

“The 6 Radical Resolutions of Biblically-Wise Dating” // Matthew 19:3-12, 1 Cor 13 // Forever Family #3

The **big idea** in this series is that **what Jesus taught about marriage radically redefines not only marriage but everything connected to it: singleness, conflict resolution, parenting, even dating. We’re using **what we learn** about marriage from Jesus in Matthew 19 to branch out into some of other topics.**

Today, we want to talk about having a **Jesus-centered approach to dating**. But here’s the dilemma in discussing this topic. People in the **Bible didn’t date**.

- Adam didn’t notice Eve on Tinder in the Garden and swipe right.
- Joseph didn’t notice Mary, go home, and start stalking her on Instagram and liking her pictures.
- Dating is, in fact, **a relatively modern invention**--really only going back the last **70 or 80 years**.
- **This is not to say it’s bad**--in the Bible they mainly had arranged marriages and **traded donkeys and cattle** for their wives; and that’s not a great system, either--just that’s there’s not a lot of specific teaching on it in the Bible.

So what we have to do is **take biblical principles on marriage** and reverse engineer them to apply to dating.

And because there are no big “go-to” chapters on dating in the Bible, I don’t have one primary text I’m going to be working from; I’ve got to **bounce around** a little bit.

Everytime I do this, somebody says, “Pastor, why don’t you just teach us the Bible.”

- *Listen, I spent a whole year going through Romans, so get off my back.*
- **1 Cor 13** if you want is one place...
- What this series does is takes principles from the Bible and applies them to places not directly addressed in the Bible: that’s called “wisdom” and it’s an important skill to develop.

Here’s the understatement of the year: **Dating is complicated**. Amen?

- It’s complicated **when you’re 16**; it’s complicated when you’re 26, 36, or 56.
- And I see a lot of people get hurt by it, and do long-term damage both to themselves and others, and
- **Honestly, I want to keep** you from that if I can.
- I want you to look back on this chapter of your life without regret, which very few people can do
- **BTW, if you’re already married**, I want to equip you to better support the single people as they pursue healthy relationships. **As I’ll show you**, dating should happen in the context of supporting community.

First, Matthew 19: There are **3 things Jesus taught about marriage in Matthew 19** that should shape our approach to dating. (You can go back and listen to that whole sermon if you missed it) but **here they are**:

1. **Marriage is friendship**. God’s primary purpose in creating marriage, according to Jesus, was for friendship man. God said it was not good for man to be alone, so he created a **‘halup’** (in Hebrew)--a deep friend for him. Like we saw last weekend, marriage is not the only way God deals with our loneliness, but it was the first way.
2. *Here is the second thing*: **Marriage is permanent**: In marriage, you lock the door and divorce should be taken off the table as an option. According to Jesus, divorce **should be as radical and rare as the amputation of a body part**, because that’s **basically what it is**. Divorce should only occur in extremely rare cases where one partner has **killed** the relationship.

3. Finally, Jesus said: **Happy marriages require God's help.** Socrates told young men, "By all means get married. If you marry well, you'll be happy in life. If not, you'll become a philosopher." **Jesus wants you to have happy marriages**, and he taught that marriage (while beautiful and rewarding) is so hard that you can only do it well with his help. **It's a gift given to you from heaven.**

1. Marriage is **friendship**; 2. Marriage is **permanent**; 3. Happy marriages **require God's help**.

If those 3 things are true, and we think they are because JESUS taught them, let me give you **6 common-sense resolutions that biblically-wise** people will make about dating.

I want to challenge you, if you are single--to **own these resolutions as your own**--whether you are 16, 56, or 86. (**And if you are married**, I want you to help those around you live by them.)

Now, one more warning before we jump in: These resolutions are **counter-cultural**, and so, if you adopt them, people on your college campus, or in your high school, or your workplace will think you are CUCKOO for Cocoa Puffs; but following them will lead you to the kind of marriages our culture longs for but seems unable to obtain!

Newsflash: our culture isn't doing awesome with the whole dating&marriage thing. I was reading one author, **writing for the** popular millennial newsfeed site, **Medium.com**, who said *"(Dating today is THE WORST. Each time I ask friends — ranging from early twenties to their forties — how the temperature in the dating pool is, I'm met with borderline hostility. For all the talk of ease that dating apps allow (and this is a little crude, I apologize), the impression I'm left with is everyone is swimming in a pool they all took a dump in. But instead of feeling gross and getting out, everyone decides they have no choice but to keep swimming in the sewage... because it's the only pool where you can meet other people."*

Our culture yearns for good, fulfilling, lifelong marriages, but doesn't know how to get there.

Here's your life lesson: If you want something nobody else has, you have to be willing to do what nobody else does.

And that's what these resolutions are--uncommon commitments, but they will lead you to the **kind of marriage you long for**, the kind Jesus wants for you.

1. I will... **prioritize character over chemistry**

If marriage is about friendship--lifelong companionship--then character is more important than chemistry.

Our **culture says physical attraction--chemistry--is everything.** According to the Bible, chemistry is not *nothing*--God created it--but it's not everything.

Did you know that studies show that the effects of attraction--the butterflies--wear off in about 18 months? **Which is why some of you have never had a relationship** last longer than that. And if that's primarily what your relationship is built on, when that fades, you have nothing left.

