

Dating, Sex, Marriage
RUF, Fall 2012

Relationships: The Search for Security and Fulfillment

Ephesians 5:15-33

"If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." (C. S. Lewis)

Scripture Introduction

Please turn with me in your handout to Ephesians 5:15-33. Tonight, we are beginning a 7-week series on Dating, Sex, and Relationships.

I'm going to read a long passage for context. It's in your handout. But I really only want to focus on verses 31-32 tonight. I understand there will be other things you hear in this passage that beg for more explanation. I will not touch on them in our brief time together. But I will be available afterwards if you'd like to talk more.

This is what a Christian leader named Paul wrote to a church in an ancient Greek city called Ephesus:

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 5:13-33

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. **"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."** This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Pray

Introduction

In 12 years of campus ministry, I've had the privilege of talking about relationships. A lot. Dating... near-dating... the fallout from dating... the drama... the heartache... the regrets... the confusion... the intoxication... the mundane... even the strange... and the crazy. We have it all here at SMU. Variety.

But in the midst of all the variety, I want to share with you a familiar script.

Jack is a boy. Jill is a girl. Jack and Jill attend SMU for the superb educational opportunities. In the midst of pursuing 14 majors between them, Jack and Jill meet, flirt, text, hang out, start talking, go out, do more stuff together, (maybe in that order, maybe not), and then...

Jill begins to wonder one day *what they are*. Are they in a relationship? Is it time to update the Facebook status or start a Jack and Jill fan page? Are they boyfriend and girlfriend? And what does that mean exactly? Are they exclusive? Sure, she reasons, we're going on dates, but are we dating? What do I tell my friends? Shouldn't we talk about it? But that might freak Jack out. But why should that freak Jack out? Doesn't he like me? Why can't he talk about us? What is he thinking? What am I thinking?

So, the confusion begins. Jill begins to question *the status of their relationship*. And because there is no clear status, she becomes anxious and uncertain and insecure... and, secretly pissed off and passive aggressive towards Jack.

Poor Jack. (If that's possible.) Jack has really not thought about any of this. All he thinks about is that fact that in one of their conversations, Jill mentioned that she likes cats. Jack hates cats. Jack doesn't know if he can be with someone who likes cats. And come to think of it, Jill doesn't think that Hot Tub Time Machine is a very funny movie. And to top it off, she texts him all the time about absolutely NOTHING. All of this has begun to annoy Jack. A girl who likes cats is one red flag. A girl who doesn't have the right sense of humor is a second. A girl who likes cats, doesn't have the right sense of humor AND who always wants to talk... that's borderline psychotic. But Jack figures, "She's hot," so maybe she's worth some of the crazy.

So Jack and Jill are confused.

Jill wants order. Jack wants compatibility.

Jill wants definition. Jack wants someone who fits him.

Now this scenario could be totally reversed. Maybe it's Jack who wants definition and Jill who hates that Jack loves cats. The point is this...

What we generally long for in all our relationships are two things. They are very simple. We long for (1) SECURITY and we long for (2) FULFILLMENT.

Security and Fulfillment.

Let me explain.

I. Our SEARCH

1. Security

Take security first. We are schizophrenic about defining our relationships. On one hand, we want to nurture spontaneity and freedom. We want to throw out the playbook. Right?

But on the other hand, we crave definition to bring order out of the chaos and confusion.

So, we have labels. And the labels help us to make sense of the gray areas. They help us to formalize relationships that are all essentially some version of, “I’m not ready to be married yet.” And the sheer quantity of these labels continues to grow. “Dating,” hanging out, talking, hooking up, friends with benefits, boyfriend and girlfriend...

... all of these labels come with rules, and roles, and expectations. Essentially, they tell us where we are on the relational map.

What does this mean? Why do we label things? Because as human beings we need structure in order to relate well to one another. We need rules and roles in order to protect ourselves from getting hurt. We want to be vulnerable on one hand, but vulnerability requires safety and trust, which flows from order and security.

Jill feels this acutely in her relationship with Jack!

I certainly felt it when I knelt down and asked Jada to marry me 11 years ago next month...

2. Fulfillment

... But let’s face it, we also don’t want to be with someone who likes cats (my apologies to cat-lovers!). We want security, but we also want someone who makes us happy, who fits us like a puzzle piece. Think about our language when it comes to relationships. We justify relationships through the language of compatibility.

“He’s perfect for you.”

“She really balances him out.”

“They are such a good fit for one another.”

Here’s another example.

I want you to think of your “LIST.” The inventory in your mind that describes the sort of person suited for you– the catalogue you use to measure potential romances.

Got it?

Now step back for a moment mentally and think about your list. How did you arrive at those characteristics?

- Someone who is fun, but not too clingy;

- Someone who is confident, but caring;
- Someone who really gets me, and who gets along with my friends;
- Someone who will make a lot of money one day (thank you for your honesty).

What is your list based on? It's based on YOU... right? You are the reference point for your own romantic hopes. You are looking for someone who will fit and fulfill you.

