

Holy Sexuality

By David Feddes

Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians is probably the first part of the New Testament that was ever written. It was written as the first of Paul's letters and was probably written before any of the other documents that we now call the New Testament. So it's very early, and of course all the parts of the New Testament are equally important and given by God. But first Thessalonians is Paul's letter to a church where he ran into a lot of trouble when he established it. He faced much persecution and difficulty, but the Lord helped the church to take off there anyway and to keep on going. He wrote to them to encourage them in various aspects of the faith. Let's listen to the first eight verses of chapter 4.

Finally then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God: your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality, that each of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God. 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. For God has not called us for impurity but in holiness. Therefore, whoever disregards this disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you (1 Thessalonians 4:1-8).

The Bible calls us to avoid sexual immorality and to holy sexuality. If you want to understand the core of that, here's a summary from our church's statement of faith: "Sexual intimacy is for marriage only. Marriage is a lifelong union of a man and a woman" (Genesis 2:22-25; Matthew 5:27-32; Matthew 19:3-9; 1 Corinthians 7:1-11). That's it. It's short, it's simple, it's narrow.

There are other roads with many lanes, and as the Bible says, there is a broad road that leads to destruction. So because there are a lot of other lanes out there, don't forsake the simple, clear, and narrow road that God gives. There's a lot of variety in practice today, and there certainly was in the time of the Roman Empire. I'll look at a few of the deviations from the road God gives, but first some background about the Empire and about the situation we're in, because the apostle tells us, don't live in passionate lust like the heathen who don't know God. How do the heathen who don't know God behave?

Back in the day when this was being written, the Emperor Tiberius, who was emperor during the time that Jesus was crucified, had been a man with preference for little boys and who spent a lot of time in orgies on the island of Capri. His successor, Caligula, was a man who, according to some writers, had married his horse and married his sister and was given to all kinds of terrible deviations from God's original design. The emperor Nero had a boy that he took a liking to and had him castrated so that he would be more like a woman. I happened to see in one of the cases for same-sex marriage that same-sex marriage goes back—it's not something new—and one of the incidents cited was that Nero castrated a boy and married him. So I guess that's pretty normal.

That tells you something about Nero and the Roman emperors but also about the time we're living in. We're living in a time that is going back into the paganism of the Roman Empire before Christianity began to shape it. We're going back into a sub-Christian, pagan way of thinking and behaving.

Some of you who follow the news may have noticed that just in the last couple of weeks, a very prominent fashion company, favored by the Kardashians and others who know a lot about style and fashion, ran an ad campaign with little children holding bondage bears. And it is what it sounds like. It's bears with the various things that people who are into that sort of thing like. One of the pictures even had a photo of a Supreme Court decision from 2002 that struck down part of the Child Protection Act.

When we look at the immorality of our own time, there are still people who believe coercion is wrong, rape is wrong, and consent should be given. And there are those who object to pedophilia, using children—underage people—for your own gratification. Let's face it, that's about where the line gets drawn nowadays. If they are consenting adults, that is the simple way of understanding sexual morality today. Of course, the "adults" part is eroding rapidly, as that ad campaign indicated and as a recent article in USA Today indicated. It said, "Well, you know, pedophilia is really misunderstood. What if minor-attracted persons are just another kind of sexual orientation? We've got a hundred others, why not minor-attracted persons?"

That's the kind of age that we find ourselves increasingly living in. So you get new ways of describing things. Instead of pedophilia, which itself is an overly nice word—the more accurate word is child molesting—now you're a "minor-attracted person." Pedophilia is Greek for "loves kids," but of course that word has even gotten some negative connotations, so now the shift is to "minor-attracted person." Instead of prostitution, there are now "sex workers." It's just another financial transaction: if you go seek a prostitute, you're just paying a sex worker the way you pay somebody at the grocery checkout. That's the kind of situation we increasingly find ourselves in.

The challenge for us is to be aware that those things that cross the boundaries today are really the final outcome of boundaries that were crossed a long time ago. Take an example that used to be unthinkable not that long ago. We don't have to be very old to remember when same-sex marriage was a very odd idea, one that even people who were homosexually attracted never thought was a thing, because marriage was between a man and a woman. Everybody knew that—until they didn't. And so you have the Supreme Court decision of Obergefell that approved of same-sex marriage. Now you have the United States Senate passing a bill to codify it and put it into law nationwide. That would have been inconceivable a few decades ago, but here we are.

