

Wisdom in Singleness and Marriage: Proverbs

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Today is our 3rd sermon in a 10 week series on marriage. And we're moving our way through the Bible. We're moving from left to right through the biblical revelation, wanting to listen to what God has to say to us about this amazing thing He created called marriage. We looked at marriage as God intended it in the first two chapters of Genesis. We then saw the sad state of marriage in the fall, how sin wreaked havoc in that first marriage . . . and we continue to see the effects of the fall in marriages today.

Now we're taking a leap from the beginning of the Old Testament to the middle. We're skipping forward to the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. We'll have a sermon this morning from the book of Proverbs, and then a sermon next Sunday from Song of Solomon. You can think of next week like coming to a wedding. It will be a wedding sermon.

Another text I had considered for this series is the book of Hosea, but I just preached from Hosea back in April when Mike and Chris Dove renewed their wedding vows. Many of you probably remember that celebration, and I kind of consider that morning to be part of this sermon series, just removed by a few months. You can find that sermon on the website if you'd like to listen to it.

So after these 2 sermons from the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, we'll then move to the New Testament and look at texts in Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 7, Ephesians 5 and 1 Peter 3. God's Word has a lot to say about marriage and singleness and purity. And it's all for our good and for God's glory. So it's definitely worth our time and attention to listen to God's instructions on these important matters.

Well, this morning we're going to turn our attention to several passages in the book of Proverbs as we glean wisdom pertaining to both singleness and marriage. I'll use three exhortations to guide our study through these themes in Proverbs: flee temptation, find a godly spouse, be faithful to your spouse.

The book of Proverbs was put together specifically with young men in mind. But as we read these proverbs that instruct young men how to flee temptation and how to find a godly wife and how to be a faithful husband, we'll broaden out these statements to understand the application for all of us.

Flee Temptation

Proverbs 5:1–6

The message for all of us is to flee temptation. Speaking to young men, these verses describe the allure of sexual temptation by the forbidden woman. This temptation may present itself in various ways, to both men and women. It may be an individual who is flirtatious and dresses immodestly or provocatively. It may be an image on the cover of a magazine in the grocery store. It may be a romantic novel that glorifies fornication or adultery. It may be a commercial on TV or an picture on the internet. It may happen through social media or through a service like the Ashley Madison company which has been in the news recently. A company that helps people connect with others who wish to commit adultery. Their slogan goes like this, “Life is short. Have an Affair.” We are confronted daily with images and messages that seek to tempt us with what is forbidden. God created physical intimacy to be enjoyed by a husband and wife in the lifelong covenant relationship of marriage. Outside of marriage, sexual activity is forbidden. The world mocks that vision of purity. The world calls that oppressive and boring and archaic. But the world lies to us.

I read an interesting interview this week in *WORLD* magazine. Marvin Olasky interviewed **J. Budziszewski**, a political philosopher who teaches at The University of Texas at Austin. He has some valuable insights into youth culture, having led philosophy classes with college students for 34 years. He has seen the emptiness of the sexual revolution and how that has impacted so many young lives. When asked about the church’s response, he says, “We haven’t a chance of getting people to live a Christian way of life if they think it is just a collection of joy-killing rules. What we should explain is that Christian morality is a prerequisite for happiness, and that it makes us more free, not less—free to do what is good rather than being jerked around by desires. People need to have the vision of the good that temptation is pulling them away from.”¹

That is a very profound, and true, statement. You can’t have true happiness apart from God and apart from walking in His ways. That’s why, first and foremost, we want to call people to faith in Christ. Look to Him for forgiveness. Seek your joy in Him. And as you walk in His ways you will experience a happiness that is totally missing in the world’s recipe for fun.

¹ *WORLD* magazine, September 5, 2015

One more paragraph I'll read to you from **Professor Budziszewski**, because it's just so good and so applicable to what we're thinking about here.

He says, "Teens need deeper instruction and honest talk. Very few people fall away from God because the intellectual case against God convinces them. More often, a naïve young Christian falls into some sort of sin, doesn't want to repent, and starts looking for reasons to believe God doesn't exist. It's also easier to guard against temptation if you understand how it works and how to avoid it. A young man may intend to remain chaste, yet no one ever explained to him that if he spends a lot of time alone with girls in dark rooms, he's unlikely to achieve what he's aiming for." Those are wise words.

