

Singleness (Part 4)

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1 Corinthians 7 It is a great joy to be with you all again tonight. It's been tremendous fellowship so far this week. And I just know what it's like at my home church when I announce I'm preaching on singleness. It's sort of a "you better." Please do. We need guidance. We need help. And there's a lot of heartbreak associated with singleness. There's a lot of hope as people hope to get married - associated with singleness.

And as I've been thinking about this message this evening, I guess I'd just like to preface it with one thing. My greatest hope, whether the Lord leaves you single for 70 years, or whether He brings you into a marriage tomorrow; whether you're widowed and left single tomorrow; is as we think through some of these principles, they would all be seen as principles that are meant to lead us into fellowship with God and to walking more intimately with God. I think of the hymn: "When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word, what a glory He sheds on the way!" And so anything we're learning about how to walk before the Lord is really not just so we can follow some rule, but we're seeking to follow a path where He meets with us and where He walks with us and communes with us as we walk with a clear conscience, and we walk in fellowship with Him and the blood of Jesus Christ cleansing us from all unrighteousness.

So let me read a few verses. I will be really handling verses from all over the Bible. I'll be handling this very topically. But I do want to begin with a few verses from 1 Corinthians 7. And I'm going to read 1 Corinthians 7:1-9. I'm also very glad we're doing question and answer tonight because the nature of this kind of talk is that you cannot possibly cover every single extenuating circumstance in different relationships and different situations people might be in. So I'm eager to spend a little time with you in Q&A after the message itself.

1 Corinthians 7:1 "Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: 'It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.' But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise, the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer, but then come together again so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. Now, as a concession, not a command, I say this. I wish that all were as I myself am, but each has his own gift from God. One of one kind, and one of another. To the unmarried and the widows, I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion."

Let's pray. Father, we come before You humbly, in great need of Your help, in great need of Your leadership and Your guidance; in great need of You to provide power and attentiveness from on high; of great need of You to dig out ears for us; of great need for You to produce the receptivity to Your Word; of great need for You to guard my mouth and to guard my tongue so that I might not sin against You; of great need for power; of great need for illumination that there might be a Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of You as I speak, Lord God.

We're in great need that we might not be overcome by the tiredness of a weekend of meetings and now it's Monday and we're tired, and the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Lord, we're in great need of You to give us supernatural understanding and alertness in hearts. Lord, we're in great need of You, but Lord, You promised You would lead us in paths of righteousness for Your name's sake. Lord God, You promised that the sheep would hear Your voice and they would follow You. Lord God, You promised that if we ask for Your Holy Spirit, You would give Him to us. And so Lord, we know You won't be unfaithful. We thank You for that. What a thing it is to bank on Your Word! To live by faith; not by feelings. And to wait on You. We love You! We love You, Lord. And we wait for Your power and Your help. We pray for it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now, we've seen in the last number of meetings that we started by just asking- as we're thinking about biblical manhood and biblical womanhood, we started by asking just who are we? Before we even think about our genders, we need to think about who we are, and the answer we came back with was that we are made in the image of God. Made to reflect God. Made to glorify God. Made like God in that we have minds and creativity, and we have the ability to discern right and wrong. And we saw that not only are we made like God, but men and women are equally made in the image of God. And so there's a complete equality between the sexes. We saw furthermore that God made us different in roles, even though we were made in the image of God, we were both given different roles. He was given the role to lead. And she, in the context of marriage and many other situations too, help. And then we saw that the curse that God put on us when we fell affects those roles. It makes submission difficult. It makes leading without harshness difficult. And then we, praise the Lord, saw that when the Lord Jesus redeems us; when we repent of our sins and trust in Jesus, and He gives us His Holy Spirit, He begins to actually work on those very things. He begins to redeem us in those very areas. And so, praise the Lord, the very things that trouble us most are the things that He gives attention to.

Then, we started to ask, well, what is a man? Ok, so if we're going to talk about biblical manhood and biblical womanhood, what is a man? The Scriptures sometimes say, "act like men." Or David says to Solomon, "prove yourself to be a man." So there's something called manhood. And we saw that a biblical man is a lord. We saw that he is a husbandman - someone who cares for and nurtures and shepherds. He is someone who is to be like his Savior; someone who loves to pull people out of difficulties and care for them and save them, if you will. We saw that a biblical man is to grow up to be a sage; to come out of the folly of childhood and to grow up and to be a savvy man who knows where things are going before they go there, because he's been informed by God's Word and he has wisdom from God's Word. And then finally, we saw that a biblical man is the very glory of God - 1 Corinthians 11. He glorifies God and has been made to glorify God.

And then we asked what is a biblical woman? And we looked at it and said, well, first of all, she is made as a helper. She's a helper like opposite unto him. She's a helper who contrasts and is compatible and is really complementary to him. And we saw that she is a helper in that she is a companion in the way that the animals could never be. She is the queen of the domestic domain who also exercises dominion over the earth but in a particular domain that the Lord has given her. And we saw from Proverbs 31 that it's as demanding as any task, any human could ever be assigned to be the queen of the domestic domain. It's a mighty kingdom

she's been given. And then we saw that they are partners in passion and pleasure. And finally, mothers and nurturers.