Before that, the stigma associated with childbirth out of pregnancy was gradually removed. The stigma of divorce was gradually removed, and it was removed in many cases by our heroes. The major landmark in a shift in sexual immorality occurred when the governor of California—and we know what kind of place California is—signed a bill approving of no-fault divorce. The governor of California at that time in 1970 was Ronald Reagan, who went on to become our first divorced president and a hero of the people who love family values. And so then we had a more recent president who was a hero of family values, but he had three wives and uncountable

numbers of affairs. So that's the situation we find ourselves in now, where even the people who hold to so-called conservative family values have presidents who are very far from those values.

When we look at what God's standard is, we need to realize, as the Bible puts it, that you live in a wicked and depraved generation. It's not normal, it's not healthy, it's not the way God intended. You need to know that no matter how much entertainment you see that makes it all normal, no matter how much some of your favorite politicians go into certain behaviors, that does not make it acceptable to someone who is born again by the Spirit of God.

Immorality

- Rape
- Pedophilia
- Incest
- Polyamory
- Transgender
- Same-sex
- Prostitution
- Hooking up
- Moving in
- Lust & porn
- Adultery
- Divorce

Let's go through this list very rapidly. Rape is evil. Forcible taking of another person's body is always wrong. That's wrong even if it's the person you're married to. Force is out, coercion is out.

Pedophilia, the molesting of underage children, is certainly wicked.

Incest, sexual relations between closely related people, is condemned in the Bible.

Polyamory is sometimes called polygamy when it's a man with many wives, but polyamory works either way, where it's a woman with many men or a man with many women.

Transgenderism is the notion that you can simply become a different gender if that's what you decide.

Same-sex intimacy is condemned in the Bible.

Prostitution is again and again warned against in the Bible. It's often associated with idolatry, but even when it's not associated with idolatry, the apostle says when you unite your body with another, you become one with that person. You may say, "Oh, that was just a one-time thing." The Bible says you become one. Sexual union was designed by God to create oneness, and even when you violate God's design it has its effect.

Hooking up is having consenting adult relationships with somebody you barely know or maybe somebody who's just a friend and thought sex together would be fun for a night.

Moving in together is considered by some people as the prelude to marriage. Many couples move in together before they get married, and that's thought to be a normal, healthy thing. Even the sociologists can tell you that your probabilities of divorce increase greatly when you move in together before marriage. You might not like seeing this grouped with some of the other behaviors on this list, But these are all different lanes that lead away from God's design.

Jesus said if you look at someone lustfully, you've already committed adultery in your heart (Matthew 5:28). All the various forms of pornography that are so abundant in our world today are harmful to us, and they're not meant to be that way by God.

Adultery is wicked. In the Ten Commandments God says, "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14). If you're a married person and you ditch your spouse for another person or have sexual relations with another person, that's defined as adultery.

Divorce does not always mean that both divorced persons committed sexual sin. Sometimes divorce is initiated by one person or caused by one person's sins against the other. But where a divorce occurs, you can be sure that something went wrong somewhere.

Sin is sin. When we sin and fall short of the glory of God, we need his forgiveness. We need his blood to cleanse us. One thing we don't need is excuses, and one thing we don't need is false prophets telling us, "Those were the old days, and the apostle Paul was a more restrictive than Jesus."

Read for yourself what Jesus says. He was asked, is it okay for a person to divorce someone for any and every reason? The Pharisees said it was okay. The thing that made divorce moral was getting your paperwork right. Back in the Old Testament, Moses had said, if you're going to divorce a woman you've got to write a bill of divorce. In the Pharisees' view, this proved that if you got the paperwork right, was okay—Moses said so.

But Jesus urged them to read a little earlier in Moses and a little more deeply? "At the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:4-6). Jesus said Moses gave you that divorce regulation because of the hardness of your hearts, not because it was God's will or because anything goes as long as you have the correct paperwork. It's better to have the correct paperwork if you're going to leave your wife so that she at least has some sort of legal defense, but better yet, stay faithful to her.

