

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

SIGNIFICANT OTHER | MADE 4 CONNECTION

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Well, we are still celebrating all that God did last week on Easter weekend.

Just want to greet everybody at all of our physical locations, those of you joining online, and any returning or first-time guests.

It's just amazing to see what happened last week and I just want to stop and celebrate that. We've just a few numbers for you. First is that we had over 1,000 people serving on ministry teams. It just takes a whole lot of people to pull this off.

I specifically want to thank, I want to thank everybody, but I want to thank a couple of groups of people. Our parking lot people, I want to thank you guys. It was crazy, especially at the 9:45 service. We had people making up parking spots and I know that it was super challenging so thank you, thank you, thank you for that.

And then all of you who served in our Kids' Ministry—at the 9:45 service I was really nervous because I know that we ran out of room at multiple campuses.

Here at Northwest we had over 400 people who couldn't get into this room, so they were watching on screens at other places around the building. And from what I understand, we didn't have to turn away any families, so thank you guys for the way that you served and stepped up to that.

And then we had a little over 14,000 in physical attendance and I just want to point out that last year we had a little over 8,000, so we saw that number nearly double. Two years ago it was just me in a room with a camera guy and he had a mask on. So that was really incredible to see that happen.

We had a little over 7,000 people online. But the number I really want to celebrate is that we had 170 baptisms. Amazing, amazing. So we just want to stop and celebrate that.

And you might, especially if you're new to our church, you might be wondering, "Are you just one of those churches that is all about the numbers?" And I just want to say unapologetically, unequivocally, "Yes, we are one of those churches that is all about the numbers." But not for reasons that you might assume.

We are all about the numbers because behind each one of those numbers is a person. That's somebody's spouse, that's somebody's kid, that's somebody's neighbor and behind every person is a story.



There were multiple stories that came in over this last week of somebody who just encountered the grace of God and a renewed sense of hope. So we will never get tired of celebrating that.

Now, I do want you to know that we're not about amassing crowds and getting people in seats and just trying to build a bigger and bigger audience. No, we're not even about just merely making converts.

I want you to know that the baptistry is not the finish line, it's the starting line. So for those of you who just placed your faith in Jesus and you got baptized, we want to help you take your next steps of growth.

I want to encourage you to go to this link, *Rooted*. We are rolling out something called *Rooted* this year. You're going to be hearing a lot about this throughout the course of the year.

Really, it is what it sounds like. We want to help root you in the faith. So if you go to that link and get on an interest list, as we're developing and building this out—we still need lots and lots of leaders to step up and lead out—but we're really excited about this as we roll this out.

Now, if you have a Bible, and I hope that you do, go ahead and turn to Genesis, chapter 1. Super easy to find. It's the first chapter of the first book of the Bible.

We are jumping into a brand-new message series today called *Significant Other*. So what I want to do today.... It's going to be a five-part series and today is largely setting the table, setting the foundation for where we're going in the remainder of this series.

I've been praying about preparing for this series for a number of weeks now. And any time I get together to do a WOD with a group of people (workout of the day) one of the things we might do is we might draw out a workout on a whiteboard, so maybe a 20-minute EMOM of power planes and toe squats. Then we will step back, and we will look at it and somebody will say this, "Oh, man. This is going to get a little spicy."

And a few weeks ago... I've got this glass dry erase board on the wall in my office, and I've just been gathering resources and praying and planning and I decided to just sketch out where we are headed with this series, just outline the number of weeks that we're going to be in it and what we're trying to cover. And I stepped back, and I looked at it and I was like, "Oh, man. This is going to be spicy."

And I just want you to know that those are usually the best workouts. And that usually means that, hopefully, this is going to be a transformational series in the life of our church and the life of us as individuals.

What I want you to know today is that I want to speak, today and in weeks to come, in a very frank, very straightforward way about some things that impact every single one of us. So let me just lay out where we are going.

Next weekend we're going to talk about two words that don't often go together but we're going to put them together. We're going to talk about sexual formation. And I want to give you a heads up that that's going to be a PG-13 message, so those of you who are parents and have kids under the age of 12, I want to encourage you to bring them but take them to our Kids' Ministry. They're going to love it in that environment.

