

# MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

**SIGNIFICANT OTHER | SINGLENESSE, DATING, DIVORCE**

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If you've got a Bible grab it and get to 1 Corinthians 7. That's where we are going to be today.

I want you to know that if you are relatively new to our church family, every summer beginning right around Memorial Day through July, the elders and you all very graciously grant me what is called a study leave. I've been taking this every summer since I've been here.

It's not a sabbatical, it's a study leave. The difference is on sabbatical, I disconnect. I'm not working. I'm out of here. In a study break I'm still working 40 or 50 hours a week, but instead of taking the 15 to 20 hours in weekly sermon prep that I would normally invest, I'm taking that time and redirecting it toward praying, planning, preparing a year's worth of sermon content and just overall vision and direction for us as a church. And it's such a gift to me.

Also, I'm so looking forward to the next several Sundays to actually go to church with my family and not be on, not to teach a message, just to worship with them. So thank you for investing into me that way.

What this means is that this weekend is my last weekend to preach for just a little bit. I will be back on Father's Day to do a very special interview on that day. But then I'll be back in August to launch our fall message series.

So next weekend, Kyle Riley, our Downtown campus pastor, is going to be wrapping up this series and then we're going to launch into our summer sermon series. We're going to be going through the fruit of the Spirit together as a church this summer and we're going to call it *What the World Needs Now*. So you'll be hearing from a bunch.... Yeah. You'll be hearing from a bunch of our campus pastors, and then I've got a couple of very special guests. If you've been in our church for a while, they are going to be familiar faces to you. And I'm not going to tell you who they are. So it's going to be a surprise, alright?

We've been in this series called *Significant Other*. We've been talking about relationships. And, by the way, I'm not even going to talk about sex today. You're either disappointed or you're glad about that. And really, honestly as I look around the room, I'm like, "Oh, man. People came back. People came back."

I just have the reoccurring nightmare about once a quarter that I stand up to preach and nobody is here. And I'm just so thankful that you guys came back even though we've

talked about some really challenging things. But God has been doing some incredible things through this.

I heard about this married couple who—he was having some health problems and they did a whole bunch of tests at the doctor's office. So he and his wife go to the doctor to get the results of the test. And they walk in, and the doctor said, "Hey, I want to speak to you first in private before we share the news with him."

So he brings the wife in, and he sits her down, and he says, "Listen." He goes, "It's not good. Your husband has maybe a year to live. And he could possibly survive this if for the minimum of a year you keep his stress nearly at zero. Which means you've got to get up every morning, fix him a hot breakfast in bed. You've got to take care of the kids. You've got to let him go play golf with his friends whenever he wants. You've got to be at his every beck and call—all of his desires for intimacy. And, if at the end of the year, you keep his stress at a minimum, he could survive."

She was like, "Wow." She leaves, she gets in the car, they are driving home. And he says, "Honey, what did he say?" She goes, "He said you're going to die. That's what he said."

Some of you are like, "That is so good."

I think that there is one thing that we can all agree on regardless of our current relationship status is that dating, relationships, and marriage can be really hard. I mean, even the healthiest marriage relationships require a lot of hard, intentional work.

Chemistry with another will only take you so far before you begin to clash with a significant other. And the reason why is because we are flawed, imperfect, broken, sinful human beings. And marriages are not rings, ceremonies, or honeymoons, but people. And since people are messy, relationships and marriages can be messy.

Now, we've already walked through God's design for relationships and marriage and sexuality from Genesis 2 and 3. Last week we walked through 1 Corinthians, chapter 6, where Paul was being very pastoral. He is confronting and he's discipling the way that these brand-new, baby Christians in Corinth were viewing and practicing sexuality. They had been totally immersed within the cultural climate of Corinth, which was the sex capital of the world at the time.

And Corinth made Vegas look like *Sesame Street*. So none of them had grown up in church. None of them had any sort of Christian background. But Jesus saved them out of their darkness and brokenness and gives them brand-new lives. So, what Paul does in this letter is he says, "Listen. Who you were is not now who you are in Christ Jesus. You've been purchased by the blood of Christ. You've been cleansed, washed, redeemed, and sanctified."

And Jesus didn't just go to a cross so that you could acknowledge His presence, tip your hat to Him, and then just go on living life the way that you want to live it. Jesus

went to a cross and walked out of a tomb so that you and I might be transformed into a brand-new person.

Now, that doesn't mean that we'll be perfect. It doesn't mean we won't struggle. It doesn't mean that we will have answers to all of our questions. What it means is, step by step, even if I'm stumbling my way toward this, I am being formed more and more into the image and likeness of Jesus.

So last week I said, we're saved in a moment by grace through faith. And then the rest of our lives is a process of sanctification. And repentance isn't just, "I'm really, really sorry. I'm really sorry I got caught." Repentance is, "I'm going to take steps away from my life of sin and more steps toward the person of Jesus Christ."

