

RELATIONSHIPS - THE TRANSITION

Stonebrook Church - 5/20/18 - Matt Heerema

INTRO

Today we're wrapping up a 3 week mini-series on marriage and family with a topic that we typically don't talk about on Sunday morning: the subject of dating. Typically this topic is addressed in youth group and our college ministry, because, we think, the topic is most relevant there. However, we thought it would be a good idea for the whole congregation to think this through and spend some time on this **so that whatever stage of life we're in, we can encourage one another in this area.**

If you are in the youth group, you've probably heard me talk about this or another leader talk about this recently, and I'm certain its been a subject of discussion among your peers. If you are in your college years, I know it is a subject that comes up not infrequently, and there is a lot of speculation around an unwritten system of rules and requirements when it comes to this area.

If you are a parent of young children, I do hope you are giving this some thought right now, as it will be relevant for you much sooner than you are ready for.

If you are a parent of older children and have already navigated through these waters personally with your marriage and your children, or if you are an empty nester, topic, I believe, is still relevant for you as you seek to help encourage and support those in the congregation for whom this is a more personally immediate question.

So this topic is not merely relevant to students who are at the age where marriage is starting to come on the radar. As you'll see in a moment, this is a community-wide issue. One where we need to offer each other support and guidance, and I'm hoping to lay a foundation or set a tone here today with **the three rules I see in the Bible when it comes to this area.**

This is going to raise questions, so I thought it might be helpful if we opened up the text-a-question hotline so that you could submit feedback or questions that come up as I'm talking here.

515-999-5077 or askthepastors@stonebrook.org,

So, first some background.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF DATING

Dating in the Bible

The Bible says very little about this idea of dating. In fact, you won't find anything resembling our modern conception of dating anywhere in the scriptures. It's tempting to think that because the Bible is silent here that we're free to make it up as we go. Not so. The only male-female relationships described are parent-child, siblings, and spouses. And it tells the church that these are the ways we are to think of one-another. This gives us a clue. What does the transition in relationship from siblings to spouses look like? From brother-and-sister-in-Christ, to husband and wife...

The Bible references betrothal, arranged marriages, and matchmaking, which if you do some research was the way of the world, pretty much throughout history, until about the past 100 years.

Dating in the past century

With the invention of the automobile and the movie theatre about 100 years ago, suddenly a young man had a way of transporting himself and a young woman, as well as a place to transport them to. Rather than "coming calling" and getting to know the young woman's family as a whole, he could whisk her away to a secluded area. Other changes in the economy, the world wars, and several other changes in culture also gave rise to women living on their own apart from their families.

Early forms of what we'd recognize today as "dating" were something of a culture shock. In fact for the first few years of this idea of "dating", some women were actually thrown in jail for prostitution because local authorities could only interpret a young, unmarried woman accompanying a young, unmarried man in public, with him buying her meals and gifts, as well, prostitution.

It's at this point that I'd like to give you a tangential caution against thinking that because our ideas of such things are more modern, that they are somehow more enlightened.

Modern dating

And frankly, the trajectory that has put us on, along with the "sexual revolution" of the 60s, and the pervasiveness of pornography in our culture has led to a modern dating culture which has more to do with "hooking up" for sexual gratification than it does the discovery of one's character and dreams and values to see if marriage might be a good idea.

I think our world has lost its mind in the last century when it has come to this and many other areas. God, being gracious, has provided us with timeless truths that we can apply to this area, and frankly every other area of life as well.