You have to admit... it's all a little self-centered... to measure other people by their ability to complete YOU.

So why do we do it?

I think the answer is easy. There is a sense in which we are *incomplete in and of ourselves*. The Bible tells us in Genesis 1 that we were not made to be alone, and we intuitively know that. We know that life is better when we can share it and sharing is better when it comes easily.

So... our language and our lists tell us something about who we are: **We deeply want security (safety, order). And we deeply want fulfillment (completion, deep connection).**

And here's the big point I want to make tonight. Here's my first controversial statement for the semester (but more to come!):

You cannot get either of these things from dating.

What you long for in dating is really marriage.

But Paul goes even further than that in our passage. He says that what you long for in marriage is really to know and be known by God.

What you long for in romance is a relationship with God.

In other words, dating cannot provide security and fulfillment... no matter how hard you push. In fact, dating relationships begin to go radically haywire when they attempt to be little marriages – emotionally, sexually, whatever.... You won't find what you're looking for in a dating relationship...

You'll only find a shadow of it in a good marriage...

Only God can give us both security and fulfillment in full measure.

II. Our HOPE

Let's look at verses 31-32 again:

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

Paul's argument here is simple: Marriage, the most intimate of human relationships, is an illustration for the relationship between Jesus and his people, the Church. The most intimate of human relationships is a signpost in life pointing us to something even deeper and richer for which we were created.

1. Security

Take **security** first. What is security? Security is safety. You have secure passwords to keep your identity and personal information safe, to stave off betrayal and financial abuse... to protect us. The same thing is true in our relationships. We want secure relationships because we want our hearts to be safe. But dating (and anything close to it) by definition is NOT a secure relationship. What is it then? Dating is a tryout. It's an audition.

Now sometimes, I realize, in the intoxicating spirit of love, promises get made... and I know they feel in the moment so secure and so sincere and so unbreakable. But they are more easily broken than my five-year promising me he won't throw the Wii controller when I beat him at Mario Kart again. At least there are consequences for his broken promises.

There are no formal consequences to leaving a dating relationship. No one gets spanked or put in time out or owes anyone a big settlement.

Promises are secure when they get ratified...

Now, if you want those, they are available to you... I will help you as a minister... for somewhere around \$5,000 gentlemen, give or take... a lot... you can purchase a little rock mounted on a tiny circle (what a deal!), have an awkward conversation with a man who believes he should be the only man in his daughter's life, get down on one knee and ask for your beloved's hand in marriage. Then, you will pick a date to get married, which means, you will spend the next 9 months fighting over calligraphy and flower arrangements that you care nothing about, all for a 30-minute slot, of which, in the end, about 3 minutes are really important.

Those 3 minutes are called the "wedding vows." That's where you promise in front of God and witnesses, to love and commit yourself to one another... not until your feelings get hurt or go away, but FOREVER.

This is qualitatively and unquestionably different from dating. A marriage ceremony is a covenant... a covenant is where we get structure... and structure is where we get security... and security is what allows us to be vulnerable and yet confident at the same time.

But I know you're not naïve. You know that in marriage, promises get broken. Two people saying "I do," does not guarantee that they will.

So, Paul in Ephesians points us to a place that is truly safe: "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church." This is the destination, not marriage.

What does Paul mean? Well look back now at verses 25-26.

Husbands, love your wives, **as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word...**

In other words, Paul says that we are sanctified – that means we are set apart for God – by the sacrifice of Jesus. Right before Jesus dies, he has a party with his followers called the Last Supper. They eat and they drink. Party staples. And on the night of the party, when Jesus presents the wine to his disciples, he says, “Drink this. This the new covenant in my blood.” That statement is not a party staple. It’s strange. But what Jesus is saying is that moment is that his death will formalize a relationship (a marriage) between his followers and God, and here’s the best part... that covenant does not depend on the strength of our faithfulness to him... it all depends on the strength of his faithfulness to us. It’s made with his blood, not yours.

What Paul is saying... if we bottom line it... is that Jesus alone can make you utterly safe. He’s saying that no one can make promises to you with the reputation and integrity of Jesus Christ. Only Christ can give you the ability to be vulnerable, and confident, and free, because he has married you to a God who will never leave you nor forsake you... even though everyone else might.

Paul says: “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”

There is security for you in the Gospel.

2. Fulfillment

Now let’s think about fulfillment for just a moment.

I told you earlier to think about your “list,” and then I said that your list is essentially self-centered because it’s built around your own needs and preferences. So that may have been a little harsh... but I think you’ll agree that the greatest problem in relationships of any kind is basically **self-centeredness. It is expecting another human being to relate to me on my terms for my purposes...**

If that’s what you really want, get a Golden Retriever...

because if you think of dating and marriage in terms of your own self-fulfillment, you will NEVER EVER be in a relationship with the RIGHT person.

There is no magical puzzle piece of a human being out there crying themselves to sleep at night because they haven’t met you yet... that Disney movie you love so much is not real....