Now, the Corinthians had been saved out of their brokenness, but now that has created significant issues in their personal lives and relationships. So in chapter 6, Paul confronts their view of sexuality. Now, in chapter 7, Paul is going to pastor them through their relationships, their singleness, as well as their marriages.

Today, in this message, what I want to do is just to kind of give you a heads up. We're going to walk through large portions of chapter 7, and I want to talk about single adults, I want to talk about divorce, and then sandwiched in the middle of that are principles around dating, alright? What could go wrong?

Here we go. Starting in verse 1 of chapter 7. Paul continues to answer some of their objections and questions that they had been submitting to him. And he says:

*"Now regarding the questions you asked in your letter."* So, in some capacity, Paul had been receiving questions, objections, from the Corinthians and he's spending a large portion of this letter responding to them.

Now, one of the keys in accurate Bible interpretation, what I mean by that is you read a passage and you're trying to discern, "What does this mean for my life?" One of the things you have to do is you have to first discern who was the original audience and what did it mean to them? The way that it was taught to me is AIM: author's intended meaning.

So in other words, before I can apply a passage to my life today, in 2022, I need to say, "Okay, who was the original author, who was the original audience, what was going on there, what's the primary application for them, and then what is the overarching principle that I can apply to my life today?"

I say all of that to say that when we recognize that these new, baby Christians in Corinth had gotten saved—what was happening is that some of them were working as prostitutes in the sex temples when they got saved. Now they are like, “What do we do with this?”

I have several pastor friends who pastor churches in Vegas. And they talk about this. they say, “People who come to our church work on the strip in the casinos and in the sex industry and they come to church and then they get baptized, and now we have to walk them through what that looks like as far as their careers and what they do for a living,”

So, in the Corinthian church, what was going on, because none of them had a church background, you had a lot of married couples who, neither one of them were Christians when they got married. And now, she came to church in Corinth, and he didn’t, and she got baptized and he didn’t and now he’s going, “Wait a second. This is a bait and switch. I didn’t marry a Christian.” And they are going, “What are we going to do with this, Paul?”

You had singles in the church in Corinth. And they are like, “Paul. I am single and I’m ready to mingle. And I really want to be married, but it is a jungle out there, Paul. The dating scene in Corinth is crazy. Paul, I just met this girl on a dating app, and I found out that she used to be a prostitute at the sex temple. And the reason why I know that is because I remember seeing her at the sex temple.”

Some of them were like, “Paul, I’m starting to lose hope that I’m going to find somebody so I’m thinking about lowering my standards. What am I supposed to do?” “Paul, is there ever a scenario where divorce is permissible?” These are of the questions that they were submitting to him.

So I want to pick this up in verse 7. Paul starts here. He says:

*“But I wish everyone were single, just as I am,”* another verse that we’re never going to put on a t-shirt or a coffee mug. *“Yet each person has a special gift from God, of one kind or another.”*

*So I say to those who aren't married and to widows—"so that would be single adults in the church in Corinth, "it's better to stay unmarried, just as I am. But if they can't control themselves, they should go ahead and marry. It's better to marry than to burn with lust."*

Wow. I've officiated a lot of weddings in my days as a pastor and never once have I ever preached a marriage message on that verse. Could you imagine? "We're gathered here today because Bill was burning with passion. And because Susan was all hot and bothered. So Bill picked Sue and Sue Bill so they could extinguish the passions of their lust in holy matrimony." How romantic.

So what's Paul doing? Well, look at verse 10. It says:

*"But for those who are married," once again, Corinthian church, these are brand-new Christians, "I have a command that comes not from me, but from the Lord." So he's speaking in the authority of God, "A wife must not leave her husband."*

Verse 11:

*"But," so he's offering some sort of concession here, "if she does leave him, let her remain single or else be reconciled to him. And the husband must not leave his wife."*

So we'll talk about when is divorce permissible in a Christian marriage. He goes on and he says, *"Now regarding your question about the young women who are not yet married, I do not have a command from the Lord for them. But the Lord, in his mercy has given me wisdom, that can be trusted and I will share it with you."* In other words, Paul is giving some pastoral counseling here, not a command.

Verse 26:

*"Because of the present crisis," what I've already explained that is going on in Corinth, their relationships, "I think it is best to remain as you are."*

So here's the overarching principle. Paul is saying, "Okay, brand-new, baby Christians in Corinth, you are walking in Christ. You didn't grow up in church. You got radically saved." He goes, "Whatever your relationship status at the time of your salvation, I think it would just be better if you stayed that way. So if you're married to a person who is not a Christian, then stay in the marriage. If you're single, just stay single if you can." That's the overarching principle that he's giving in their immediate context. Verse 27:

*"If you have a wife, do not seek to end the marriage. If you do not have a wife, do not seek to get married. But if you do get married, it is not a sin. And if a young woman gets married, it is not a sin. However, those who get married at this time will have troubles, and I am trying to spare you those problems."*

Now first, I just want to address what Paul is saying to single adults. Because I've been married for 23 years next month, I am not an expert at being single. But I do remember what it was like. And I remember some of the feelings of fear and insecurity that I had that came along with that, wondering if I would ever meet and find someone.

