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**Core Seminar**

**Singleness & Courtship**

**Session 13: Things That Go Wrong**

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Have you ever played the telephone game? You sit in a circle of friends, whisper some message into your neighbor’s ear and then wait until it has been passed down the life of people until the end where the last person retells the message. What happens? Usually, and often amusingly, the message has changed.

Anytime something is taught or principles are laid out, we’re at risk of playing the telephone game with that message. We come from different backgrounds and seasons of life which means things *can* be heard differently either deliberately or unintentionally. So in our last class together, I’d like us to look at the topic of *Things that Go Wrong in our Courtship Culture*. Many of the topics we’ll look at are not unique to the CHBC culture and often don’t affect people dating within this church. But, over the years, we’ve found these six categories to show up from time to time.

For each of the six categories we’ll begin by seeking to understand what is going on and how we can make mid-course corrections.

1. **Paralysis**: *Hesitating to initiate from fear of the high-stakes nature of courtship.* In this situation, the man is afraid to initiate and ask the girl out. It might be that the he is simply being passive and needs to have some courage. Or, it might be that he’s concerned that any indication of showing interest may be mistaken for something more – as if the first date has to end with a marriage proposal. Or it may be a similar issue on her end. She’s freaked out that this guy she doesn’t know that well asked her out. Now, sometimes that’s a whole different issue—which we’ll get to in a moment. But sometimes it’s because he just wants to get to know you better. In either case, we don’t want a dating culture where a date carries any more significance than a date. A date doesn’t mean he wants to marry you, a date doesn’t mean you’ve decided this person is the one. A date is just a date.

We’ve talked about this throughout our time together, but for both single men and women in this congregation who are considering dating, remember this is *why* we date – to carefully and prayerfully determine if this is the person God would have me marry. So instead of letting fear paralyze you before you initiate or giving a relationship a chance, pray about it, do your best to get to know the person, get wise counsel, and then give it a shot! For many of us, our dating culture would be more healthy if the first date was *less* significant. And we can all help here. If one friend asks another friend out on a date, don’t start treating them like their halfway to engagement. A date is just a date.

1. **Stalkerism:** *Thinking you need to know everything about the person before dating.* Now, taking the time to observe someone before dating is an important thing to do. But, it’s a little freaky when a stranger approaches you and says, “You know, I’ve been watching you for the last five months and I’ve come to the conclusion that you and I should consider getting married.” That approach is probably not going to help you find a spouse; it will probably get you arrested. So, what are things you can do to avoid ‘cold-turkey’ dating?
   1. Hang out in groups – this is a great and natural way to get to know each other without the one-on-one focus, plus you get to see how they interact and care for others around them.
   2. Be a friend – relate to them as you would to any other friend. Remember this is your Christian brother or sister and it is good for us to treat them as such. It should be normal for us to have good friendships between men and women where we care for each other as brothers and sisters aside from a romantic context. This is part of you get to know someone without leading them on. Don’t get to know them as a potential girlfriend or boyfriend. Just get to know them as a friend.
   3. Talk to others who know them well.
2. **Narrowness –** *being so set on dating one person we miss someone else right in front of us.* Whether we’re hoping to date someone specific for the first time or hoping to get back together with someone we dated before, there are times we can’t get them out of our mind that we put on blinders to other possibilities. You have your list and you're waiting around for the person who fits your profile, and if another godly person comes along and doesn't fit, you say, "no."  Then, sadly, I often hear folks complaining that no one ever asks them out, when they actually should be saying, "My *ideal person* never asks me out." Now, this is not to say we can’t like someone specific; it’s not to say we can’t date someone we previously broke up with, it is simply a reminder to be *open*. Who knows, you’re future spouse may be someone right in front of you. (*Joan’s experience vs. mine)*
3. **Legalism** – *seeing courtship as an equation.* The singleness/courtship class is an important one in our core seminars – we’ve enjoyed teaching it and thank God for the fruitful discussions we’ve had both here and with many of you outside the class. But at times it can feel like we’re walking a tightrope over a dangerous chasm. To one side is a *disregard* of good biblical principles that can help us date well; on the other side is a tendency to make a wise principle law – *equal* with God’s word. It’s a tightrope worth walking, but we need to walk across it carefully.

One thing we’ve mentioned a number of times is that some things we’re talking about are issues of prudence and not explicit commands of Scripture. As a result, some things in the class are commanded from Scripture and should be followed by *every* Christian (e.g. abstinence before marriage, marrying a Christian) others are *principles[[1]](#footnote-1)* (length of courtship, holding hands, etc.) where each of us should be fully convinced in our own mind[[2]](#footnote-2) what God would have us do.

* In these areas of Christian freedom, we should strive to be charitable because relationships will look different, and that’s *okay*.
* We should be charitable in not *imposing* a non-biblical standard on others as law, even when we find personally helpful.
* On the other hand, we need to avoid the other extreme of closing our ears to the counsel of others because it is an area of Christian freedom. **Proverbs 12** reminds us, “The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man *listens* to advice.[[3]](#footnote-3)” Don’t be a fool because of your freedom.
* Finally, we should not date in such a way thinking that if we apply every principle we’ve heard in the class exactly right, we’ll end up with the perfect marriage. God uses such principles, but we need to rely upon Him, not in our method[[4]](#footnote-4).

1. **Selfishness –** *wanting to be married so badly we become preoccupied and only concerned with our self.* How do you know if you’re being selfish? Consider these three questions:
   1. Are you thinking only about what *you* want rather than what’s good for the other person?

***Philippians 2:3-4*** *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."*

* 1. Are you acting married when you’re not? In other words, are you expressing intimacy with words, acts, or physical affection before commitment?