The Apostle Peter says there are two kinds of beauty. He's speaking to women, but you could apply this to men, too) ³ **Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes.** ⁴ **Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight."** **1 Peter 3:3** (And, I would add, should therefore be in yours, too.) Why? Because that kind of beauty is **"unfading,"** Peter says.

Physical beauty, you see **fades in 2** ways...

- **First, the beauty itself fades:** Things **sag** and **wrinkle** and **gray** and **droop**.

- **2nd way it fades: it's power on you fades.** Even if they nip, tuck and botox themselves in place; or start working out and unbutton their shirts and drive red sports car, it's impact on your fades.

So if you are wise, in the dating process you will prioritize the presence of character, because that is the **kind of beauty that is unfading.**

Matt Chandler, a pastor-friend about my age, got brain cancer a few years ago and had to undergo pretty severe treatment.¹ **He says,** *"When I got cancer, everything that was sexy about me vanished — my strength, my vibrancy, my sense of humor, even my hair... All of that was gone for two years. I became a shriveled up version of what I was before the cancer. But Lauren had entered into covenant with me, and she loved the character that God had formed in my heart. All that mattered in that chapter of our marriage was her character and mine. Character sustained the marriage, fueling and reigniting all the rest."*²

You are like, "Oh, but he's so cute and his eyes are beautiful and when he takes his shirt off he has that six-pack."

- **Let me tell you:** When your kid gets sick and you are one the way to the emergency room at 3 am, it doesn't matter what kind of 6-pack he has.
- All that is going to matter to you is **if he's the kind of guy** you know can **petition God** in prayer; if he's a **spiritual rock** that you can lean on
- Or when you **learn that you've lost your job,** what's going to matter is if she is the kind of partner you know will stand by you and not go anywhere

Because marriage is companionship and because it is permanent, character matters most of all. You are going to tie yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually to someone else for life.

¹ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/10-questions-on-dating-with-matt-chandler>

² Edited last sentences for flow.

You want to marry someone whom you are in love with and who is in love with you, right? Well, what actually is love? **It's not just warm-fuzzies and butterflies.**

In **1 Cor 13,** Paul defines LOVE. 1 Cor 13 is called the great LOVE chapter in the Bible for good reason:

- **Love is patient...** **Patience means they're ok with you not being perfect.** At some point, your intoxicating effects on them are going to wear off, and you're going to disappoint them. **How are they going to respond?** Are they going to lash out at you, and punish you for disappointing them, or look for someone new?
- **Love is kind...** That means it is **considerate.** It thinks of **others' needs instinctively.** They don't just think about themselves all the time; they think about you and your needs.
- **Love keeps no record of wrongs...** This will be a **big one** in marriage. Are they the **kind of person** who, every time you do something wrong, **pulls back up their mental list** of every way you've disappointed them down since you got married? **I know spouses who keep journals** of how their spouse has disappointed them. Is that someone you want to be married to?
 - **Love does not envy...** That means this is the kind of person who can be happy when you feel good even if they don't feel good. That is **really crucial in marriage** because otherwise they'll be like, *"Well, I'm not happy in life right now so there's no way I'm going to let you be happy, either."*
 - **Love does not boast, is not proud...** **A person of true love doesn't think life** is all about them; that they are entitled to everything and that it is everybody else's role in life ~~to provide those things to them!~~ **including yours**
- **Love does not dishonor...** That means love doesn't use someone else like a commodity for the fulfillment of their needs, emotionally, sexually, or whatever. **They honor the whole you and respect you** that way.
- **Love never gives up...** **Love doesn't give up** when you've let them down. It **doesn't leave.** It never stops believing in you and working for the success of the relationship.

Isn't this the kind of person you want to marry? If so, then prioritize character.

You say, "Well, **how can you tell** what their character is like?"

- **The English word “character”** comes from the word *cherax*, which refers to the engraving done by a metal tool. **That tool makes the same imprint** no matter what you dip it in.
- So the way to tell what they are like is to look at how they are in their other relationships. In the dating stage, they are in the **used car salesman mode** then, trying to hide all the defects. They hear a rattle in the engine and they are trying to turn up the stereo.

So, ask questions like...

- **How do they treat their parents? How he treats**
- How do they **treat their friends?**
- How about **their siblings?**
- **Kaestner with waiter:** How they treat the waitress is what they are like.
- Do they **keep their word?** If they can't hold a job, or they don't keep their word to others, they won't to you, either.
- Here's one that will feel like a punch in the gut: **Can they keep your hands off of you?** If they don't have the control to keep their hands off you now, why do you think they'll have the control to keep their hands off someone else when your intoxicating effect on them inevitably wears off?

So, if marriage is a lifelong union of companionship, then character matters most of all. Again, **chemistry is not nothing--God made it**, but it's not everything.

Real quick: Sometimes I get asked, **Practically speaking, what do you do if you are really attracted to someone's character but not them? Keep dating her for Jesus?**

- I would never tell someone to date someone that they are *not* attracted to. For their sake. Every woman wants to be beautiful to her spouse.
- **No woman wants to hear**, *“How you look doesn't matter to me. I don't really find you attractive at all but I admire your quiet time routine.”* And same with guys.
- **But, I will say that sometimes that attraction grows over time**, so, practically speaking, if you are in a relationship like that, **give it**

some time! Stay in their proximity and see if it develops. But if not, that's not the person for you.)