I'm not an expert at being single but I have been a pastor for the last 25 years so it's not an exaggeration to say that I've got hundreds of hours of meetings with people, counseling, coffee, lunches, processing lives, thoughts, and passions of adults who happen to be single.

What I want us to know, as a church family, is the number of adult singles in our society is only increasing. For the first time in American history there are more single adults as a fully formed generation than there are married. That's the first time in history.

The median age of a first marriage has risen to 29 and half for men, and 27.4 for women. Today's young adults, this generation, by the time they reach the age of 50, about one in four, 25 percent of them will remain single all of their lives. These are significant shifts in our cultural landscape.

So, just as the church oftentimes hasn't dealt with divorce in an empathic, caring Christ-like way, we've oftentimes not approached, spoken to, or related to these single adults in a very empathetic, encouraging way either.

There is a book called *Celibate Sex* on singleness and life with Christ, and in it, it describes a perspective that many Christian, single adults have. It says:

Singles today are a widow of sorts needing to be listened to in a framework for who we are and how we fit into the Christian family. What does it mean to abstain from sex while having urges? What does it mean to be content in one's singleness while longing for marriage? Can I be sexual without a spouse? Am I becoming less desirable as I age? How do I trust God in this? Should I use technology, [aka dating apps] to date?

I have serious reservations about this person I just went on a date with, but I'm lonely. Should I stay in it? Are there enough eligible single people at this church?

Are there enough single people at the other church that I go to? That's just a preacher joke, that's for me. I know you do it.

For many of you, there were these expectations around a quote unquote age that you thought you'd be married by only to see that age come and go and you just didn't see your life going this way.

Maybe some of you in your mid to late 20s you're seeing all of your friends getting married all around you and having their second, maybe their third kid and you'd just love to have a second date.

Maybe you've experienced, as a middle-aged adult, an unwanted and even painful divorce and you're trying to heal from that and you're like, "Okay, now what? Do I start all over again? What does this mean for sexuality? The dating scene—all of the rules have changed. And it's just brutal? What do I do?"

Maybe you were widowed at a relatively young age, and you wonder, "Okay, what now? How soon is it okay to start dating again? And what will others think? Do they think that I've waited long enough? Where is the place of grief and what do I do with this guilt that I have?"

I say all of this to just say, for many of us who are married and within the church, as a church family, which is what I want us to be, a family, is that we would just have a greater amount of empathy and that we would recognize that not all single adults come from the same perspective. Their experiences are vastly different. And the amount of hurt and anxiety over this is just unprecedented.

I just want us to be aware and be more empathetic and encouraging. In our small groups, just watch that all of our examples aren't just about marriage, but that we would genuinely show interest and that we wouldn't, even unintentionally, sort of give off the impression of like, "Hey, when are you going to get hitched?" Or, "You're half a person, incomplete." Or, "Your life is waiting to begin when you walk an aisle." That just isn't the case.

Paul's heart in addressing singleness in chapter 7 is so that you would not be anxious about being single. And that is easier said than done. But Paul actually has a greater amount of credibility to do that than I do. Because I can say it as your pastor, "Hey, don't be anxious about being single." "Easy for you to say, you're going to go home with your wife." But Paul wasn't married. Paul was single and stayed single his whole life.

So here are a few observations about singleness. The Bible affirms it. The Bible affirms singleness, oftentimes when our society does not. So I just want to speak to all of the single adults who are gathered here whether you are content in that or not. I just want you to know that you are not half a person, you're a whole person. And you're not just waiting around for your life to begin when you walk an aisle. No, no. Paul says, in verse 7, "I wish everyone were single as I am." He doesn't say, "I'm really sorry that you are, but hold on, there's probably somebody out there for you somewhere." That's not what he says. He goes, "I wish that everyone could be...."

Jesus was single. And oftentimes we miss the fact that we worship a man who never married, never had sex, and died single. And He was arguably the most complete person ever to walk the face of the earth.

Jesus was tempted in every way that we are, but He didn't sin. And we go, "Well, not really fair. He was God." No, He was fully God and fully man. I have no doubt that He probably desired companionship in some way and yet He chose not to, primarily because He had a mission He was focused on. And He was the most complete person



who has ever walked the face of the earth. This should be a major affirmation if you are a single adult listening to this right now.

Well, why does the Bible affirm it? Two big reasons. Here's the first one. The Bible views it as a gift. It views it as a gift. It could be lifelong. Or it could be for a season. There is such a thing as a spiritual gift of singleness.