And it's interesting isn't it? We live in a generation where just to say that a woman is called to be a mother and a nurturer is radical. It takes almost nothing to be radical in this generation. To say the simplest, biblical truths. And that just underscores the depth of Satan's attack on the truth in our day. That just to read the simplest verses of Scripture, are utterly foreign to the way that we naturally think. Well, so far, and someone pointed this out to me yesterday after the sermon - are you going to say anything to singles? And the answer is yes. But I have to admit, I make no apologies for making most of my applications to married people. And I make no apologies because it's exactly what the New Testament does. When the New Testament says, "be filled with the Spirit," in Ephesians 5:18, what does it then do? It works out to being filled with the Spirit in which context? Wives submitting to their husbands. Husbands loving their wives. Children obeying their parents. Parents training their children. Slaves obeying their masters. It basically says, listen, be filled with the Spirit and work this out in marriage, work this out in parenthood, work this out in being a child, and work this out at work. And someone will always say, but I don't have a job. I know, but most people do. And someone will say, well, I'm not married. I know, but most people do and parchment is limited. And so the New Testament writers regularly addressed the broadest categories. We see this in 1 Peter. Peter does not address every exception, but he addresses those who are working; he addresses those who married. We see this in Colossians 3:16. "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly." How do I work that out, Paul? Wives submit to your husbands. Husbands love your wives. Slaves obey your masters. Fathers train your children. Children obey your parents. It's this common set of what the most basic relationships in life are. And so I make no apologies for not always dealing with the exceptions.

And yet, praise God, for those who feel neglected, there are different portions of the Scriptures where the Holy Spirit inspired the writers to go in there and dig into the exceptions and into the situations that people have questions about that are outside of the norm. And so often people feel very alienated in the church. If they're one of those people without a job or who aren't married or who aren't able to have children. And you need to know there are portions where the Holy Spirit made sure there were words that would address you in those circumstances and He leaves no child of God - there is no circumstance you can find yourself in in life where God has not inspired a word to speak to you in the Bible. There isn't one. His light is a lamp unto our feet no matter where our feet go. And that's a very encouraging thing.

So the question is tonight, how do I think about singleness? How do I think about singleness? It's a very fair question because many people are single. And God sometimes has people in singleness for extended period of times or repeated times through divorce or widowhood. And so it is a very fair question. How do I think biblically about being a single person? And then the question that is the next on many people's minds when they begin to think of this: And if I want to, how do I move towards marriage? How do I move towards marriage if I'm single now?

And the first principle I want to lay out when it comes to singleness is some people have a gift for it. Some people have a gift for it. Please look at 1 Corinthians 7:6. Paul says, "Now as a concession, not a command, I say this." And I believe he's referring to what he referred to in

chapter 7:1-5. He told people that they generally ought to get married because of the great sexual immorality and temptation of the culture they were in. He says generally, each man ought to have a wife. But he says, but, I want you to know, I'm saying this whole thing - that you should get a wife - I'm saying this as a concession, not a command. I wish that all were as I myself am. Well, how was he? Well, v. 8 tells us: "To the unmarried and the widow I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am." So Paul was single. And you need to realize this.

Here is the Apostle Paul, who's been given this Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in the first generation after the Holy Spirit has been poured out. He wants to see this Gospel spread out over the entire planet. And what he says is, oh, if I could get an army of single people! If I could get an army of people who were not married; who could stay up till 4 in the morning ministering the Gospel and then get up early and do it again. If I could get that kind of army - the kind of army who weren't worried about their wives dying in persecution and their children dying of persecution; if I could get that kind of army with that kind of liberty, I would have more of them. And this is an important verse because sadly in the church, we have made singles the second class citizens when they were actually Paul's preference.

We have preferred marriage and exalted marriage so high that what I find is when I read commentators on this verse, that they're constantly telling you how Paul doesn't mean that singleness is better. The problem is that Paul keeps telling you singleness is better. V. 38 "So then..." He's speaking to a betrothed man who's on the edge of getting married. And he says, "so then, he who marries his betrothed, does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do..." I don't know what that verse means. It must not be translated that way, but in my Bible, it's translated, "...will do even better." Now, when we say, "better," - and again we have to get used to this in the Christian life - isn't it amazing, over and over, God says things are equal and different. Men and women are equal and different. Single people and married people are equal. They're both in Christ. They both have the Spirit. They're both children of God. And yet, they're different. And one is better than the other for certain things. For certain things. Look at v. 32.

Here is how singleness is better. "I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife." And when Paul uses the term "worldly things" in this context, I don't think he means worldly as in sinful. I think he simply means worldly as in the things of this world - the difficulties and the paying the bills and the getting the house straightened up for the wife and the kids and the caring for the daily life that a married man or a married woman must take care of. And he says, "and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit, but the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord."

So, we come along and we tell people, marriage is Christ and the church. And it is. And it's a glorious thing. And it will satisfy all your desires and you'll be sexually satisfied. You'll be relationally satisfied. Marriage is such a glorious thing. And it is. I'm happily married. Wouldn't trade it for the world. Love being married to my wife. But the simple fact is the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to warn us ahead of time: it's not just a cake walk. It's not a bed of

roses. There's lots of trouble. Lots of anxieties in marriage, even among the most compatible people on the planet.

When I was a single man, I was a student minister at a church in Toronto. Friday night I went out to teach a Bible study or something. Stayed out late ministering to people. Loving people. Teaching the Word of God. Saturday - woke up, got up, if I didn't get up till 10 it didn't matter. I could do my devotions till noon. And then I got out and I taught the Bible at night, spent some time out with people. Sunday morning went to church, ministered to people. Sunday afternoon, had lunch with people, encouraged them, strengthened them. Sunday night, went to church again. Maybe met with some people after church. I got on the bus in downtown Toronto to go back up to the dorms where I was living. and I fell asleep on the bus. And the bus driver woke me up at the end of the line. You know what I thought of that? I didn't care. I just got on the other bus and went back home and went to bed. You run that by your wife a few times and see how that works. There is simply a difference between being a married man and a single man. And if you're a married man, this is what happens to many radical-for-Jesus single men, they get married and they refuse to embrace the limitations that Paul says will come to them in marriage. And you need to embrace them. If you've chosen the gift of marriage; if you've not been given the gift of self-control that leads to singleness, and you get married, then you have been given a great gift, but a gift with some limitations and you need to embrace them and not fight them. "Honey, I like to go to bed at 8:00." Whoa. "And I want to go to bed with you at 8:00." How am I going to please the Lord and my wife? Well, that's the struggle you're in from now until death-do-you-part. And we need to be extremely realistic about the blessings and the difficulties of married life. And we need to realize that Paul would wish that more people would be single.