I'm not saying chemistry is nothing; but don't give it the weight...

And, if #1 is true...

2. I will... date for clarity not intimacy

- **First, ask yourself: What are you after in dating? What's the purpose?** It's not supposed to be like an appetizer for marriage, “commitment light,” or “sexual pleasure light” or “companionship light” **until you get to the meal** of marriage.
- **No, dating is a time to evaluate** the person you want to join yourself to for your life.
- So, if the **purpose of dating** is to choose someone to marry, and that means **character matters most** of all, then physical intimacy is something that, for the most part, you should keep to a minimum.
- **Why? Because physical intimacy works like a drug--it intoxicates you.**
 - When you are sick, and your body is in pain, you pop a codeine pill and you feel awesome. Your body is not awesome, but the drug deceives you into feeling that way
 - **And that's fine when you're sick**, but when the drug of physical intimacy keeps you from seeing what is really going on in the relationship, & who they really are, you're in trouble.
 - When the **physical excitement of sex** fades, which it will, all you are left with is a sick relationship.

Listen: Let me be clear: The Bible tells us that awakening sexual stimulation outside of marriage is sin.

- **Jesus said in Matt 5, the Sermon on the Mount**, that to think lustfully about someone you're not married to is committing fornication in your heart. Obviously, doing things that get your motor running, even if you don't go all the way, does that.
- **In 1 Cor 6, Paul tells us to “flee”** sexual immorality, not see how close we can get to the edge of the pool without falling in.

So, we avoid that because it is in. But even beyond that, knowing what I know now about marriage, even if I weren't a Christian I would counsel a couple who were dating to keep physical intimacy to a minimum. *Because sexual stimulation sabotages the spouse search.*

Practical for me, from my dad gave me: **Lynn's laws**

- **Nothing in the dark**
- **Nothing below the chin**
- **Never lie down.** **Matt Chandler:** "Nothing good and godly ever happens between dating couples when they lie on a couch together late at night to watch a movie. It has never in the history of humankind led to discussions about cinematography or the symbolic resonance of the director's body of work."³
- **Nothing should last longer than 5 seconds**
 - B/c once it crosses 5 sec, it almost for sure has become sin.
- Again, these are just guidelines--the goal is seek purity, not see how close to the line you can get.
 - You can abuse any of these--you can get creative in 5 seconds.
 - One of our pastors, **Eric Gravelle, CP of our CHC,** makes a helpful distinction. He distinguishes between acts of affection vs. acts of desire. Acts of affection are one thing; acts of desire outside of marriage are sin.

Here's how King Solomon said it: *Promise me, O women of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and wild deer, not to awaken love until the time is right.* **Song of Solomon 2:7** (Gazelles and wild deer represent youthful, sexual vigor.) **Keep 'em hibernating** until it's time for them to run. Then let 'em out the cage and let 'em go wild.

And by all means, don't live together:

- **First, again, if you are living together, you are in blatant sin--**and I can't say for sure that means you're not a Christian, but I can say you are living in unrepentant sin, and there is no way you have the blessing of God on this part of your life which, we have seen, is the one thing you most desperately need.

- **But second,** studies show statistically that someone who has lived with 2-3 people has less than 5% chance of staying married.
- Living together, I've heard, is better preparation for divorce than marriage. **Love says, "for better or worse."** Living together says only, "for better."

The purpose of dating is not to give you marriage light, an intimacy appetizer. It's to give you **space to get clarity** on their character.

Sometimes I get asked: "How does this apply to high school kids? Should they be able to date?" We don't have a rule against that at our house, but since they are not ready to get married, that's a road it doesn't make a whole lot of sense to go down. We say the **3 ideals to pursue** in this stage are: *non-exclusive; non-physical; non-escalating.*

Date for clarity, not intimacy.

Singles! Listen, I know living like this is difficult, counter-cultural.

- *But I'll say it again: If you want something very few people have, you have to be willing to do what very few people will do.*
- **Understand: Dating is a time of testing.** Are you going to be faithful in this and wait on God? If you use this time to show that you can wait for him, you won't believe the ways he'll bless you.

Even this stage of dating should be characterized by *selfless, sacrificial love. Love for your future spouse, and this person's future spouse.*

- **Physical intimacy creates bonds** between people that are hard to undo. *We'll get more into this next week--but it's like duct tape... Out of love for your future spouse and their future spouse, don't steal for yourself something that should be special for them.*
- **Don't prioritize the satisfaction of your lust over their long term good.**

3. I will... reject the 'marriage=completion' myth

³ Matt Chandler, Mingling of Souls, 61.

This goes back to last week: *This myth says that **there is a right person out there for you, and if you don't find that person, you'll never be happy.*** And if you're not happy, it's because you haven't found that person.

