

# “Preparing for the the Ultimate Marriage” // Mark 3:31–35; Matthew 6:33 // From the Beginning #2

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We’ve had an **incredible couple of weekends**. On Easter we had more than **11,500 people**, and over the last two weeks we baptized **199**. Seriously, **who was supposed to be # 200** and didn’t do it? I just know that one of you college dudes who was planning to get baptized slept in.... So, after service, let us know and we’ll **take you out back** and hose you down and call it 200.

We just started a series called “From the Beginning” in which we are looking at **God’s amazing designs** for relationships and sex. To know how something functions, you must know what it is for.

I’m calling this week “**Preparing for the Ultimate Marriage**” and it is about singleness and dating. I want to deal with a couple of myths that our society accepts about singleness and romance. We accept these things as a society without qualification. And we even believe and **promote them in the church**. And they are false and they cause real damage.

**The first myth** is what I call **the “marriage = completion” myth**. This myth assumes that marriage and a nuclear family is some kind of ultimate state for mankind... and thus if you don’t get married (or at least find that special someone to spend your life with) then you have **missed out on the essential part** of a full life.

Sadly, as I noted, **the church promotes this myth as much, if not more, than regular society**.

You can hear it in how we try to encourage/console singles:

- “Don’t worry... **you’ll get married someday**.”
- Or we tell them, “**God just has to do a little bit of work** on you before he brings you that special someone. You have to **become someone special** before God can give you someone special.”  
Single thinks: I’m not special or lovable yet?
  - That’s not to mention all the psychotic people I see who get married. And I think, “If God gave marriage as a reward to those who had become special and lovable, he got the wrong address on that one.”
- A lot of churches treat their singles ministries as little more than sanctified substitutes for singles bars... I know of one church that called its adult social group, “*Pairs and Spares*.”<sup>1</sup> So the single people are the **spares**?

The assumption is that marriage is the ideal state, and singleness is an inferior or incomplete state.

Tied closely to this myth is **Myth 2**, what I’ve heard called **the “right person” myth**. This myth states that life’s primary quest is to find the right person, and when and if you do, your life will be perfect, and until you do, you’re going to unhappy.

- Yes, many of you just thought of the heart-touching, nausea-inducing scene in *Jerry Maguire* where Tom Cruise looks at Renee Zellweger and says, “*You complete me*.” But that’s how we see it. I am incomplete until you love me, and I’m everything I am because you love me.
- Thus, in the dating stage, your top priority is to find the right person.

**Both of these myths are false, and both lead to confusion and pain.** Jesus, who was single himself, rejected them both. So strongly, in fact, that if you didn’t know better, you’d be tempted to think he was dissing on marriage.

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<sup>1</sup> Rodney Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads*, 89.

## Myth #1, The “Marriage = Completion” Myth

**Mark 3:31–35** [31] And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they... called him. [32] And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.” [33] And he answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” [34] And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! [35] For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”

- What is going on here? Did Jesus not love his mother and brothers?
- Of course he did... but he was using this opportunity to teach something very important: **He had a greater family** than even his biological one. **The family he was creating in the church** would trump even the bonds of biology.
- **RADICAL: The nuclear family is not the center** of God’s kingdom.

**Luke 11:27** As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!” (Listen, I’m into people talking back to me while I preach, but that has to be the **weirdest** things ever said to someone while preaching... Blessed are the breasts at which you nursed!) **Jesus turned and said** (“Creepy.” No...), “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”

- Take a minute to let that sink in: *Those who obey the word of God are more blessed and precious to Jesus than even his own biological mother!*
- **Think about it: How awesome would it be to have Jesus in your ancestry tree?** *Anyone who knows me at all knows that give me half a chance and I’ll tell you that my great, great, great, great, great Uncle was Davy Crockett. If you bring up Tennessee, Texas, or the 19<sup>th</sup> century, I’ll find a way to slip that into conversation. But how cool would it be to be related to Jesus?*
- *Jesus says, ‘Being my brother? My mom? Not a big deal. Be united to me by baptism and have my Spirit dwelling in you? Huge deal.’*

**Mark 12:18–25** [18] And the Sadducees, *who say that there is no resurrection*, asked him a question, [19] “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife, but leaves no child, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. [20] There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and when he died left no offspring. [21] And the second took her, and died, leaving no offspring. And the third likewise. [22] And the seven left no offspring. Last of all the woman also died. [23] In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife.” *I know, this sounds like the prologue to a Mormon joke...* [24] Jesus said to them, “You are wrong, knowing neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. [25] For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