So you have all of these different forms of sexual sin, and each of us may have our own kind of temptation. You might say, "Some of these on this list are just so gross and inconceivable to me that I would never do them." Well, I'm glad that's so. But there may be others, and the great danger is to excuse your own variety of sexual sin: "That's my temptation, but thank goodness it's not a very serious thing if I do it." Yes, it is. So we need to be able to identify what is God's

will when he says, "This is my will for holy sexuality," and what is outside his will. Don't let the latest preachers who think they're really with it, who claim to understand this generation and want to update the Bible for you, mislead you.

No to immorality

- Don't act like godless pagans.
- Don't rebel and reject Trinity.
- Don't violate or cheat others.
- Don't damage or destroy self.

The apostle urges us to say no to immorality. Why would you say no to immorality? The first reason is one I've already highlighted: you don't want to be like godless pagans. Recognize that you're living in an environment that's sliding back into godless paganism, like Sodom and Gomorrah and the Roman Empire and all of its wickedness. Recognize that what's called normal now was called normal back then too, before Christianity got a hold of people and changed the way entire civilizations thought about sexuality and marriage. Before that, anything was permitted. If you had power, you did whatever you wanted. If you had money, you could hire whatever you wanted. You just did whatever you wanted. But that is not who you are in Christ Jesus. So don't act like godless pagans.

And don't reject and rebel against the Trinity. Read the passage carefully. It says, "We urge you in the Lord Jesus. You know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 4:1-2). One of the first signs of trouble when you're dealing with people who are changing the Bible and leading others into wickedness is that they will tell you, "Yeah, we follow Jesus. We're not really into that Paul guy or into Moses or other Bible writers." But what does Paul say here? He says, "We instructed you in the Lord Jesus, and we instructed you in what the Lord Jesus taught."

I've just told you what the Lord Jesus taught about marriage, where God created us male and female. He brought male and female together and then said, "Stay together." That's the teaching of Jesus, not just the teaching of Paul. So when you reject this writing of Paul, you're not just rejecting a guy who lived a long time ago. It would be foolish, of course, for you to reject a man who wrote half of the New Testament and spread Christianity throughout the Mediterranean world, and then listen to some bozo who comes along 2,000 years later and thinks they know better. But even if you suppose for a moment that you could avoid Paul, you can't avoid Jesus on this. Paul's instruction is "in the Lord Jesus."

Not only is this what Jesus teaches, but Paul also says you need to know how to walk and to please God. This teaching is the will of God, not the will of Paul or some person with hang-ups.

Then he says that not only is it the will of Jesus and of God the Father, but "whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you." When you have God the Holy Spirit living in you, you're a temple. Your body is his temple. So all sin of misusing your body is sin against the Holy Spirit, who indwells you as a Christian. It is sin against Jesus Christ,

who calls you to the life of holiness. It is sin against God the Father. And the Bible says that God "is the avenger in these things." He is going to judge those who go against his will in this matter.

So then, sexual immorality is acting like pagans, and it's also rebellion against all three persons of the Trinity.

Another reason to say no to sexual immorality: don't violate and cheat others. The Golden Rule is, "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12). Do you want your spouse cheating on you repeatedly? If you're single, do you want the person you're someday going to marry to be sleeping around all over the place? Do you want that? If not, then don't do it yourself. That's the Golden Rule. Treat others the way you would have them treat you. The apostle here says that you don't want to be someone who violates or cheats or defrauds others. You're defrauding the person you're dealing with if you're having sexual relations with them without a marriage commitment, and you're sinning against the person whom they could eventually someday marry.

A final reason to avoid immorality is how it affects yourself. Don't damage or destroy yourself. You can do great damage to your own body and to your own spirit by living in a way contrary to what God says.

So those are some of the reasons in this passage to say no to immorality. You don't want to mimic the pagans; you want to be unlike them. You want to be in tune with God the Trinity. You want to be loving and blessing others. And you want to be doing what's good for yourself. If you had to summarize it, just take the two greatest commandments: love God above all—don't reject the Trinity; love your neighbor as yourself—do to them what would be best for them. And do what is best for yourself by pursuing sexual holiness.

