

A Marrying Kind of Man

Marriage and Courtship

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Preeminently this morning, as always, we gather in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, don't we? We gather because Jesus Christ loved his people and gave his life for them at the cross, and that same Christ who saved many of us offers forgiveness and eternal life to some of you who are outside of Christ this morning. He gives that blessing to everyone who will repent and believe in him for salvation and so we invite you to Christ even as we start this morning.

In response to his saving mercy over these past couple of weeks and today and next week probably, we are seeking to honor his institution of marriage and we see things in the global salvific sense of the great work that Christ has done, we realize that he has established an institution of marriage to be honored by his people and so we've wanted to teach on that the past couple of weeks, and today and next week we go a little bit further to help those who are considering marriage, those who are on the front end of marriage with things that will be helpful to them to make good, wise decisions that the Lord will bless over the course of time, and yet also it's for more than just them, you young parents even and those of you with children that are not yet to marriageable age, it's very important for you to hear these things so that you know how to guide your children and to train them over time. It's not too early even now to start speaking to them at their level about the things of which we're discussing here today because you can't just turn this on like a light switch and suddenly everything makes sense, you have the opportunity and the privilege of developing those little lambs, as it were, so that they know what to look for and so that their hearts are conditioned to be right and right for marriage when the time and opportunity comes to them. But it's not just for parents and young people or single people either, it's really for all of us and it's a great burden of my heart pastorally, this is the reason that I've been planning this series for many many months, is that together as a church we would come together and gather around God's word and have a common sense and a common view of these things and what it is that people approaching marriage should look for because that's going to inform all of our interactions with young people, it's going to inform the counsel that we give them. It is not good in a church of a few hundred people to have a few hundred different opinions about these matters. Surely in God's word there's enough for us to unify and to come together and to say this is the way that we think about these things, and therefore that informs the way that we interact with one another.

It's so vitally vitally important and whenever I speak on marriage and courtship, I can't help but remember a story I heard years ago from a dear friend as he was speaking to me about his dear daughter. It's no one anywhere remote to Truth Community Church so it's not anyone that you would know, but he was telling me about his daughter and his daughter was getting on in life and she was getting impatient with the prospect of marriage and there was no one for her to marry, and so when an opportunity came, she hurried into it. She probably walked past and blew through some counsels of warning and concern in the process but she quickly got married to a man who was relatively new to their church and who had all of the outward appearances of being a godly man, but the time that was taken to invest in the relationship was brief, the man was not very well known but he checked all of the outward boxes. So they had a happy marriage and then the truth came out and two weeks after their wedding, they were barely back from their honeymoon, this wicked man looked at his new bride who had trusted him and loved him and said, "Now, you're going to find out what the real world is like." And he proceeded to beat her with his fists and over the course of time, abused her in horrific ways that are just seared in my memory.

So there are a lot of things at stake here and we want with all of our hearts to guide you and to help you to think rightly about these things so that if by the grace of God we might spare you an outcome like that. In that particular story, just to finish the account, eventually the man was arrested, he's in prison. There was an understandable and righteous divorce there. The woman has since remarried and God has restored her, but there was a heavy price paid for neglecting time-honored biblical principles of considering marriage that make this all so important for us to know and to consider, and in a time like ours where the days are so dark and the Bible is so rejected and there is so much wickedness in our culture that can't help but influence the way people in the church think and react, it is so important for us to cleanse our minds with the purifying effect of God's word and to look at this matter, this whole matter very very carefully, and it is incumbent upon you whether you – I'm repeating myself here just because this is so important – it is incumbent upon you even if there is no prospect of marriage for you because you're past that age, or there's no prospect of marriage for you for whatever reason, it is still so vital for you to understand because as we interact with one another as a body, we are going to have the opportunity to lend a gentle word here and there, to give an encouraging word or to give a caution to someone who needs it, and it is important for us to be doing that from the word itself.

