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SERMON TITLE: Singleness, Sex, and the Christian

Marriage Series: The Honeymoon is Not Over

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, 7:1-3, 6-9

DATE: October 25, 2020

View online service at www.fpcd.org/live-stream

Read also Isaiah 62:3-5

We have come to the eighth and final week of our study on marriage.

We have approached the subject with the possibility that *the honeymoon is not over*. Our purpose was to overcome a low view of marriage, expressed in our culture by the decline of marriage, the persistence of a high divorce rate, and the newfound anomaly of “serial cohabiters” here in the US.

We want to understand God’s gift of marriage, and that not only is successful marriage possible but it is valuable and stabilizes the nation. Marriage can be very fulfilling when we put our minds and hearts to it! So we began with Adam, a lonely man. God, in great mercy and grace, gave him the gift of “relationship.” God gave him Eve, someone who was part of him but entirely different. It is an interdependent relationship.

Not only is marriage an intimate relationship, marriage reflects our intimate relationship with God. Christian marriage is like an A-frame house—God in the vertical and horizontal with your spouse, held together by your wedding vows. **God is committed** to the people who take their vows before him. It’s like our Scripture from Isaiah: You shall be a crown of beauty to the Lord; not forsaken, but married and rejoiced over by God. Because God’s vows are dependable, *you see your vows through*, like Jesus saw God’s plan through.

On many levels marriage reflects our relationship with Jesus. It’s not a “me marriage” but a covenant that lasts into the future. Consumer marriage is about what I want today, and that will not survive the pressures of life for long. Real marriage takes faithfulness to a lifelong vow.

But how do we, in our humanness stick to it? Remember, God is invested in your marriage and we can count on this:

*God is big,
God is powerful,
God sees your troubles and cares about your rights.*

So we lean on God as part of the marriage equation. It’s not that hard: balance your daily life and work with reading the Bible and praying. You give your rights to God and God will work it out for you. We never gain by putting self first. Rather, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ and your relationships will become blessed.

If couples commit to this together, it’s the best. But, if only ONE of you turns to the Lord’s path that is, puts God first, prays, and asks for the Holy Spirit, here’s what will happen: the Holy Spirit, who is powerful, goes to work immediately answering your prayers.

We’ve talked about other things in marriage: having children, husband loving your wife, wife submitting to your husband, what to do when we have conflicts. Marriage has many facets—it is after all a lifetime venture.

But what about those who are single?

- ~ You might not be married but you aspire to be married someday.
- ~ You might not be married because you are fulfilled in your single life serving God.
- ~ You might not be married because you are a widow or widower.
- ~ You might not be married because other relationships have failed.

So what does the Bible say about singleness?

The Bible was unique for the time period in which it was written. The New Testament, out of all other societal structures, gives legitimacy to singleness. Paul is a good example of those who do not marry. He may have wanted to marry, but discovered that his singleness gave unique opportunity to minister effectively.¹

In fact, Tim Keller writes that “the kingdom of God provides the most lasting possible legacy and heirs.”² Some examples are Dr. John Stott, who has been defined as “An architect of 20th-century evangelicalism [who] shaped the faith of a generation.”³ Another example is A. Wetherell Johnson, founder of Bible Study Fellowship (BSF), who created structured Bible Study classes for lay people. BSF holds 2,200 weekly classes on six continents in 120 nations.

There are hundreds of examples of people who enjoy their singleness. Let’s read about biblical parameters on singleness:

READ 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, 7:1-3, 6-9

¹ “An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs— how he can please the Lord. . . . An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit.” ~ 1 Corinthians 7:32b, 34b

² Tim Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*, p. 230.

³ John Stott, at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Stott, accessed October 22, 2020.

So those are the standards for single life. But, if you are single and desire to marry, how do you approach it? The Bible says marriage is special and sex is reserved for it. But Keller cautions against making marriage into an idol because you have the need to have someone in your life.

How do you, if you are single and desire to marry, find someone? One helpful thing is to understand marriage throughout history.

In biblical times and even up to the 18th-19th century, marriages were routinely arranged. Sometimes it had to do with social, political or financial reasons. Women had virtually no rights and survival often depended on marriage.

Love was not the driver of marriage until the late 19th century. Then young men were invited by a young woman or her parents to court her in the family home—on the front porch or parlor. He got to know her in the context of her family.

By the 20th century the courting practice evolved. The man invited the woman out for a date on the town. It was not proper for women to invite men on a date. The focus changed from getting acquainted in her family context to entertainment so the couple could get to know each other in a context of fun, spending money, and being seen.

Now, Dr. Keller describes the male-female relationship in the 21st century as “hook-up” culture. He quotes a New York Times Magazine article which reports that “teenagers found members of the opposite sex to be annoying and difficult, and dating involved you in the hard work of give-and-take, communication, and learning to deal with someone who was different.” Rather than that, “a hook-up is a simple sex encounter without the condition of developing a relationship. Afterwards you may want to start a dating relationship or maybe not...” He concludes, “**We have one of the first societies with no clear culturally-supported pathways for single adults to meet and marry.**” (p. 234-235)

There are many reasons for this. The influence of Hollywood and media is great. When more than half of marriages end in divorce, that means many children grow up with their parents’ failed marriages. They might be influenced by the pain of their friends and extended relatives who also divorce.

Now that all seems depressing, especially to those of us who have been married a long time! How do we recover the joy of marriage, the purpose of marriage, and the fulfillment of which Scripture speaks?

Let’s think about what is specifically Christian in regards to marriage:

First, pray for your future spouse, even when you do not yet know him or her. If you are the parents of young children, begin praying for that future spouse. Then realize that Christians must marry Christians, according to Scripture.

Being married to a Christian was my greatest joy. My husband operated from the same foundation as me. We assumed certain things about each other. **We would pray together. We approached money issues within the template of Scripture**—realizing God’s blessings and promises for giving. When we had issues with each other, **we forgave**. That was sometimes hard, but when you make forgiveness a habit, then there’s the possibility of **reconciliation, not retaliation**. We strove not to compete for control but to **work together in unity**.

Begin to practice these things when you are single and dating and you will increase your chances of finding a compatible partner. You increase your chances of really being able to assess what someone is like if you refrain from sexual involvement when you are dating.

If you, as a young person, can understand the history of dating, avoid pitfalls and allow yourself to get to know the other person’s character, if you both love Jesus then C. S. Lewis says there’s a “secret thread” that you share.

When you marry a Christian, let these foundational truths guide your marriage.

God created us male and female to help us with our basic problem of being alone. His purpose was for us to “leave our parents (i.e. a change of loyalty), cleave to our spouses (i.e. love), and become “one flesh” (i.e. physical intimacy), putting the intimacy in the context of marriage (Genesis 2:24).⁴ This is a great mystery and a great blessing.

However, singleness is also a legitimate context in which we can be committed to the Lord. Trust the Lord and ask yourself, am I truly honoring God in my lifestyle whether single or married? If so, you will be blessed.

AMEN

⁴ Vicar John Hartley, The Church of England, Diocese of Leeds, Bradford, England UK., email received August 27, 2012.