

How to Know It's the Right Person and the Right Time to Marry

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I have literally jotted down some things that I want to say tonight and exhort the body on tonight. I don't have a polished sermon; I just took some things I've done through the years and thought about some new things that I want to speak to you about. I want to talk about how you know it's the right person and the right time to get married. How do you know it's the right person and the right time to get married. You may say, "I've raised my kids. This doesn't apply to me." Dear brother, if you're a part of this church you're responsible for my children too. We all are to be admonishing and encouraging, guiding as we have opportunity one another. Grandmothers and Granddaddies, I'm one of those now, you are too very responsible so these things are pertinent to all of us.

First of all, if you're thinking about a person that you might get serious with and marriage might be around the corner, they ought to have a clear Christian testimony. A clear Christian testimony. I remember there was a phrase out when I was a single guy many years ago that "Good Christian girls are a dime a dozen." What they meant by that is that in the southeast here just about everybody goes to church, everybody has been baptized and just most everybody goes to church off-and-on but that doesn't mean they have a good and clear Christian testimony. I mean, when you're going to marry somebody, you've got to know more than they prayed a prayer and walked down the aisle. You need to know that there's something real about their Christian confession.

I just listed four areas that I would exhort you to pray about and look for. 1. Look at their affections. What things do their hearts go out to? You have to be patient because some people may have been raised in a church environment and not exposed to some of these but as they are exposed, you should see their affections or their desires going toward them. 1. Strong Bible preaching. A person who is regenerated of the Holy Spirit and loves the Lord and is a candidate for marriage will have a heart drawn to the preaching of the word of God. Even if they haven't been around it before, they will begin to warm up to it. It's kind of what I call the Amen of the Spirit: when you hear something preached and maybe it rubs you the wrong way or it doesn't fit, there's something in you that says, "Amen. That's right. I affirm that truth."

Another thing to look for in their affections is are they drawn to a sound church? As they learn God's will for the church, as they learn what God formed the church to be, as they understand how it's the bride of Christ, that it's the beauty and the wisdom of God and the

primary means of glorifying God. How in the world are you going to have a marriage worth anything if your spouse does not have a heart for the church? So look for that. Don't think that's going to just happen later on, look for it.

Do they have an affection for sound doctrine, the great doctrines of the faith? None of us have arrived there. I've studied a lot through the years and I'm still learning and understanding, we all are, but you ought to be noticing that there is a passion, if you will, maybe that's too strong of a word sometimes but at least an affection and a drawing to the great truths of the gospel of the faith.

Then, of course, an affection for the person of Jesus Christ. This sometimes comes slow, as a matter of fact. Sometimes, a new convert, for example, may be super-excited about the how-tos of Christianity but as time goes on, you will notice if they belong to Christ, they become more and more in love with Jesus Christ. You should be seeing something of that before you get to the engagement stage.

A clear Christian testimony. Look at who they fellowship with. That's a second are: affections and also fellowship. Who are their friends? There is no such thing, really, as a genuine committed Christian as a lifestyle who has friends who are hellions. It just doesn't work. Light doesn't fellowship with darkness. Now, we all should have some acquaintances, some people we reach out to. I'm not saying you run from people but I'm talking about the people you chose to be close to. Look at their friends. The Bible says, "Do not be deceived, bad company corrupts good morals." Proverbs tells us, "He who walks with wise men will be wise but the companion of fools will suffer harm." Who are their friends?

This goes side-by-side with that one, third thing, who are their enemies? Is their walk with Christ real enough that it offends someone? I always have to balance this statement because there's always young zealots who try to be offensive. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about just their convictions, their love for Christ. I'm sure in any public arena, I'm going to be offensive before long because I can't condone things like homosexuality. We don't have to be hard or mean-spirited but we have to say the truth and speak the truth in love. Now, the young person ought to at some point have experienced that, "There are some people that just don't hang with me. They think I'm too committed to Christ." Well, that's probably a good sign that that's the right kind of person.