So beware of the lies of the world around us. Beware of the lies that your own sinful inclinations will whisper in your ear. And put the necessary parameters around your life to help you remain on the path of true happiness.

My prayer for all of you this morning is that God will show you so powerfully (more powerfully than the world could impress its message upon you) that He loves you so much, and He wants you to be so happy, that He gave these wise instructions to protect you from harm and preserve your purity so that you might have far greater pleasures than anything the world offers.

Augustine, who lived in the 300s A.D., is a great example of someone who left a worldly lifestyle, by God's grace, and found far greater joy in a life of following the Lord. He was living with his girlfriend and was in bondage to that lifestyle of sexual immorality. But as God was drawing Augustine to Himself, Augustine felt the fierce battle between the pleasures of sin and the pleasures of purity. The pleasures of purity won out, praise be to God. And I hope you, too, will have a vision for purity that will help you to fight temptation and flee temptation, so that you can enjoy the blessings of God.

I also want to say to all of you this morning that there is forgiveness for our sins. Maybe you've really messed up. Maybe you've sinned sexually in ways that continue to affect your life, and you just feel like you'll never be able to experience God's blessing on your life. Look to the cross, friend. Don't wallow in grief. It's appropriate to have sorrow for what you've done, but don't live there. Don't remain there. Lift your eyes to see the redemption that comes through Christ. Confess your sin, repent of your sin, fight against present temptations, and find great comfort in the forgiveness we have in Christ.

Consider some of the warnings in Proverbs chapters 6-7.

“Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched?” (Proverbs 6:27–28, ESV)

That’s an important warning to flee temptation. Don’t flirt with temptation. Don’t minimize the devastating effect of falling into temptation. You might have a certain standard in your mind, a certain line that you’re committed not to cross. And you might think that anything else is OK as long as you don’t cross that line. A teenager who has been brought up in church might think, As long as I’m still a virgin when I get married . . . Or a married person might think, As long as I don’t commit adultery . . . That kind of reasoning can be used to justify all kinds of wickedness and impurity. To think that way is just as foolish as going up to a bonfire and thinking, I can pick up one of those burning logs, and it won’t hurt me. As long as I don’t actually jump into the fire. That’s insane. And similarly, to think that you can watch sensual movies and listen to sensual music and hang out with folks who are talking about who’s sleeping with who, and it’s not going to affect you – that’s insane. You’re going to get burned. So beware. Be careful who your friends are. And be careful what you’re exposing yourself to by way of media. Don’t think you can walk on coals without scorching your feet.

We also have to understand that the whole matter of purity is not just about outward behavior. It’s about the heart. As Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, *“everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Matthew 5:28, ESV)* So we need to engage the battle at that level. It’s not just about what you do with your body. It’s about what’s going on in your mind, in your thoughts, in your heart.

Fleeing temptation starts in your heart. You must guard your heart. You must guide your thoughts toward things that are pure.

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” (Philippians 4:8, ESV)

Where your mind goes, there your actions will go also. As you guard your thoughts, as you meditate on Scripture, then you will have much ammunition to battle the temptations when they come. Like Joseph did when Potiphar’s wife was trying to seduce

him. He had the right frame of mind. He was thinking about God. He said, How could I do this great wickedness and sin against God? (Genesis 39:9) And Joseph fled out of the house. That's a concrete example of the instruction from 1 Corinthians 6 to flee sexual immorality. That's exactly what Joseph did. And it's exactly what we should do as well. Don't play with fire. Run away from it!

Look at what the proverbs say about the fool who does not flee temptation, but rather walks right into the trap.