***Song of Solomon 2:7b*** *“Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.”*

* 1. Are you ignoring others’ counsel so you can get what you want?

***Proverbs 18:1*** *"Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment."*

1. **“Evangedating”** – *Dating a non-Christian in hopes that they will become a Christian while dating.* This can be tempting for a number of reasons: you spend a lot of time with non-Christians at work, school, or your neighborhood; you’re getting more attention from them then you are other Christians; you became a Christian while you were dating and it’s hard to break up. Of course, it’s a good desire to see someone trust in Christ. But mixing a dating relationship with evangelism—for any reason—can be confusing and clouds the decision of the person considering the claims of Christianity. The Bible is clear that it is a sin[[5]](#footnote-5) to be unequally yoked in this way in marriage – it doesn’t make sense to enter into the most intimate of relationships when you don’t share or agree on what’s most important.

QUESTIONS???

\*Extra: **How to break up to the glory of God**[[6]](#footnote-6).

*Five things to remember:*

* 1. *Remember we live in a fallen world*. There is no such thing as risk-free dating. **Proverbs 13:12** reminds us that "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life." When there is a breakup, there is often at least one who still hoped it would work out and has that hope deferred. Though we wish it wasn’t this way, we need to have realistic expectations and ultimately put our hope not in the person we’re dating, but in God who *never* fails.

* 1. *A few Specifics…*
     1. Let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’ and your ‘no’ be ‘no’[[7]](#footnote-7) - don’t beat around the bush. If you know you need to break up, it’s better to rip the band-aid off and be straight forward. That doesn’t mean you should be cruel; we are still called to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15) and to speak only those words that build up and are fitting (Eph. 4:29).
     2. Talk in person, not on email, Twitter, Facebook or over the phone. This is a simple way to honor them and provide space for questions or discussion.
     3. Don’t make the breakup a one-way conversation. Often the person breaking up has taken a great deal of time to think, come to his/her conclusions and then unloads and leaves. Don’t do that. There are times when it will be helpful to leave room for a follow-up conversation, giving the "break-ee," if you will, a chance to hear and process a bit. They may have questions or things to discuss afterwards. Some people are good on their feet, some aren't...
     4. Don’t use the advice of a counselor as a trump card. “I talked to X about this, and he/she thinks we should break up.” It’s tempting to do this rather than taking responsibility oneself. When it comes to deciding who we will or won’t marry, we need to take advice, yet remember that ultimately this is a decision each person must make. If you agree with the counsel you are receiving, own it and make it your own.
  2. *Can we just be friends?* It is normal (and sometimes necessary) that your relationship *not* look exactly like it did before you dated. It’s okay to distance yourself or set some boundaries in order to protect your heart – give it some time. On the other hand, you have a responsibility to do good to that person as your Christian brother or sister. Paul says in **Colossians 3:13** "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” This *includes* a former boyfriend or girlfriend, especially if yours was heart that was broken.

It *is* possible to stay in the same church with the person you once dated. Too many people assume that they must leave because of how uncomfortable it is initially.  It’s easier to run and avoid then to do the hard work of living "at peace" with one another, and eventually (sometimes years later), again being friends.  It is not wrong to go to another church, but we don't want to presume that is the only thing you can really do after a break-up.

* 1. *Fight against bitterness* (Heb. 12:15). When our hope for the relationship is shattered, it is tempting to play the details over and over in our minds until we fester. What can we do to fight against bitterness?

* + 1. *Assume the best in the other person’s motives*. **1 Corinthians 13:7** reminds us that love “believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” We can’t peer into someone’s heart, judge their motives, and conclude that they were being malicious. Assume the best in them.
    2. *Preach truth to yourself[[8]](#footnote-8)*. For instance, when you find yourself struggling with the temptation toward bitterness, we can let go of bitterness because God is righteous and just – we don’t need to take vengeance into our own hands. Paul writes in **Romans 12:19, 21**, “Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord…Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” We can forgive by remembering how god has forgiven us in Christ as we see in **Ephesians 4:** “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.[[9]](#footnote-9)”
    3. *Love the person you broke up with*. Even if the command to “love your enemies” (**Matthew 5:44**) might feel like it applies right now—your job is still to love. One way you can do that is by working to protect the reputation of the person you’d been dating. You might consider picking just a few close friends to process things with—rather than detailing the break-up with all your friends. You want to protect and build up that person in your speech.
    4. *Hope in God*. **Psalm 27:13-14** "I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord." Remember that your identity is in Christ now—just like it was in the dating relationship. You aren’t defined by the relationship or by its ending. One implication of that is that when people ask you how you’re doing, this doesn’t need to be the whole of your answer. After all, most of the church isn’t thinking as much about your break-up as you are. Above all else, you need to trust God’s plan for you. He has a perfect plan, and nothing will dissuade him from it. It is likely that there will come a day, not too far in the future, when this break-up will make more sense. But if not then, certainly from the perspective of heaven you’ll be able to agree with all that God has done and call it good. (Rev. 15:4)
  1. *Remember the importance of dating well.* Obviously, this is helpful to know and do *before* you end a dating relationship, but when we date well, we avoid *unnecessary* pain and regret.

**Conclusion**

1. Romans 14:1 “Accept him whose faith is week without passing judgment on *disputable matters*” (my emphasis) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Rom. 14:5 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Prov. 12:15 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Prov. 3:5-6 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 1 Cor. 7:39b “she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.” Also, 2 Cor. 6:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 1 Cor. 10:31 "So whether you eat or drink or *whatever* you do, do it all for the glory of God." [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Matt. 5:37 “Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Examples of preaching to yourself would be Psalm 42:5, 62:5 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Eph. 4:32 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)