And if I can step one further step beyond my notes here, I just want to say this as well. Now in the days of social media, it is just so common when people post their new relationship status and all of that for people to respond to that in an emotional way, "Oh, that's a great! Oh, we're so happy for you guys!" And it's just all pure utter emotion and a sugary emotion about these things, and you need to be cautious about doing that and affirming things that you don't know about. Maybe that relationship is good, maybe it's healthy and something to be encouraged, but if it's something brand-new to you, you need to restrain yourself from affirming something that you don't have any idea, any way of knowing whether it's actually healthy or not. So we need to be careful about this

because the whole institution of marriage is important in the plan of God and there are lifelong consequences and generational consequences to the way that we approach marriage, and it is incumbent upon a people who take the word of God seriously to deal with these matters in a sober way. Of course, we rejoice with those who rejoice. Of course, we want to encourage couples that are in love and couples that are walking a godly path. We want to shower them with encouragement and love and blessing and support. Of course, we want to do that but we also realize that sometimes young people don't realize the risks of what's happening, sometimes they haven't counted the cost, sometimes they're utterly ignorant of biblical principles of marriage and it is our privilege as a body to come along such ones to gently and humbly over time encourage them in a right direction and not simply playing an emotional response to their own emotions. And so it's very critical what we're doing here today and it's with that background that I invite you to return again to the book of Ruth for our time in God's word here this morning.

The book of Ruth is the eighth book in your English Bible, just after the book of Judges. We saw it in an overview sense last time and I don't have the opportunity, time does not permit us to review those things, simply to say this, last time we saw that Boaz and Ruth got married and they had a son, and what we want to do today is to kind of do a retrospective, we want to retrace some of the steps that led to that marriage and in the process of that, we're going to find something really wonderfully helpful, in my humble opinion, we're going to help everyone recognize the kind of man that is a marrying kind of man. What kind of man is it that is prepared, that is on a right trajectory to enter into Christian marriage? This is vital for a young woman to know so that she has some kind of objective criteria by which to measure things and not simply go on the emotion of the moment or under the influence of the man who is courting her. It's vital for the man to know. For a man, it's vital for the young man to look at these things closely and to examine his own heart and to examine his own life, "Are these things true of me? Is this the general trajectory of my life as well?" Look, we're not expecting young people to be perfect. That would be pretty ridiculous for a nearly 60-year-old pastor who is very flawed and very sinful himself to expect a standard of perfection from someone who's been walking with the Lord decades less. We're not expecting a standard of perfection here, we're looking for a standard of direction and what are the heart tendencies, what are the life tendencies of a man and I believe that the book of Ruth has a lot to say to us about that.

So before Ruth and Boaz could marry, there was an issue that needed resolution and we're kind of jumping into the deep end of the pool without the benefit of a lot of the context of the whole book of Ruth, but Boaz was interested in Ruth, they were interested in each other but there was an issue that needed resolution. Boaz was not first in line for Ruth. There was a closer relative and we see this in verse 9, let's say. Actually, let's go back to verse 8. Ruth had placed herself at Boaz's feet in a cultural way that was utterly appropriate at the time, perhaps in ways that we don't understand but she had laid herself at his feet in the middle of the night to ask him to protect her. So in verse 8, "It happened in the middle of the night that the man was startled," meaning Boaz, "and bent forward; and behold, a woman was lying at his feet." Now if you went to bed not expecting that, that wakes you up in a hurry. "He said, 'Who are you?'" It's dark, he couldn't see. "And

she answered, 'I am Ruth your maid. So spread your covering over your maid, for you are a close relative.'" The language there is, "You are a kinsman redeemer." The idea is this, she is saying, "Protect me. I'm in this vulnerable position as a widow in a foreign land and I'm asking you to recognize your responsibility and to protect me." And Boaz responds with these gracious words. He's such a godly man, "he said, 'May you be blessed of the LORD, my daughter. You have shown your last kindness to be better than the first by not going after young men, whether poor or rich. Now, my daughter,'" you see the gentle tender way that he speaks to her, "'Now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you whatever you ask, for all my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence. Now it is true I am a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I. Remain this night, and when morning comes, if he will redeem you, good; let him redeem you. But if he does not wish to redeem you, then I will redeem you, as the LORD lives. Lie down until morning.'"

Now what we're reading here in English, this phrase "close relative," is referring to a familiar Old Testament idea of a kinsman redeemer and a kinsman redeemer was a relative who was in a position to rescue another relative from trouble. The kinsman redeemer defended and assisted the one in the family who was unable to help themselves and it's an Old Testament picture of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, who defends and helps his people in their helplessness. So as we see, the story will show us how this all plays out as we turn to chapter 4, verse 1. Boaz acted quickly and he had a meeting to resolve the situation.

Look at verse 1,

1 Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there, and behold, the close relative of whom Boaz spoke was passing by, so he said, "Turn aside, friend, sit down here." And he turned aside and sat down.

Now the gate was the entranceway into the city and in those times, it was the place where legal and commercial transactions would be conducted. This was a formal setting that was taking place here and so the close relative passes by. We don't know his name, apparently it's not important, but what follows adds to the legal formality of the occasion.