“With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him. All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast till an arrow pierces its liver; as a bird rushes into a snare; he does not know that it will cost him his life.” (Proverbs 7:21–23, ESV)

That sounds a lot like Jesus' warning: "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell." (**Matthew 5:29**, ESV)

My question for us this morning is, Are we going to recognize how much is at stake when it comes to fighting for purity? Jesus is not saying that you're actually supposed to gouge out an eye, but He's saying you need to fight hard, you need to make sacrifices, you need to give up some things, whatever it takes, to avoid and resist the temptations that come our way. Get rid of the internet if you have to. Get rid of your TV if you have to. Confess your sexual sins to trusted Christian friends. Ask for accountability. Some of these measures may seem as painful as cutting off a hand or gouging out an eye, but it's worth it. Fight, by the power of the Spirit, to kill the momentary pleasures of sin and pursue the never-ending pleasure of following Jesus.

Yesterday morning at men's breakfast, Doug Miller led our Bible discussion and made a very strong point about our need to fight sin, kill sin, not be at peace with sin in our lives. It was very powerful. And it's very needed for us to hear that message.

I want to speak to parents now for a moment about how we need to be attentive to our children and shepherd them well as they grow up and as these temptations begin to appear. How can we protect their purity and prepare them for marriage, if God would have them to be married someday? How can we help our kids fight and flee temptation? Well we need to realize that "The Talk" shouldn't be just one talk. It should be a series of many

conversations. And I think some of these conversations with our kids need to start relatively young, even in the elementary years.

There are some good resources out there that can help you with this. *The Squire and the Scroll: A Tale of the Rewards of a Pure Heart* is a good book for a dad to read through with his young son. *The Princess and the Kiss: A Story of God's Gift of Purity* is a great book for a mom to read with her young daughter. The ministry of FamilyLife with Dennis Rainey has some great materials for talking to your children about purity. One of them is called Passport2Purity, designed to be used when a young person is entering the teen years. There are also a series of short books by Stan and Brenna Jones that are very helpful. The series is entitled God's Design for Sex, and there are books aimed at several different age groups. Age-appropriate discussions for you to have with your kids about purity and sexuality.

There are lots of resources you can find to help you. But a good place to start is right here in Proverbs. Simply talking through some of these verses we're looking at this morning and trying to have age-appropriate conversations that will keep the dialogue open.

And I would exhort the children here, too. Listen to your parents. Listen to Proverbs. Listen to everything God's Word has to say about these things. You need godly wisdom to help you deal with the temptations that are coming your way. Don't resent the fact that your parents want to help you and teach you. They're just trying to keep you from grabbing ahold of that burning log. They're trying to keep you from walking off to be slaughtered like an ignorant ox.

There was an interesting news story I came across a few years ago about a guy who attempted an armed robbery. What he didn't realize, though, was that the man he was trying to rob was a mixed martial arts fighter. Here's what the news report said, "A mugger in Chicago clearly didn't know his potential victim very well. Police say 24-year-old Anthony Miranda tried to mug a man in Chicago's Southwest Side neighborhood on Dec. 2 after asking the victim for a lighter. When the unidentified victim said he didn't have a lighter, Miranda produced a gun and ordered the victim out of the car. Once out of the car, the victim, later revealed to be a mixed-martial artist, began pummeling the surprised Miranda. While receiving his beating from the MMA fighter, Miranda accidentally shot his own leg, inflicting a serious wound

to his own ankle. Once out of the hospital, Miranda will face charges of armed robbery and aggravated discharge of a firearm.”²

As I think about that incident it makes me think of all the ways that people think they can just play around with sex, and they think they’re not going to get hurt. People think they can do what they want, when they want, without any consequences. They’re like the adulteress in Proverbs 30:20 who treats sex as casually as eating a meal, and says, “I have done no wrong.”

I say this to young people especially, if you think you can experiment with the ways of the world and not get hurt, you’re fooling yourself. You’ll end up shooting yourself in the foot, just like this guy did. Sex is more powerful than you can imagine. It has the potential for amazing pleasure and fulfillment and intimacy in its appropriate, God-given context. But violate God’s plan and design, and you will regret it.

Find a Godly Spouse

Now, the pursuit to guard your purity is not ultimately about self-denial. This is not a “Just Say No” campaign. It’s about saving yourself for something very wonderful. Purity will bring far greater satisfaction in the long run, whether you remain single or someday get married. If you do get married, as many of you young people will, here are some things you should look for in a spouse.