Now, spiritual gifts, for those of you who are not familiar with them, are usually gifts—it could overlap with natural gifts and abilities—but it's often very distinct from them. A spiritual gift is something that God grants to every believer when they become a Christian. There is something that the Holy Spirit empowers you to do that you're better at than most people around you and it is meant to serve others and it's meant to expand the kingdom of God.

And he says, "There are some who actually have the gift of singleness." It says that in verse 7:

*"... each person has a special gift from God, of one kind or another. So I say to those who aren't married and to widows—it's better to stay unmarried, just as I am."*

So there is such a thing as a gift of singleness. I would say, in my experience, anecdotally, that few feel that they have that gift. Few feel that they have it.

I was talking to a couple of pastor friends of mine who were taking a spiritual gift inventory just to determine what their top spiritual gift was. And I said to one of them, "Hey, man. What did you get?" And he said, "Well, my top spiritual gift is martyrdom. But, you know, that's kind of one and done. You can use it one time. That's it." And I asked the other one, "What did your gift come back as?" And he was like, "My number one gift came back as celibacy." He was like, "I think I'd rather have martyrdom."

So there is such a thing as a spiritual gift of singleness, but few people have that. Quite honestly, some people do have it and they are not half a person, or anything like that. That's who they are in Christ.

Now, for the rest of you all who are single, and you know, “I don’t have that gift. I do not want to stay single for my whole life.” What are you supposed to do? Well, Paul answers this in verse 32:

*“I want you to be free from the concerns of this life. An unmarried man can spend his time doing the Lord’s work and thinking how to please him. But a married man has to think about his earthly responsibilities and how to please his wife. His interests are divided.”*

In other words, he says, “As a single man you only have to worry about your schedule, your finances, all of your responsibilities. But you get married, and now you have somebody else who is merging her life with yours, and so your interests are divided. You’ve got to provide for and protect her and then you have kids who come into the equation and those little bundles of stress, I mean joy, that is just going to complicate things. That’s the primary point that he is making.

And then he says the same thing for the ladies.

*“In the same way, a woman who is no longer married or has never been married can be devoted to the Lord and holy in body and in spirit. But a married woman has to think about her earthly responsibilities and how to please her husband. I am saying this for your benefit, not to place restrictions on you.”*

That’s huge. Verse 35:

*“I want you to do whatever will help you serve the Lord best, with as few distractions as possible.”*

So the overarching theme is that he is saying, “Hey, when you get married, your life gets infinitely more complicated.” And I think it’s easy for us to always look over the fence at other people’s lives on Instagram or whatever and just feel like, “Man, if I could only be married.” And then you’ve got all of the married people going, “Man, if I could only be single.”

I was talking to one of our campus pastors and I said, “Hey, what are the most common prayer requests that you are getting from people?” And it was startling what he said. He goes, “The most common thing that I am hearing is single adults coming up to me asking for prayer because they are lonely and discontent in their singleness. And I’m having a lot of married people coming up to me asking for prayer because they are lonely and discontent in their marriages.”

Eddie Camp said it this way. He goes, “Marriage is an attempt to solve problems together you didn’t even know you had when you were on your own.” So, it just gets infinitely more complex.

What I want you to know is that it is my relationship with Jesus first, and then right behind that is my wife and my kids, and you all are a distant third. It doesn’t mean that I don’t love you, it means I do. And if I succeed at church, but I fail at home, then I fail completely. Paul is saying that there is a disadvantage to marriage from the perspective of discipleship because your focus is divided.

The next reason why the Bible affirms singleness is that it is an opportunity. It’s an opportunity. Whether that opportunity is for a season of your life or maybe a little bit longer, in those moments, he’s essentially saying, “I understand it. I want to be incredibly empathic here. I understand the desire to want to find somebody. Maybe you’re on dating apps. Maybe you’re going to night clubs. You’re trying to get set up—I understand all of that. You’re trying to find someone.”

But Paul is saying, “Hey, don’t get so focused on the future that you miss the present and the opportunity in which God wants to use you right now in the state of singleness in which you are to serve others, expand the kingdom, do things you won’t be able to do whenever you do get married. And really work on your character.”

It’s reported right now that the average person (I think this is mostly male, I think, although I don’t want to exclude the ladies) has spent 10,000 hours playing video games by the age of 21—10,000 hours.

Have any of you read Malcom Gladwell’s 10,000-Hour Rule? You do 10,000 hours at anything, you’re a certified expert. And we have young adults at the age of 21 who are

certified experts at fantasy land. I just want to say, “Hey, man. We need you. I’m not against video games, but we need your talents in the real world not a fantasy one.”

So, you’ve heard the term FOMO, fear of missing out, I want to coin a new term. FOSO, fear of squandering opportunities. I don’t think it’s going to catch on, but there it is. And this is an important opportunity to serve others and advance the kingdom and to really figure out, “Who am I?”