Not only their affections and their fellowship, who are their enemies, but also look for the fruit of the Spirit in their lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Nobody has all of these all of the time but there ought to be an evidence of those in their life that are evidence of growing.

I think there's one overarching virtue that I didn't get to in my message this morning and God willing I will next week and that is forgiveness. They are a person quick and ready to forgive. You do not want to go into a marriage situation with someone who does not have a forgiving spirit and that is, by the way, we'll dig into it well next Sunday but that

is the antichrist spirit. Whatever else our God is and whatever else his Son provides, it's forgiveness.

Those are things we should look for in a clear Christian testimony. Secondly, they must be in harmony at home. Look at their home environment. Look at how they're dealing with their Mom and Dad. Look at how they respond to Dad's leadership and Dad's authority. God has ordained that the home is something of a proving ground. God divinely ordained your parents, young people, to shape your character. Did you hear that? He divinely ordained your parents to shape your character and God even ordained the imperfections and the things you don't like about your parents because they're rubbing you the wrong way which is actually the right way. One way I've heard it explained before is: Dad's like a hammer and Mom's like a chisel. Now, this is not illustrating the relationship of the husband and wife, okay? But Dad's like a hammer and Mom's like a chisel and the child is like a diamond in the rough and God uses your Mom and Dad to chisel and shape you to be a quality person. So, if you're courting a person and you're thinking you might want to marry this person and they're always resistant, they always have a mocking spirit, they always have an insubordinate spirit to Mom and Dad, then they've moved themselves out from under God's means of making them the kind of person who will be a good husband or wife. Did you get that? They've removed themselves from God's primary means. I remember a story of a man that said, "I'm so sick of my Mom, I'm so sick of my Dad. I'm getting out from under their authority. I'm leaving this household. I'm tired of their rules. I'm tired of having to do what they tell me to do. I'm going to go and join the Marines." You just gave God a bigger hammer and a bigger chisel. Listen to me: he's got one, it's just that your parents are the most loving, caring hammer and chisel God has. He's shaping you so make sure they're in harmony at home.

Numbers 14:18 has an interesting truth in it. It talks about how the Lord is slow to anger, abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression and he will visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation. Listen to that: he will visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations. Here's what I'm telling you: if you get into a marriage situation and you are not in harmony in your home, you're always blaming your parents, they're not doing things right, you're giving yourself permission to indulge in sin and have a rebel spirit, what you're going to find out is you're going to pass that iniquity on to your own children and they're going to do you the exact same way. Did you hear your Pastor? If you get married one day, you'll have children and your children will dishonor you because you passed that seed of iniquity on to them. Here's my challenge: stop it in this generation. Say to yourself, "That's not going to be passed on again. For the glory of God, I'm going to deal with that now. I'm going to honor my parents even though I think my parents are unfair, even though I think sometimes they're hypocrites, even though I don't think they do everything right. I'm going to trust God who gave me these parents to guide me and direct me."

Make sure they're in harmony at home. You need to remember, young people, that a young man will typically treat his wife the way he treated his mother. If he dishonors his

Mom, he's not sweet to his Mom, he's going to dishonor you and he's not going to be sweet to you. And typically, a woman will honor her husband the way she honored her father. You think she's sweet and wonderful and lovely, guys, right now but she's dishonorable to her Dad at home, you just say "I do" and in about three days, she's going to talk to you the way she talked to him. The home environment is the proving ground, the character shaping time and you see a lot in that. Make sure they're in harmony at home.

Thirdly, make sure they have a commitment, of course along with yourself, not to defraud. Not to defraud. Listen to 1 Thessalonians 4:6, "and that no man," he's in the context of moral impurity here and he says, "and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you." He's talking about Christians: brother to brother, sister to sister, or brother to sister, sister to brother, whatever. He said, "Don't defraud your brother." Now, the idea of defrauding means to overreach. It's the idea of taking advantage of and in the context of moral purity, defrauding someone is when you stir up desires that you cannot righteously satisfy. Now, sexual desires are God-given; they're beautiful and they're wonderful but during the courtship years and the engagement days before marriage, you are not to defraud. You're not to stir them up to be involved in sexual immorality because you are not able to righteously satisfy that desire. Now, there are 101 ways that could happen; there are so many things we could say there but there needs to be a humble spirit.