The description of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31 is helpful in many respects. It sets an example that women can aspire to. It is also a good exhortation for men to praise those women in our lives (a wife, mother, sister, daughter) who fear the Lord. And I certainly count myself very blessed to have a wife who fears the Lord. God has been very good to me to allow me to be married to Stacy. I like to take these opportunities to say publically how thankful I am to have a wife who loves the Lord, loves His Word, loves me and our kids, and loves to serve others. I am a very fortunate man, indeed. So that’s another great application of this chapter, that we should express our gratitude for Proverbs 31 women in our lives . . . and not just on Mother’s Day.

And then this chapter is also very helpful for any single person who is hoping and praying to be married, because this gives a description of the kind of person you should be looking for.

Let’s consider a few characteristics briefly. The description is of the virtuous woman, but we can also think of

² WORLD magazine, January 14, 2012, page 17.

many of these characteristics in terms of what a woman should be looking for in a man. So we'll apply it generally.

First of all, **she is trustworthy**. Look at verse 11, "The heart of her husband trusts in her . . ." Her husband trusts her. He is never worried about her faithfulness to him. He never has to wonder if she is using their money in dishonest or foolish ways. As you are getting to know someone who would be a potential spouse, you must consider if the person is honest and trustworthy. Does he or she have a track record of following through on their word?

Second, **she is a helper to her husband**. Verse 12, "She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life." Verse 23, "Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land." It seems odd that right in the middle of this passage about the woman who fears the Lord there's a verse about the husband. But it makes a point about the woman's commitment to her husband. Her work at home and service to her husband benefits his reputation and success. He is a better man because he is married to her. And in verse 28 he praises her because of her virtue. You should look for a person to marry who is going to encourage you and work alongside you in a complementary manner. A married couple should be stronger together than they would be apart.

Third, **she is a hard worker**. This is seen throughout the passage. Look, for instance, at verses 13-16, "She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar. She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her maidens. She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard."

The godly wife and mother works efficiently in managing her household. She redeems the time. She is so dedicated to the success of her husband and children that she works and plans and prepares food and provides clothes. As Titus 2 says, she is "busy at home" or "working at home."

It also appears that this woman is doing some work outside of the home. In verse 16 she considers a field and buys it. In verse 18 she perceives that her merchandise is profitable. In verse 24 "she makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchant." I think the emphasis we need to see in this passage is that the woman who fears the Lord works hard to serve her husband and care for her family, and those are the core commitments that motivate her work, whether it's guiding the myriad of tasks at home or, in addition to that, selling some of her

merchandise to earn extra income. Whatever she's doing, her focus is on her husband and her family.

This is an important thing to talk about as you are approaching marriage. A dating couple, engaged couple, should talk very seriously and candidly about their understanding of the roles of the husband and wife in the home and how they see that playing out in their married life together.

Fourth, **she helps those in need**. Verse 20, "She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy." This woman looks to the needs of her family, but she also looks to other needs around her. She is generous and hospitable and helpful. In verse 26 it says, "She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue." She looks for ways to help others, both in practical, tangible ways, and also in emotional and spiritual ways. She is a sage, and others will seek out her wise counsel and benefit from it. You want to marry a person like that—someone who is not just consumed with their own selfish activities and entertainments, but who delights to help others.

Fifth, **she is not overcome by worry**. Verse 25 says, "she laughs at the time to come." This woman fears the Lord, and out of her fear of the Lord flows wisdom and kindness and hard work. And because of these things she can look to the future without being overcome by worry. The virtuous, godly woman will trust in God, and in His providential plans for her. Therefore she won't be consumed with fretting over the details of the future. She will laugh at the time to come.

This gets at the core characteristic that you should look for in a spouse. Does this person fear the Lord? Is this person a believer? Don't compromise on this point. Don't enter into a marriage where you're going to be unequally yoked. Christ must be the foundation of the relationship, and then you can both look to Him, trust in Him, and laugh at the days to come.

Here are a few other words of wisdom that pertain to looking for a spouse.

"Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion." (**Proverbs 11:22**)

Guys and girls need to heed this word. Don't just consider how a person looks. Stacy just had a haircut the other day and the stylist was a single woman who shared some of her frustrations with dating sites that are only about how people look. You swipe this way if you think the person is cute, swipe this way if you don't. Don't let that be the main factor in choosing who to date, or who to marry. Don't just consider appearances. You have to look at the character of the person.