Now then the question is: well, how do I know if I have the gift? And I want to be very clear. I want to make a distinction here. There is no such thing as the gift of singleness. When Paul talks about singleness, he talks about the gift of self-control. If you have the gift of self-control, then you can be single. Let me show you that. "Now as a concession, not a command, I say this: I wish that all were as I myself am, but each has his own gift from God, one of one kind, one of the other." So, both marriage and the gift of self-control are gifts from God. "To the unmarried and the widow, I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am." But how do you decide? How do you decide if you're going to remain single? "But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion."

Now, the gift of singleness causes great confusion in many Christians. People are torn up about it. They pray about it. And among many people, it's sort of the gift that nobody wants. It's like, "Oh, Lord, do I have the gift of singleness?" And among others, there have been times - I know I've had these times in my life where it seemed very wonderful to be single and to give yourself to a life of single-minded devotion to the Lord. But the way you make that discernment is by asking: do I have the self-control to remain single? If you find it just a constant nagging raging desire in your heart - and there may be even a tendency to fall and stumble, that is not a situation where you should just keep in that place forever. But rather you should pursue marriage.

Let me show you another verse that sort of lines up with this. It says in v. 37, "whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity, but having his desire under control, and has determined in his own heart to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well." Notice the person

who can not marry - it's the person who has his desire firmly under control. It's the person who can avoid a falling into sexual sin.

And so the first thing that you need to understand is, when we talk about the gift of self-control, it's not a gift that someone really, really doesn't want that they've had forced upon them. But it's more like this: It's more - I'd love to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. I'd love to give Him my undivided devotion. And I think I can put away the joys of marriage and I think I can restrain the temptations that might be alleviated in marriage. And so I can go all out for Jesus in singleness. Now notice it doesn't say that the person who is single has no sexual desires. It just says in v. 9 that they can exercise self-control over those desires, so that they do not need to marry.

And so let me just say this to you. And I know a number of people like this. If you're someone who has a heart to build the kingdom of God - visiting widows, visiting orphans, sharing the Gospel, ministering to people through the Word of God - if you've got a heart to do those things with as much time as you possibly can, and God by His grace has given you self-control over your sexual desires, you need to realize that you are not being called into some second class citizenship in the kingdom of God, but you may indeed be receiving a great gift of self-control to use your singleness in the church for as long as you desire really. And there's no sin if you get married later on. Because Paul is abundantly clear throughout this passage, if they get married, there is no sin. And it's very hard for some of us to deal with because everything's a sin/ righteousness issue in our minds. But the Apostle Paul makes it very clear if you get married or you don't get married, it's not a sin or not a sin issue. And so no one ought to be sitting here going, "oh! Maybe I'm about to sin!" No, if you choose to get married, you have not sinned. But if you have your desires under control and want to move forward in singleness, that can be an amazing gift.

And so that means something to the married folks here too. It means that we don't treat every single person like something's wrong with them. And we don't always ask: "What's a pretty girl like you still doing single?" "What's wrong with all the guys out there?" We need to get rid of that idea. And we need to thank God that He's called many, many people - and we need to have the heart of the Apostle Paul: "Oh, that You might even grant more." And my experience is that in the church, it's very easy for bitternesses to develop. The single people are like, "why are those married people at home so often taking care of those kids all the time? They've got to be living radical for Jesus." And the married people are like, "all those single people with their idealistic views of living radical for Jesus." Well, instead, there ought to be a mutual appreciation between the married and the single. I praise God that that married couple is at home right now training their children, reflecting Christ and the church. They have their own struggles and I praise God for them. And the married people are like, man, I love those single people that have the freedom and the liberty to take care of them.

And I say this to our church - I don't know if this is applicable here, but the gift of singleness is not just so the married people can have free babysitting. It's not just so they can serve you. And we need to be extremely careful that we don't think that just because someone is single, well, that means they have all the free time in the world to take care of the needs that might pop into my mind at any given moment. And so God has given the gift of singleness, but if

you don't want it, and you can't handle it, it's not yours. The gift is not a curse you don't want. It's a gift from Your Father. Not a curse.

The second thing we need to say about singleness is some people don't have a gift of self-control, and they're still single. Some people are burning to get married. Deeply desire to get married. No doubt in their minds that they would like to be in a married state, even though it will cause greater anxieties, even though it will cause difficulties, but they are sure, they want to get married, but it never seems to work. And honestly, in the church I pastor, my heart just goes out to these people. I often get to talk to them. And you need to realize that when you don't feel equipped; when you feel like, man, I have to spend all my time gouging out my eye and cutting off my hand and fighting to stay pure and I'd love to be getting married and my heart just aches to be married and I just stay single. And it was one thing when it was 20-25, but now it's been 25-30, and now it's been 30-35, and now it's been 35-40. And nothing is working. And I've heard all these sermons on biblical principles for getting married and they don't "work." You need to realize that you have not been given the gift of self-control. You've been given the gift of suffering. You've been given a gift of suffering. And many times when we walk into a good gift, God gives us the gift of suffering. Many couples get married and they begin to want to have children. Is that a good desire? You bet it's a good desire. They begin to come together hoping to have children, and then one year of infertility turns into five, and five turns into ten, and they've been given the gift of suffering. There was a time where half of our pastors were in infertile marriages. Just deep suffering. And the reason it's so hard is because it's not like, Lord, I want to go drinking every night. It's not like I want to go out and do drugs. I just want to get married to a godly man and serve You. But You keep saying no. And I'm doing all the stuff to be available, be godly, be modest, and nothing's working.