I honestly—hear this in the right tone—whenever I do a marriage series and people who aren’t married give me a hard time for doing a marriage series, and I can understand because of our history in the church. I just want to simply say to older teenagers who are like, “Hey, I don’t plan to married for a long time,” man, the best time to work on your marriage is before you ever enter into one. It’s this idea that, “I’m going to work on who I am first, try to figure out my identity first.”

Lindsay and I got married in our early 20s, not because she wanted to. I convinced her, alright? For me and not for her. We got married and there were a lot of blessings and advantages to that. There were a lot of disadvantages in that too, in the sense that we didn’t even know who we were apart from each other just yet. My brain didn’t even fully develop until I was 25, and some would argue much, much later.

So we hurt each other (I was primarily hurting her more than she was hurting me) in our early years of marriage because we didn’t really know who we were as individuals yet. I would simply say to take time, take your time to just breathe, take your time to really lean in to who God is creating you to be while you are still single.

And I want to say this. The Bible says very clearly that God wants to give you the desires of your heart. And once you begin to get those desires ordered right, usually that’s when He does some of His best work in your relational lives.

Hear me in this. The Bible does not obsess over singleness, nor does it idolize marriage. Let me say that again. The Bible does not obsess over singleness, nor does it idolize marriage. I want you to know that even the best earthly marriages will one day end. The state of singleness will one day end. Your covenant relationship with Jesus never will.

Marriage on earth, at its best is temporary. We do not believe in eternal marriage. Now if you're in a bad marriage, you're like, "That's wonderful news." If you're in a good marriage, it's a touch sad, right?

And some of you are totally shocked. You're like, "Wait a second. You mean I'm not going to be married to my spouse for all of eternity?" I think you'll know him. I think you will know that you were married to her. But marriage is an earthly covenant. One that doesn't extend into eternity.

Some of you might push back on that. Just go with the logic on this. I've known Christians who were married, but their first spouse died. They got remarried. Who are they going to be married to for all of eternity? No polygamy in heaven. It all comes to an end.

What do we have left? What's the one thing that carries over into eternity? Our relationship with Christ.

So understand this. Here's the encouragement for you. Shift your focus from finding the one to becoming the one. Spend all of your time, "I'm just going to become the one." The Bible says nothing about how to find a good spouse. It says a whole lot about becoming the right kind of person.

You go to the Bible like, "How do I find the one?" You're not going to find any answers. If you go to the Bible, "How do I become the one?" Every page answers your question. The assumption of the Bible is that if you become the right kind of person, you will attract the right kind of person. Could I say it this way? Become the person the person you are looking for is looking for. Go, "I'm not going to hunt anymore. I'm going to be the one hunted." Alright?

I remember leading a small group of college guys a few years ago and I was like, "Hey, guys." These were all single guys, "Hey, guys, describe your perfect woman, the woman you want to marry." And it was ridiculous. They were describing a creature out of Greek mythology. It was like, "Yeah, we want her to be beautiful and slender and have a great sense of humor, and to be godly, and want to do fun stuff with me." And I was like, "Guys, if you ever met that girl, she would never marry you, alright? Keep it realistic, man."

So if we could kind of shift gears into principles of dating, one of the common questions that came in with all of the questions you guys texted in was around dating. And I'm just hearing from so many of you how the dating scene nowadays is so challenging and, honestly, and really brutal.

And what I want you to know is that dating is a relatively new concept in human history. It came about in the early 1900s. So the whole concept of dating is only about 100 years old in comparison to all of human history. It used to be, and I'm not saying that this is all good, but I do think it is something to be noted, it used to be that a man would go through a woman's family in order to get to her, which actually now that I have three daughters I think that's pretty good. I like the logic of that.

But now we've got set ups and night clubs and dating apps. And listen. I'm not against dating apps per se, and I know that there are some Christian dating apps and that sort of thing. I just think that you need to be really careful with them because we can commoditize people. So you see somebody's profile and it's like, "Don't like them," swipe, swipe, swipe. Or maybe, "Oh, I kind of like them." You have an interest and maybe you're kind of waiting for him or her to hit you back.

Somebody described dating apps this way: Amazon Prime delivering hot people. And there are just a lot of minefields in that. John Tyson describes dating this way, "The heartbreaking, painful, confusing, murky journey of meeting people with a vision of moving toward marriage."

I would say in a lot of dating scenes nowadays there is an overemphasis on physical appearances, and I'm not saying that is unimportant, I'm just saying there is an overemphasis. There is a lot of emphasis on feelings rather than character.

Romance is a modern invention.

Historically marriages were like a group decision. It wasn't two young people running away with each other wrapped up in romance. Romance is Hollywood selling us a story.