- Jesus’ answer, simply—**in heaven, marriage and the nuclear family do not exist.** *In heaven, marriage and the nuclear family do not exist.*
- I’ll admit: Part of me finds this a little sad... In heaven, when I see Veronica, there’s not going to be anything? Will I give at least her a wink and a suggestive nod?
- You say, “That **makes me sad, too.**”
- There’s **no sadness here.** Because in heaven, you see, our joys are not diminished at all; they are heightened.
  - **C.S. Lewis** in his book *Miracles* had a great example for this... Say, he says, you were trying to explain to your adolescent that the greatest bodily pleasure you can experience is sex, and as your adolescent is processing this, he thinks, “Well, the greatest bodily pleasure you can experience is to eat candy.” So, they say back to you, “Well, can you eat candy while you do it?” **You have a hard time explaining that sexual pleasure is so much better** than eating candy that you won’t even think about the candy when you are in the midst of that pleasure.
  - **Lewis said we are the in the same position as that child.** “We know the pleasures of earthly things like sex, married life and nuclear family; “we do not know, except in

glimpses, the other thing which, in Heaven, will leave no room for it.”<sup>2</sup>

- Whatever God has for us there will be even better than what we have here.
- That means whatever it is like up there, I’ll be even closer to my wife and kids there than I am here.
- But **the bigger point for you to see** is that marriage is not eternal nor ultimate because we don’t take it with us in the resurrection.
- These relationships, mothers and brothers and wife and father, are only temporary.

**John Piper:** Jesus was here calling out a new family where single people in Christ (or people not in traditional families) are full-fledged family members on a par with all others, bearing fruit for God and becoming mothers and fathers of the eternal kind. Marriage is temporary; and it will finally give way to the relationship to which it was pointing all along: Christ and the church—the way a picture is no longer needed when you see face to face.”<sup>3</sup>

**Let’s go on to Paul in 1 Cor 7:29–30** The appointed time (of Christ’s return) has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none... I love that phrase... What does it mean? Let those with wives live as though they had none? Seems like the mantra of people going to Vegas... No. **30 For the present form of this world is passing away.**

- **This world is passing away**, Paul says, and along with it marriage and biological families... so for a married man to live as though he had no wife means to **reflect on the fact** that your marriage is not ultimate or permanent.
- And you single people, he is saying, should reflect on the fact that your situation is **not permanent either.**

<sup>2</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/single-in-christ-a-name-better-than-sons-and-daughters>

- **Both situations—marriage and singleness—are light and momentary**, and soon they will give way to what is permanent and ultimate: Christ and the church.

**Marriage and singleness, Paul says, are temporary gifts that God gives** for the fulfillment of **his** purposes on earth.

Go back to **1 Cor 7:7** (Regarding marriage) I wish that all were as I myself am. (What was Paul? Single) But each has his own (charismata) gift from God (spiritual empowerment), one of one kind and one of another.

- **Both marriage and singleness are charismata.** You need spiritual empowerment to do either well.
- You say, **“Well, I get how marriage can be a gift...** in marriage, you get a companion, a sexual partner... a girl sometimes feels like she gets a provider, protector, someone to dote on her; the guy gets someone to tell him that he shouldn’t wear **black socks with shorts** and tennis shoes, changes his sheets more often than 1x every 6 mos and makes him **brush his teeth 2x** a day... but how can **singleness** be a gift?”
- Paul explains in vs. **33 The married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided.** Paul said, “I have a **special assignment** that I can accomplish much better as a single man than a married one.”
  - **My wife was a wonderful gift to me, but when I got married, my interests got divided.**
  - **I had to start spending a lot of my MONEY on blessing my wife and kids.** Before I got married, **to move** it took me one buddy, a Ford Mustang a few bungee cords and 15 minutes. Now, if we move, it takes **1 car just to haul the pillows** that sit on top of my bed. It would take **another carload** just to haul all the toiletry products Veronica stocks in our bathroom... I look around in our bathroom and we have so many kinds of soaps now... different kinds of soaps for different parts of the body; weird rock-looking thingies. **My bathroom used to have**