If you have kids 13 and older, I want you to bring them, sit with them, and embarrass them, alright? No, I'm just joking about that. I want you to actually take this content in with them.

And the reason why is, if you don't talk to your kids or disciple your kids in this area someone else will and is already. So I think it's really, really important that we do that. So you come, you take notes, and draw diagrams and all of that kind of stuff and have a good conversation with them later.

The next week we're going to break from this series for Mother's Day. Then we're going to come back and we're just going to talk about things that maybe we wonder if we can or should talk about in church.

So we'll talk about dating, and singleness, marriage and divorce, interpersonal conflict, and all of that. And I need to do this. Here's the reason why. The culture speaks to us in a very, very straightforward way about many of these same issues. And oftentimes the church can be really, really silent on them for all kinds of reasons. Maybe we don't think we can talk about it in here, we're afraid of offending people, that kind of thing.

But here's the thing that we need to understand. The culture is constantly talking to us about it, and it shapes the way that we think about, speak about, and act upon relationships, dating, marriage, and sexuality.

Now, we don't often think about it in this way, but whatever you are exposed to on a consistent basis, here's what it does, it shapes your beliefs, it determines your perspective, and it guides your decisions. And the word for that is:

Discipleship

Now, I want you to get really familiar with that word. We hear that word, and we sometimes don't exactly know what it means. But when I say *discipleship* I mean, what is shaping your beliefs, determining your perspective, and guiding your decisions? And I promise you, something is. Nobody is neutral on this.

So, this is the process by which we are being formed more into the image and likeness of Jesus. That's what we desire for you. And it's also the understanding that there is an enemy who is actively at work to deform the image and likeness of Jesus within you.

Now, we are all disciples of something. We're all taking in content. We're all thinking about things, watching things, consuming things that shape our beliefs and determine our perspectives and guide our decisions.

Some of us are disciples of Bieber and we went to worship him this last week when he came to Indy for a concert. Some of us are disciples of golf. Some of us are disciples of that blogger or that influencer. And that's all fine and good. I just simply want to get you to understand that whatever you're constantly exposing yourself to, you are being disciplined by.

So the culture is constantly disciplining us in the area of relationships: dating, marriage, and sexuality through media, music, entertainment, and policies. It just shapes the way that we think.

We're going to spend the next five weeks just really unpacking what God's Word has to say about all of this. And I would be a poor excuse of a pastor if I didn't speak as straight forward to things as what the culture does.

Now, here's what I want you to understand about Jesus. Jesus does not just ask you to believe in Him. Oftentimes we sort of reduce Christianity as that, "I believe in Him." But the Bible says very clearly that even the demons believe in Him, and they shudder.

So Jesus isn't just asking you to believe in Him, it's a good place to start, but He's asking that you would believe Him. That means that you would believe what He has to say about certain areas, subjects in our lives. That we would recognize that God has a tremendous amount of wisdom when it comes to relationships, dating, romance, marriage, and sexuality.

So, what I want us to do is I want us to begin to operate from the premise that since God made us, and He designed us for connection, that He knows how it works best and He can help us sort through the baggage when things go wrong—and they do, unfortunately, all of the time.

Right now, in the room that you are sitting in, there is a tremendous amount of loneliness, and struggling marriages, and broken hearts. And I think oftentimes we've sort of been conditioned to think that if God has anything to say about romance, and relationships, and dating, and marriage, and sexuality that it's bad news, that God is sort of like a cosmic killjoy on this, that His basic answer is shame or judgment, or you should feel bad about yourself in this area.

And maybe there are some of you right now, you invited somebody, you were here last week at Easter, or you heard about this series, and you were like, "Well, I'll give that a shot."

Maybe some of you just started that dating relationship and this is your second date and right now there's this hot heat coming out of your collar like, "Oh, no."

And some of you may be sitting there saying, "I don't know that I'm going to like what I'm going to hear." And I totally get that. Maybe you have a good reason to feel that way because of a bad church experience, or maybe you went to college with a weird Christian and he kind of made you feel bad about this area of your life.