Here's **how it plays out** in dating and marriage:⁴

- **In the dating stage, you're on the hunt.** You've got to find that right person. And you're always worried about it. "What if I don't find them? Am I too picky? What if they don't like me?"
- **Finally, you find that one that makes your heart flutter**, your liver quiver, **and you think**, "This is it. Our relationship is special. Oh, we never fight. We're perfect for each other"
- **But then you get married and you figure out they are not as perfect as you thought.** HE is totally insensitive to your needs and he just smells bad at night. That cute little burp he did when you were dating starts to drive you crazy. Or SHE IS selfish and acts crazy sometimes.
- **All those little habits you thought were so cute start to drive you crazy.** In the dating stage you thought they were quirky. Now you think, "I think something is seriously wrong with you, dude."
- And then their **selfishness** or their **bad temper** or their **thoughtlessness** really start to hurt you.
- **Looking at them doesn't intoxicate you anymore;**
- **So you come to a crisis point in your marriage**, and you think, "I know how we can fix this. Let's have a baby!" **BRILLIANT!** Yes, *let's bring another life into a dysfunctional relationship.*"
- **And so after you have the baby** you think, "The problem is I just think I married the wrong person."
- **And then, after having the baby and losing sleep** one of them is at work and **guess who they finally see?** The "right person." You are like, "*OH, I get it now. I married the wrong person, but I just met the right person.*"
- **And so they decide to correct the problem** by getting out of that marriage to the wrong person and getting married to the right person.

⁴ This description owes a lot to Andy Stanley's sermon in *The New Rules on Love, Sex, and Dating*

*But that doesn't work either. Let me tell you why: **You always marry the wrong person.*** For two reasons:

- **First, we're not primarily lonely people** who need soulmates; we're sinners who need a Savior!
- *I love how Gary Thomas says it: "Marriage doesn't solve emptiness; it exposes it... If someone can't live without you, he or she will never be happy living with you either."*⁵
- *Lonely, insecure people... life-preserver*
- **Tim Keller says that most people today approach** marriage with the attitude: "*I want someone to fill every vacancy in me, awaken dormant gifts inside, continuously enrapture me in other-worldly emotional bliss.*" And that puts tremendous, unfair pressure on them.

The second reason that I say you always marry the wrong person is they are a sinner and so are you and that means they will inevitably, let you down.

- *I love how Tim Keller says it: **the best you can hope for in marriage is "less of a bad match" for you, since everyone ends up disappointing you.***

So what if you gave up the myth that there is a "perfect person," and understood that's not what marriage was about anyway?

- What if you saw that **God's main purpose** IN LIFE was preparing you for himself, **and that marriage was a way** he can do that, and **a way** he can supply some of your needs, but **not the only way** he can do those things?

Wouldn't that change how we approached singleness?

- Rather than being on a rabid, obsessive search for the right person who was **the** key to a happy life, we could put our eyes on Jesus, and focus on following him, and **let him** supply your needs.

⁵ *Sacred Search*, 209.

You could finally live out Matthew 6:33: **“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matthew 6:33)”**

Which leads me to...

4. I will... seek God *first* and my significant other *second*

When you reject the **“marriage = completion”** myth, you can put your eyes on Jesus and let him supply your needs.

The best marriages are like 2 people running down the road as hard as they can after God, and looking over you see someone running about the same speed and direction that you are, and you are like, ‘Hey, where you going? Wanna go together?’

- **I said this last week: Don’t wait on a spouse** to determine who you are or where you’re going.
 - **Some of you are like chameleon** just taking on the characteristics everyone around you. **Don’t do that.**
 - **Be your own person.**⁶ Be full in Christ.

Here’s a statement: *“You’re not ready to date until you are ready not to date.”*

- **Be full in Christ.** Don’t look for in another human being what you should be finding in Jesus.
- I even love this **counsel from Proverbs:** **Prov 24:27, “Put your outdoor work in order and get your fields ready; after that, build your house.”** Outdoor work = job. House = metaphor for marriage. Guys, before you seek a spouse, get a job. When you do this, btw you’ll become much more attractive, I promise. **Not a formula.**

Here’s how we said it last weekend: Become the person that the person you are looking for is looking for. That’s a practical way of applying Matthew 6:33. And **if God has marriage for you;** great, you’ll be better prepared. And, if not, you **haven’t wasted a decade.**

Here’s another one...

5. I will... date ‘only in the Lord’

- If **marriage is about friendship, a life-long companion** to walk alongside of you, then why unite yourself to someone who doesn’t share the most important part of you?
- **Scripture is very clear on this:**
 - **1 Cor 7:39,** talking about a single lady in the church, **“She is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord.”**
 - **2 Cor 6:14,** **“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness?”**
- **Friends,** I want you to see **what Scripture says** here less as a restrictive rule; it’s a **LOVING GUIDELINE, because to be unequally yoked to an unbeliever** means you will never be able to share the deepest parts of you with them.
- **A yoke was a harness** put on two animals pulling the opposite directions! **If they don’t share your faith in Christ,** and it’s important to you at all, they are going to be pulling different directions when it comes to your time, your money,
- And **raising children.** If you are dating an unbeliever, have you thought about your **future children? The single biggest impact** on their spiritual lives is going to be your spouse. **And you are intentionally** going to make the biggest influence on them someone who doesn’t share your faith?
- **Honestly, are you really that selfish?** Prioritize your desires of the moment over the souls of your future kids?
- Or do you just not care about the faith your future kids? **You will!**
- Please understand: **If you’re not a Christian here today, I’m not trying to be mean to you:.** In fact, if you’re not a Christian, I’ll tell you, for your sake, **you shouldn’t date a Christian, unless you plan to become one. Because the Christian you are dating right now really wants to convert you.**
 - **LET ME PROVE IT:** THEY HAVE YOU HERE TODAY. They keep looking at you every once in a while to see if I’m connecting
 - **The point:** They don’t accept you as you are.