Yes to holiness

- Act like children of the King.
- Delight Father, Son, & Spirit.
- Love and bless others.
- Flourish and enjoy holy life.

Here's the positive side: Act like children of the King. You're not a pagan when you belong to Jesus.

Delight in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is one of the most important things in living a holy life in your sexuality or in another part of your life: a delight in God. If you haven't learned to relate to God and to rejoice in God, to be glad that he's your Father, that Jesus became human like you, and that the Holy Spirit lives in you and is your friend, then to be told what you're supposed to do here and there just sounds like orders from somebody you don't know very well or like very much. Is that how God seems to you sometimes? You don't know him very well, and you don't like him very much, but he's out there and you think, "Okay, I better do what he says." That's not going to lead to obedience. When temptation becomes strong, you're going to

do what gives you the most happiness and pleasure. So it's very important to be finding your pleasure in a relationship with God before you seek pleasure anywhere else.

Yes to holiness means that you love others, that you bless them, that you want their life to be better. You want to bless your spouse or your future spouse, and you want to bless those who aren't going to marry you. You don't want to mess them up or detract from the joy they're going to eventually have in marriage.

And you want your own flourishing, to flourish and enjoy a holy life. So those are the reasons and the outcomes of saying yes to holiness.

Now before I move on, I need to pause here. When you look at your own life, at your own relationships, at your own sexuality, there's much to feel guilty about or be ashamed of. God's purpose is not to get us stuck in that but to rescue us from it. We need to know again that these are things for which Christ died, that his blood covers our guilt, and that his Holy Spirit can move us in a new direction and transform us. One thing you don't want to do is keep slogging along in the same rut. Let the Lord lift you out of that rut. Receive that forgiveness, pray for it, and accept again the fact that he loves, transforms, and leads in the path of holiness.

Possess vessel

Now I want to zero in on a particular verse here, the fourth verse of chapter four: "Every one of you should know how to **possess your own vessel** in holiness and honor" (1 Thessalonians 4:4). That's literally what it says. Most translations will say that means to control your own body, but literally it is, "know how to possess your own vessel."

One meaning is to "control your own body," if you consider the vessel to be your body. Another meaning would be to "take a spouse for yourself," if the vessel is the spouse that you're going to be taking. It's been interpreted both ways. The first is a little more common. Both meanings are conceivable because both are taught in the Bible more broadly. It is important to be able to control your own body, and if you're going to live in holiness, you do need to know how to get a spouse—a husband or wife—in a manner that's holy.

So let's think about that. I want to look briefly at what it means to be holy within the bonds of marriage and also holy when you're looking for someone to possibly marry.

Holy marriage: God's 3-D design

- Dramatize Christ & church
- Develop godly offspring
- Delight in each other

Holy marriage involves quite a number of things, but I want to highlight three—God's 3D design. One purpose of marriage is to dramatize the relationship between Christ and his church. The apostle Paul says in Ephesians 5: "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the

Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:22-25).

So marriage is, at its deepest level, dramatizing the relationship between Jesus and his church, in which a husband takes the lead in sacrificing himself. Sometimes people read the Ephesians 5 passage and misunderstand it and say, "Well, that means that in every disagreement the husband gets his way because it says the husband is the head of the wife." You're misunderstanding the passage if you read it that way. The message of the passage is that Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Jesus said, "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). You will get nowhere with this passage, and it will be very damaging to you as a couple, if you think that it's telling us who gets to pull rank. It's not. It's telling us who takes the lead in making the sacrifices, who takes the lead in setting the tone of the marriage.

Christ came not to be served but to serve. He said, "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27). If you're not going to wash feet like Jesus did for his disciples, you might at least wash the dishes once in a while. The point is that you're dramatizing a relationship. The husband has the Jesus role, and he shouldn't get a messiah complex, but he should get the idea: loving and sacrificing and serving is what I do as a husband. And when I set that kind of tone for my marriage, then my wife is very happy to follow that lead.

Things fall apart if the wife is giving lectures on how the husband ought to behave and the husband is lecturing on how the wife ought to behave. When you listen to the Bible, listen to what it says to you. Take it to heart and live by it. Dramatizing Christ and the church is the first thing that holy marriage does.