I just really want you to take a deep breath, in fact just do it now, in through the nose out through the mouth. Here's what I want you to know. Jesus came to bring Good News. Do you believe that? Jesus came to bring Good News.

Now, you may not initially receive that as Good News at first, but it's ultimately for your good. He came to bring Good News. In fact, what the Bible says about Him is Jesus came into the world, not to condemn, but to save, which tells us that there is something that we need to be saved from. And He didn't come to condemn us, He came to set us free.

In fact, look at what Jesus says about Himself in Luke, chapter 4. It's so informative for our entire life, but even this specific area of our life. He's talking about Himself. He goes:

"The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring," say it out loud at all of our locations, "Good News." That is why He came. He came to bring Good News, "to the poor."

Now that could be monetarily poor, but there are all kinds of ways that we can be poor. You can have a lot in the bank and still be poor. You can be spiritually poor. You can be relationally poor. You can be emotionally poor. He said, "I've come to bring Good News to the poor."

"He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released," I'm praying that for this series as well, "... captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD's favor has come."

This is the tone that we want to establish for the whole series. And I've been trying to be in as much prayer for this series as I've been preparing for this series because right now I know that there are all kinds of hurts right now, all kinds of emotional baggage. And I'm praying that there would be those who are poor, blind, and oppressed, relationally, and emotionally, who would be set free.

I'm praying for that single adult right now who really wants to be married but it hasn't happened yet. I'm praying that you would know that you are not half a person regardless of maybe what well-meaning Christians have made you feel. You can find fulfillment as a single person and God loves you and that this series is for you.

I'm praying for the marriages that are barely holding on by a thread and you've thrown everything at it. You've thrown counseling. You've thrown books. You've thrown self-help conferences, and nothing has seemed to work. I'm actually praying that something supernatural would happen in this series and that you'd be set free from the thing that's been keeping you pinned down.

I'm praying for that woman who is in a really abusive marriage, and she doesn't think that she can leave because she doesn't know how she'll provide for her kids and so she just stays and takes it. And I'm praying she'll be set free. And I'm praying for the man who is

abusing her that the Holy Spirit would convict him to his core, and he would knock that nonsense off in the name of Jesus.

I'm praying that you'd be set free because Jesus came to bring Good News.

So I'm going to speak directly but please don't misinterpret my directness for abrasiveness. I'm going to speak very frankly but I'm not going to speak in a spirit of superiority. I'm going to speak truthfully but not pridefully. And the reason why is because I'm no expert. Those of you who know me well are like: Amen.

I still struggle. I'm trying to grow in my EQ, my emotional intelligence, and what it's like to be on the other side of me. And God just continues to define that in me.

If I'm to be honest, I've got some relational hurts in my heart right now, some interpersonal conflicts, some wounding that I've caused others and others have caused in me. I'm just a mess.

I've been married for 23 years, 17 of them good. The others are my fault. I married a saint. You want to pray for our church, pray for my wife.

I mess up. I fail. My pride gets in the way more times that I'd like to admit. So, I'm not up here saying, "Do as I do." I'm up here as a fellow struggler saying, "Man, we need all of the help that we can get from Jesus who came to bring Good News."

And one of the things that I think that all of us would agree on is that one of the things that makes life so incredibly gratifying is relationships. Would you not agree with that? When you think about some of the best moments of your life, you think about the things that bring you joy and happiness, likely someone else is involved: a great conversation around a good cup of coffee, a walk along a beach, playing with your kids at a playground, some sort of relational connection.

Regardless of your Myers-Briggs or your Enneagram number or if you're an extrovert or an introvert, we all crave social connection. And chances are that's one of the things that just makes life so fulfilling.

I think that we would also agree that one of the things that makes life so incredibly painful, complex, and complicated is relationships. And all of the betrayals and the breakups—I mean, it's just heartbreaking.

This last week—I didn't watch much of it but I kind of saw it on in the background—the Johnny Depp, Amber Heard depositions were going on. And I don't even really know any details about it or who's to blame, but I do know by just watching it, seeing the facial expressions, and the things that were being said, it was heartbreaking. It's just heartbreaking when you see relationships fall apart and people turn on each other.