And Philippians 1 is a good verse for us. It's speaking in a persecution context, but I believe the words are applicable in any difficult trial in a Christian's life. Philippians 1:29 "For you it has been granted..." or gifted; it's a charisma. "For to you it has been granted (or gifted) to you for the sake of Christ that you should not only believe in Him..." That was your first gift. You get to believe in Him. "...but also" this gift has been given. "...that you should suffer for His sake." God gives both faith to believe and be saved, and He gives the gift of suffering. And He gives it to so many different people. He gives it to the preacher who loses his voice. He gives it to the couple who can't have children. He gives it to the man who wants to use his health on the mission field and loses his health before he gets to the mission field. He gives suffering to all of His people. And some of the people He gives it to are single people who desperately want to get married, but nothing works. And you need to know, you have not been forgotten by God. Not one bit. You haven't been forgotten by God. You have been gifted by God. And you need to know that it's alright to grieve. You look at the Psalms. The psalmist is not a stoic. The psalmist does not say, this is hard, but I've got a stiff upper lip. He says Lord, this is miserable! Lord, it's so difficult! Lord, this is a trial! Lord, I'm going through agony and pain. And the psalmist always vents his heart to God and tells God of his trials. And the last thing we want to do is tell people who are single who want to be married, that they just need to have a stiff upper lip about it, and they just need to suck it up. That's not the right counsel at all. We're a church that weeps with those who weep, and knows that trials really are trials.

John Angel James wrote a book my wife read, and she shared some wisdom from it with me. It's called, "The Widow Directed to the Widow's God." And of course, widowhood is just one more form of suffering. You wanted children; you didn't get them. You wanted to be married; you didn't get to. You wanted your husband to live; he died. And in that book, John Angel James - I don't know how to pronounce his middle name - he says when God puts you into a trial, it's wrong not to grieve, because He has taken something good from you. And it's wrong not to express to Him, Lord, this good thing has been taken. But then he adds, but it's also wrong not to be comforted. It's also wrong not to be comforted. For a parent to lose a child and not weep is not the height of spirituality. The Lord Jesus Christ lost His friend Lazarus, and He didn't say, "Oh, he's in heaven." It says He snorted like a horse, the verse actually says. He was filled with anger and then tears in the face of death of His friend Lazarus. It deeply affected Him. And He was moved by it. And it's wrong not to be moved by suffering. But it's wrong not to be comforted too. It's wrong not to eventually in due time dry your tears, and take up the promises of God, and know that Christ is enough; that He is sufficient.

We had a testimony in our church a few weeks back of a woman who was single for a very long time, until she was about 40. And she said, I never got any victory because I made contentment my idol. She wanted to be content as a single person so bad she couldn't get content. And she goes, I got victory when I realized what I needed wasn't contentment, but Christ. And when I had Christ, then I had contentment. And then she got married right away. But don't tell people stories like that. Don't tell single people stories like that. Once you're content, then they got married. There's lots of couples who give it all to the Lord when they're infertile and never have a child. Giving it all to the Lord is not a promise that He'll make it better. Giving it all to the Lord is a promise that you'll get Christ. And you'll get satisfaction in Christ.

Now, we've seen that some people have the gift of self- control for singleness, and it should be esteemed in the church. And then we have also seen that some people don't have a gift for singleness and they're still single, and that should be regarded for us as a suffering to be comforted and encouraged with all the promises of God in the Scripture.

But then the question becomes, well, how do I move from being single to being married? I am single right now, but I'd like to be married. And in fact, the Apostle Paul tells us that you should seek to be married, right? He says in v. 8, "to the unmarried and the widow, I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am, but if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry." There actually becomes an obligation to pursue marriage if you don't think you can handle singleness. So, some people think when they begin to pursue marriage that they're not being spiritual; that they're losing their first love; that they're falling away from deep devotion to Christ. But that's not it at all. The Bible is immensely practical and it says to you, if you don't have this gift, you should marry. No guilt. But rather freedom from the Lord to marry. And in fact, marriage is something we are told it is good to seek. Proverbs 18:22 I'll read it to you. Sometimes when I'm flipping through my Bible, I think entire books disappear. Proverbs 18:22 "He who finds a wife, finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord." And so there's both God's side and man's side. Man is finding a wife, looking for one, seeking for one, and when he finds one, he has obtained something that God gave him.

But this question of how to seek a wife is one which I believe the evangelical church is in utter confusion about at the moment. How to find a wife. And it's very possible to be misguided

for so many reasons. First of all, there's the bad use of Bible texts. Misguided. So where do you go in the Scriptures for guidance about how to get married? Genesis 24? Remember Genesis 24? Abraham sends his servant back to his homeland, and the servant says whoever I ask for water, if she also offers to water my camels, then I'll know that that's the one. I'll put some gold jewelry on her and I'll take her back home to my master. So you know, two guys read this one day. They're like whichever girl comes into the kitchen and asks for a Pepsi, if she also offers to make me a sandwich, then she'll be the one. And you're like, you're a dangerous guy. Don't read Genesis 24 like that. Or, you know some woman is reading along in the book of Ruth, and she's sick of all these passive men. And so she says, well, maybe I just need to go to one of them by night, pull the covers off his feet, sit down, and ask him if he'll be my kinsmen redeemer when he wakes up. And you're like, there are so many possible ways to abuse the Scriptures on this point. And just because the Scriptures give us an example of something does not mean that's the way God wants to do it in our lives.

On top of that, the history of people coming together in the United States of America is very mixed. When this nation was first formed, most marriages were arranged. That is, families, for different reasons of social benefit or for financial benefit or maybe love was involved at times, I'm not sure - but for different reasons, would arrange the marriages between a young man and a young woman. Then, you move forward in the history of our nation, and what you get is you get a system of gentlemen callers, where the man would go to the woman's house and - I've just read this in one place - that she was actually the one who invited him to her house, and of course, then, they basically dated with dad watching. So they sat on the porch and were under that sort of system. Then, in the 1930's, money became more of an option. The automobile begins to become prevalent. And the date becomes prevalent, which is where you leave the home and you go away from where there are any parents, and you buy something - you buy a ticket to a movie, you buy a pop, you do whatever, and you date. And so it's not like there's been one way to come together in marriage in the history of this country.