It's been a great joy through the years for me to counsel with young people, girls, young men, and realize they're just like their Pastor and they're just like every other red-blooded American person on the earth. God gave them hormones and they have a sex drive but they humbly wanted accountability, they wanted people to check on them, they wanted guidelines for their relationship, they would strive to do their courtship in family and group settings and not be alone together by themselves. Why? Because they didn't want to defraud each other because God says, "I am the Avenger in these things," and once you start down that path, it's almost impossible to come back up out of it. Sexual activity before marriage destroys intimacy with God. I think that's one of the most damaging things. The more you're involved sexually as single people, the greater the cloud of guilt comes over your life and that cloud of guilt blocks your fellowship with God. You see, you're supposed to come close to each other by becoming closer to God. God is in the center of the triangle and you become close to each other by spiritually becoming closer to God and each other but what Satan wants you to do is come down here and sexually become close and then the cloud of guilt comes and you become bonded sexually and it's a take-lust relationship, not a love-give relationship. Then you get married and you have to learn who this person is because you don't know who they are because you married in the blindness of lust and God doesn't want that to happen. Be sure that person – yes, they should have desires, as a matter of fact, especially with young men, if a young man tells somebody he doesn't struggle with sexual desires, if he tells me he doesn't struggle with things like pornography, I'm going to be concerned about him. Those kinds of struggles, but we don't have to give in to them, we don't have to walk in them and we can put

ourselves in environments so that we do not fall in ruts and patterns of sin and rebellion in those areas.

One quick word: remember that love can always wait to give but lust cannot wait to take so when somebody says, "If you love me, you'll be sexually active with me," they're not saying, "I love you," they're saying, "I love me. I want to use you." Because anybody that loves you would never do anything to cause you to receive the discipline of God. That's defrauding so make sure that person has a humble spirit and is willing to be in the fight. Did you hear your Pastor? To be in the fight with you that we're going to fight, not engaging in that kind of immorality.

Fourthly, honor God's timing. Honor God's timing. We have an example of Jacob as he was laboring for Rachel. Laban was her father and Genesis 29:20 says, "So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her." Now, I'm not suggesting that the first time a young man gets interested in a girl that there ought to be a seven year waiting period. Now that I have daughters, that might not be a bad idea at all either. But, nevertheless, the principle does apply.

How are you going to know, young person, Mom or Dad, how are you going to know if it's God's timing? First of all, you honor your parents. God will let you know through your parents if it's God's timing. Ephesians 6:1-3, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth." You just can never, ever in any way think that God has given you his blessing for you to enter into a marriage covenant if you're getting married outside the blessing of your Mom and Dad. It violates clear Scripture.

Secondly, not only parents but the church. Get the blessing of your church. Your church is not here to be legalistic, harsh dictates of your life and my position would always be to be as lenient and as liberal in my viewpoint as possible but I remember I learned this truth, I was 19, came from a quasi-Agnostic home and I had been seeing a girl and she was a Christian. I thought, well, maybe we're supposed to head toward engagement and this not only be in courtship and I went and saw my Pastor, Charles Dinkins, up in Lawrenceburgh, Tennessee at First Baptist Church and I sat down with him and in about five minutes he said, "You don't need to be courting that girl and you don't need to marry her." I stopped courting her and I didn't marry her, I married Pam, of course, I didn't know Pam at that time. I just learned God-ordained biblical authority to protect me. Young people, it's a protection. It's not to rob you, it's to bless you and protect you. Now, this is a fine lady, that girl that I was dating. She's married a wonderful man and they live in another city but I know without a shadow of a doubt, she was not a pastor's wife. God didn't call her to do that. God called Pam to do that. You see, God knows what he's doing. Hebrews 13:17 says, "Obey your leaders," that means your pastors in your church, "and submit to them for," now listen, "they keep watch over your souls." It's not that they like exercising authority, it's that they care for your outcome, they care for your well-being, they keep watch over your souls. "As those who will give an account and let them do this with joy and not with grief for that would be unprofitable for you."