Several weeks ago I preached on Mark, chapter 8. Some of you were here for that. You may recall it. The passage was about a father whose child was demon-possessed and he

brings the child to Jesus. And he says, "If you can heal him...." And Jesus said, "If I can? Anything you ask for you if you believe, I'll say yes."

So this guy says, "I do believe but help me in my unbelief."

And we talked about healing. Now the healing from God can come instantaneously, but oftentimes healing is a process. Why? Because God is really interested in character formation. And oftentimes that comes through a process, not an instant. So it can happen both ways.

And then at the end of the message I just said, "Hey, man. If you need prayer for healing just come. Just come as you are. We just want to pray over you and at every location we had people fill the aisles and we were praying for people."

Now here's something that surprised me. Most of what I prayed for, I can't speak for everybody who prayed for people, but the people I prayed for, it wasn't things that were physical in nature. There were some. Some people were saying, "I've got cancer." Or, "MS." Or, "I've got this chronic back pain. Would you just pray that God would heal that?"

But most of the requests were relational in nature. Most of the requests were for an estranged relationship with a son or daughter. Most of the requests were about broken marriages or hurtful relationships or some sort of betrayal. And it really sort of startled me.

And I said to somebody on our team, I was like, "You know, if we could just sort of pull back the veil and we could see the amount of emotional and relational pain that every single one of us are bringing into the room with us, then it would be overwhelming. The amount of broken relationships, interpersonal conflict, and unmet expectations would just kind of smack us in the face."

And I say all of that to really make two points: number one, if you're feeling any of that you are not alone. You are not alone. The second thing that I want to say is that instead of cursing, criticizing, or cancelling each other, we need to have more compassion toward one another because of the stuff that is going on in all of our lives.

Have you ever noticed how we have a tendency to be experts on other people's relational problems and issues? During football season, some of you guys are such experts sitting on your couch drinking a beer criticizing all of the elite professional athletes for things you have never done, nor could you ever do.

You're sitting on the couch, and you haven't gone for a run in a decade and you're criticizing an athlete for dropping a pass. And you yell at the TV, "How can he do that? Bum. Trade him to the Browns." You're just all upset. You've become an expert.

Now, let me tell you why he dropped it. He was running faster than you will ever run, from someone running faster than you will ever be who happens to be bigger than a truck and

if he catches him, it's going to be to legally assault him. So maybe we could cut the elite athlete some slack.

How many of you have ever dropped your phone and you were just walking? Nobody was tackling you.

So, let's be more compassionate toward one another. You just have no idea what that other person is going through in his personal and relational life.

None of us have this all figured out. Why? Because we are all broken sinners in need of a Savior who can put us back together.

So let me jump in. Genesis chapters 1 through 3 is going to be kind of foundational. I just want to read a few of these verses and make a couple of observations here today. Starting off in Genesis 1:1, it says this:

"In the beginning," I just want to stop right there. There was a beginning. We love to split hairs and kind of get into arguments about how that beginning went down. Was it a literal six-day creation? All kinds of interesting debates while God is sitting up there going, "Come on, you're missing it."

There was a beginning. And what you believe about the beginning will impact your relationships. It just will. If you believe that this is all just random, by chance, we all just kind of fell together, that we're all just highly evolved animals with urges, desires, and needs, then it doesn't really matter how we treat each other.

But if you believe that there was a beginning and that there was a Creator God with intentional purpose and design, that radically changes everything.

"... God created the heavens and the earth."

If you read on down from that He talks about all of the things within it and how He did so. Now I want to draw your attention to verse 26:

"Then God said, 'Let us,'" now notice the plurality there, we'll come back to that, "'Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us.'" What an amazing statement.

"They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.' So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

There was great intention and great design. So the first thing that I want you to see is:

What you believe informs how you'll behave

What you believe informs how you will treat other people regardless of whether you have good chemistry with them or if there is lots of interpersonal conflict, this will just change the way that you treat other people.

We all believe something about where we came from, how we got here, and what this is all about. Even if what you believe is that all of this is just random and by chance.