A second purpose of holy marriage is to develop godly offspring. That's one of the main reasons—it's not the only reason, but it is a major reason—that the Bible tells us not to marry someone who doesn't share our faith or follow the same Lord Jesus. The apostle says of a woman: "She is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:39). You can take your pick. If there's somebody out there that you like, great. You're not following some rigid blueprint, but it must be in the Lord. Don't be unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14).

In Malachi chapter 2, God talks about Judah being faithless. How have they been faithless? They married the daughters of a foreign god. "Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring" (Malachi 2:15). That's the answer that you get in Malachi chapter 2 when it talks about marrying someone who shares your faith. You want godly offspring, and that's far less likely to happen when you marry outside the faith. When both of you know and love the Lord Jesus and want your children to grow to know him, that is the best environment for a child to grow up to know God.

A third major element of marriage is delight in each other. Read Song of Songs—there's a lot in the Bible about this. Proverbs has several major chapters devoted to it as well. Song of Songs opens with a woman saying, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—for your love is

more delightful than wine" (Song of Songs 1:2). And the man says, "All beautiful you are, my darling; there is no flaw in you... You have stolen my heart, my bride; you have stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes... How delightful is your love, my bride! How much more pleasing is your love than wine" (Song of Songs 4:7, 9-10).

So marriage has these three purposes: to dramatize that wonderful relationship between Christ and his church, to develop godly offspring, and to delight in each other as companions as well as sexual partners. There are many ways to measure marriage, but those three are a good place to start.

How's our marriage?

- Does our relationship tell truth or lies about Jesus and his church?
- Are we leading our children into faith, holiness, and biblical wisdom?
- Are we delighting in intimacy and guarding our garden from intruders?

Does our relationship tell truth or lies about Jesus and his church? If people looked at us and saw the level of the wife respecting her husband and honoring him, and of the husband loving and giving himself for his wife, would they say, "Wow, that really makes me want to know more about Jesus and his church. I can really see how she's reflecting the role of the church and how he's doing things like Jesus does." That's a very high measure, but it is one of the main measures.

A second measure of how our marriage is doing is: are we leading our children into faith and holiness and biblical wisdom? Do we spend time with them talking about the Lord? Do we pray with them? Are we reading the Bible with them? Are we answering questions and making it part of the conversation when kids are curious and want to know more about Jesus? Is that something both husband and wife are really intentional about, seeking to help their children know Jesus?

And then thirdly, are we delighting in intimacy and guarding our garden from intruders? If marriage is made for delight, it's also an exclusive delight. Are we faithful to each other? Are we enjoying each other? In each of these areas, it's good to ask the questions to evaluate our marriage, but also to ask God for forgiveness where we're failing and for help in doing better.

Guard marriage

- Emotional affection, physical intimacy.
- Keep far away from temptations: at work, on the road, in entertainment.
- Be honest and accountable.
- Family-friendly spiritual fellowship.

If we're called to follow the way of holiness, it means we need to know how to guard ourselves. One of the main guards is simply to have a lot of affection for each other, to have emotional affection that you express, and to have physical intimacy regularly. The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 7 that you should not deprive each other when you're husband and wife for any lengthy period of time. You shouldn't deprive each other at all except by mutual consent, and certainly not for a long time. He says that because we don't want Satan to get in there and mess

things up. So we ought not to be committing adultery with other people's spouses, but we also ought not to be withholding ourselves from our own spouse.

We also need to guard our marriage by avoiding temptation. Some of you travel a lot. That's hazardous business. It gives you access to motel rooms where there's a lot of smut on the TVs and where there's more opportunity for anonymous hookups. When you're on the road, you need safeguards and accountability. Stay in touch with your spouse or somebody else who can help and talk with you.

Be aware also of what entertainment does to you. I'll give a tidbit you might find laughable now. I didn't grow up with TV. I read a few comics, and one of the comics I liked was Superman. I saw the first Superman movie, and then I remember going to the second Superman movie and being aghast when the great American hero Superman went to bed with Lois Lane. It horrified me that Superman would do that in a movie. Well, that will happen 500 times if you watch 24 hours of TV—500 is probably a low estimate. That's how we get desensitized by entertainment. Now I'm watching a football game, and the ads are atrocious. You can't believe it. The ads are all about the drugs that can help you behave in hideous ways sexually and still not die of it, and maybe not kill anybody else with it. But we've got a drug for you for that!