Verse 2,

2 [Boaz] took ten men of the elders of the city and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down.

Now this wasn't a random group of guys that were just gathered together, these men were city officials who transacted official business and Boaz calls this group to be witnesses to the transaction that he knows is about to take place. This was a formal legal matter that was taking place before our eyes here in the text. So with the witnesses and the close relative in place, Boaz gets down to business and he says this in verse 3,

3 Then he said to the closest relative, "Naomi, who has come back from the land of Moab, has to sell the piece of land which belonged to our brother Elimelech. 4 So I thought to inform you, saying, 'Buy it before those who are sitting here, and before the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if not, tell me that I may know; for there is no one but you to redeem it, and I am after you.'"

What Boaz is doing here is he's giving this closer relative notice of his legal right. This closer relative had the right to redeem Naomi's property, to buy it for his own, and he had first claim on it, so to speak. So Boaz gives the close relative notice of his potential claim and calls on him to make his intentions known. So the relative, who thought only property was at stake, that this was simply a financial investment and transaction that was going on, he says that he wants it. Look at the end of verse 4 there,

And he said, "I will redeem it."

So he had a financial opportunity before him, he jumps on the opportunity and says, "I'll take it." And as the story unfolds, the whole prospect of Boaz and Ruth's relationship is teetering on the edge with what's happening here, and now Boaz goes on to deliver the ultimate import of the discussion and he informs them of something else that he had not mentioned beforehand. He says in verse 5, look at it there with me,

5 Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also acquire Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of the deceased, in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance."

Now we don't understand the full details, we don't have the full details of why the one who redeemed the property also had to take Ruth as his own. It seems likely that at the death of Elimelech, the property passed to his son Mahlon who married Ruth. Now with that property in Mahlon's possession, when he died, as we saw last week, then comes with him Ruth and the redemption responsibility of the property also includes Ruth. So what's happening here is that Naomi needed the finances and now Ruth is involved and so there's this complex situation going on that changes the closer relative's entire perspective on the matter. He goes on and he says this in verse 6, he backs out of the deal. He steps back and he says,

6 "I cannot redeem it for myself, because I would jeopardize my own inheritance.

What he's saying is that, "I don't want to split the estate with Naomi's family, with Ruth's family because they're going to enter into rights that I don't want to share with them. I want to keep it within my own family," which is fine as far as it goes, but he doesn't want to jeopardize his inheritance by bringing another person in whose going to share in the distribution of his estate later on. He wants it for his own family. So he says, "I don't want it after all. Look there at verse 6, he tells Boaz,

Redeem it for yourself; you may have my right of redemption, for I cannot redeem it."

And so realizing that we've covered all of this very very quickly, just understand that there's a legal process that Boaz is following, he follows it in an honorable way, and in the providence of God the closer relative who had the first right of refusal, you might say, refuses his right and now Boaz is free to redeem not only the property but to redeem Ruth as well. Boaz through this transaction has been cleared to marry Ruth and their budding romance is now in a position to fully bloom. He is able to pursue her as he wants. They are able to get married and it is from that wonderful marriage that they have a son that we saw last time, and from that son came David, and from David came Christ, and so this moment of transaction outside a city gate thousands of years ago had incalculable consequences for God's history of redemption leading even to us today because it was out of the line of Boaz and Ruth, as we saw from Matthew 1 last time, that our Lord Jesus Christ came in his human flesh. It's a wonderful story. We taught several messages on Ruth many years ago and I invite you, if you want to explore this more, to look for those on our website or on SermonAudio. You can find them and see the whole context here. We've given the briefest and most inadequate of summaries in what we've had to say today.

But for today, our question is this: what can we learn from Boaz about the nature of men and potential marriage? What should we look for in a believing man to affirm him as a candidate for marriage? What is it that a young lady should have in her mind, what are the things that should be important to her thinking of a young Christian, an earnest sincere Christian woman who eagerly desires marriage and yet is waiting? Do you know what? It's okay to be single. Let me just say that clearly and definitively. If you are single right now, it's because that's what God has appointed for you in this time of your life and he intends your good, he intends your blessing even if you find yourself a little bit frustrated and impatient with the whole process. God's timing isn't your timing. God's ways aren't your ways. That's kind of the nature of things.

