Core Seminars—Singleness and Courtship

Week 7

# Things that Go Wrong in our Courtship Culture

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 nine categories we’ll begin by seeking to understand what is going on and how we can make mid-course corrections. 1srt six – wrong things that happen before we date. Last three, wrong things that happen while we date.

**Things that God Wrong *Before* We Date**

1. **Territorialism**: *You declare your interest in someone in order to stop others from getting in your way.* You tell friends that you are interested in a certain someone who has caught your eye. And you do this to get dibs on the person. By declaring your interest, you make it socially awkward for anyone else to ask them out. Yet, because of your nervousness, or because you’ve been really busy, you haven’t spent the time that is needed to get to know the person, or more importantly ask them out on a date. You’re slow in doing something about it, and you prevent everyone else from pursuing the person since they don’t want to hurt your feelings. Our advice to you: Fish or cut-bait. You either need to do something about the relationship, or back off so someone else can initiate with the person.
2. **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 – that the first date has to end with a marriage proposal. 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!
3. **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 and I’ve come to the conclusion that you’d make a great spouse.” 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.
   3. Talk to others who know them well.
4. **Narrowness –** *being so set on dating someone we miss someone 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, then 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. (*personal illustration)*
5. **Test Driving a New Car**: *Flirting and vulnerability prior to dating.* I (Deepak) remember several years ago I was talking to a single man who had been talking, emailing and texting extensively with a young lady in our church. He had been spending a lot of time getting to know her and asking deep questions to get her to be vulnerable and open up to him. But here is the kicker: He still wasn’t sure if he wanted to date her. He was still evaluating. What a jerk. He opens up her heart, leaves her exposed, and he’s not sure if he’s going to pursue her yet. Sadly, she went along with it because she was really interested in him. They were still at the friends stage without having made any kind of commitment. Guys: Take time to get to know someone you are interested in, but be very careful how much you ask a girl to be vulnerable. Too much vulnerability in a relationship is likely to lead to an emotional divorce when things don’t work out. After a while of getting to know the gal, be courageous enough to either commit to the relationship (and communicate your intentions) or move on. Don’t test drive the girl and then drop her.
6. **Keeping Too Many Ponies in the Stable**: You (*women) take advantage of the fact that men are interested*. You are an attractive woman who has several men ask you out. Rather than picking one and sticking with him, you decide to check out every one of them. You prefer not to commit because you’re constantly waiting for the “right” guy to show up. You like to keep a couple of ponies in the stable because you want to keep your options open. One gal commented after going out on a dinner date with a different guy every night: “After all, a gal’s got to eat, right?” Women, please don’t do this. When you take advantage of a man’s interest, you are defrauding the man (1 Thess 4:6). From early on, you need to train your own heart to be committed to one man. It’s good preparation for marriage. Keeping your options *all* open shows that you can’t trust God in your dating relationships (Prov 3:5-6), and that you are more of a selfish than you might want to admit.

**Things that Go Wrong *While* We Date**

1. **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 we know if we’re being selfish? Consider three questions that can serve us in assessing whether we’re being selfish:
   1. Are you thinking only about what *you* want rather than what is 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 to 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. Regardless of why, it is a good desire to see someone trust in Christ, but mixing a dating relationship with evangelism 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 is most important.

QUESTIONS???

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

*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.

*A few Specifics…*

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).

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.

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...

Don’t use the advice of a counselor, trusted friend or authority figure (parent, pastor, etc.) 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.

*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.

*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?

* *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.
* *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)”
* *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." We need to remember that just as our identity is in Christ in the dating relationship (we are not defined by this relationship or by being pursued). So, too, in the breaking up...this broken relationship does not now define you. Most of the church is not thinking as much about it as you are, so when people ask you how your life is, feel free to share other things that are going on, as there are likely many things to talk about. Perhaps even being careful to only talk to a couple of close friends about the details of how you are processing or struggling, just to protect and build up the other person in your speech

*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.

*Remember that regardless of how painful the breakup may be, God is using this difficult experience to sanctify you*. Paul says in **Romans 8:28**: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Your breakup is included in this phrase “all things.” If you are a Christian, God is using this experience for your good. As hard as this is, he is making you more like his Son. You might not want that *right now*. With the pain and sorrow over the lost relationship, what you might want more is your ex-boyfriend or girlfriend. Or you might want to just wallow in your hurt or sadness. But take comfort from the fact that God wants to use this to refine you, using trials “of various kinds” (James 1:2) to help you become more like Christ.

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)