Be honest and accountable. Don't keep secrets from your spouse. If you're struggling with pornography, don't keep that secret. Talk with your husband or wife, and talk with somebody else who can help with that. Be part of a fellowship. There are many reasons for church. One is to make the normal seem normal again, instead of the bizarre, the wicked, and the immoral seeming normal. Because that's what you're going to get if you have a steady diet of today's entertainment and education systems. You need a marriage-friendly, family-friendly, spiritual fellowship.

We've talked a little bit about marriage, and I hope each of you married people can pray together and think about how you're doing, and how the Lord can lead you into better paths if you need to be.

Date wisely

- Make the most of singleness.
- Find ways to meet and mingle.
- Be modest, but look your best.
- Hang out before getting serious.
- Involve family and friends.
- Avoid bedrooms and backseats.
- Date only if marriage is possible.

Dating and getting a spouse for yourself is also an important part of this whole equation. The first thing I want to say is that not everybody is meant to be married, and not everybody is meant to be married yet. Those are both important things to keep in mind. Everybody has a season of singleness. For some, your season of singleness might be your whole life—that might be God's purpose for you. And you don't want to waste your whole life saying, "The goal and purpose of

my life is to wait for the right spouse to come along." Make the most of your season of singleness.

It may be that God will bring a spouse your way, but if he hasn't yet, then make the most of that season. By making the most of it, I don't mean play the field and sleep around with 40 different people because you're not committed yet—that's what some people think it means. Making the most of singleness means living the single life before you're even looking for a spouse or dating anybody.

I'll take one example. When I was in seminary, there was an offer for one student from the seminary to go to Israel for two months, study with some leading professors there, and do some street evangelism. I was asked if I wanted to do that, and I said yes. I went there, had a great time studying and doing street evangelism--and dodging a few eggs and fire hoses and fists from time to time. Overall I survived, and it was a wonderful time. But I could do that in part because I wasn't leaving somebody else behind for two months. I was single. When you're single, you can do some things that you can't do so readily when you're attached.

So do something daring in your season of being single. Seize opportunities that you might not be able to pursue once you're not in your season of singleness anymore, to serve the Lord or for an adventure he sends your way. Make the most of your singleness. Don't just pine away and waste that season hoping and waiting for a different season.

If you're a person who says, "I'd really prefer not to be single the rest of my life"—and that is the case with most people, though not all—then look for ways to meet other people and to mingle. You're not likely to meet somebody if you're never out among other people, especially people of your own age and possibilities.

Look your best. Christians have rightly emphasized modesty, but sometimes too strongly, where frumpiness equals godliness. This is not so. Even in the Bible, when Ruth was supposed to go visit Boaz, she was supposed to dress up in her best clothes, put on a little perfume, and look her best to make herself attractive. Whether you're male or female, you don't have to dress and act like the world, but you don't have to try to be as ugly and plain as possible either. Look your best if you want someone to look your way.

Hang out with people for a while before getting serious. Get to know a variety of people, or get to know them in non-serious contexts where you just want to spend time together and have conversation before you even think about getting very serious romantically.

It's usually good to involve family and friends. Sometimes terminology gets us in trouble. The word "courtship" was one that a lot of Christians preferred. In some ways I do too, because "dating" had taken on meanings of recreational romance and playing games with each other's feelings and bodies. Courtship could avoid that, but the word itself sometimes makes kids allergic—"Oh no!" So I'll phrase it this way: date wisely. If "dating" is the word you prefer, then add the adverb "wisely."

Involve family and friends when possible. The level of involvement has to be wise. For example, when I met Wendy, I didn't involve my family and friends—I was 1,600 miles away from home. She came out to Montana and met my parents, but by that point we were pretty serious. We weren't asking mom and dad for permission at that stage. But when your family and friends are around, hang out with them. Enjoying other people's company together can be a healthy way for relationships to develop without always being alone and without always focusing on the physical part of your relationship. As appropriate, involve family and friends. Again, modesty and family involvement can be taken overboard. Some would say you should involve the father so much that you date dad for about six months before you even get a peek at the girl. Well, no. Most people don't prefer to date dad—that's been my experience, and I have several married children.