THE BIBLICAL WAY

Some initial thoughts

1. The world has nothing to offer us when it comes to wisdom in this area. It has gone completely insane when it comes to issues of sexuality and relationships. There is almost nothing to be found in magazines, media, the examples found on television, movies, and popular music. Peers from school, influenced by these things, posting thoughts on social media are the blind leading the blind. Our culture has been so infested by pornography and an agenda that seeks to throw off any restriction to the absolute free expression of whatever sexual thought enters your head, that it has completely lost its bearing on what is real.
2. Dating, or whatever you want to call it, is one of the tools in the project of pursuing marriage. If you are not in a position to support a spouse and a household in the near future, your primary concern should not be identifying an individual to marry. First things first. (We must trust God's timing here, and not worry that a specific individual will still be available when it is time.) If you are in a position to support a spouse and a household, then you ought to be thinking toward marriage. But that is the purpose of a dating relationship: to determine if that person is the right person to marry in the relatively near future.
3. There are many models and labels for this pursuit: dating vs. courting / DWAPing (dating with a purpose). They're all problematic because we are sinners.
4. Abstention from dating does not divorce-proof one's marriage. Plenty of other ways exist to pick up baggage that could lead to divorce. You will bring emotional baggage with you into your marriage. We are fallen humans. Emotional baggage is what we do.
5. It is impossible to "practice" with dating. Dating one human being does not necessarily give you wisdom or insight for a future relationship. You cannot practice knowing someone (your future spouse) by knowing someone else.

I am not going to talk about tactics or specific models for dating in this sermon. There are many tactics I could give, but that would take too long, and is too affected by an individual's situation to cover adequately in a sermon. I want to focus on relevant commands of scripture.

When we stray too much from that and make all sorts of other rules and requirements that are not found in the scripture, then we get ourselves in trouble.

We, just like the pharisees did, are very eager to make up rules that aren't in the Bible. Because it is easier and more clear to follow those rules. The commands of scripture are so hard as to be impossible to follow without the help of the Spirit. They lead to confusing situations that we have to apply a lot of faith and thought to. It's easier sometimes to just make up rules about who can date when, or who you have to ask and get approval from before you get started. But we're in dangerous territory as advisors when we are issuing commands not found in the scriptures to people. I hope that makes sense.

So, for the principles found in scripture: Biblical pursuit of marriage -

Promotes and enhances worship, unity, and mission in the church

There is one incredibly important message you (all of you!) can get out of this morning. Your primary concern needs to be your relationship with God. Not a relationship with another person. I need to mention it first because it is the basis for being able to have relationships God's way.

Ephesians 2:1-5

1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved...

[Expound the gospel...]

This relationship with God, however, will profoundly affect your relationship with other people!

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

God has work for us to do! Our focus is no longer finding something or someone that will make us happy, we find that fulfillment in our relationship with God. And unless you find it there, you will never find it with a human being.

Our focus now becomes doing the work God has prepared for us, each individual, and together as the church. As we go about doing this work, together, as the church, we get to know each other. We get to see each other as we deal with pain, joy, hard times, good times. We get to see each other as we actually are!

How much better is this scenario than a dating scene, where it is all about hiding your flaws and trying to put up the best facade possible?

We have such a great opportunity, such a great gift of community available to us in the church.

Illustrate: Think about a service project trip in a mixed group where you get to see each other up to your knees in mud, sans make-up, emotionally stressed, heartbroken and tired together. Praying together as a group...

...you can see whether a guy is hard working, a servant, good with kids, respects others. You can see how she holds up under emotional stress, how she interacts with others, how flexible she is, whether she's likely to flirt with a lot of guys... ...you can see how much they can be trusted. You get to see the real "them" without the posturing that goes on during dating.

THIS is the best way. Watch them through several seasons of life. Watch many. Be encouraged by their faith!

As we go about this work we might eventually notice someone who has the same focus, vision, hopes and dreams for life, same values, same tastes, same interests as ourselves.

2 Corinthians 6:14

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?

The person you are pursuing must also be a Christian with a mission!

You're asking the question: are you more effective in ministry together than apart. Is the church better build up toward love, unity, good works, and worship of God when we are together than when we are apart? Or is our relationship going to be a distraction for ourselves and for our brothers and sisters?

PROMOTES AND MODELS ABSOLUTE PURITY

1 Timothy 5:1-2

5:1 Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.

Ephesians 5:3 (NIV)

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.

Hebrews 13:4

Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-8

4:3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, 5 not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and

solemnly warned you. 7 For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. 8 Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

- The Bible is crystal clear on this issue of purity. "Not even a hint" - "shouldn't even be named among you", "god will judge", "we solemnly warned you..."
- Purity brings trust!
- Lack of selfishness and shows self control
- What happens when they go on business trips, pregnancy, etc...
- Not just maintaining your own standard of purity, but also models purity for the church. Others are encouraged about the sanctity of the marriage bed, no one has any reason to even wonder what you two are doing behind closed doors. ("If he's comfortable touching her that way in public... what are they comfortable with in private?")

