

Intro:

- With all of the college students and young professionals that make up Boston, there's no disguising the fact that dating is a hot topic issue for singles. Dating is basically assumed and expected in our culture if you're single and of age (and that age is dropping quickly).
- Boston.com/life
 - **Is he into this?** Now I find myself just hoping he will reach out and he tends not to. Should I give it more time or is he pulling the slow fade away?
 - **Is it strange that I don't want a relationship?**
 - The League, an elite new dating app, is ushering in a new era of swiping standards. "No Fakes" and "No Randoms" are allowed to join The League.

Why is it important that we spend an entire sermon on the issue of dating?

- There is very little difference between how Christians and non-Christians date (if this is true, why?) and marriages continue to end in divorce (can we do things differently on the front end?)
- MS and HS students: now is the time to formulate a biblical framework for dating.
- If you're not single, there's a good chance that you have some kind of investment in singles (your kids, those in your CG, those you're mentoring, etc.).

What if you're already in a dating relationship?

- One of the greatest temptations, which I even struggled with myself, is that once you are in a relationship you put blinders on your eyes and ears and tune everyone out.
- Would you pray right now that God would grant you the humility to not be defensive, but to look openly and honestly at your relationship, evaluating whether it matches up to God's will?
- There's probably even a good chance that you're doing to disagree with some of the things I say today. So do this, if you disagree with something I say, ask yourself why you disagree. Is there something you are trying to hold onto that you think a biblical approach will take from you?

Where should we start?

- While the Bible says nothing explicit about dating, since the Bible is sufficient for both faith and practice (2 Tim 3:16-17) and since no area of our life should fall outside of the authority of God's Word, we should look to it for principles to formulate a biblical framework for dating.
- Thus, we're going to look at a number of passages today with a primary focus on 1 Thess 4:1-8.

Read 1 Thess 4:1-2

- "Finally, then brothers (and sisters)..."
 - Paul transitions from chapters 1-3 where he defends the integrity of his own ministry to giving very specific exhortations about living the Christian life in the rest of the book.
- "We ask and urge you.." (similar to Rom 12:1; Eph 4:1).
 - A gentle, friendly request combined with an authoritative apostolic plea
- "as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing,"
 - Summary of 1 Thess 1:3, 6-10: Paul gives thanks for their faith, hope and love in Jesus Christ; they became examples to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia in how they turned from idols to serve the living and true God
- "that you do so more and more" (read 1 Thess 3:11-13).
 - The ultimate goal of pleasing God entailed continual transformation into the likeness of Christ, especially in view of his return.

The Point: Pursue dating in way that is pleasing to the Lord and prepares your brothers and sisters in Christ to be blameless at his return. How do you do this? That's the goal of this sermon.

****The articles at boundless.org by Scott Croft provided enormous wisdom in crafting these principles.*

I. Please God in how you prepare yourself for dating

a. Soberly reflect on your own spiritual walk with Christ.

- i. Are you glorifying God with your singleness (from Tanner's sermon last week)?
 1. Are you pursuing... a) single-minded devotion to Christ with urgency, b) serving Jesus with all your heart, c) community, d) contentment in Jesus above all else, and e) greater hope in Jesus than the prospect of marriage?
- ii. If you are content in the gift of singleness that God has given you, then there is no need to proceed and engage in dating.
- iii. Are you growing in the rhythms of grace? Are you maturing? Do you see the fruit of the Spirit increasing more and more in your life?
- iv. Make it your aim to *be* a godly spouse versus just trying to *find* a godly spouse.

b. Embrace marriage as the purpose of dating.

- i. Modern dating may or may not have marriage as its goal and it is often purely recreational or educational. It encourages "playing the field" as if it were a game.
- ii. Dating with the explicit goal of marriage gives dating a purpose and this purpose helps to clarify how we actually engage in it.
 1. Are you at a place where you are and able to marry? If not, you shouldn't be dating.
 2. The purpose of marriage helps you to know what kind of person you should be looking for (the next encouragement).

c. Look to God's Word for characteristics of a godly mate

- i. Note that you're supposed to do this BEFORE you engage in a dating relationship. Many times believers get so involved emotionally in a relationship with non-believers that they throw away their convictions.
- ii. Pick a potential dating partner with an eye toward biblical manhood and womanhood. Who would make a good husband or wife as defined by God, not Hollywood.
- iii. Go listen to Tanner's sermon from a few weeks ago on deacons from Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3 and look for those qualities. Go read Proverbs 31, 1 Peter 3, Titus 2 and pray and look for a P31 girl.
- iv. You shouldn't just look for someone who simply professes to be a believer or affirms our statement of faith or who agrees to attend church with you. You should look for someone who is actually following God with his/her life.
- v. Ask your friends, pastor and/or CG leader what they think about this person.
- vi. Can a Christian date an unbeliever? (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14).
 1. Deut 7:3-4: God forbade Israel from intermarrying with the nations in the OT for fear that "...they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods."
 2. Your hopes, beliefs, loves, joys, convictions, worldviews and sources of authority are all different
 3. Shouldn't you pursue marriage with someone who will complement your spiritual thirst for Christ?
 4. What are your motives for dating/marrying an unbeliever?

d. Be wise in where you pursue a godly mate

- i. Where would you most likely find a person possessing godly characteristics? In church. Singles, serve, get in a CG, go on mission trips, etc. Make sure this isn't the main reason you're at church, but it can be one of many.

