need his help, healing, love and forgiveness. That is exactly what God gives to us in His Son, Jesus Christ. We all need God's love and forgiveness. The only unforgivable sin is turning our backs on God's gift. If your marriage didn't last a lifetime, let God help you by forgiving you, healing your hurts and teaching you how to love again.

When we put Christ like love into practice, when we focus on the needs our marriage partners instead of on our own needs, then we can move onto the fourth season, "Rebuilding." This is when couples become true friends. God can help us rebuild our marriages in three key ways.

1. He reminds us that we are different and helps us adapt to those difference. Thank God for partners who compliment and complete us. It is during this rebuilding stage that we begin to see how these differences can become strengths instead of weaknesses.
2. It takes God's gift of forgiveness to get past the resentments and begin the rebuilding process. That means that we have to admit our faults and ask for forgiveness. It means that we have to set aside our hurt feelings and forgive one another. It is not easy, but we can do it because God loves and forgives us.
3. It is easy to think of love as an emotion. But emotions run hot and cold. Love is a decision that shows itself in action. After the fall into sin, God decided to keep loving the people He created. He acted on that decision by sending His Son into our world to forgive us and restore us to His family. Jesus tells us to put that same kind of love into action. Jesus said, **"So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other."** (John 13:34 NLT)

God's gifts of love and forgiveness can make our marriages stronger and healthier than they have ever been. He wants to help us build strong relationships and can do it because His love is not seasonal. His love last forever. His love is available to us every day.

So now for today's Love Dare challenge. If you are married, take some time this week to renew your vows and then to pray for your marriage. All of need to work to put forgiveness into practice in the significant relationships in our lives and make the decision to keep loving our close friends and family members. All of us need to ask God to forgive us for the things that we have done to hurt one another and for God to renew our love with His love. God can help us through the seasons of marriage and help us love for a lifetime. Amen.