Now, what I'm just trying to draw your attention to is that what Genesis is telling us is that there was a beginning, there is a God, and He designed everything on purpose, including our relationships. He made us in His image. Now, what we believe about that will impact everything.

Here's the question: Do you see the image of God in others? Do you see the image of God in the people you work with? Do you see the image of God in that person you are dating? And in that person who you are married to?

We are spiritual beings. Therefore, what we do with our bodies, physically, will impact us spiritually. If not, then we are just highly evolved animals with desires to be fulfilled. And what ends up happening, this always ends up taking place, is that we will use people to meet those desires and then whenever they don't meet those desires anymore, we discard them.

So what you believe about all of this will inform how you behave. Here's the second thing:

We are all image bearers of a good God.

I just want you to receive this. I need you to hear this. In a day and age in which we are looking to the words of other people to affirm us, in a day and age when there is really low self-esteems and insecurities, and depression, I just need to remind you of the fact that you have worth and value. That you are an image bearer of God and that that is how He sees you.

I've got four kids at home: 19, 17, 15, and 10. And whenever I look at them there are times when I just catch a glimpse—we may be eating a meal together, we may out somewhere—I'll just catch a glimpse and I see the image of their Momma in them. And it just stirs my affections.

Sometimes I see my image woven into them, poor kids. And I just see that and what it does is it stirs my affection for them. I could be frustrated with them. I could be discouraged, but I see that, and I'm just reminded, "Man, there isn't anything they can do to make me love them any less."

You take that and multiply it by about a million and that's what God sees when He looks at you.

Here's what I want to challenge you with. That person right now who is driving you crazy—let's just take romantic relationships out of it—that person at work, that person you live next to, whoever drives you crazy, I just simply want you to begin to see the image of God within him. Just ask God for help in that. He may drive you absolutely

crazy, you don't have to like him, but you can love him because he is an image bearer of God.

One last observation that I'll make is that:

God is relational.

And that's the reason why we are. It says in verse 26:

"Let us make human beings in our image."

Now, who is He talking to? Well it's God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, what we know as the Trinity. Lots of ways to explain it. How does it work? None of us fully know. What we do know is that God is relational. Not three different Gods in one but one God existing in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

The way it's been described to me before is: His presence, His power, and His position.

Here's what I really want you to see. The Trinity shows us that God is relational, and He has built that into you. That's the reason why we all crave relationships. It's the reason why babies, if they're not held, and if they are not loved, and if they are not talked to, it sets back their development.

That has all been hard-wired into us. We are all longing for this social connection. Now look at verse 18:

"Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good,' everything up until this point that He created, He created it and He said, 'Oh, man. That is good. Oh, that's great. That's good, it's good, it's good.'"

The first thing that He says isn't good is that man was alone. So he says:

"I will make a helper who is just right for him.' So the LORD God formed from the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and the man chose a name for each one. He gave names to all the livestock, all the birds of the sky, and all the wild animals. But still there was no helper just right for him.

"So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the LORD God took out one of the man's ribs and closed up the opening. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to the man." Now notice these two little words in verse 23:

"At last!" the man exclaimed. 'This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called "woman," because she was taken from "man."'"

Now, lots of things that we could talk about in that paragraph. Maybe various emotional responses as we read those words. But the two words that I simply want to draw your attention to are the first two words in verse 23: at last.

And I just want you to feel the emotion and the desperation and the sense of relief in those words. That he's been alone for a while. I don't know long it takes to name all of the animals. I'm guessing a while.

And I think with each animal that is coming up, he's just reminded that none of them are like him. Admire them, for sure, "Man, that is amazing. Incredible. I'm going to give you this name." And he's sitting there going, "But I'm alone. I'm alone." It was a reminder all along, "I'm alone. I'm alone." Nobody he could identify with.

And all of a sudden God gives him Eve and he recognizes it immediately, "Man, she is like me, but she is different than me." And this was the beginning long before....

Now, we're going to talk about this next week, but the very first command that God gave them was: be fruitful and multiply. Can I get a good amen? That's the very first command that God gave them. And they were naked and didn't feel any shame and they were one flesh. We're going to talk about that.