And then, if there wasn't just the bad Bible verse problem - Genesis 24 and Ruth. If it wasn't just the mixed history in the United States of America, there's preachers who get really dogmatic about the exact right way you ought to do it. And I said this when I preached on this in my home church. You've got preachers who are really dogmatic that it's good to do sanctified dating. And you've got preachers that are really dogmatic that it needs to be courtship. And if you're in India, you'll have preachers that are really dogmatic that it should be an arranged marriage. And the Charles Leiter test is: what's the verse for that brother? What verse will you use? And when you don't have a verse, the number one rule of preaching is to be quiet. You don't pretend you have a verse. And so we've got weird verses, like Genesis 24 and Ruth, and then we've got a mixed history in the United States of America, and then we've got people getting dogmatic where they have no place getting dogmatic. And it makes for a very difficult situation for young men and young men to come together and to follow Paul's admonition that they ought to get married.

And so what I want to do in the remainder of our time, is I want to offer some principles. And we might think, oh, we don't have explicit directions. All we have is principles. If the Holy Spirit had wanted us to have explicit directions, we would have them. The Word of God being sufficient means that we trust all that it does say, but it also means that we trust all that it doesn't

say. And we don't get dogmatic because the Holy Spirit forgot to say something. The Holy Spirit has never forgotten to say anything. And so we intentionally give greater liberty and greater freedom when we approach those topics that the Holy Spirit has spoken less about. This is going to be very important in the next two messages when we speak about parenting and we speak about marriage. I mean, if you were going to speak to a group of pagans about marriage - a group of pagans who had just been converted - about marriage, what would you do? Maybe a couple 300-page books? Paul gave them two verses in Colossians. And all of a sudden, everyone knows more than the Holy Spirit about marriage. Rather than giving one another the freedom that the Holy Spirit gave to the church in marriage and so many other things.

Here are some principles which I hope are all biblical and that will help you. Occasionally, I will give you a few examples of how these principles have worked out, but you have to always remember, I'm just giving you examples of how the principles worked out. It's not the only way it could happen.

First, before you seek who you should marry, you would worry about who you are. Before you seek who you should marry, you should worry about who you are. There is nothing more dangerous than a person doing a Bible study about the person they should marry. Not quite, but... They should be godly. They should be holy. They should be pure. They should be forgiving. They should be honoring. They should love their parents. They should be this. They should be that. And then the worst part is if you wind up single till you're 40, the "they should be" list gets longer every year.

The problem is that often we approach the Scriptures and miss the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that Spirit says that I take the log out of my own eye before I take the speck out of anyone else's. And yes, there are some people you ought not to marry because it would be compromise to do so. And so the Bible study can be good in that sense. But, more than that, you ought to be asking how could I be a humble person who might serve someone in marriage? How could I be a holy person who might sanctify another person in marriage? And on top of that, you can't miss the Gospel. You see the Gospel changes everything. The Gospel says that you are a wicked sinner who should be condemned and go to hell. But instead, the Lord Jesus Christ stepped on to this earth and lived over 30 perfect years for you and then shed His own blood to die for your soul out of love. And now He washes you and cleanses you and He died and He rose again to give you new life. Now, He's ascended to the right hand of the Father, and He pours out His Spirit on you, and you - even though you should be in hell, and you're on your way to heaven, might be given a wife. You might be given a wife. And when you're under the Gospel, you aren't walking around like God's gift to all women thinking are they sanctified enough for me? But rather you're asking, Oh God, would I be worthy of such a calling? Of caring for a woman or caring for a man? And this applies to married couples too, doesn't it? This is what we do in marriage. We forget that we're supposed to be like Christ. "Well, you're not like Christ." "Well, neither are you." "Well, I'll be more like Christ when you're more like Christ." Bad news. And so we need to keep ourselves under the Gospel which reminds us of our sin, but not without hope. And it humbles us and makes us fit to be married to someone else. So before you should seek who you should marry, you should worry about who you are.

Before you seek to be married, you should know who you are looking for. Which is kind of the opposite point. And I come a little short on time this evening, and I covered this yesterday,

so I'm just going to remind you of it. But in Proverbs 31, it gives men guidance for who they ought to be seeking. It tells us that the woman you ought to be seeking is the kind of woman who loves to care for the home, who loves to care for the poor, and it's not the one who is full of beauty and charm - that will deceive you. It is the one who fears the Lord. That's who you are after. Listen, I do not mean to be crass or insulting to anyone who is getting older, but the simple fact is that men are consumed with looks and especially now so in our generation of pornography, and that consumption with looks is an absolute deceit, because you are going to be married primarily for most of your years to a 40 year old, to a 50 year old, to a 60 year old, to a 70 year old, and to an 80 year old. You are going to spend most of your decades not married to a 20 year old woman. And if you bank all your hope on her staying looking like she's 20, when she's 40 and 50, you will be disappointed.

Early in our marriage, I said to my wife who is beautiful, but I said to her, we are not putting the focus of our marriage on you maintaining physical beauty. We are putting the focus of our marriage on loving each other no matter what Christ brings us through, so that we're not going to be deceived. And the thing is that physical beauty is not wrong. And I'll get into that a little later. But the focus of the Lord is on the gentle and quiet spirit. It's on the woman cleaned by the Word of God. Not by the woman made up perfectly who can keep her beauty until she's 70. That's not the focus at all. And so you need to know what you're looking for. And if what you're looking for is just a pretty face, you will be disappointed.