⁶ Jon Tyson.

- Their **mom and dad don't really like you** and they want you to become a Christian. Their whole family is praying for you (they know you're here), and nobody in the family is ever going to be really happy until you become a Christian
- I'm just being honest with you; I've observed this for many years.

Resolve to date only in the Lord. **Believers: understand how our enemy works.**

- **Everybody knows the story of Balaam--but not the details behind it.**⁷ "I can't curse them, but you can get them to curse themselves. Send in all the hot Moabite women to seduce them and the kids will grow up in homes not sure who God is, and you'll destroy the faith of the next generation. **That's what our enemy does.** He gets you in relationships that will stop the forward progress of Christianity in your family.
- **So, please don't think of "date only in the Lord" as a restrictive rule;** think of it as loving wisdom from God.
- **And don't deceive yourself** by saying, "Oh, **we won't get serious.**" This is just about having fun and having a buddy."
 - **Dating is a road that leads to a destination.** And every mile you travel with them it **gets harder** to take the exit ramp. If you don't want to go to the destination, stay off the road!

6. I will... date only in the context of community

- **Back in Bible days, marriages were arranged.** Your community chose your spouse for you. And let me be clear: I'm glad we're not there anymore. There were **A LOT** of problems w/ that)
- But **in our culture we have gone** to the opposite extreme. In what is **arguably the most important** decision of our lives, **we isolate ourselves and tell ourselves that our heart knows best.**
- But your heart usually doesn't know best. **Other people,** your community, can see what's happening even when you can't, all hopped up on pheromones as you are.

⁷ Numbers 31:16; Revelation 2:14. Balaam devised a plan to get Moabite women to seduce Israelites.

You need **godly and wise counsel** more at this stage than perhaps any other!

- **If there were no other practical reason to be involved in the church as a single, this would be it.**
- Sometimes people see **the obvious problem** with this person or your relationship that you can't see
 - Lust or flirtation problems
 - Failure to keep their word
 - Manipulative, controlling behavior
- **Matt Chandler:** "One sure way to walk in foolishness in a romantic relationship is to date someone who troubles the godly counselors in your life."⁸
- **Stay connected to people in the church.** Ask older believers to speak into your relationships..

Now, just like last week: *I know what you are saying. PJD, you are a middle-aged man who's been married for 20 years and you have 4 kids. What do you know about dating? Again, you are right!*

But before I do that... Let me close by saying that some of you listening to this say, "**Woah, when it comes to dating,** I blew it. I've messed up." Maybe you're looking back on great hurt you've caused to yourself, or someone else. Maybe it is regret over sexual sin.

In 1 Cor 6, Paul talks about those who have **blown it sexually,** he says, "But you are **bought with a price.**" God bought you back from where you messed up. And then he says: "...you are washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." 1 Cor 6:11

- Washed means cleansed from sin, as good as new.
- Sanctified means "set apart"--made special. Set apart for a special purpose
- Justified means forgiven.

There is a fountain filled with blood...

⁸ Matt Chandler, 56.

[Dating Q&A](#)

Invitation

Bullpen:

This whole scene is pretty much a dumpster fire. The hookup culture has ravaged the dating scene. I **read one author who said**, “The question used to be how many times you should go on a date before having sex. Now it’s how many times you should have sex before going on a date.” And the **addition of the online element** has **greatly complicated things**:

- And that’s not just a sanctimonious Baptist pastor saying that. **Plus**, even in dating, you should operate more out of love for your future spouse and less out of selfish desire.
- Remember 1 Cor 13--love is patient. That means you put your spouses future needs above your desires at the moment. Sexual bonds you make pre-marriage will hurt your spouse later.
- Furthermore, you are potentially dealing with someone’s else’s husband or wife, mother or father. Love them and their future spouse enough not to steal for yourself something that should be special for them.
- **1 Cor 13 says**, Love does not dishonor. Being intimate with your bf/gf is not loving toward them; it’s selfish.

Statistically, someone who has lived with 2–3 people has right at a 0% chance of staying married.

- Living together is better preparation for divorce than marriage. Love says, “for better or worse.” Cohabitation says only, “for better.”

where Paul warns us about sexual sin, or marrying an unbeliever, he says something I find absolutely riveting: “You are bought with a price.” **God purchased you back from the sin** to which you had given yourself and made you his own.” And he says this: Though many of you have made mistakes you deeply regret

- **Be a person who, in many ways, complete in God** and not looking for things in marriage partner you should be finding in God.