But before any of that, they were friends. Before any of that Adam looked at Eve and said, "At last. Somebody who I can connect with. Somebody who I can share with. Somebody who I can love."

And this was a way for him to image his Creator. You've got this vertical imaging with God, this relationship with God. God desires a relationship with us. And then this horizontal relationship with one another.

C.S. Lewis writes about this in his book on the four loves. He says,

"We are born helpless. As soon as we are fully conscious we discover loneliness. We need others physically, emotionally, intellectually; we need them if we are to know anything, even ourselves."

And that captures that paragraph in these two words *at last*. At last. And my guess is that those words *at last* have been exclaimed from your heart multiple times throughout your lifetime when you have begun a new friendship with somebody. Those words *at last*....

You ever met somebody for the first time, and you immediately click into this chemistry, you just become fast friends? You ever had that dating relationship, he asked you out, and you're like, "At last"? She said yes, "At last." You walked the aisle, "At last."

We've got this *at last* that comes out of us. This has happened to me multiple times in life. And it's one of the greatest experiences ever.

I remember when I was in fifth grade one of my friends, I was hanging out with him a lot, he invited me over to his house and we just had the best time.

We went to his house after school, and we built a skateboard ramp in his driveway. This was the 80s, so we were all about it. And then later that night we went down into his

basement to play Super Mario Brothers on the original Nintendo, now I'm just dating myself a little bit.

And his mom, she would bring us Totino's party pizzas just one after the other. Manna from heaven. There is something about Totino's party pizzas that just speaks to my heart, alright?

We stayed up really late. Then we got up the next morning and went out on his driveway and we were shooting baskets as I was waiting on my parents to pick me up. He was a really good athlete, and he shot the ball and I said to him, "Man, you're a great basketball player."

And I will never forget this. I don't know why this has stuck in my mind. He turned around and he looked at me and he said, "Hey, thanks, man." And then he said this. He goes, "You're my best friend for this year." I had no idea that I had to re-up on that. "I'll take it. I'll take it for this year."

I just remember, I don't know, but I had these words to say to him, but it was like, "At last. Somebody wants to be my friend. Somebody called me best friend." It's the best feeling in the world.

I remember that same year that I developed my first crush, fifth grade—great year for me. Her name was Camile Wolf. What a great last name. She was a fox to me.

And I remember, I was like, "Oh, man. How do I get her attention?" And I will never forget one afternoon, she dropped some papers and she got on the ground to pick them up and I was like, "I've got to do something. I've got to do something." So I was like, "I'll just jump over her."

Ladies, that is just how we think. Honestly, I'm 46 years old, really not much has changed.

I remember I jumped over her and my left foot cleared her head but the right foot that came in from behind did not. And man, I drilled her right in the temple. And she fell down on the ground. And I remember going, "Oh, no."

I turned around and her hair was all messed up, her face was red, and she had a red mark on her temple, and she looked up at me and she glared at me, "Aaron." And right there in that moment, there was a little smile and she looked away.

And I was like, "Oh, yeah. She's into me."

Man, we began a fast and a furious relationship for the next two weeks and then she broke my heart when she told me her parents were moving to Cincinnati. Just as quickly as it began, it ended, and I've never seen her since. So, Camile, if you're watching—what could have been?

So for all of us, there is a reason why that happens. We are imaging our Father. And those words *at last* pop up in our hearts all of the time.

In friendships, family, friends, relationships—all culminating in one person who becomes our boyfriend, girlfriend, our companion, our partner, our spouse who we covenanted with, and we're going to talk more about that in this series. And we build a life with them, raise a family with them.

And what I want you to see is that our culture has the tendency to put all of the emphasis on romantic love. What I want you to see is that it all needs to be undergirded with this deep and abiding friendship where you see the image of God in this other imperfect person.

And you're not looking to fulfill all of the empty places in your life. Only God can do that. You're actually looking to help them be formed more and more into the image and likeness of Jesus and they are helping you be formed into the image and likeness of Jesus.