You know, there have been some verses that have been ricocheting in my mind in multiple ways for multiple reasons over the past several weeks, really, and I would just say this, you know, Romans 8:28 tells us that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love him and are called according to his purpose. That means that even in your singleness that frustrates you perhaps, God is working that out and has good purposes in mind while you wait on his time for these things that you righteously desire. Along with that, I've thought often of 1 Corinthians 10:13 that says, "No temptation has overcome you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it." As hard as this is, God has not laid upon you a burden that is too great for you to bear, and to the extent that you feel your weakness, you need to call upon him, draw closer to him and find your sufficiency in Christ, find your sufficiency in Christ and not in a human relationship. Find that first and then you're even better prepared for marriage when it comes. And as you call upon our gracious Lord, as you call upon your Savior, "God, help me in this! Christ, have mercy

on me!" I've been mindful also of 2 Corinthians 12:9 that says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."

So the grace of God is sufficient. He does not tempt you beyond what you are able. He's working this for good. There is all kinds of spiritual nutrients for the roots of your heart to draw upon to help you and to encourage you through those times as you're waiting as you are sometimes feeling discouraged in the midst of it. I understand that. I got married a little bit later. I was in my late 20s, I was 26 when Nancy and I got married. There were times where I was impatient with the process. To just be honest with you, I got discouraged too and wondering when this is going to come to pass. So I've been there and I understand and I speak to you not to chastise you but to encourage you and to help you understand that the Lord is faithful and the Lord has your good in mind whatever circumstances you might find yourself to be in. So trust him. Draw near to him. Ask for grace in your soul, my single lady friends, my single male friends, and trust him and let him work. Better to wait on the Lord to do things in his time than to rush ahead and find yourself in a relationship that was not what you thought it was going to be. I think that's obvious and I will say no more about it.

Well, what about courtship, then? Courtship as I've said multiple times, I'm using that in a very broad sense, just using it as a term of reference for a relationship that could lead to marriage. What is it that those in a relationship that could lead to marriage, what is it that they should be thinking about? And here's what I want to do today, especially in our visually driven society, in our short attention spans and everything being driven by images and emotion, from politics to everything else, everything driven by that, for the glory of Christ and for your own good, I want to try to do this with the help of the Holy Spirit. I simply want to inject some biblical objectivity into a decision that is too often made in the heat of emotion or, heaven help us, in the course of manipulation in the context of relationship. We need to protect ourselves. We need to protect each other from these things and the best way to do that is for us to consider some things from God's word.

So when we ask the question is a man a marrying kind of man, we're going to ask and answer five questions. We're going to give you five questions to ask, five categories of things to consider for you as a young woman, for you as a young man, to aim your life after. You know, and if you're not in a relationship, this is the time to cultivate your own sanctification. This is the time for you to say, "God, there's no one in my life right now. That's wonderful because that means that I have the opportunity to give myself more fully over to a pursuit of Your word, a pursuit of Christ, a pursuit of prayer. I have the opportunity to grow in Christ without distraction and, Lord, I embrace that and I ask You to bless me as I seek to do that." In my own life, I had a small window of time, there were just a few short years there where my life was ordered in that way, and I look back with great fondness at the memories of those times of solitude with my Bible, solitude in prayer. You know, I'm very grateful to be married, I'm very blessed by God to have the wife I do and to have the children I do. I'm greatly greatly blessed but part of the way that the Lord gave me opportunity to prepare for that was there was this time of solitude where there weren't any relationships on the horizon. So we can all embrace this.

Well, let's get to these five questions that are so important and so vital that we see principles that come up from the book of Ruth itself, as I will show you as we go along. Question number 1 that you need to ask is this: is this man a godly man? Is this man a godly man, which is a different question than asking exactly how does he treat you. It's a different question than saying do you like him. It's a different question than saying do you love him. It's a different question than saying does he love you. We have to ask a different prior fundamental question is he a godly man and here's what we mean by that. First of all, it is a given that a Christian woman has no business marrying a non-Christian man. If you have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, you have no business pursuing a relationship, let alone getting married to a man who is not a Christian. There is no fellowship between light and darkness. There is no fellowship between the realm of Christ and the realm of Satan and it can only bring about heartache and misery for you to do that. There are plenty of people who have violated this principle to their long-lasting pain that would affirm the things that I am saying to you just by way of anecdotal affirmation. Do not marry a non-Christian man. If he cannot articulate a reasonable testimony of faith in Christ, if the word of God is not a living reality in his heart, don't marry him. Don't even get into a relationship with him. It can only bring you sorrow in the end. I speak to protect you.