- ii. What about online dating (from *Ask Pastor John Piper*, episode 405)?
 1. “The biblical issue is not how you meet but whom you marry.”
 2. “I would think that you could rule out a lot of losers by using the Internet. It won’t take long to learn from Facebook and Twitter and blogs if this man or woman is passionate for Jesus or if Jesus is an incidental mark on the shoulder or a trinket around the neck” (*Ask Pastor John* Episode 405).
 3. There are some different potential dangers with online dating so you should be careful which sites you engage in and how you actually meet in person (move slow, protect your info, do a background check). If you end up going this route, make sure you invite accountability early on in the process and in any potential relationship.

*****If you apply these principles you will place yourself in a very healthy place to begin dating.**

II. Please God in how you engage in dating.

“We may define *biblical dating* as a method of introduction and carrying out of a pre-marital relationship between a single man and a single women:

- That begins (maybe) with the man approaching and going through the woman’s father or family;
- That is conducted under the authority of the woman’s father or family or church; and
- That always has marriage (or at least a determination regarding marriage to a specific person) as its goal” (Scott Croft at Boundless.org).

a. Men initiate (see Gen 2; 1 Cor 11:7-9; Eph 5; reference roles within the Godhead).

- i. We start with a proper understanding of roles in marriage and then work backward to dating. For instance, if a man is supposed to be the leader in the home, then that should also be reflected in his dating relationship.
- ii. Men, you initiate the first step, risk and all. I love what Michael Lawrence says, “Real men risk rejection. Welcome to leadership. Welcome to trusting God. Welcome to being a man. Your cards belong on the table” (in *Real Men Risk Rejection*). By initiating, your goal is to provide a safe and secure context in which the woman can respond. You should be honest, upfront and extremely clear about your intentions...that you intend to pursue the relationship to determine if marriage to her is the right choice before God.
- iii. This initiation might be with the woman herself or her father or someone filling that role instead of her father.
- iv. You’ll need a response from the woman before things can go any further or not.

b. Women respond

- i. As men need to learn how to lead and initiate, women need to learn how to respond. Yes, this does require great trust in the sovereignty and providence of God, especially with so many men who need to get their act together and start initiating.
- ii. What role should a woman’s father or church play?
 1. Some of you have fathers who are not involved in your lives or who are not believers or who are indifferent or unaware of their role to protect and shepherd you.
 2. Father’s should ask the guy to fill out an *Application to Date my Daughter* (reference the application).
 3. In all seriousness, why is this not the best solution? It expects that your daughter will have poor judgment. Instead of preparing to interrogate potential suitors, you should be preparing your daughter to choose wisely.

4. In a recent article, Jen Wilkin (a mom to 4 kids) says, "...you need to build a wall. That's right, you heard me—build a wall. Go all 'Rapunzel.' Build it so high that only the strongest of suitors can scale it (referring to Songs of Solomon 8:8-9). Instead of intimidating all your daughter's potential suitors, raise a daughter who intimidates them just fine on her own. Because you know what's intimidating? Strength and dignity. Deep faith. Self-assuredness. Wisdom. Kindness. Humility. Industriousness. Those are the bricks that build the wall that withstands the advances of Slouchy-Pants, whether you ever show up with your Winchester locked and loaded or not. The unsuitable suitor finds nothing more terrifying than a woman who knows her worth to God and to her family."
5. If a guy initiates with you, it would be completely appropriate to ask him meet with either your father or another couple in your church to discuss this with the two of you. At minimum, you should meet with others who know one or both of you well to provide consistent accountability (this is contra modern dating which seeks to keep everything private).
- iii. When you respond, be honest and upfront. If you need time to process his request, tell him that. Then take time to pray and ask one of your pastors what he thinks about this person.

c. Guard your time together.

- i. Prioritize spending time with other people, preferably with your families and church families. Spend time in groups. Be very cautious about spending time alone (contrary to modern dating).
- ii. Be careful about how much and how deep you share too early in the relationship.
- iii. Don't spend lengthy time in the Word or prayer together.
- iv. Stay away from things that would lead to deep emotional, spiritual and sexual intimacy.
- v. Song of Songs 2:7: "Do not awaken love before it pleases." Do not start what you cannot finish.
- vi. Talk about your interests, faith, values, priorities, ambitions, plans, family, church and what's going on in the world.

d. Flee sexual intimacy and pursue holiness (1 Thess 4:3-8).