- Don’t date out of emptiness: Tim Keller says that most people today approach marriage with the attitude: “I want someone to fill every vacancy in me, awaken dormant gifts inside, continuously enrapture me in other-worldly emotional bliss.” This puts tremendous pressure on another human being.
- Remember the words of Gary Thomas: **“Marriage doesn’t solve emptiness; it exposes it... If someone can’t live without you, he or she will never be happy living with you either.”**⁹
- **Sometimes** people do some things in dating that is so dumb, I want to ask them: Did you think that through at all? Did you ask anyone? Would anyone say that is a good idea? Have you ever seen that workout? Not on Netflix or the Hallmark Channel but in actual real life work out? But it felt right because you were in all hopped up on pheromones but it was destructive and everybody else could see that.
- Listen: Some of you are serial daters. You can’t imagine life being good without a bf so you go from one to the other. You are like, “I gotta have a guy. Gotta have a guy.” Oh, oh, oh, we just broke up. There goes another guy. I name her and claim him in Jesus name.” You don’t need that. You need to seek Jesus and be complete in him.

And **marriage to a new person won’t fix your personal problems**, either. A lot of people blame their issues on their marriage. *“This person makes me like...”* **Marriage doesn’t create problems; it only reveals them**. There are no married people issues; just individual people issues that get revealed in marriage.

... Why? Because they are sinner and you are a sinner, too. If you try to correct the problem in your marriage by changing partners, you are correcting the wrong problem.

⁹ *Sacred Search*, 209.

And for you singles, this time where you are dating is a test for you, for God to build character, to see if you trust him enough to wait; to see if you love him enough to bring your sexual desires under his Lordship. When a young man or woman brings this area underneath the Lordship of Christ, he uses it to release long term trust between them and dynamite spiritual power into their lives.

We'll get more into this next week, but physical affection and sexually charged touching put bonds between people that are not easily undone. Like tape.

- We have to remember that even in dating, you should be loving your future spouse--remember 1 Cor 13--which means putting their future needs above your desires at the moment. And sexual bonds you make pre-marriage will hurt your spouse later. *Love does not dishonor.* Being intimate with your bf/gf is not loving toward them; it's selfish.
- And, furthermore, you are potentially dealing with someone's else's husband or wife, mother or father. Love them and their future spouse enough not to steal for yourself something that should be special for them.

Matt Chandler, a friend who is a popular Bible teacher and author Our culture tells us **physical/sexual attraction should come first** and is the basis for everything else. **But** that's 100% wrong.

- **Studies show the buzz of infatuation** wears off after about 18 months. (Which is why some of you have never had a relationship last longer than that!). And **when that wears off, if that** is the basis of the relationship you'll have nothing left.
- Plus, **when you are married, it's not the cute sound of their laugh** or how they made you feel when they looked in your eyes that is going to make for a happy life. ~~When you first met him you were like, "Oh, he would tell these jokes nobody laughed at and it was so endearing and while we were eating he let out this cute little burp and when I went back to his apartment his socks were everywhere...he just needs me." And then 3 years into marriage you are like, "Why are you always telling the same stupid jokes~~

~~and can not stop sitting around the house burping all the time and pick up your dang underwear."~~

(I would never tell someone to date someone that they are *not* attracted to. If a guy says to me, I really admire her walk with God I'm just not physically attracted to her, should I date her?" I tell him, "For her sake, no. I mean, every woman wants to be beautiful to her spouse. No woman wants to hear, *"How you look doesn't matter to me. I don't really find you attractive at all but I admire your quiet time discipline."* Now, I will say that sometimes that attraction grows over time, so, practically speaking, you may want to stay in their proximity and see if it develops. But if not, that's not the person for you.)

So, again, **chemistry is not nothing**, but it's not everything. If marriage is a permanent, undissolvable union between two equals, the quality of your spouse's character matters most of all.

I hate seeing people make mistakes that mess up their lives in ways they don't have to. Doing this poorly can lead to long term pain like few other things. I see people do things in dating and I want to say, "Have you thought this through? Have you ever seen that work out well for anybody else, ever?" Maybe on Netflix it works out, but I mean in the real world!

- **What you need is not perfect chemistry**--a lot of people had that when they started out and still got divorced. What you need is relationship skills grounded in the gospel--which we'll get to later.

1. I will think comprehensively about attraction

- If marriage is about friendship, then there are things a whole lot more significant than simply physical attraction.
- That's not to say that physical attraction is not important. God created it, but our culture makes it everything.
- I've sometimes had people ask, "What if you are with a godly girl you really enjoy as a friend but you are just not attracted to her?"

- I always say, For her sake, don't say to her, "How you look doesn't matter to me. I don't really find you attractive at all but I admire your quiet time discipline." No girl wants to hear that. And don't say, "I'm going to romantically pursue you in the hopes that one day I will be physically attracted to you." Every woman wants to be beautiful to her spouse. But my point is you should prioritize other things even more than that. If her main role in your life is to be your friend, don't make physical attraction everything or even the main thing.
- The most enduring attraction grows out of knowing someone.
- You say, "Well, I really like him but I'm just not attracted to him." OK, practical advice: Stay in his proximity, and see if that develops. It might, because godly character makes someone attractive. But if not, that's not God's person for you.

But this leads me to the 2nd resolution, closely related:

- **The right person myth** is that there is somebody out there perfect for you and until you find them, you'll always be unhappy.
- But that's not true.
- Many people in dating
- **Stanley:**
 - Here's how the myth goes: If I marry the right person everything will be all right.
 - They both think that they have met the right person and that everything is going to be all right. They also both think, "No one has loved like this before!"
 - Here's what happens: these people get married and the problem becomes they aren't good at relationship. All they had was chemistry.
 - They get together and they get married and they have problems. Guess what their problems are? Not chemistry problems, but relationship problems.
 - The very thing that held them together (the chemistry) starts to die because they are not good at relationship.