**just one bar of soap in it**, and I cleaned everything with it—my face, my hair, the floors.

- **On a more serious note... my schedule** is different. Even for ministry. I am not able to go on all the **mission trips** I want to go on anymore. I can't **work every night until 8:00** and then go home and watch a movie to unwind and then golf every Saturday. I've got to be at home to 6 to eat **dinner**, help give **baths**, and read the **Berenstein Bears**. I drink 5-hour energy drinks on the way home, because that's when the real sprint begins. All the hard stuff at work is nothing compared to what I... ENJOY when I get home...
- Singleness **can be a gift that allows you** to be more devoted to God's kingdom.
- Or maybe it is a **gift that God gives you temporarily** so that you can complete some assignment (like your education or a military assignment). Singleness can be a **gifting** that is temporary or permanent... divine empowerment.

You say, *"But I don't want to be alone."* You're not supposed to be alone.

- **It's just that marriage is not the only way to "not be alone."**
- Listen... A lot of times I'll hear people say, "All you need is God." That sounds really nice. The problem is, **God never says that**, and it's not true. God said, **"It's not good that man should be alone."** *It's just that marriage is not the only way God takes care of that.* **"Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time... (Mark 10:29-30).**
- **IN THIS TIME... The ultimate community in God's kingdom is the church.**

You say, **"I really want to have kids."** Jesus said, "Spiritual offspring are much more important, and more eternal, than biological offspring."

- If you are single, you need **to get involved in the discipleship ministries of the church**. We have many single people in the church who act as surrogate big brothers and parents to those children in the church who have been deprived of fathers or mothers or families, and we need many more! That's what the church is.

**The only part of your life that is unfulfilled if you are single is sexual...**

- And God says he will give you a special **charisma** (spiritual empowerment) for that, and in **eternity he is going to give you** something that makes sexual pleasure seem insignificant...
- **But the other things** we feel like we need marriage for... companionship and offspring... God gives you now, in an ultimate form, in the church.

*Singleness is a gift that God gives to some for his purposes... and it comes with divine enablement, which you need to deal with some of the struggles of being single. **BTW, marriage is also a gift that requires spiritual empowerment. To do that well requires spiritual empowerment. FWIW, I know a lot more unhappy married people than single people... Both require spiritual empowerment.***

***Whatever stage God has you in, you can be happy and fulfilled, because happiness and fulfillment do not come from your marital status; they come from the God who gifts and empowers you and walks with you ever step of the way!***

- *For many of you, this seems crazy... Happy without marriage? We're talking about a level of commitment you've never gotten to*
- *Christianity does not work for the half-committed; it never works as a religious garnish to your life. It only works as a radical abandonment to Jesus.*
- *I pray unhappiness in singleness/marriage works in your life like pain and tragedy often work... a catalyst to go beyond vapid religiosity to a real, deep walk with God.*

We need to get rid of the myth that real life, and the only complete life, is the married one. And we need to quit giving off this vibe in the church.

- I had a friend who was single until he was a little older... he said he got so sick of the sweet little old ladies at his church who at each wedding would say to him, “Don’t worry, Bruce. You’re next.” He said, “I finally got them to shut up by saying to them at funerals, ‘Don’t worry. You’re next.’”
- GET INVOLVED / OPEN YOUR LIFE

## Myth #2: The “Right Person” Myth

2 parts to this myth:

- **That there is a right person out there for you, and good marriage is determined by finding that person, and if you don’t find that person, you’ll never be happy... and that if you’re unhappy it’s because you haven’t found that special someone...**
- *I’m going to explain this more in a later sermon, but this is one of the most **widespread and destructive myths** in our culture.*
- *This myth destroys marriages. **Andy Stanley** says it works like this:<sup>4</sup>*
  - **In the dating stage, you’re on the hunt...** You’ve got to find that right person. You’re always worried about it. You wonder, “What if I don’t find them?” Am I too picky? What if they don’t like me? *Oh, if I don’t get this right I’m going to be unhappily married or even worse, single.*”
  - **Finally, you find someone** who sweeps you off of your feet. You fall in love. You think, “He/she is it. Our relationship is special. We never fight.” You’re going to ride off into the sunset.
  - **But then you get married and you figure out they are not as special as you thought.** The guy smells bad all the time and he seems totally oblivious to your needs. Or you figure out that she’s selfish and seems to act crazy sometimes

and seems to think that you should be able to read her mind.