Avoid bedrooms and backseats, situations that are going to get you in trouble and beyond your powers of self-control. We don't have to legislate, "Thou shalt never hold hands. Thou shalt never kiss." We can get very legalistic about those things. But even if you decide you're not going to be legalistic, the alternative is not, "Therefore I will be stupid." Sometimes it seems like those are the only two paths—legalism or stupidity. No. There is such a thing as dating wisely, avoiding the situations that are most likely to cause difficulty for you.

Here's a last important point: date only if marriage is possible. Don't start dating somebody if you know for a fact you're never going to marry them. I'm not saying you could never go out for coffee or have a nice conversation with somebody, but if you're starting a relationship and already know, "No way, not going to happen," then don't start it. Many people nowadays go into a relationship knowing they don't want to marry, but they enjoy the feelings of romance and the pleasures of sex. They think that's what the relationship is for. Don't date unless you can conceive of the person being your spouse.

How do you know if somebody might possibly be the one for you? You go back to the design for marriage. What's God's design? Dramatizing Christ and the church, developing godly offspring, and delighting in each other. That means when you're dating and wondering, "Is this the one?"—or even before you start dating if you're wondering if someone is at least in the realm of possibility—ask some key questions.

Is this the one?

- Is he/she committed Jesus and to the Christ-church drama in marriage?
- Does he/she have a relationship to God that I want my children to have?
- Do we have romantic attraction and physical desire for each other?

The first question, an absolute non-negotiable, is this: Is he or she committed to Jesus and to the Christ-church drama in marriage? Do they understand who Jesus is and love him, and do they want their marriage to reflect the way Jesus and his church relate?

The second question, a very helpful one to evaluate where your relationship is and where it ought to go: Does this person have a relationship with God that I want my children to have? Because that's likely to happen. If you marry somebody who is very far from God, don't cross your fingers behind your back and say, "I'm going to change them, and by the time the kids roll around, we're

going to be this wonderful Christian household." God in his grace can sometimes bless even foolish decisions, but don't presume on that. Marry somebody whose faith is the kind of faith you want your kids to have, because that is the most likely outcome.

Here's a third important question: Do we have romantic attraction and physical desire for each other? That's one of the things that distinguishes a friendship from a marriage—you are attracted to each other. If you say, "This person is a dynamite Christian, and I really would be pleased if my kids had a faith like hers," but you have no attraction to her whatsoever, then don't date or marry her. I had a best friend like that, and she was a wonderful person. She married someone else and is happier with him than she would have been with me.

There are some people you may admire spiritually, but if you're not romantically drawn to them, they are not the one for you. Take an extreme case: if you're same-sex attracted, then marriage isn't really open to you unless your sense of attraction were to change. Otherwise, you would need to live singly and live a holy life as a single. But even if you're drawn to people of the opposite sex, that doesn't mean you're drawn to all of them. If someone is meant to be the spouse for you, you will feel romantic attraction and physical desire for each other.

Song of Songs is part of the Bible, and Proverbs is part of the Bible. We're not doing ourselves or our spouse any favors if we say, "I could walk into a marriage as a platonic relationship." There's a phrase some of you use—"I married my best friend." That's all very nice, but I hope not most of the time. A lot of girls have best friends, and your husband is not going to understand you the way your girlfriends do—because he isn't you, and he isn't a girl. Sometimes girls understand girl stuff better than any guy ever will. Sorry—that's just the way it is.

So don't just look for somebody who can replace all your best friends and also be your romantic partner. That's putting too much weight on one relationship. It's okay to have other great friends who aren't part of the marriage. Otherwise, you're putting too much burden on your spouse to be everything to you. Have some friends. There may be stuff you like doing that your spouse doesn't. You don't have to rope them into all of it—you may still have a few friends to do those things with. Different couples handle that differently.

My mom and dad: he would go to a ball game, and my mom would go to concerts with her friends. I had another friend who loved drag racing and was a mechanic. He married a woman who loved the cello and the arts. She ended up going to drag races, and he ended up going to concerts and even took up the cello himself. It worked out great. So there's no one formula for all of this. But the key is that you should have a strong attraction and desire for each other.