Why not? (1) Because it’s a cartoon...

(2) Not only is a person infinitely more complex than a list of bullet-points you’ve compiled, not only is a person a sinner, someone flawed inside and out, but a person is someone alive (we hope)... and that means you will be in a relationship with someone who will change – physically, emotionally, intellectually... and you can’t know

those changes ahead of time. The problem of romance is not finding someone to marry who fits your list... it's learning to care for and love the flawed individual to whom you will find yourself bound together in a covenant.¹

I want you to see this crucial point that Paul makes in our passage. Look again at verses 25-27...

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, *so that he might present the church to himself in splendor*, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

This is important. Your romantic interest was meant to be **presented to Christ...** not to you.

Self-centeredness involves treating people in our lives, including our romances, as if they were meant to be presented to us... to fulfill us... to make us happy. But Paul says that it is to Christ that they belong... which means that the central task of any relationship – dating, marriage, friendship, whatever – is to be a part of that presentation, to help present the other person to God in splendor... in Christ.

People were not made to fit you... and you were not made to fit them. You were made ultimately to fit God, together in relationships with one another.

III. Our CALL

Well, I want to make this practical, so let me conclude with 3 practical points from our discussion tonight:

(1) **Unburden dating.**

Dating is not supposed to be a life-altering commitment. It's not. Take the pressure off dating. You don't need six labels to work up to dating. Dating is simply getting to know someone... on a date. It should be talking, doing fun things together, meeting each other's friends, helping one another, and if it hits its expiration date, then so be it.... Come to RUF and meet someone new.

That sounds callous, but I really want you to relax the expectations you have for what dating can offer you.

Now at some point, I realize you'll want a relationship to go further than what I've described... and what I can tell you is that, that's good, you are wired for it... but it's not called dating, it's called marriage.

And if you try to connect emotionally and physically with someone in the most intimate and serious of ways, but without the most intimate and serious of vows, then you are burdening the act of dating with a weight it cannot possibly bear.

Dating is not like getting free HBO for three months to see if you want to keep it. It's nothing like marriage, and the more you try to make it into a mini-marriage, the more it will

¹ Tim Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*

strangle and confuse your relationship.

ASIDE...

(How do you know if you're ready to take the next step if you're in a relationship?
How do you know if you're ready to make and keep such serious vows?)

This is a long conversation, but let me give you a starting place – just to get you facing in the right direction. Join a local church. That sounds like strange advice, but here's the rationale. When you become a member of a church, not only do you place yourself within the care and oversight and wisdom of God's people (which is pretty helpful when you're making major life decisions), but you also take vows. You actually exchange promises with these broken, messy people. Does that sound familiar? It sounds like a wedding. Joining a church, more than dating, is the best way I know to prepare you to love something for better or for worse, and to practice a life a vow-keeping before you hit the altar. Can you make and keep promises to God's people? That's a good first step when it comes to examining your maturity for marriage.)

Unburden dating... by keeping it emotionally free and sexually uninvolved.

(2) **Don't make romance an ultimate thing.**

Paul is clear. The ultimate thing is God, not romance. Listen to the warning of C. S. Lewis on this:

"We may give our human loves the unconditional allegiance which we owe only to God. Then they become gods: then they become demons. Then they will destroy us, and also destroy themselves. For natural loves that are allowed to become gods do not remain loves."²

What he says is that it's easy to make a good thing into an ultimate thing – A job, a friendship, even a romance. But if you do this, if you try to make a good thing into an ultimate thing, you'll not improve it... you'll destroy it.

It's easy to think and feel that, "If only he would ask me out..." "If only she would fall in love with me..." "If only I could get married..." then my life would be full and complete.

But what Paul says in this passage is that you can actually live a full and complete life without romance and marriage, because you can live a life with God... no matter who you are. Because God has not withheld himself from you, he is not withholding happiness from you at this very moment. He is the ultimate thing, not romance.

Which brings us to our final practical point tonight...

(3) **Get to know God.**

Whoever you are, get to know God. Maybe you're not a Christian. Maybe this is your first time in any kind of religious meeting. Maybe someone dragged you along tonight and promised you free Jamba Juice if you would endure me and weird Christian sing-alongs, or maybe you've been around Christianity a long time and you've heard it all before and you're struggling against doubt or cynicism or shame or self-righteousness... it doesn't matter...

² C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*.

this applies to you... get to know the God who would lay down his own life to secure a relationship with you.

I remember when Jada first told me she loved me, and I thought silently to myself in that moment, "Well, that's easy... she doesn't really know me." A fairly un-romantic thought, I know. But it was at least partly true. She loved the "me" I had presented to her. We manage to keep some of our ugliest stuff stashed away and hidden even from those who know us best...

But God has no such illusions about you. He knows you without the pretense and self-presentation, and get this, he has not turned his face away... he is determined for the splendor of who you could be to become the splendor of who you really are....

Someone like that would be worth getting to know, and perhaps even, growing to love.

Amen.