And women, this goes for you too. My experience in our church is that women will rule out guys who are really godly but don't have the cool factor. They're not slick guys. They're not guys who present well. They're a little bit awkward, and if they're a little bit awkward, they don't even get a mention. So the girls will sit around going, the girls will just go looking for looks, but they won't notice that they're just looking for someone who's not a geek. Well, at our church, a lot of the godliest guys are kind of geeky. And since the Lord doesn't choose many wise things, a lot of Christians are a little geeky. That's just the way it is. He just doesn't choose from the world's cream of the crop. And so if you're looking for that, you won't find it. And you'll be disappointed. And so you need to think: "who am I?" before you think about marriage, and you need to think: what should I be looking for? And you need to have a biblically transformed mind about what the Lord values. He values the gentle and quiet spirit. He values the fear of the Lord. He values a Christlike character.

The third thing is before you seek to be married, you need to know what you're getting into. The problem is we talk about: I want to get married. People have no idea what marriage is. I was at a wedding just recently, and a good old seasoned pastor said to his dear daughter and her future husband as they were standing before the altar. He said, "you have no idea what you're about to do." And you need to realize that marriage, it is a sexual relationship. Yes. It is a romantic relationship - yes. It is a business relationship where you pay bills together and you organize a home together and you change sheets together. And you scrub the bottom of the pots out together. It is a business relationship. It is a relationship with spheres. You aren't going to be together all the time. People get married and think now we're going to have more time together. No. It doesn't work. It is a relationship with extended families where you are involved with moms and dads and uncles and aunts and family traditions that you don't understand and don't relate to. It is a relationship with Alzheimer's where you spend a half a decade or a decade

nursing someone who forgot everything kind you ever did to them. And the minute a person remembers that it just changes who you want to go on a date with. It's not that this guy's really funny and tells great jokes and takes me to the best restaurants. What would this guy be like if I had no memory? And there was no one to watch over him to decide whether he would take care of me. Has he got a Christ-loving sense of duty in his heart? Is he humble? All of a sudden, the girls that aren't picture perfect pretty and the geeky guy's got a chance now, don't they? We should seek to think about who we are first. We should think about who we're looking for biblically. And we should seek to know what marriage is, and it's a lot more than never-ending date nights.

Fourth thing: we should seek a spouse in a community of brothers and sisters. We should seek a spouse in a community of brothers and sisters. 1 Corinthians 5:1-2. Especially to you young people, and I include myself in that I suppose, these are verses that have been very helpful to me in just living the Christian life. They just contain a lot of wisdom. They don't contain a lot of doctrine. They just contain a lot of wisdom. But the funny part is that if you hold on to your doctrine without a lot of wisdom, you don't get very far, do you? 1 Corinthians 5:1 "Do not rebuke an older man, but encourage him as you would a father." And just because you became a Calvinist yesterday doesn't mean that verse isn't in the Bible. (from the room) Where are you? Ryan: 1 Timothy - did I say 1 Corinthians? I'm so sorry. Thank you. Yeah, 1 Corinthians 5 is very different isn't it? There's wisdom there too, but of a different kind. "Do not rebuke an older man, but encourage him as you would a father."

And sometimes, guys, they get into a new theology, and they go to the old men of their church and they go, "You need to see the truths of the Scriptures!" And the guy's like, I've never seen that before. "Well, you're a fool!" And the guy says, "you're 18." And the young man walks away going, "the men of my church don't have a heart for truth." And the older man walks away going, "The 18 year olds of my church don't have a bit of wisdom." You don't rebuke an older man. You encourage him as a father. I've said some hard things to my father in my life, but the way you talk to a father is very different than the way you talk to your buddy. "...older women as mothers." Older women as mothers. You don't just spar with your mother the way you spar theologically with your roommate. That won't go very well for you. She'll have the "I'm your mother" reflex. And the Lord wants us to honor those things. Those are real dynamics in the world. That older men ought to be honored. That older women should be honored as well.

Then he says, "...younger women as sisters in all purity." In the church, there ought to be a brotherly and a sisterly relationship between the men and the women of the church - single and married. And far too often, the church only reads part of this verse. We read "in all purity." That's right. I'm going to be pure. And so you've got men who are coming out of sexual struggles. You've got women coming out of sexual struggles. You have people coming out of impure lives. And they're just worried that they're not going to look at each other; they're not going to lust after each other; they're not going to say anything crass. And that's good to a point. That's good. It's good for men to be concerned to look at their sisters in all purity. To not say anything crass. To be gentlemen and gentlewomen in the way they relate to one another. But far too often what happens is there just becomes an uneasiness and we never really get to the point where Christ wants us to be family. Brothers and sisters.

This was a major turning point for me in thinking about the battle against lust; realizing that the battle against lust is not just that you stop lusting, it's that you start loving sisters. You start caring for them. Asking how they're doing. Which means that in the church, it ought to be very common for single men and single women to be saying what's the Father teaching you? Brothers and sisters do talk about their fathers right? What's the Father teaching you? How is the Father's work progressing in Indonesia? I know you went there last year. How are things going in your small group? Are things encouraging you? And when you see a man and a woman talking like that, the church ought not walk by and go, "I wonder what's happening between them?" I'll tell you what's happening. They're being brothers and sisters. End of story. And just because groups are going out together, it can be very good for young people to go out in groups and to spend time in groups and just because two people begin to encourage each other or maybe they even have coffee one time doesn't mean they're on the edge of being married. And it adds a pressure and puts the church in a pressure cooker situation where all of a sudden, as soon as there's any interaction between a man and a woman at all, we're asking: are you getting married?