- **Stanley:** A version of the right person myth is that it doesn't matter what you do with the wrong person(s) because when you meet the right person, you'll become a better person.

want you to not regret/be someone else's regret. Not hurt someone. I don't want you to be a hypocrite. Ladies, I don't want you to be treated like a commodity. If you want something you've never had, you must think differently

Dating a newer thing in human history. This is probably only been the last 60-70 years that it has gotten really

Dating in our culture is **just goofy**... it's more like **used car sales** than anything.

- You **hide everything** that will make a sale less likely and advertise whatever will close the deal.
- And make sure to take it for a **test drive**. You wouldn't want to buy a car without a test drive.
- **The stats on the hookup culture are truly staggering.** One recent study reveals that 77.7 percent of college females admitted to 'hooking up.' For guys... the # is 84.2 percent."¹⁰
- Shani Silver (podcaster for Refinery29.com) says this: "It used to be how long do we date before we have sex, now it's how long do we have sex before we date."
- Now **apps**...

I've heard it said that the way we date is better preparation for divorce than for marriage.

- You **find someone** that captures your attention and thrills you... so you give yourself to them... but then they begin to disappoint you (which, as I've explained, inevitably happens), and so **you walk away** and search for a new person.
- **Our whole philosophy of dating is built on the right person myth**... that happiness in life is achieved by finding the right

¹⁰ Matt Chandler, Mingling of Souls, 52.

person, and if you're not happy now, it's because you are with the wrong person...

And so **we establish in dating** the relational patterns **that lead to divorce** in marriage.

Matt Chandler: "One sure way to walk in foolishness in a romantic relationship is to date someone who troubles the godly counselors in your life."¹¹

1. **Establish your career and your ministry**

- a. **Prov 24:27**, "Put your outdoor work in order and get your fields ready; after that, build your house."
- b. **Get a job**
- c. Guys, get a job and you'll become much more attractive, I promise.

2. **Decide now the kind of person you are going to date**

- a. If marriage is a gift, decide in advance that you are going to wait for the one that is a gift of God.
- b. **Christians**: don't date a non-Christian unless your faith is not that important to you... and your future children's faith is not important to you.
- c. **Non-Christians: Don't date a Christian unless you plan to become one.** When you think about it... If you're not a Christian, and you are dating one... understand that **their hope is that you become a Christian. LET ME PROVE IT: THEY HAVE YOU HERE TODAY.**
 - i. **See**, they do not accept who you are; they want you to change.
 - ii. Their mom and dad don't like you and want you to become a Christian.
 - iii. Their whole family is praying for you and nobody in the family is ever going to be really happy until you become a Christian.

iv. I'm just being honest with you; I've observed this for many years.

d. You see, "Well... he is a Christian, just one fallen out of church."

i. Also, **having observed this for many years**, you are better off dating an honest pagan than a hypocritical Christian.

3. **Cultivate gospel character**

- a. 1 Cor 13... traditionally ready at marriages. But the context in which Paul writes is the local church. These are **virtues to master and live out** in the church—the ultimate, forever family. But when you become them, they **make for wonderful** marriage.
- b. **Love is patient...** Patience means you're ok other people not being perfect, disappointing you, and not lashing out in vengeance at them.
- c. **Love is kind...** considerate. It thinks of other people's needs instinctively. Anticipating what they need and serving them.
- d. **Love keeps no record of wrongs...** Think kind of person forgives others quickly when they hurt you... you don't keep it in your heart and nurse and it and turn it over and over until you explode in hurt
- e. **Love does not envy...** I can be happy that you feel good even if I don't feel good. That is crucial in marriage so that you are not the kind of person who says, "I'm not happy in life right now so I'm not going to let you be happy, either."
- f. **Love does not boast, is not proud...** love doesn't think life is all about them, and that they deserve good things and everyone else is obligated to give those to them!
- g. **Love does not dishonor...** Love never uses people for it's needs. I'm not going to use you as a commodity for my sexual needs; not going to use you emotionally... your time.

¹¹ Matt Chandler, 56.

h. Love never gives up... Love doesn't give up on people after they have failed you, after they have screwed up and made a mess.

Irony: these things are essential in marriage... but they are cultivated with Christ (the ultimate husband) in the church, when and if God brings marriage into your life, you will be an awesome spouse—I can assure you!

IV. The importance of character

Eleazar observes her from a distance. What does he see? She's a servant-hearted person, gracious and hospitable. His test reveals her *character*.

Character is not the **only** thing that matters in a relationship; she's beautiful, too... but character is by far the **most important** thing.

The Apostle Peter says: ***Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. ⁴ Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.*** **1 Peter 3:3** And, I would add, should therefore be in yours, too. Why? Because that kind of beauty is "unfading," Peter says.

Physical beauty, you see (which is what we usually most care about in dating) **fades in 2** ways...

- **First, the beauty itself fades:** Things **sag** and **wrinkle** and **gray** and **droop**. And if that is the entirety of someone's beauty, then they become really ugly in old age.
- **2nd way it fades... it's power on you fades.** Even if someone manages to hang on to their physical beauty through makeup or

botox or liposuction... it's impact on you fades. Eighteen months is what it takes for the intoxicating effects of beauty to wear off.