And if you just jump from one serial dating relationship to another, anytime that you're not in a relationship you're overly uncomfortable, you need to stop for a minute and think, "If I'm always serially dating somebody, then I'm constantly on a job interview." And how many of you are totally honest on a job interview? Oh, come on.

So we're just constantly putting the best version of ourselves forward, the other person is putting his best version of himself over and I'm becoming what somebody else wants me to be so that he doesn't reject me.

Another question that comes in, and maybe you've wrestled with this, if you a Christian should you date or marry somebody who is not? Now, once again, in the Corinthian letter, Paul is talking to people who were not Christians and maybe they had gotten married and now one of them becomes a Christian and the other one doesn't. And his counsel to them was, "Stay married." That's not reason enough to split up. Your relationship with Jesus just might win them over."

So we take that principle, and we apply it over, "I'm a single adult and I'm a Christian. And I meet a non-Christian. I think I'm going to date him—you know, missionary dating. I think I can convince him. I think I can lead him to Jesus. Now, hear me in this. I've seen examples where that can happen.

So, here's the short answer to: if you're a Christian, should you date or marry somebody who isn't? The Bible doesn't prohibit it. It also doesn't recommend it. And the reason why is because dating and marriage is hard enough as it is, let alone add the complexity of a spiritual mismatch.

Now, if you're a Christian in name only, not really going to change the way you're going to live your life, man, knock yourself out. But if you are sincere about following after Jesus, this should cause you significant pause. You have to ask yourself, "Is this other person that I'm merging my body and my life with, by the way, going to help me look more like Jesus or discourage me away from Him."

The term the Bible uses is unequally yoked. We don't talk that way anymore, but this was an agrarian society and so in this farming culture to plow a field they would take two animals of equal size, speed, and strength and they would yoke them together to plow a field. And the best farmers knew that you did not fit animals that were a different

size and strength and speed in the same yoke. They would tear each other up. They would tear up the yoke. They would tear up the fields. So He says, "Find somebody who is of equal size, strength, and speed spiritually because life is hard enough as it is."

Here's my counsel to those of you single adults who are Christians and you really want to be married one day, man, ditch the dating apps, ditch the night clubs, you focus on Jesus and you run as hard and fast toward Jesus as you possibly can. The Bible says that God wants to give you the desires of your heart. And one day you might just wake up and you're sprinting toward Jesus, and you see somebody out of your peripheral sprinting toward Him at the same speed you are, convince him to marry you. That would be my counsel. Alright?

But there are inevitably going to be problems in a marriage relationship. And the problem isn't that you married the wrong person. This is where no-fault marriage came into play. The problem is that there is something in our person and we need Jesus to make us a new person. So if you start looking for another flawed human being to do for you what only Jesus can do for you, "Fix me. Complete me. Make me happy. Give me an identity. Remove my loneliness," you're just not going to find it.

Now, there is a guy who can do that, and His name is not Ryan Gosling. His name is Jesus Christ. And so, walking into a relationship where you think that this created person can do for you what only Creator God can only do for you, you will spend your life perpetually dissatisfied, frustrated with your spouse, your co-workers, and your friends because, as I've said earlier in this series, whoever you idolize, you will eventually come to demonize, usually around year seven—they call that the seven year itch. And I think that there is nothing magical about that number, I just think that is right around the time that it dawns on you that this person isn't going to become the person you were hoping he would be.

Paul mentions where separation and divorce might happen. And I don't have enough time to do a full exposition on what the Bible teaches about divorce. But I'm going to address it. I did spend a much more comprehensive amount of time on it in our Sermon on the Mount series that I did a few months ago. You can go back and check all of that out.

But usually problems in a Christian marriage, where two people are following after Jesus and they've got issues, it usually comes down to a foundational level, just like a



house. You see hairline cracks in the ceiling, you see the door jambs not matching up, and the floors are crooked, you've got a foundation problem. So, at a foundational level where two Christians in a marriage with issues, here's what's happening, they skip steps, and they start using Bible verses like darts. And it's tragic to see.

I've had so many married couples in my office where it ends up that they just start playing a game of Bible verse darts. They dehumanize each other. They are not kind to each other. So he pulls out a Bible verse and he says, "Well the Bible says you're supposed to submit to me, woman." And then she pulls out one of her darts, and she says, "Well, I'd be happy to submit to you if you would sacrificially love me as Christ loved the church." And it's like they throw these spouse verses at each other.

So, I want to get real, real practical here. A drowning person doesn't need a Greek word for life jacket. He just needs you to throw him one. Some of you right now are just drowning in a relationship, this marriage where you just can't see straight and you're trying to figure your way out of it.

Let me just give you the relational structure of a healthy marriage that the Bible lays out. The first step is that you are a Christian first. And I know that sounds simplistic, but oftentimes we're just not acting like Christians toward each other. The fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.