I was a little bit nervous about sharing this, because I don't know if it really applies to you. But this was something that affected our fellowship. In our fellowship, there is a real commitment to purity. And a real commitment to not just dating the way the world does, and sort of having 20,000 relationships and you fall sexually in each of them and then you get back up and do it again until eventually you get married and stay pure. We really don't want to do that. But there was so much desire not to do that and so much desire to say, if you're in a relationship, it better be intentional. It better not just be some free-floating relationship. That basically the guys were sitting there going I dare not ask her out for even a coffee because if I do, she's going to think I want to marry her. And the girls are like, he better not ask me for coffee because what he really means is he wants to marry me. And so there was no context for people to even get to know each other where they could just spend a little bit of time together. I'm not talking about 18 romantic dinners where no one knows what's going on. But there could just be some interaction at a healthy level between brothers and sisters where a relationship actually could develop. And so in our zeal to stay pure, we can create these smothering atmospheres where you can't even get to know anyone. And the church ought to be encouraging the brotherly and the sisterly interactions. So that means, married couples, when you invite singles over to your house, you don't just always invite one guy and the one girl and they're like, I guess I know why we're here. We're being set up. Invite lots of people over. Do lots of things together.

And let me speak to the singles. If you're brothers and sisters in Christ, that doesn't mean that the main thing you do is go to G-rated movies together or to movies you feel you could watch before Jesus. You can decide that yourself. I'm not saying movies are always wrong. But what I am saying is that the main obligation of every Christian is not primarily to entertain themselves biblically. It's to love widows and orphans. It's to care for the needy. And so it shouldn't always be hey, a bunch of us are going to a movie this Friday night. It should often be, hey, a bunch of us are going to a nursing home this Friday night to speak the Gospel and to visit with the older people and to sing hymns. Hey, on Saturday, we're going to go and care for some shut-ins in the church, and we're going to take all the single people to all the different houses and have a great time as brothers and sisters - two key words: in Christ. Doing what

Christians do. Now listen, when my daughter turns 18, if she says, hey, there's a bunch of people from the church going to the nursing home today. Can I go? The answer is yes. I don't need to go watch that movie first before she gets to go. I know that one's ok. And I'm not saying all entertainment is wrong. I am just saying any entertainment, no matter how good it is, is not the dominant thrust of the Christian life. The dominant thrust of the Christian life is service. You've got Christians who think that because their kids watch 30 hours of Veggie Tales they're holy. That's ridiculous. Children ought to be being trained to be like Jesus. And Jesus was with prostitutes and tax collectors, not tomatoes and cucumbers.

I'll say them quickly, but if we're going to be brothers and sisters, then men, you need to cut out the pornography. And women need to cut out the pornography. And if you're going to be brothers and sisters, you need to dress in modesty. When it's very hard to watch the portions of your body you're showing in public, or that you've wrapped in spandex so that there's no imagination needed. It's very hard for anyone to act like your brother or sister and to get the kind of ease and comfort that just come when a woman is dressed modestly and a man speaks modestly. When that happens, they can just begin to interact in greater freedom. Next point.

All of this you should seek eventually in the context of authority. Seeking happens as brothers and sisters. And eventually, you may find someone you want to get to know a little better. But seeking happens under the authority and guidance of fathers, mothers, pastors, and friends. Seeking happens under the authority and guidance of fathers, mothers, pastors, and friends. The Lord wants you to live your life under authority.

First: His. "All authority on heaven and earth has been given to Me." Teach people to obey everything I've commanded. We're first under His authority, but we're under the authority of our government. Romans 13:1 tells us that the government is a minister of God and we're to submit to the government. Even if we didn't vote for them, we're to submit to them. In 1 Peter and Hebrews 13, we're told to submit to our leaders - the pastors of our church should be submitted to and honored and followed. In Ephesians 6:1-4, children are told to obey their parents and to honor them. And there is safety under godly authority. And there's blessing under godly authority. Eve was deceived, not because women are more gullible, but because she came out from under godly authority - the authority of Adam in that context. There's always danger in leaving authority.

And there will be different things happening among different families, so I have to be very careful here. In my family, you want to know how this is going to work? I'll tell you how it's going to work. My daughter's been told since the earliest day, when that boy asks you for a phone number, you give him mine. I've heard others say that, but it's true. But that might change. If she's 25 and away at college and she's sufficiently mature and walking a godly life, and she wants to have coffee a couple times with a guy, there will be liberty for that. There's no law is there? Which verse are you going to use to prove she's got to do it just that way? So that's going to be something between fathers and daughters. And fathers and sons. You know, a lot of times we put the emphasis on fathers and daughters. Fathers, you have authority over your daughters to keep them from marrying. Well, listen, if you've got some boy who's a wild boar of a man; a wild ox who might kill someone, you ought to keep him off the playing field. You're dating who? No, I'm calling her. Don't date my son. He's an ungodly man. It's not just a girl thing.

And so I don't know how each family will set this up, but I would suggest to you that if you have godly parents, you give them great heed in the choice of a spouse. If you have ungodly parents, you still ought to give them heed in the choice of a spouse. 1 Peter 3: A woman is to submit even to her ungodly parents. Just because a woman's parents are not Christians, doesn't mean there isn't some common grace. We had a situation at Immanuel where a man was involved in some serious, perverse sexual sin. And we found out about it in the midst of some pre-marriage counseling. He was on the edge of marrying one of our young ladies. And we began to move in to break them up immediately because he was not ready to be married. It was not even clear he was converted. And I had this lady in my living room for hours and she wanted to marry him. It was too late. She loved him. And I said to her, if I told your dad, who was not a Christian; if I told your dad what this guy was into, what would happen? She's like, "he'd kill him." That was the basic idea. She said he wouldn't let him marry me. And there are many times where a non-Christian parent has the common sense to protect their child. And you ought to be slow to dismiss their counsel. There may be a time to dismiss an ungodly parent's counsel, but we ought to always be slow to dismiss any of the counsel from the authorities God has put above us. And if you don't have godly parents, you ought to be relying twice as hard on your pastors. Seeking your pastors. Asking to get together with your pastors. One of the first coffees I took my wife out on was with my pastor. You know, to get to know him, and have him get to know her. Because you want those authorities in your life caring for you. Ravi Zacharias points out that whenever we disobey one of the authorities God has put over us, we need to be doubly sure that we're doing what's right. There are times we say we must obey God rather than man. But we have to be doubly sure in those situations.