- i. The people of God are to pursue holiness (4:3, 4, 7).
 1. It conveys the concept that God's covenant people should be separate and distinct from the surrounding peoples.
- ii. We pursue holiness by abstaining from "sexual immorality." THE NEGATIVE
 1. The sense of the word is not only abstaining but also keeping away (cf. Matt 15:8; Acts 15:20, 29; 1 Pet 2:11).
- iii. What is "sexual immorality" (πορνεία)? (cf. 1 Cor 6:9; Gal 5:19; Col 3:5).
 1. Nearly every major Greek lexicon includes "fornication" as at least an aspect of its meaning (consensual sexual intercourse between two persons not married to each other - Merriam-Webster).
 2. In view of Matt 5:27-30, it is not only the actual intercourse that is prohibited, but also the lust that lies behind such actions.
- iv. Conclusion: the only proper context where sexual activity is allowed is the one flesh marriage relationship between a husband and a wife. Any other sexual activity is sinful. Those who continually practice *porneia* are declared guilty and unrighteous before God and will be subject to God's judgment (just like with all sin).

- v. Why should Christians abstain from sexual immorality?
 - 1. Our knowledge of God should affect the way we view and practice sex.
 - a. God created sex to be enjoyed within the context of marriage which was created to display the glory of God.
 - 2. To engage in sexual immorality defrauds and wrongs your brother and sister in Christ who will one day take this person as his/her spouse.
 - vi. The positive: control your own body in holiness and honor.
 - 1. This is one of the primary reasons God has given us his “Holy” Spirit.
 - 2. What are some practical things we can do with our bodies to pursue holiness?
 - 3. Principle: treat your relationships as brothers or sisters in Christ, with all purity (1 Tim 5:2).
 - vii. What is permissible in a dating relationship?
 - 1. Would you describe this potential act as “holy and honorable” or does it satisfy your own passionate lust?
 - 2. Does this action make that person more holy (Eph 5:28-29)?
 - 3. Does it glorify and magnify the greatness of God (1 Cor 10:31)?
 - 4. Was there even a *hint* of sexual immorality (Eph 5:3-5)?
 - 5. Does was you did inspire peace or “an uncomfortable shudder” knowing that the Trinity (Father, Son and Spirit) observed it all?
 - viii. “How far is too far” is the wrong question. Rather, we should ask, “What will most please my heavenly Father?”
 - ix. What does it look like to “flee sexual immorality” (1 Cor 6:18)?
 - 1. Eph 5:3: “But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints” (Eph 5:3).
 - x. What about cohabitation?
 - 1. It assumes that the best way to figure out whether to marry someone is to act like you’re married and if you like it then you make it official. If you don’t like it, you go through something similar to a divorce (both emotionally and physically).
 - 2. If you are supposed to not just abstain (1 Thess 4:3-5) but flee (1 Cor 6:18-20) sexual immorality, can you pray “Lord, lead me not into temptation” when you willingly live in a tempting environment? Wisdom would strongly suggest that one not cohabit.
 - 3. You are supposed to be the light of the world, displaying the gospel with your actions. Given that culture naturally assumes cohabitation includes sexual activity, wouldn’t your love for your lost neighbors compel you not to cohabit.
 - xi. What should you do if you are caught in sexual sin (Pornography, premarital sex)?
 - 1. Only a relationship with Jesus Christ will satisfy all of you desires and longings (give a brief testimony to my story of freedom).
 - 2. Repent and believe the gospel. It is through the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit that you can kill this sin in your life.
 - a. Stop having sex now with your girlfriend. Stop looking at pornography.
 - 3. Confess not only to God but also to others around you – seek help and accountability.
- e. **As the relationship progresses, rightly assess commonality.**
- i. At this point, you are exploring to see if there are any clear obstacles to the two of you getting married. If at any point in the relationship, either of you conclude that you are not supposed to marry the other person, communicate this.

- ii. Are the two of you headed in the same general direction in life?
- iii. Do the two of you agree about major biblical and theological issues?
 - 1. Theology (read our statement of faith together). Agree? Disagree?
 - 2. Church life
 - 3. Meaning and purpose of Marriage (roles).
 - 4. Family (children, adoption, schooling options).
 - 5. Desired lifestyle (home, cars, standard of living, view of money).
- iv. There should either be a good deal of commonality between your goals and visions or there should be a significant deal of flexibility on the part of the woman who would one day be called to submit to her husband's headship.
- v. Continue to initiate accountability and wisdom from others.

III. Please God during engagement as you prepare for marriage

- a. You are not married yet so don't act like it.
- b. Don't spend significant time talking about what your sex life will be like.
 - i. Don't believe the cultural lie that you have to do show as a sexual expert on the night of your wedding. Learning and growing together is one of the many wonderful things about marriage.
- c. Prepare for Marriage (get solid, biblical marriage counseling).
- d. Prepare for the Wedding

*** I probably didn't answer all of your questions and potentially even raised others. Promo the "Best Coffee House Ever" (October 5, 6-8pm). Give us your questions.