Those things are a given, now what else can we say? Let's assume now that we're talking about two believers and in a relationship. What can we say to help them and to speak into their lives? Well, asking this question is he godly, one of the things that we see about Boaz is this, is that Boaz manifested godly speech and godly character. Look at Ruth 2:4. Boaz being a man of wealth had people working for him and look at how he interacts with them. Ruth 2:4, "Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem and said to the reapers, 'May the LORD be with you.' And they said to him, 'May the LORD bless you.'" You can see even in that brief interaction how Boaz has in mind, he's not looking at these men simply as workers doing tasks for him, sees them from a spiritual perspective and seeks the Lord's shalom, his peace on them; not that that's the word that is used there but he is seeking the Lord's blessing upon these men that are under his authority and it just naturally comes out. Listen, it's coming out naturally before he had even come to terms with Ruth. There was a prior established godliness in his character. There was a prior established godliness in who he was before their relationship even started. That's really really critical to see, especially when there are so many, you know, wonderful, beautiful, available, Christian women in this congregation, it's quite possible for word to get out and for men to come and to try to latch onto one of you ladies who don't share the convictions, don't share the love for Christ, they're just looking for a kind woman without this shared conviction and the shared the love for Christ. What was he like before he met you? That's a fair question. You need to know. The history of a man is an indication of what the future of that man will be.

Well, Boaz was manifesting godly speech beforehand and in chapter 2, verse 12, you see this as he's speaking to Ruth, he says, "May the LORD reward your work, and your wages be full from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge." Here is a man with his workers and with this woman that he had just met

earnestly seeking the blessing of God, thinking about them and reacting to them in a spiritual way, and wanting the blessing of God on their lives without regard to how it interacts and how it would affect him. This is one of the aspects that you look for, this kind of godliness, this concern for the spiritual well-being of others, not simply you but the spiritual well-being of others. In New Testament times, we would look for signs that this man has genuinely repented of sin and that he is bringing forth fruit of repentance that is consistent with that profession. We're looking for a man who makes an open unashamed testimony of his faith in Christ, and as a result of that faith, as we're going to see from a couple of verses here in just a moment, that there is spiritual fruit that is manifesting in this young man's life. This is not too much to ask. This is not too high a standard. We are only talking about what it means to be a Christian, that there would be some kind of fruit like this coming out of the man's life.

Go back to the New Testament in Paul's letters to Timothy. Timothy was a young man and Paul exhorts him to be godly. 1 Timothy 4:12 and as we turn to different passages of Scripture for the remainder of the message, I really want you to turn to these and look at them with your own eyes because you need to see this in the word of God for yourself. 1 Timothy 4:12, "Let no one look down on your youthfulness," so the idea of a young Christian man is at stake here, and what is it that that young man is supposed to bring forth out of his life? "In speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe." "Timothy, you young man, you manifest in your godliness what it is to be a Christian." That's not too much to ask of a young man. That's the standard. That's the biblical standard.

Now turn to 2 Timothy for just a moment, 2 Timothy 2:22. Paul tells Timothy in his parting words soon before Paul died, he said, "Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart." So there is a manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, being manifested in the life of this man. That's what we mean by is he godly, are there traits of the godliness that the Spirit of God produces in the hearts of redeemed, is there something like that coming out of his life? And that's different, my friends, from simply asking whether, you know, whether he's a good bloke, whether he's externally moral. That's different than asking whether he's physically pure. Those things all have their place but the external stuff is not a substitute for the spiritual reality of this work of the Holy Spirit in his heart being manifested in observable ways by those who know the man.

Now just step back from my own forcefulness of speech here, you know, the way that I would speak to a young couple in premarital counseling would be done perhaps with a little bit different tone than what I'm doing here from the pulpit but the reason that I am being so emphatic about this and spending so much time on this is because it's so very important, and because it's important, it evokes the deepest parts of my animation when I preach. As I said earlier, this has lifelong generational consequences. We should not trifle with these things. We don't need to be afraid of them, we don't need to be intimidated by them, we just need to deal with them earnestly and honestly. Is that too much? Of course it's not.

Secondly. So we asked the question is he godly, we see this from the life of Boaz. We supported it with a couple of New Testament cross-references to a young man. Question number 2: what do wise people think about him and your relationship? What do wise Christian people think about the man and the relationship? Here in the context of the book of Ruth, Naomi, a woman of God, the closest human relationship that Ruth had at the time, endorsed Boaz to Ruth.