Holy sexuality

Sexual intimacy is for marriage only. It's a glorious gift of God, and it's so powerful that once we fell into sin, there were a whole lot of different ways we could go wrong. Marriage is a lifelong union of a man and a woman, and God calls us to honor that standard, to dismiss anyone who holds a different standard as a false teacher if they happen to be a preacher, and to pursue that in our lives. Seek God's forgiveness where we fail, his renewal to do better, and don't settle.

Some of you may have a marriage that at a formal level is holy in the sense that you haven't committed adultery, you haven't run out on each other. But you might be stuck in the rut of simply putting up with each other—not being unfaithful, but not exactly delighting in each other either. If that's where your marriage is at, then keep it up in terms of faithfulness, but seek more. Don't just settle. Ask God to help rekindle the flame of your marriage, the love and attraction you have for each other, the delight in each other.

I may have made a little fun of the "I married my best friend" line, but companionship—enjoying each other's company, supporting each other the way best friends do—is important. Pray that God will not only keep you from acting like pagans but also help you truly delight in each other.

Prayer

Father, we thank you for the great gift of male and female and the wonder of marriage. We ask, Lord, that you will renew us in this area of our lives—one that's so important and taught so clearly by our Lord Jesus and throughout the Scriptures. We pray, Lord, that you will ignite afresh the love between husband and wife. We also ask that you give wisdom and guidance to singles.

Lord, for some who have been going steady for a while and are possibly moving toward marriage, help them to discern whether that's your will and the step that you want them to take. Guide them, Lord, in that relationship and bless them each. Bless others, Lord, who may be at the beginning stage of getting to know each other. Help them in that. And help those, Lord, who are single but really wish they weren't. We pray, Lord, that you'll either help them to become content in that situation or to find the person who could be a blessing to them and with whom they could have a future marriage.

Lord, we have a lot of different situations, and we need your help. We pray too, Lord, for those who have been guilty of sexual sin. We pray for your cleansing, your pardon, and your renewal in their lives. We pray for those whose marriages are broken and ended in divorce, and we ask for you to bring them into your way, Lord, to live for you from where they are now. They can't go back and change everything, so help them to move forward by your grace and your truth. We pray that you will help all of our marriages to honor you in the way that the church honors Jesus. We pray in his name. Amen.

Holy Sexuality

By David Feddes

Slide Contents

¹ Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. ² For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. 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. (1 Thess 4:1-8)

Holy sexuality

Sexual intimacy is for marriage only. Marriage is a lifelong union of a man and a woman. (Genesis 2:22-25; Matthew 5:27-32; Matthew 19:3-9; 1 Corinthians 7:1-11)

Immorality

- Rape
- Pedophilia
- Incest
- Polyamory
- Transgender
- Same-sex
- Prostitution
- Hooking up
- Moving in
- Lust & porn
- Adultery
- Divorce

No to immorality

- Don't act like godless pagans.
- Don't rebel and reject Trinity.
- Don't violate or cheat others.
- Don't damage or destroy self.

Yes to holiness

- Act like children of the King.
- Delight Father, Son, & Spirit.
- Love and bless others.
- Flourish and enjoy holy life.

Possess vessel

Every one of you should know how to **possess your own vessel*** in holiness and honor. (1 Thessalonians 4:4)

*Possible meanings:

- control your own body
- take a spouse for yourself

Holy marriage God's 3-D design

- Dramatize Christ & church
- Develop godly offspring
- Delight in each other

How's our marriage?

- Does our relationship tell truth or lies about Jesus and his church?
- Are we leading our children into faith, holiness, and biblical wisdom?
- Are we delighting in intimacy and guarding our garden from intruders?

Guard marriage

- Emotional affection, physical intimacy.
- Keep far away from temptations: at work, on the road, in entertainment.
- Be honest and accountable.
- Family-friendly spiritual fellowship.

Date wisely

- Make the most of singleness.
- Find ways to meet and mingle.
- Be modest, but look your best.
- Hang out before getting serious.
- Involve family and friends.
- Avoid bedrooms and backseats.
- Date only if marriage is possible.

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