Seeks the Blessing of Father & Mother & Counselors

Ephesians 6:1-3 (ESV)

6 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."

- **Proverbs 11:14 (MSG)** - Without good direction, people lose their way; the more wise counsel you follow, the better your chances.
- **Proverbs 15:22 (MSG)** - Refuse good advice and watch your plans fail; take good counsel and watch them succeed.
- **Proverbs 20:18 (MSG)** - Form your purpose by asking for counsel, then carry it out using all the help you can get.
- **Proverbs 24:6 (MSG)** - It's better to be wise than strong; intelligence outranks muscle any day. Strategic planning is the key to warfare; to win, you need a lot of good counsel.
- **Proverbs 12:15 (ESV)** - The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.
- **Proverbs 14:12 (ESV)** - There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.
- **Proverbs 16:25 (ESV)** - There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

If you don't get advice and follow it, you are being a fool and are condemning yourself to failure. If you get a lot of advice, and follow it, you are putting yourself in the best possible position to succeed.

It is very important to select who you ask for advice. If you only ask people who are going to tell you what you want to hear, you aren't actually getting advice. Ask people who are going to shoot straight with you. Better yet, ask people you are pretty sure will tell you the opposite of what you want to hear. That will be your best opportunity to actually learn something.

THE ULTIMATE SECRET WEAPON: REPENTANCE

What if you didn't follow this path? What if you have broken the commands of scripture when it comes to this relationship? What if you were sexually immoral prior to your wedding day? What if you alienated your brothers and sisters by focusing more on spending time with each other than your fellowship and mission with the church?

Here's the thing. Getting married doesn't fix the sin problem. Your having been sexually immoral together prior to marriage is not somehow "okay" in God's eyes simply because you got married. You need to deal with that sin. It is not "justification by marriage" it is "justification by grace" through faith as shown in repentance.

In fact, I believe many marriages are hurting in the church, strained and full of guilt, because of unconfessed sin. Refusal or failure to name and reject immorality.

There is good news: It's never too late to repent.

Never too late to reject and renounce and turn from sinful actions or attitudes, whether past or present. You can be new again. You can start again with a blank slate, guilt free, shame free, if you come to Jesus in repentance, even for past sin. I think a lot of marriage counseling situations ought to start here.

Young couples, if you're reacting to this idea by saying something like "we can always repent later and be forgiven", let me give you a warning. Thoughts like that reveal a complete lack of comprehension of the Gospel, meaning you are likely not a believer, and therefore on your way to hell. If you are in a relationship where that line is being used, you are in a relationship with an unbeliever and ought to get out of it immediately.

If you're reacting to the things I've said today because you've stumbled in this way in the past, I'm so glad. It means you're hearing me. Don't reject this. Do renounce past and present sin in this area. James says "confess your sins to one another and pray for each other so that you may be healed." I encourage you to find a wise counselor in the church here, be it a pastor, your life group leader, or an older couple. Share your life with them. Share your past with them, share your "now" with them! You will find mercy, forgiveness, great advice, and great safety!

Biblical relationships of all kinds, (and today especially applied to men and women pursuing marriage): **promote and enhance worship, mission, and unity in the church, they promote purity, and they honor mother, father, and the counsel of community.**

There's so much more to be said on this topic, and I'm sure for some I've raised more questions than I've answered. I'm certain someone wishes I would have pointed out more verses or tactics or practicals, but I'm happy to answer questions as they come up, and I hope I've been able to shift your thinking a little today.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How were you raised to think about the topic of romance and dating?
2. a) If your group is younger and made up of those who are still in or entering the "dating years", think through specific questions you have had. How do the principles outlined in scripture inform those questions?
b) If your group is past the "dating years", how have you navigated these relationships, guided children, encouraged those in the church to think through these issues?
3. How does the Gospel impact our thinking about dating? How does that differ from the world's way? Think in terms of ultimate goals, how we have our emotional needs met, our source of identity and acceptance, dealing with heartbreak and unmet expectations, etc.
4. How can the principles we applied to dating help us in every relationship we have?