Look at chapter 3, verse 1. Now Naomi her mother-in-law said to Ruth, "My daughter, shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you?" You see, 3,000 years ago Naomi spoke in the same spirit to Ruth that I'm speaking to you here today. I am simply seeking your security, that it may be well with you. I have no other agenda than that. And what Naomi says to Ruth is, "Boaz is our kinsman. Behold, he winnows barley at the threshing floor tonight. Wash yourself, anoint yourself and put on your best clothes, and go down to the threshing floor." She's endorsing Boaz to her and she tells him and she affirms Boaz to Ruth as a man that is worthy of her indication, of her support, of her coming together with. And Ruth says in verse 5, Ruth is teachable about it all, she says, "All that you say I will do." And Naomi affirmed Boaz to Ruth and gave her blessing to the relationship, you could say.

Here's the thing, my friends, and while we're focusing on the man and we'll focus on the woman next week, there's a lot of cross-pollination here in the principles that we're talking about. My friends, you single ladies desiring marriage maybe in a relationship, if this man is the marrying kind of man, it will not only be obvious to you, it will be obvious also to the godly people who are in your life. It will be obvious to the godly people in your life, not only to you. And you need to hear from mature believers who have an outside objective perspective on the whole matter, you need to hear from them what their perspective is, what their counsel is. The book of Proverbs speaks to the importance of receiving counsel as a believing person repeatedly, and I want to take you there because the general principles of Proverbs inform our perspective on seeking the counsel of wise, godly, mature, Christian people in what you are doing.

Proverbs 12:15. We're going to look both positive and negative perspectives on this from the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 12:15. When it comes to considering who you want to marry, you're going to have to answer a prior presuppositional question: am I going to be a wise person about this or not? Am I going to be wise about this or not? Proverbs 12:15 says, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel." Chapter 13, verse 10, "Through insolence comes nothing but strife, But wisdom is with those who receive counsel." Chapter 19, verse 20, Solomon saw fit to speak up and down this issue multiple times as he wrote to his son encouraging him to godliness. Proverbs 19:20, "Listen to counsel and accept discipline, That you may be wise the rest of your days." Listen to counsel, receive it, accept it, Scripture says. And when it comes to courtship-type relationships, my friends, you should especially heed the caution that comes from mature Christian believers in your life, you should especially heed the caution that is contrary to your own emotion in the relationship.

Now look, this is like, and you know, there's just a limit to what a preacher can do, and at this point I'm just utterly dependent upon the Holy Spirit to make this acceptable in the hearts of everyone that hears my voice here today because in some ways speaking these things, speaking caution to people that have their foot flat on the accelerator is like standing at the ocean and saying, "Stop! Stop with the waves! Stop with the tides!" You know, you have about as much opportunity to stop the ocean as you do to stop people who won't listen in the midst of a relationship, not just stop them but to help them and to encourage them and to give them things to think about. You know, this is the nature of the human mind and, parents, this is why it is so important for you to train your children and to condition your children on this years over time so that this is their own and it's not simply a last-minute brake that you're trying to apply in desperation when they've already got their minds made up. There has to be a lifelong cultivation of these things so that young people are thinking about these things properly. There is a limit to what a preacher can do. It's the parents who have, you know, the opportunity from the time they're knee-high.

Now saying what I said was you should especially heed caution that is contrary to your emotion, look at Proverbs 12:1. Proverbs has commended wisdom and shown the blessing on those who would receive counsel. Now we're going to look at some passages where he warns against those who refuse to receive it, who reject it, who are hardheaded, who won't listen to anyone. What does the Bible, what does the word of God say to someone like that? Well, it's not a flattering picture. Proverbs 12:1, "Whoever loves discipline," it could also be translated, "instruction," "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, But he who hates reproof is stupid." Proverbs 15:10, "Grievous punishment is for him who forsakes the way; He who hates reproof will die." Verses 31 and 32, "He whose ear listens to the life-giving reproof Will dwell among the wise. He who neglects discipline despises himself, But he who listens to reproof acquires understanding." There's the option laid out, you listen to reproof and it guides you, it helps you, it guards you, or you can reject it and suffer the consequences, and the problem is a prior heart attitude that says, "I don't want anyone to speak in my life, I don't want anyone to tell me anything. I'm my own man, I'm my own woman, no one speak to me." That ain't good. That's exactly what Scripture is reproving in these passages that we're looking at. Proverbs 29:1 and I read this almost with weeping in my heart knowing the illustrations that I'm about to give. Proverbs 29:1, "A man who hardens his neck after much reproof Will suddenly be broken beyond remedy."