- **And then those little habits they have start to drive you crazy.** In the dating stage you thought they were quirky Almost entertaining... Now you think, “I think something is seriously wrong with you.”
- And then their **selfishness** or their **bad temper** or their **thoughtlessness** really starts to hurt you.
- And your **sexual desires are all out of sync**... can’t get on the same page.
- **Looking at them doesn’t intoxicate you anymore**; you can barely stand to look at each other...
- So you come to a crisis point in your marriage, and you think, “I know how we can fix this. Let’s have a baby!” *Oh yes, that’s brilliant. Let’s bring another life into a dysfunctional relationship.*
  - *Did you know... Of the top 3 times a man has an affair, one of the top 2 is when his wife is 1<sup>st</sup> pregnant? That doesn’t fix anything...*
- Well, after having the baby and losing sleep one of them is at work and guess who they finally see? The “right person.” *They think, “I get it now. I married the wrong person, but I just met the right person.”* **And so they decide to correct the problem** by getting out of that marriage to the wrong person and getting married to the right person.

*But that doesn’t work either. Let me tell you why: **You always marry the wrong person... Why? Because they are sinner and you are a sinner, too.** If you try to correct the problem in your marriage by changing partners, you are correcting the wrong problem.*

- *We’re not lonely people who need soulmates; we’re sinners who need a Savior!*
- *Lonely, insecure people... Love how **Gary Thomas** says it: **“Marriage doesn’t solve emptiness; it exposes it... If someone***

<sup>4</sup> This description owes a lot to Andy Stanley’s sermon in *The New Rules on Love, Sex, and Dating*

can't live without you, he or she will never be happy living with you either."<sup>5</sup>

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

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

**So what if you gave up the idea that there is a "perfect person," and understood that's not what marriage was about anyway?** What if you saw that God's main purpose in life was preparing you for himself, and his kingdom... and that marriage was **a way** he can do that, and **a way** he can supply some of your needs, but **not the only way** he can prepare you, and not the only way he can supply our needs?

**Think about it... this is radical... Wouldn't that change how we approached singleness?** Rather than being on a rabid, obsessive search for the right person who was **the** key to a happy life, we could put our eyes on God, and focus on becoming what God wants us to be, for him, and let him choose what ways he will supply those needs.

**Listen to this:** after talking about all the needs we obsess about... food, clothing, companionship... Jesus said this. "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matthew 6:33)"

**Man, I love that verse. It's a life verse for me.** Focus on preparing yourself for the kingdom of God and doing what he wants, and trust God to supply whatever you need.

- Jesus is not disconnected as if we have no needs. He made us; he knows we need **food**; he knows we need **clothes** and he knows we need **relationships**. He knows we **can't do without companionship** any more than we do without food or clothes. (Remember, **he said**, "It's not good that man should be alone.")
- But God tells us to **seek him and his kingdom** first, focusing on becoming who we are supposed to be for him... and **trust him** to supply that need.
- **That means when I'm single my focus should be on becoming the right person, not finding the right person—and becoming the right person for him, not for someone else.**
- **A lot of times we talk about the single stage as if it were all about getting prepared for marriage.** Our preparation in life is mainly for our ultimate marriage to him, not our temporary marriage to someone else here. **Our most important identity** is not the spouse of someone else, but the bride of Christ.
- **Think of this way:** We're all preparing for marriage; just for some of us it won't be on this earth. Some of us will skip the JV version of marriage and go straight to the Varsity version in heaven. 2x.

Let me tell you the ironic benefit for you that are single if you begin to think this way. When and if God does bring that person to you, ironically, you'll be ready for them.

**Most single people, you see, are not ready for marriage and that's why marriage is so difficult for them and why so many end in divorce.** They obsess about finding the right person rather than becoming the right person.

We think that when you get married, you are just going to be able to stand at an altar and promise to be an awesome spouse and that promise is going to give you the ability to make it...

But that **doesn't work** in any other area, does it?

- Those of you who have ever **signed up for a long distance run** know this. Marathon? It's one thing to promise/sign up to race

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<sup>5</sup> Sacred Search, 209.

and it's another thing to prepare for the race. If you're not prepared it's a waste of time to promise that you'll finish the race. What determines if you will finish the race is not the promise, it's whether or not you're prepared.