Another good thought here is that you should never court someone that cannot be God's will to marry. Think over that. You just don't go down that road. We're not in the business of trying people on like clothes and discarding them and trying another one out. Courtship should be a rare thing with a few special people and there should be lots of Christian discipline and accountability. Don't court someone unless you know they're the kind of person that your Mom and Dad know would be God's will for you to marry.

Also in God's timing, things like finances need to be looked at. You know, this idea of, "Well, I don't know where I'm gonna work. Don't know what I'm gonna do but we'll make it somehow." You're not going to marry my daughter and they shouldn't marry yours. Young men, find out what you're going to do. Have enough idea of how you're going to support that girl or you don't need to be asking her father's blessing. Some of you need to learn these three words: go to work. Quit living off your Mom and Dad and show that you can provide so finances is an issue. I'm not giving absolutes here, I don't know where the line draws but finances is something that you could look at to know is this the right timing? Has God made this available?

Career. I think a person should have some idea of where they're going in life. How in the world can you ask a girl to be your helpmeet and come and complement what God's called you to do and you don't know what it is yet? So there's a lot of wisdom in knowing pretty well, "Sure, here's where God's leading me." When Pam and I were courting years ago, we would pray fervently and genuinely that, "God, if this is not your will, if you're not putting us together for ministry then we need to know it." We'd literally say, "God, break us up if this isn't your will." You don't have to be afraid of what God might do. If he does, it's his blessing.

Then the basic tenets of education. There may be some requirements on education being finished. It's not absolute but those are some things about timing that need to be looked at.

I'm going to shift gears. I'm not wasting any time here because I want to meet with the parents and the kids in just a moment and we're all going to go home. Let me say something about rebellion. Let me say something about being with a band of rebels. I think we may have a little band of rebels. I think it's a small band and I don't think it reflects on a lot of our kids who love God and who try to do right but I think there is a little band of rebels and if you're part of the band of rebels, you're part of the band of rebels for two simple reasons: you don't love God and you do love sin. It doesn't matter whether you're 7 or 17 or 77. Moms and Dads, quit making excuses for your children. Love them enough to look them in the eye and say, "You don't like church and you don't like the Scriptures and you don't like the things of God because you don't like God and you love your sin." Help them. Do not be an enabler to their sin and idolatry. I'm not saying you're not compassionate, you're heartbroken about it but speak the truth to your children in love. You know, rebels almost always desire companionship. Do you know why? Because they have fear in their hearts and they have guilt in their hearts and they don't want to face the consequences of their rebellion alone. They know there's going to

be a payday. They know there's a consequence so, "Come rebel with me because if I've got to go through it, I want somebody else to go through it too." So when rebels get together, they don't care about each other because sin is, in its essence, self-centered. They just don't want to face what sin's going to bring them alone and by themselves. They're going to work at destroying themselves and they want you to go along with them.

In Genesis 3, you know we have the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. We have Eve disobeying God: God said, "Don't eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," and she eats of the tree. What does she do? She immediately says, "Hey Adam, you eat too." Isn't that what she did? She went from being a rebel to forming a band of rebels. I mean, this is an ancient truth. It's all throughout history and that's exactly where it started. Now, here was Eve's thought as she rebelled against God: she felt guilty for it, she feared the consequence and she didn't want to face it alone so she enticed Adam, "Come rebel with me. I don't want to go through this by myself." And then Adam's thought was the peer pressure thing, "Well, I'd better comply, I'd better go along. Eve could get mad and leave me." So, it's that thought of taking care of self again. Then he probably thought, "Well, it looks like it's working for Eve. She looks happy with her decision." But you know what? You can't see the torture of a guilty conscience. I'm sure Eve was torn up on the inside and remember, Satan is the master of disguise. He makes wicked, evil, painful things look good.