This is the reason why marriage is so hard. Marriage exposes us. You can hide and you can pretend pretty much your whole dating relationship, it is one big audition where you're just presenting the best version of yourself. You get into a marriage, and you just can't hide it. It just comes out into the open. And it's a gift of grace as well because what God is doing is He is forming our character through that.

C.S. Lewis in his book *The Four Loves* talks about how love can be unpacked a variety of ways. We have a tendency to see it from one lens, but we have:

Philia love, which is friendship love.

This is where we get the word Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love. So we have friendship love. And then we have:

Storge, which is empathetic.

It's like a nostalgic kind of love. And then we have:

Eros, which our culture puts so much emphasis on.

This is erotic love. And then you have:

Agape love, which is sacrificial.

What I simply want us to see is that love has different forms. We live in a culture that has sort of cheapened the word *love* because we use it for everything. It's like, "Oh, I'm so in love with him." Or, "I love my wife."

Or, "I love pizza." Wait a second, that word doesn't have the same weight. There are different kinds of love.

Now, all I'm simply doing is introducing this. We'll unpack this further in this series. But we have to order the loves right. And I'm giving you just a little bit of a teaser where we're going to when we talk about dating. Many times we start with Eros, "Am I attracted to this person?" And then, ultimately, we may build a friendship.

No, start with friendship.

I'm not saying that physical attraction isn't important, but we start with friendship if we get the love ordered correctly. And we understand that we cannot place upon this other person the expectation that they will fill the gap that only God, Himself, can fulfill.

So all of this is a living illustration and an example of what it is that God desires for us. When we talk about a saving relationship with God, we talk about it in a variety of ways. We say, "He's my Lord and my Savior," all of that is true. What I want you to know is that the gospel of John puts it this way: God desires to be your friend.

Friendship with God. And our friendship with God, our connection to God has been damaged because of sin. John's gospel is known as the love gospel, and he talks about the love of God this way. Notice this in chapter 15. He goes:

"This is my commandment: Love each other," love each other how? "... in the same way I have loved you." By the way, that would be Agape love. "There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends," this is Jesus talking to you, "You are my friends if you do what I command.

"I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me. You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name. This is my command: Love each other."

There needs to be this deep and abiding friendship. And there is a lot of heartache right now due to broken relationships but what it really comes down to is that the friendship fell apart.

That's what happens in Genesis, chapter 3. Satan attacks Adam and Eve's friendship first. He went after their relationship, and he continues to today.

And it's one of the ways that he seeks to destroy the image of God within us. So if you've ever wondered why marriage is so hard, it's because there is an enemy actively opposing it.

Now, we don't want to over spiritualize that and say that it's all Satan to blame. But I am saying that he's not making it any easier. If marriage is the way that we image God and if it's actually the living example and illustration of salvation, he hates that. And so he's going to do everything he can to destroy it.

And right now there are so many struggling marriages and so many struggling relationships and so much baggage. If the statistics are anywhere near being accurate, then Christian marriages really don't look any different than non-Christian marriages. There is just as much divorce. There is just as much strife. There is just as much abuse and betrayal. And that is tragic.

Many times we're just sort of wondering where we go from all of this. And in the coming weeks we're going to continue to explore God's design, what went wrong and how He's seeking to redeem and restore.

But for now, I'm going to leave you with this. Part of the way that we destroy, or damage relationships is when we look to another imperfect, fallen, sinful person—a significant other—to do for us what only God can. And it happens all of the time when someone fails to meet our expectations.

So what we're doing is that we've bought into the words of the great theologian Jerry McGuire and we're just looking for the one. I've just got to find the one. I'm going to find the one and he will fulfill me. She is going to make me happy. He's going to make all my wildest dreams come true. And that's just a lot of pressure that nobody is designed to live up to.

What I want you to know is that we're all broken sinners. There is all of this space within us that no other human being can fulfill. So two half-empty people, when they meet each other, they do not make a whole. Two half-empty people who meet each other without God just make a large sucking sound.

We were made for connection. But our connection with another person cannot be ultimate. This why the greatest gift you can give your spouse is to say, "You are not number one. Jesus is number one. You're number two, you're number two."