Word to fathers and mothers. Neglect your daughter and your son for 18 years and then step in real hard with authority right before they get married. That will go well for you. Press them down. Be controlling. Don't show your heart to be out for their best. And then wonder why they don't want to ask you who they should date and marry. The collateral you will need to guide your son and your daughter at that moment of decision is being earned or lost right now. The way you're treating them now - do they have a sense, my father and mother would drop everything for me to serve me? They're out for my good. They want to protect me from what's evil and give me over to what's good, and they long to see me married. And they will give me up - they aren't eager to just control me. If your children don't have that sense, they should go to you, but they might not. You see what I'm saying?

Ok, a few more points and then we'll open it up for questions. Seeking happens with an eye to compatibility. Seeking happens with an eye to compatibility. You ought to be eager to be compatible with the person you're marrying. Which means first of all, that you're both Christians. Do not be unequally yoked. It's wrong to marry a non-Christian. And the heartbreak I've seen in the course of my ministry from women who married ungodly men; that we even heard of last night. We heard of a brother who his wife is struggling. And that difficulty brings extreme heartache and difficulty. And you think it's divided and difficult when you're married to a Christian? It's doubly so. "Quadruplably" so when married to an unbeliever. And it just doesn't honor the Lord and is not obedient to His Word. Not only though should you both be Christians, but it's probably wise to have a good deal of theological compatibility. Paul and Barnabas found things they couldn't even work together on. How much more difficult in marriage! Different views

on healing, different views on tongues, different views on the sovereignty of God will make difficulty in marriage.

I do also believe that it's wise that the persons also be physically attracted to one another. Now, I've said a number of things that sound like I don't believe that. What I'm against is, "I'm not getting married till I find a supermodel," and, "I'm not getting married till I find some perfect guy." They don't exist. They're airbrushed. The people in the magazines - they don't exist. They aren't anywhere to be found. So don't go looking for them to get married. But if part of the joy of marriage is coming together and it fights temptation, there ought to be a sense in which I want to be with this person. And beauty is not wicked. The Holy Spirit said Sarah was a beautiful woman. Because she was. And there ought to be a sense in which a man and a woman want to be together and have an attraction for each other. But that ought to be taken soberly in light of the context that we're in, where we put way too much emphasis on that.

Last point. Seeking a spouse happens in the context of purity. While you're seeking, whether it's some initial dating or whether it's in some courtship, or whether it's in an engagement time, while you're seeking and on your way to marriage, there ought to be absolute and complete and total purity. Let me just show one verse to you on this matter. This time it is in 1 Corinthians. 1 Corinthians 7 It says, "Now concerning the matters about which you wrote..." (this is v. 1) "Now concerning the matters about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." Now that was something the Corinthians wrote to Paul. They wrote, Paul, we think it might be good for us not to have sexual relations with a woman. They were in a church where people were going to prostitutes; where they'd been exposed to sexual immorality their whole life and they're thinking, maybe we should just get rid of this whole sexuality thing. Maybe it's good for a man not even to be with a woman. And Paul answers back, no, no... "but because of temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman, her own husband." And they should come together, he says.

But do you see what's happening here? He says because of temptation, you should get married. He doesn't say because of temptation, you should have a friend you have benefits with. Because of temptation, there should be masturbation or that kind of thing. He doesn't say that. He says because of temptation, you should have a wife. The context and the only context for sexual expression is heterosexual marriage. That is the only context for sexual expression. (incomplete thought) People always say, "where is the line?" Well, I don't have a verse for that. But, in 10 years of pastoral experience, I have found once people start kissing, it's really hard to turn back. So, side hugging and holding hands is probably about the limit. But, I don't have chapter and verse. But I would just say, nothing that grieves the Holy Spirit. Nothing that grieves your conscience. Nothing that you wouldn't do with a sister. Nothing you wouldn't do in front of her dad. One of the counsels I got years ago and I pass along to the men at the church is make her dad your accountability partner. That's very effective. Two 21 year old guys: "I fell last week." "Yeah, so did I." "Let's pray." "I fell this week again." "Yeah, so did I. Let's pray." You tell her dad once you touched her and you won't touch her again. You did what? There's just a godly fear of fathers that's good. That's a good blessing. Sisters, you ought to love to put yourself under your fathers in that way.

So, focus on who you are, not on who they are. Focus on having biblical desires, not worldly desires. Focus on knowing what marriage really is. That it's not just a date night, but it's

a whole covenant for a whole life of living and serving and dying together. And then, not only that, but realize that you come to this as brothers and sisters. This isn't a pick up place. This is a church where we are brothers and sisters first. And then love the safety of authority. Cultivate being good pastors and good parents and good authorities who can counsel and who would be pursued for guidance. And then on top of that, do this with an eye to compatibility. Is there compatibility between us? And finally, are we remaining pure? And notice I didn't say "pure until marriage." Because once you're married, it's still pure. It's not impure once you get married. You're pure until marriage, and then you're pure after marriage. Let's pray that God would allow us to have the purity that reflects Christ and the church in all kinds of marriages through the church.

Father, thank You so much for Your Word. Thank You for Your grace. Thank You for Your help. Thank You for Your light on our feet and on our path. And I pray that You'd help my brothers and sisters to encourage each other. Help the married people to encourage the singles; to esteem them. I pray they'd have a great place in the body. I pray that You'd be with suffering singles. Help them to grieve. Help them to be comforted. And Lord God, I pray You'd be with those who want to be married. That You'd create a great context here for people to meet and to come together with those who they could honor You with in marriage. I pray this in Christ's name. Amen.