So if you are wise, in the dating process you will prioritize the evaluation of character, because that kind of beauty that is unfading.

And how do you tell their character? By watching how they relate to others.

Character is rarely revealed in how they relate to you in the dating stage... they are in the **used car salesman mode** then... hiding all the defects. "What's that rattle in the engine?" "Let's turn up the stereo. AC works great!"

Character is revealed in **how they treat "the camels"** in their lives, metaphorically speaking...

- **Successful CEO** who told me that he watches how people treat the waitress/hired more than one waiter or waitress based on how they treated him... this is what Eleazar did.

English word "character" comes from the word **cherax**, which refers to the engraving done by a metal tool. That tool **makes the same imprint** no matter what you dip it in. No matter what **relationship...**

So ask questions like...

- **"What is their reputation?"** Abraham Lincoln once said, 'Reputation is the shadow cast by the tree of character.'
- **How they treat their parents?** Mom/Dad
- Do they have a **servant spirit**, like Rebekah?
- Is he or she **faithful in their commitments**? If they can't hold a job, or they don't keep their word to others, they won't to you, either.
- **Can they keep your hands off of you?** If they can't control themselves around you now, when they know it is wrong, how will you know that he will control himself late at night with the

internet... that he will control himself with another person after you're married?

To really see character, you need two things:

A. Time. You have to be able to observe them in **regular life contexts**. **People come in after 2 weeks** and say, "We're ready to get married." I'm not saying you can **never be right**... just that's there is no way you can know. **And don't think "my heart knows,"** because it is all hopped up on the drug of infatuation.

Here's what happens: You are so excited about being in love, so you take that parts of them you don't know yet and fill them in with what you want them to be. But **that doesn't mean that's what** they are!

You need time to see them in different contexts.

- I heard about a **Christian couple**, no joke, that got engaged after a week and a half, and only had talked through email and pictures. Never met. Some other guy challenged him, and the guy said, "Sure, we've never met, but she's **perfect**... We both want to have the **same number of kids**." (In his case, it was 8) "**She dresses** how I've always wanted a girl to dress. And she wears her hair the way I've always wanted a girl to wear it." You **probably need more** to go on.

Only time and proximity reveals who they really are. You need to **understand how their past** shapes them; how the **wounds** of their past affect their relationships; what they are **like under pressure**; how they handle **responsibility**; what their idea of **family and success** are.

Secondly, to really see character...

B. You need to keep the physical out of it.

Physical contact (sexual stimulation) intoxicates you and hinders your ability to evaluate. It works **like a drug**. When you are sick,

and your body is in pain, you pop a codeine pill and you feel awesome. Your body is not awesome, but the drug deceives you into how you really feel.

- Which is fine when you're sick, but when you do that in a relationship it leads you to disaster. When the codeine wears off, your body is still sick, and when the physical excitement of sex fades, all you are left with is a sick relationship.

So, I would encourage you to keep the physical minimal FOR YOUR OWN SAKE.

- **Postpone physical commitment ALAP.** Sexual stimulation sabotages the spouse search

· **Lynn's laws**

- Nothing in the dark
- Nothing should last longer than 5 seconds
- Nothing below the chin
- Never lie down. If you can lie down with a girl and not be sexually aroused... we have other things to talk about: **Chandler**: Nothing good and godly ever happens between dating couples when they lie on a couch together late at night to watch a movie. It has never in the history of humankind led to discussions about cinematography or the symbolic resonance of the **director's body** of work or whatever." [1] (Not his body)

Promise me, O women of Jerusalem, by the gazelles and wild deer, not to awaken love until the time is right. Song of Solomon 2:7

(Gazelles and does represent youthful, sexual vigor.) Keep 'em hibernating until it's time for them to run. Then let 'em out the cage and let 'em go wild.

- **And, by all means, don't live together:** someone who has lived with 2-3 people has right at a 0% chance of staying married. (Even if you don't believe in God... good counsel)

I know this is difficult, but this time where you are dating is a test for you, for God to build character, to see if you trust him enough to

wait; to see if you love him enough to bring your sexual desires under his Lordship. When a young man or woman brings this area underneath the Lordship of Christ, he uses it to release long term trust between them and dynamite spiritual power into their lives.

Let me be clear on standard... wait until married

So, prioritize character in the dating process, and while you are waiting, focus on **its development in you.** Here's the way we said it, "Are you the person you are looking for is looking for?" Are you becoming more godly, self-controlled, and servantlike?

[1] Matt Chandler, *Mingling of Souls*, 61.

-
- Let me be clear on standard... wait until married
-
-
- One of our pastors, Eric Gravelle, CP of our CHC, makes a helpful distinction. He distinguishes between acts of affection vs. acts of desire.
 - **My practical guide:** Lynn's laws.
 - **Matt Chandler again:** *"Nothing good has ever come from a boyfriend and girlfriend cuddling on the couch watching a movie from 11pm to 1am. It has never ended in a discussion about cinematography in the history of watching movies on couches. To put yourself in that position to begin with is a foolish one."*¹²
 - Like a drug

¹² Chandler