You know, one who joins up with rebels often is a person who has been hurt in life. They're often the person who has had a deep disappointment in their life; they want love and acceptance from others and they choose the wrong group. Now, why is that? If you think that through, why is that? Here's why that is: why would somebody who's hurt, they've really been hurt, they're disappointed and very often it's a Mom or Dad that's hurt them and they feel hurt and they feel done wrong and so to get over that, to find some love and acceptance, they join up with someone that they think they can get that love, attention, fellowship from and it's the wrong group. Why is it the wrong group? Because it's not the wrong group. It's the right group because what are they harboring in their hearts? They're harboring unforgiveness in their hearts. They're harboring bitterness in their hearts. They will not forgive the person who has wronged them. So, listen, what is the quintessential opposite of God's nature? Unforgiveness, so here they're functioning in a spirit that is not the Spirit of Christ, it's not the Spirit of God. They're functioning in a spirit as this hurt, disappointed person and we all have compassion for people like that, of course, but how are we going to help them? We're going to help them by speaking the truth in love. What they do is they harbor unforgiveness, they put off a spirit that's a rebellious spirit because God's will is to be forgiving and trust that God even has a purpose in the wrong things that come into your life. So, they harbor unforgiveness and they naturally identify with the spirit of rebels and so they'll join up with the band of rebels and they add to their sin of unforgiveness, many, many other sins of commission. Here the dominoes begin to fall.

What's the opposite of that? The opposite of that, the child of God who's been hurt, genuinely hurt and it does hurt, a child of God's been disappointed but they get in the word of God. They talk with godly friends. They look to a godly small group leader.

They study what the Scriptures say and they purpose to strive to be forgiving, to strive to not hold against the person who has wronged them and to strive to understand that God has a purpose for even these bad things that have happened and I'm going to trust the Lord and I'm not going to be angry and I'm not going to be bitter. All of a sudden, do you know what kind of spirit they project? A sweet Christ-like spirit and the rebel band comes by and there's no connection. The rebel group comes and makes an offer and there's no desire, there is no link-up. You see, here's what a lot of parents think particularly, "My child is a good kid but they got with the wrong group." No, you didn't know what kind of rebellion was inside. On the outside they were dotting the i's and crossing the t's but on the inside they had a rebel heart so they fit the rebel band. They weren't doing the outwardly rebellion yet but that was just a matter of time because they were a rebel. Are you getting me? It's the same spirit. But the humble person who sees God's hand in everything that happens, has the grace of God to be forgiving, doesn't exude that kind of rebel spirit and they don't hook-up with the rebel band.

So often the rebel believes the Satanic lie and the Satanic lie that hits young people so strongly is that there's some outward ideal appearance: you've got to look a certain way, you've got to dress a certain way and that's the main goal of life. It reminds of a verse that speaks to that and it's 1 Samuel 16:7, "But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance,'" he's talking about Saul because Saul was real impressive outwardly, "do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.'" So, Satan gets you into the idolatry of focusing on outward talents, outward popularity, outward appearance and you'll join up, run with, connect with, anyone who you think will give you that outward show and so often it's a rebel band and it's just a form of idolatry.

You think, "Well, I don't measure up. I don't fit in." What's the common personal pronoun in those two phrases? I. I. It's not about developing the inward beauty of Jesus Christ, the inward character of Christ. That's what gives you value. That's what makes you significant. We're all different on the outside. We all have different talents. God has no universal outward standard, okay? But he does have a universal inward standard: it's the character of Jesus Christ and so young people need to learn to look at developing the character of Christ. Listen: use the difficult things, use the hardships, use the disappointments, use the hurts that cause you to draw near to Christ and have a spirit of forgiveness and have a spirit of longsuffering, have a spirit of kindness and goodness even when you're hurting and that's the beauty of Jesus Christ and then you'll not be so attracted to it and you'll not be connecting in spirit with a rebel band.

That's all I've got to say. Let's stand in prayer, alright?