We see this in Genesis where God created Adam, and Adam was in communion with God, a Christian. He was walking with God. And then God said, "It's not good for you to be alone." And so He gave him a friend in Eve. And Eve became his companion. And Adam said, "At last. She's like me but she's so unlike me. And she is a helper. And she is an encourager. And I want to help, and I want to encourage her. She's a friend." Then the last step is God gave marriage and sex to be fruitful and multiply.

So the structure of a healthy Christian marriage is Christian, friend, then spouse. So if you find yourself in this position where you and your Christian spouse have locked horns and you're not quite sure what the next steps are, go back to these steps and say, "Hey, we're going to be Christians first. Now, let's work on our friendship. And then we can get to all of this spouse stuff."

And I say to those of you who are single adults and you're looking for somebody to be married to, pick a spouse, pick someone that you'd be honored to suffer with because even the best marriages are really, really hard work.

C.S. Lewis said, "Sex is about naked bodies. Friendship is about naked personalities." And you just go back to say, "Hey, let's just start investing in our friendship." It's easy to look over the fence at other people's relationships and say, "Man, the grass looks so green over there." And the grass is always going to look greener on the other side. In that instance, don't sell the house, just fertilize, and water your lawn.

Can I just say this? Right now work for your spouse to be your very best friend. When you got married, you created a circle of intimacy that nobody else is allowed inside of but your spouse. And I'm not just talking physical, I'm talking friendship. I'm talking emotional.

And some of you are like, "No, no, no. I feel like having a friend at the office and sex outside my marriage...." You think that can actually help you. No, it's cancer. "No, no, no. You just don't understand. She's my work wife." No, no such thing as a work wife. If you're married, it's to your spouse.

"No, Aaron, you don't understand. There's this really sweet guy at the gym and I'm not really attracted to him, not really anyway. He's not really my type but we confide with each other about problems in our marriages, and it's totally okay. It's helpful to get a guy's perspective." No, no. You are opening the door—every affair starts with a friendship. And you're opening the door, you're actually violating that circle of trust.

And some of you are like, "Pastor Aaron, you're supposed to be solving the conflict, not creating it." No, actually, right now, and I say this pastorally, for some of you I'm trying to start a fight that will hopefully save your marriage.

See, you can have the pain of surgery, a really hard conversation, an ending of a friendship outside of your marriage or with the pain of cancer. You allow that, you're allowing something destructive to stay alive in your marriage. Surgery leads to life; cancer leads to death. You choose your pain.

Some of you are like, “Well, what if we can’t resolve this? We’ve tried. We’ve tried to be Christians, we’ve tried to be friends, it’s just not working. Is there ever a permissible way out? Does the Bible ever allow divorce?”

Well, let me just give you this principle. The Bible teaches divorce should not be a first response, but it can be a last resort. Many of us have bought into the myth of *the one* and we thought, “Well, I’ve got problems because I married the wrong person, so let me divorce him and go find the right person.”

I just want you to know that all marriage does is it just reveals who you really are. Marriage does not create new problems in your life, it just reveals the ones that are already there. Like a tube of toothpaste, marriage is the squeeze revealing the content.

Some of you are like, “Not, me. I was never like this until I met her.” Wrong. You were always a jerk, now there’s just witnesses. It just reveals who you are.

And understand that the Bible says God hates divorce, He doesn’t hate divorced people—that’s oftentimes where the church has gotten this wrong. He doesn’t hate divorced people; He hates what divorce does to people. The other group of people that hate what divorce does to people are the people who have gone through divorce and the kids of those who go through divorce.

Jesus said in Matthew 19, “Let no man separate what God has joined together.” It is not a contract. It is a covenant. A contract is that little receipt that you sign at the restaurant. A covenant is something that goes much deeper.

So my favorite sandwich is from a little sandwich shop on the north side of Indy. I won’t give the name because I don’t want to make it seem like I’m favoring anybody. But I love this sandwich shop, they’ve got this sandwich that is just killer. It’s called Thanksgiving on a Bun.

And I go there and, oh, man. Do yourself a favor sometime—find me after. I’ll tell you. It’s like turkey, and cranberry, and dressing—oh, it’s so good. And I’ll find a little receipt for that. But here’s the deal, man. If I find another sandwich shop that can serve up the same sandwich in a better way, a better price—I’m out. I will violate the contract.

But a covenant is deeper. A contract says, "I will as long as you will." A covenant says, "I will even if you won't." And, by the way, that's what God has given to us. Jesus is not a contract. He's a covenant. And God says, "I will continue to extend grace and mercy to you even if you don't hold up your end of the bargain to Me."

Well, that brings up an interesting question, "Does that just mean that I should let my spouse mistreat me?" "Does that mean that I should just allow him or her to cheat on me and just stay a dutiful wife, or a faithful husband?" No, that's not actually what that means.