“An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rotteness in his bones.” (Proverbs 12:4)

Don't take marriage lightly. The marriage union is life-long. You're making a covenant with that person, till death do you part. So choose wisely. Choosing a godly spouse will be like a crown to your head, but choosing an ungodly, foolish spouse, will be like rotteness in your bones.

“He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD.” (Proverbs 18:22)

This is the blessing that a good marriage can be.

And then there are verses that describe the life-draining burden that a bad marriage can be.

“It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife.” (Proverbs 21:9)

“A continual dripping on a rainy day and a quarrelsome wife are alike; to restrain her is to restrain the wind or to grasp oil in one's right hand.” (Proverbs 27:15–16)

So think and pray and seek counsel about the characteristics you should be seeking in a potential spouse, and then resolve in your mind that you're not going to settle for anything less. You should be looking for someone who is godly and mature, someone who studies the Bible and is a member of a church and accountable to other believers, someone who is a hard worker, who is responsible with money, who is honest, kind, self-controlled, someone who can admit their faults, confess sin and seek forgiveness.

If you're in a dating relationship you should introduce this person to as many friends of yours as possible, including your family and your church family. See if anyone has any red flags. This is what humility looks like in a dating relationship. Don't think that you know better than everyone else. Invite the counsel of others.

Be Faithful to Your Spouse

Lastly, and briefly, everyone must also have a vision for faithfulness in marriage. We must all flee temptation. Those who desire to be married should find a godly and wise spouse. And then as you enter into the covenant of marriage you must do so with a commitment to faithfulness.

"Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love. [This is encouragement to enjoy God's design for marriage. But then here's also a warning] Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman and embrace the bosom of an adulteress? For a man's ways are before the eyes of the Lord, and he ponders all his paths. The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin." (Proverbs 5:18-22)

Two things I want to highlight here. First is the reminder that a person's ways are before the eyes of the Lord. And this brings us back to the Ashley Madison company and the recent news story about the group that hacked into their system and exposed personal data of more than 30 million people who had signed up for those services. Again, this is a company designed to help people commit adultery, and to do so secretly. What a startling development that the sin of all these folks has been exposed, through the unlikely means of a group of internet hackers.

In a weird way this is a foreshadowing of the final judgment. It's a little glimpse into what it will be like for every person to have all their deepest and darkest secrets made public. Don't ever say to yourself, "Nobody will ever know." God knows. And if you bring those sins to Him, asking for mercy, clinging to Christ, then you'll have nothing to worry about, nothing to fear, nothing to hide.

And then please notice the very positive way that these verses speak of marital love. This is what Professor Budziszewski, whom I quoted earlier, would want us to emphasize. God is not a killjoy! Do you see this? There is delight, there is intoxicating love to be enjoyed in God's plan. Depart from that plan, though, and you will be like a prisoner to your sin. You'll be held fast in the bonds of sin. Some of you know exactly what that feels like and you may be experiencing that right now. You need Christ to free you, redeem you, forgive you.

Hebrews 13:4 says, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled [that is God's ideal, that is God's beautiful design held out before us, that's the honorable and pure passion we should pursue, but then here's a warning as well], for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous." There's the carrot and the stick. In this fallen world, God redeems His people through the blood of Christ and He gives us clear instructions about how we ought to live. His instructions are for our good (I hope you hear that!). He wants us to know the happiness of what He designed for us. So He presents His great

promises, and also His warnings, that those who continue to rebel against Him will be judged.

I hope that we can all benefit from what we've seen here in Proverbs. I hope we will all be striving to live wisely, as singles, as those who hope to be married someday, as those who are dating or engaged, and as married couples. May God be glorified as we delight in the good instructions He has given us. After all, He made us in this way. He came up with the idea of sex and marriage. He created us as male and female. And it's all for His glory, for there to be such a thing as marriage in our world in order to portray a picture of Christ and the church. Because for all of us, single and married, the intimacy we most need and desire, is found in a relationship with Jesus. I hope we will all find that today.