Beloved, I plead with you, Christian counsel, pastoral input is not against your interests, it is only in your interests, and whether it is godly family, whether it is godly friends, whether it is the elders of your church, I beg you and I have this italicized in my notes because it's so important, listen to counsel. Listen to counsel. Seek counsel. "What do you think about this? Are there any yellow flags? Are there any red flags?" It's not that there has to be an utter veto over things but be receptive to the people who have manifested Christian living over a period of time and who have no vested interest in the relationship and what do you they say to you about it? Why would you not listen to that if your goal is simply to do the will of God and God commends godly counsel to you? Why would you not listen to it?

I have a relative, this is the painful example that just makes all of this so urgent to me. I have a relative who refused warnings that were made to her about the man that she proposed to marry. She rejected all of the counsel, and without going into any more detail than that I can simply tell you this, her scars in her heart verify the wisdom of God's word on this very point. The scars in her heart later in life verify the wisdom of God's word about receiving counsel. Look, I'm all in favor of young people getting married. I really am, just in the right way and with the right approach. Beloved, romantic emotion can blind you so that you're seeing only what you want to see and you just assume that all of life will work out no matter what else happens. That's the stuff of fairytales. That's not real life. And when emotion is blinding you and you've got your fingers in your ears not wanting anyone to talk to you, that's a very vulnerable place to be because biblical counsel protects you. And when biblical counsel comes, your own character is tested and even revealed by how you respond to it. There's no other way to say it.

So this is a very vital point. What do mature believers think about the man, think about your relationship? You need to listen to that and if, you know, if you're in that blessed the place where you're excited and you think you know what you're looking at and you have godly people coming alongside you and saying, "Yeah, I see that too. This is wonderful. God bless you. This is exciting." Then you're not reliant simply on your own emotion, you have the benefit of the people that God has put into your life to affirm it and give you an even greater sense of confidence as you move forward. Why wouldn't you want that?

Third question. We asked is he godly, we asked what do mature believers think about the man and the relationship? We saw Naomi affirming Boaz to Ruth. Let's ask this question: is he honorable? Is he honorable? Is he honorable in the context of the relationship? Boaz had Ruth at his feet in the middle of the night and he protected her honor rather than taking advantage of an opportunity for sin in the dark.

Look at Ruth 3:8. I need to turn back there too. Ruth 3:8, "It happened in the middle of the night that the man was startled and bent forward; and behold, a woman was lying at his feet." We saw how he protected her, he spoke gently to her. Verse 14, "she lay at his feet until morning and rose before one could recognize another; and he said, 'Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.'" Boaz protected Ruth's honor personally and then he instructed his workers, "You keep your mouth shut about this. You don't say a word lest it be misunderstood and aspersions be cast on her character by gossiping people." Ladies, a marrying kind of man will protect your virtue in the relationship. I'll say that again. A marrying kind of man will protect your virtue in the relationship. He won't take advantage of your affection. He should not pressure you for physical favors. He won't demand a premature emotional commitment from you that you're not ready to make. He won't pressure you about the relationship. He'll trust the providence of God for it. He does not try to control you. He is not repeatedly critical of you. And he certainly does not hurt you physically. You see any of that stuff starting to happen, just find the next exit and get out. If he's not honorable, you need to walk away.

Now, point number 4: is he kind? Is he kind? Boaz sent Ruth home with a gift for Naomi. In verse 15 he said, "'Give me the cloak that is on you and hold it.' So she held out her cloak, and he measured six measures of barley and laid it on her. Then she went into the city. When she came to her mother-in-law, she said, 'How did it go, my daughter?' And she told her all that the man had done for her. She said, 'These six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said,'" this is so sweet, "Do not go to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'" Boaz was kind to Naomi through Ruth.

Ladies, let me encourage you along this line. Look beyond how he dazzles you in private and ask some objective questions that you need to ask and understand and answer honestly. What are his family relationships like? How does he relate to the women in his life? How does he relate to the men in his life? Perhaps even more significantly, how does he treat people who can do absolutely nothing for him? How does he speak to people in the restaurant? How does he speak to people in the street? How does he react to drivers on the road? Those are little windows, those are like the portholes on a ship, you can look through and you can't see a whole lot but you can see through and see some things there that give you perspective about where the ship's at. How does he respond to people who cross him? How does he react when someone doesn't do what he wants them to do? How does he respond when pressure is on and things aren't going his way? Ask those questions. Why wouldn't you, because life is going to cross you both eventually. Get a sense of how he's going to respond.