This is why, if you're in a dating relationship and he's not a believer, she's not tracking with the Lord.... There is not a stigma about who they are personally. I'll talk about this more in the coming weeks.

The Bible talks about being unequally yoked. It's the whole idea that two animals that are yoked together pulling, if one is outpacing the other, one is a different size, it's just going to make a mess.

This is the idea of this other person, have they placed God as number one in their life and you number two? Because if not what they are doing is they are making you a god. And that's going to ultimately crush you.

Once again we come back to C.S. Lewis, and he says this. He goes:

"We may give our human loves the unconditional allegiance which we owe only to God."

And when that happens they become lowercase gods. And then if we make them a lowercase god, eventually they become demons.

“Then they will destroy us, and also destroy themselves. For natural loves that are allowed to become gods do not remain loves. They are still called so, but can become in fact complicated forms of hatred.”

So what I want to do as we conclude week one of this series before we venture on to the rest of it, is I simply want to extend this opportunity to say to many of you who may be holding on by a thread, maybe in your... in the midst of really painful circumstances, this might be an opportunity in which God dramatically changes your relationship, that God dramatically and supernaturally saves your marriage. Maybe you’ve thrown everything else at this relationship, but you’ve not yet fully invited Jesus in.

Or here’s the thing. Some of you are just skeptical. You’re going, “Aaron, we’ve tried this. We’ve gone to counseling. We’ve gone to a conference, read a book. Nothing seems to happen.”

I understand all of that. But if there is still breath in your lungs, don’t give up. If you just place yourself in this opportunity to say, “God, we’re at the end of our rope. It is going to require a miracle for You to come in and salvage this.”

And some of you are going to look back on this moment as the moment that changed your marriage, that changed your dating relationship. I really do believe that there are going to be marriages that are going to be saved in this series.

There are going to be some dating relationships, unfortunately, that are going to break up because you’re going to realize that, “This person is not leading me closer to God. This person is actually making me a god, which eventually I will be incomplete in their life.”

There are actually going to be some new relationships that are going to start. Some dating relationships that are going to start. And we’re going to celebrate that. There are going to be a few people who are going to find some hope and new life. They’re going to resolve that interpersonal thing. Now is your moment. Now is your moment.

What I want to ask you to do is I just want to ask you to get really vulnerable. I don’t want you to miss this opportunity. The Bible says very clearly that if we publicly stand up and say, “Jesus, You are God. I’m unashamed to follow after You.” He recognizes that. He blesses that.

I’m just even wondering if there would be people at all of our locations who right now you would be like, “You know what? I really need God’s supernatural intervention in my marriage,” or, “In my dating relationship,” or, “In this relationship with a significant other.” “And I want to invite Him in. I want to actually listen to what the Designer has to say about the design.”

Would you just be vulnerable and courageous enough right now...? We're all going to eventually be standing in here in a minute, would you just stand to your feet and go, "No, I want to invite Jesus in. I'm going to trust. I'm going to invite Him into my relationships. And I want Him to speak. I want Him to bring healing."

Just look around the room. You are not alone. We are all in this together, pulling for each other.

God, we want to hear You. The culture has been discipling us in sexuality and relationships for far too long. We want to get what the Designer has to say.

So what I'm going to do is pray and what we're going to do, in the spirit of what we did a couple of weeks ago when we had you come and pray for healing, I just want you to come.

There will be people lined up down front and all you need to do is say, "Hey, pray for me." You don't have to go into all of the details, just, "Man, pray for me right now. I'm really struggling with ____." "Pray for our marriage right now." "Pray for my dating relationship." "Pray right now that I would be open to hear what God has to say."

You just come and receive prayer. We want to receive you today.

Father, we come to You today and I thank You for relationships. I thank You that You made us social beings designed to connect with one another because that's one of several ways that we image You as a relational God.

And yet, we've allowed our culture and our society to shape the way that we think about dating, relationships, marriage, sexuality.

So, God, we want to hear from You because it's not working. It's not working right now. There is so much pain and there is so much heartbreak.

So, God, we just invite You to bring Good News. We invite You to speak into those barren places of our life. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.