So is there ever a time when the Bible allows for divorce? Yes. Three instances. One, in the situation of adultery. In Matthew, chapter 19 Jesus is trying to be trapped by the religious leaders, so they are asking Him all of these questions. He actually quotes Genesis. He says, "What God has joined together let no man separate."

Then He goes, "But there is a concession for this in the event of adultery, in the event of unfaithfulness." And the reason why, as we've already established, is that sex is not just merely biological. It is the supernatural mingling of the souls that two people do to consummate their marriage covenant. And it's such a deep violation when that is violated that Jesus, listen, concedes that you may divorce in that situation, but He does not command that you must.

And that's very important. Because you might walk away, but you don't have to. You could walk away, particularly if it's unrepentant sexual immorality where your spouse gets caught, doesn't care, going to keep doing it. But divorce is not a first response, it's a last resort.

It's kind of like amputation. You only amputate a part of your body to save the rest of your body. If you sprain an ankle, you don't walk into the doctor's office and the first thing is, "I don't care what you say, cut it off." "Well, let's try to rehab it first."

And I say the same thing in marriages where adultery has happened, "See if there could be rehab." Because even in situations of sexual immorality, He says, "Try and see if there might be healing, repentance, and restoration."

See, marriage on earth is an image of God's covenant relationship with us and we have been unfaithful to Him over and over and over again. He has not left us. Jesus is alive, the tomb is empty, and anything is possible. And if a dead body can come back to life, then a dead marriage can do the same.

Let me give you two last ones. They are going to go very quickly. And then this message does not have a conclusion, it just ends, alright?

So here's the second one. In the situation of abandonment it says in verse 15:

*"If the husband or wife who isn't a believer insists on leaving," abandonment, "let them go. In such cases the believing husband or wife is no longer bound to the other, for God has called you to live in peace."*

In other words, he's saying to this couple, they were not Christians when they got married, and then she became a Christian and he didn't and he's like, "I didn't sign up for this, I'm out." Then Paul says, "Hey, let him go and your conscience is clear. You didn't initiate it. That was his decision and he walked out."

And the third is in the situation of abuse. And in such circumstances, when a spouse engages in abuse, what they are doing is they are abandoning that person, they are violating the covenant in a very violent and real way.

As a pastor, I've had the heartbreaking experience of walking through a situation (this is mostly with the ladies, not saying it doesn't happen with a man, but mostly with the ladies) where she is in an abusive relationship with a man who calls himself a Christian and he says, "You can't divorce me. You'd be an adulteress if you do." And I would say he's wrong, because his abuse, whether that's physical, spiritual, or emotional is a violation of the covenant. And in that example, Jesus concedes that divorce could happen.

I want us to be a church that shows mercy. And so, maybe some of you feel like if you walk in here you've got a scarlet letter sewn on your chest. And I want you to know that

there is only one scarlet letter sewn on your chest—that's *R* for redemption. You are redeemed by the person of Jesus Christ.

Some of you walked in here today and you're like, "I'm so ashamed because I've been divorced and it's the biggest thing that has ever happened to me in my life." I understand what you're saying but I want to lovingly say to you, "No, that's not the biggest thing that has ever happened to you in your life. The biggest thing that has ever happened to you in your life is that Jesus went to a cross and took on your sin and walked out of a grave so that your divorce would not have the final say."

So, you've had an affair. Whether you've been cheated on or the one who has been cheating.

If you've been abused, I want you to know that, as a church family, we just want to come alongside you and walk with you through that. And divorce is an option but separation, even momentarily, is a must. And we just want to walk with you through that.

We want to be a hospital for hurting, broken people so that they might experience healing and get back up on their feet.

Jesus went to a cross, not so that you continue to be pinned down by your guilt and your shame, but to set you free from it and to make you a brand-new creation. Today that can happen in an instant. No matter how hopeless your situation might seem right now, it is not too hopeless for our God. And He will meet you in that seat that you are sitting in right now.

Father, thank You for these precious people. I'm so sorry that many of them are in pain right now. Maybe it's because they are lonely and want to meet somebody, but it just hasn't happened. God I pray that You would comfort them by Your Spirit right now to know that You've got them right where You want them. And, God, I pray that You would give them the desires of their heart as they seek after You.

God, I pray that if there is a man or a woman who is in a marriage relationship right now and it's just not working, that they would begin to just rekindle the flames of their

relationship with You first and then their friendship, and that you would do an absolute miracle in their marriage.

God, I pray that the enemy would not have the final say in this, but that You would give us victory through redemption, reconciliation, and healing.

And, Father, finally, if there is anybody here who is in an abusive relationship and needs help, I pray that You would first of all comfort them by Your Spirit and somehow we could find out about it and as a church family we could come alongside and support, love, and encourage them so that they can find themselves in a season of safety and peace and health.

You are a God who can change lives. We ask You to do that today. In Jesus name. And everybody says: Amen.