- Raudel: preach at SEE. I really want you to preach in Spanish. Can you do that, and I really want to make Raudel happy, so I say, "Si."
- But when it comes to relationships people think, "I can promise my way past my lack of preparation." Andy Stanley says, "**Promises are no substitute for preparation.**"

**Now is the time for you to prepare... again, not for marriage, but for the kingdom of God.**

- You see, when you open up the Scriptures with the question, "How do I find the person I am looking for?" you will find very little help. It just says, "Trust God." But if you open the Scriptures and ask, "How do I **become** the right person?" suddenly the pages of Scripture light up.
- Be honest with yourself. For many of you single people, if you met the right person today, right after church, you wouldn't be the right person for them. I've heard it asked this way... Are you who the person the person you are looking for is looking for?
- Marriage: **Two people, running the same direction. Not a pick-up line.**

What should you do now? A few ideas

1. **Break bad habits and start good ones**
  - a. Bad: Get out of debt; porn
  - b. Good: serving, giving, quiet time, going on mission
  - c. For God
2. **Get into real community** (the church—good for dating; your family)
3. **Establish your career and your ministry**
  - a. **Prov 24:27**, "Put your outdoor work in order and get your fields ready; after that, build your house."
  - b. **Get a job**
  - c. Guys, get a job and you'll become much more attractive, I promise.

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

- a. If marriage is a gift, decide in advance that you are going to wait for the one that is a gift of God.
- b. **Christians:** don't date a non-Christian unless your faith is not that important to you... and your future children's faith is not important to you.
- c. **Non-Christians: Don't date a Christian unless you plan to become one.** When you think about it... If you're not a Christian, and you are dating one... understand that **their hope is that you become** a Christian. LET ME PROVE IT: THEY HAVE YOU HERE TODAY.
  - i. **See**, they do not accept who you are; they want you to change.
  - ii. Their mom and dad don't like you and want you to become a Christian.
  - iii. Their whole family is praying for you and nobody in the family is ever going to be really happy until you become a Christian.
  - iv. I'm just being honest with you; I've observed this for many years.
- d. You see, "Well... he is a Christian, just one fallen out of church."
  - i. Also, **having observed this for many years**, you are better off dating an honest pagan than a hypocritical Christian.

#### 5. **Cultivate gospel character**

- a. 1 Cor 13... traditionally ready at marriages. But the context in which Paul writes is the local church. These are **virtues to master and live out** in the church—the ultimate, forever family. But when you become them, they **make for wonderful** marriage.
- b. **Love is patient...** Patience means you're ok other people not being perfect, disappointing you, and not lashing out in vengeance at them.

- c. **Love is kind...** considerate. It thinks of other people's needs instinctively. Anticipating what they need and serving them.
- d. **Love keeps no record of wrongs...** Think kind of person forgives others quickly when they hurt you... you don't keep it in your heart and nurse it and turn it over and over until you explode in hurt
- e. **Love does not envy...** I can be happy that you feel good even if I don't feel good. That is crucial in marriage so that you are not the kind of person who says, "I'm not happy in life right now so I'm not going to let you be happy, either."
- f. **Love does not boast, is not proud...** love doesn't think life is all about them, and that they deserve good things and everyone else is obligated to give those to them!
- g. **Love does not dishonor...** Love never uses people for it's needs. I'm not going to use you as a commodity for my sexual needs; not going to use you emotionally... your time.
- h. **Love never gives up...** Love doesn't give up on people after they have failed you, after they have screwed up and made a mess.

- **Consider him** who endured such hostility from sinners... **we esteemed him smitten by God** and afflicted, but he was wounded for our transgressions...
- *The cross is the ultimate example of being **considerate***
  - *Though he was rich, yet for our sake became poor... / MATT 9:38*
- *The cross is the ultimate example of **keeping no record of wrongs**.*
  - ***As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us***
- *The cross is the ultimate example of love **never giving up**.*
  - Who **for the joy** that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame...

When this (vertical) relationship is right, these relationships (horizontal) fall into line!

This is an idol for you. IDOL: something you can't live without. You weren't created for romance; or money or power... those things are good, but you were created for God. His love.

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

## MUSIC

**The church is the laboratory in which good spouses are made.** Here's why: ultimate marriage love is found in the husband of the church, Jesus!

Think about it:

- *The cross is the ultimate example of **suffering patiently**.*