Look beyond the outward displays of romance to consider what kind of man this is, and I plead with you, look closely, look hard because, ladies, here's the reality of life, these other matters, these other relationships, this is how he's going to treat you when the glamour is gone. Once he's got you under the bonds of matrimony, especially as professing Christians, the way that the totality of his life relationships are is eventually going to come down to you. If he's kind and gracious and all of that, then you can be really encouraged by what you see and look forward to a lifetime of blessing under the hand of God. If you see other things, darker things, don't ignore them thinking, "It won't come to me." It will. Don't ignore it thinking, "I can change him." You can't and you shouldn't get married with the thought of saying, "Well, I'll change him and make him like I want him to be." If you need to change him after you get married, then why are you getting married in the first place because these things show who he really is?

Fifthly and finally, I've gone a long time here, haven't I? Is he financially responsible? Is he financially responsible? Boaz was a man of great wealth. We saw how he handled the legal affairs well. He had people working under him. He was, you know, he was exemplary in that way. He was an older man. He was established. Well, let me say this. A marrying kind of man does not need to be wealthy. These character things are far more important than the matter of human resources. He doesn't need to be wealthy but he should at least have a work ethic, a demonstrable work ethic. He should have a plan of some kind to support you. Babies come and these things happen and so, ladies, beware of that man who can't seem to keep a job, beware of the man who never seems to finish a task, beware of the man who is a man of a thousand excuses and no accomplishments of

any kind. Even if he's a God-talker, even if he talks a good spiritual game, a man without some kind of work ethic is a man who is going to bring you misery.

Now those are the five questions that we've asked and answered. Let me just rehearse them again. Is he godly? What do mature believers think about him and the relationship? Is he honorable? Is he kind? Is he financially responsible? Now as we gather these things up and I'm about to close things up here, you know, and as we talk about godliness, you know, at some point someone needs to ask, you know, is he mired in an addiction to pornography? Have a man ask him that question. You shouldn't ask him that personally yourself. But is he mired in a hidden addiction to pornography?

Let me say a couple of things in closing, words of grace here. First of all, these are principles, not rigid externals. A young man, a young Christian, may still be in the process of establishing his patterns for life and that's okay. My dear wife married a man who was a young Christian, who had a lot of things still to sort out in his life. My dear wife is married now to a man who still has things to sort out in his life. We're not demanding perfection from anyone here, we're asking questions about direction of heart, trajectory of life that are based on more than a man's own profession, after all, this man, he's a sinner just like you are. Of course, he's going to have life blemishes. Of course, he may fall and stumble in the course of your courtship. That doesn't disqualify him but you're looking for trajectory, you're looking for patterns in different areas that should have some kind of general agreement with one another to have a sense of whether this is a marrying kind of man or not.

Can I add one more thing? Ladies, somewhere in the midst of this there ought to be something in that man that shows some kind of spiritual initiative or spiritual leadership, that this man has the capacity to talk to you intelligently about spiritual things, and that you're not trying to drag him along. "This is the doctrine I believe, don't you believe that too?" You know, you're pulling a resistant mule. No, look for a man who is committed to Christ before he was ever committed to you, who loved doctrine before you were ever a contingent factor in the consideration because the man who's growing in Christ is the one who can lead you to become more like Christ, who can have a sanctifying influence on your life.

And I thank God for the fact that there are men who have been married within the walls of our church over the past 10 years or so who are having that kind of sanctifying influence on their lives, and I love them for it, I praise God for it. They're setting a standard for the rest of us as to what this looks like and I'm grateful for it and I know their wives are too. And ladies, that's the kind of wake that you want to walk in. That's the path that you want to follow. That's what you want to look for and my prayer is that God will bless you in marriage as he has me, that God would give to you, if you desire marriage, that God would give to you what Peter calls the grace of life to share with a godly man. If you find a man like that, you will find that the full support of our church is behind you to help and encourage you, to pray for you and to make that marriage everything that you would have it to be. But we can't come alongside and fix problems that are long-lasting simply because principles of wisdom were violated in the process.

And so may God bless you, may God help you and give you wisdom and a teachable spirit, and my desire is to be 10 years from now that we'd have multiple families in our church with multiple children that had come up under this kind of instruction and pastoral care, and the blessing being spread out through generations to come. Will you pray with me to that end?

Father, we ask You to have mercy on our dear young people. We pray that You would sanctify them in the truth, Your word is truth, that You would bless them in every conceivable spiritual way, relational way, material way, Father, that they would sense the love and support that they have from this church. Make us a congregation that honors the institution of marriage and give help to these young people as they seek to find their way in a world that is stacked greatly against them. Father, may they find great encouragement knowing that greater is He who is in them than he who is in the world. We commit all these things to you in Jesus' name. Amen.

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