

“Finding Love... Apart from Marriage” // Mark 3:31–35; Luke 18:28–30 // *Finding Love: How Does This Work? #4*

On Wednesday I got back from Germany, where me and a few of our staff put in a church planting and multiplication seminar there in what is often said is the most secular place in the world, meaning that more people indicate they are atheists or have ‘no religion’ than any other place in the world. Some of our people there put on this conference, and we had 200 church planters and leaders... It’s amazing what God is doing... and then on the way back we stopped in London to visit with our church plant there... What a week. It’s amazing to see how people who used to sit right here are being used in places like that around the world.

We are on week 4 of a relationship series, *Finding Love*, in which we’re looking at what some of the most ancient texts in the world say about finding love. And this week, I want you to open your Bibles to **Mark 3**... I had planned for this week to be a second message from Song of Solomon looking at elements of lifelong love, but over the last weeks I’ve really gotten the sense that God wanted me to use this week differently. I could be off, but I wanted to pivot. I’m trying to

Works Consulted:

No Greater Love: A Biblical Vision of Friendship, Rebecca McLaughlin
 “Singleness: Myth Busting,” Lori Frances
Confronting Christianity, Rebecca McLaughlin
 “Singleness (Matthew 19:12),” Jon Tyson
Seven Myths About Singleness, Sam Allberry
 “Finding the One,” Craig Groeschel
 “Singleness,” David Platt

listen to the Spirit of God the best I can here. We’ll pick up the last Song of Solomon message next week, Lord willing.

You see, I know there are some of you in here for whom what we’re talking about just doesn’t seem that relevant. Maybe, for whatever reason, marriage just isn’t on the horizon. Or, maybe you’re an older single and the way we’ve approached this topic just doesn’t seem to fit where you are. It’s not scratching where you itch. I get that.

By the way--I hope you won’t take this as defensive--but I knew that going in. We’re a big church, and so I knew the approach we chose to take wouldn’t apply equally to everyone. But what I hope you can see is that the church is a family--and that means certain messages will be more applicable to some family members more than they are to others, and we put up with that kind of stuff for the sake of the rest of the family.

Amen? Married people, if you’re sitting with your spouse, look at each other and say, “It ain’t all it about us.” Single people, if you’re sitting with a friend, look at them and say, “And it ain’t all about us, either.” And kids, you guys can say, “*That’s right, old people. It’s always about us.*” Just kidding.

All that said, I did want to take a moment and step back to address this question from the perspective of those of you for whom marriage, or a good marriage, isn’t anywhere on the immediate horizon.

Let’s do a quick little poll:

- **How many of you are married?** Raise your hand up at your campus--you're not raising it for me, you're raising it for everyone else, so raise it up....
- **OK, now... How many of you are not married?** Raise those up high, too. Come on, up, up!
- **Anybody** in here who has gotten **married within the last year? How about during this series?**
- **How many of you are single and would really be open to meeting "THE ONE" sometime soon?** Come on, raise those hands up high. I'll give you a minute to see who else's hands are raised. *Just kidding!*
- **How about this one: How many of you met and married THE ONE that you thought was THE ONE, but now after a few years, you'd like to trade in THAT ONE for ANOTHER ONE?** Raise... Just kidding! **DO NOT raise your hand. Do not! God bless you, I see that hand. Yes, I see that hand. I'll pray for you.**

Did you know: This generation will remain single longer than any other generation in American history.

- The **average age** for an American male getting married now for the first time is almost 31; for women it's 28.
- We have close to **7K single people** at our church services each weekend.

And I'll acknowledge, **sometimes being single in a church** can be tough.

- My family and I have had various singles live with us over the years, one told me it felt like a lot of people were always subtly pressuring her to get married, and that if she wasn't getting married there seemed to be some underlying assumption that something had gone wrong.
- She said married people would say things to her like, "Don't worry... **YOU'LL get married someday.**" **As if to say,** "Buck up, poor one, you won't have to be in this inferior stage forever."

- One of our **former elders was single in this church** for a long time and he said sometimes when he was at a wedding these sweet little old ladies... He said he got so sick of it he started to repay them at funerals. "Don't worry, you'll be next." I told him he had a hateful spirit and needed prayer.
- *Sometimes, this single girl who lived with us said people in the church would say to her, as if trying to console her, "Well, **God just has to do some work** on you before he brings you that special someone." And she'd think, "Does that mean there's something wrong with me that God has to fix before I can get married?"*
- And that's not to mention, she said, then when she looked around, it seemed like some of the most dysfunctional people she'd ever seen in her life had managed to get married. And she was like: if God gives marriage as a reward for readiness, **THEN SOMETIMES IT SEEMS LIKE HE GOT THE WRONG ADDRESS.** Amen?

The title of our series is 'Finding Love' and I want to talk about finding lasting love when you're not married. **(And, btw, married people: what Jesus is going to say to us today has profound implications** for how you think about your marriage, so pay attention.)

It starts with challenging what might be the most cherished myth in our culture, a deeply, deeply ingrained myth; one often perpetuated by the church: We've actually dealt with it a few times in this series. I call it **The "Marriage = Completion" Myth.**

- **This myth holds the idea that marriage (and having a close-knit biological family) is some kind of ultimate state for us; the pinnacle of earthly blessing.**
- **And thus, if you don't find that special someone to marry, you will have **missed out on THE essential part** of a full and happy life.**

I want to start by showing how Jesus utterly refuted the myth that Marriage = Completion in several places, the first of which is Mark 3...

Here we go: **Mark 3:31–35**: And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they... called him. [32] And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.” Imagine this happened somewhere today. A pastor is up somewhere preaching and somebody comes to them and says, “Your mother and brothers need you.” We’d expect that pastor to say, “*Oh, well, family first; family is my first calling, you know; see you guys later.*” In fact, we’d almost be scandalized if he *didn’t* say that, right? But look at how Jesus responds:

[33] And he answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” [34] And (then) looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! [35] For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.” (Again, imagine if I did that! “Your family needs you, J.D.” And I said, “Who is my wife and family? You all, listening to the Word of God right now, you are my family.”)

- **Question:** Was Jesus dissing family? **No: he was using hyperbole, exaggeration**, to teach something very important. Jesus did that often: “It’s easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter heaven.” “If your hand is prone to sin, cut it off, ‘cuz it’s better to go to heaven with one hand than to go to hell with both.”
- **He’s using hyperbole to teach something, and here’s what he was trying to teach:** (To quote our friend Rebecca McLaughlin) “He’s teaching us that our **FIRST** (our primary, our ultimate) identity as followers of Jesus is not *biological*; it’s *theological*.”

Give me a minute to build this out for you (and I’m going to use several places Jesus spoke to this. I’ll put them all up here on the screen for you)

First, let’s be clear: Jesus did not dis the importance of family or our commitment to it.

- In fact, Jesus had such a high view of the commitment levels involved in marriage and family that it sometimes shocked his disciples.
- For example, Jews in Jesus’ day had a whole list of reasons that divorce might be ok but Jesus said, in Matthew 19, that getting divorced for any reason except marital unfaithfulness was, in God’s eyes, like committing adultery. In 1 Corinthians Paul would use Jesus’ reasoning to expand that list to include a couple of other things, but the point is that Jesus and Paul had a higher view of the commitment levels involved in marriage than anyone else at the time.
- Similarly, Jesus put an incredibly high value on the responsibility of parents to care for their children, far beyond people of his generation. In the 1st century world, children were thought of as secondary, sometimes as little more than property--the needs of adults were far more important than those of the kids. **So Jesus, in Luke 18**, scandalized everyone by gathering everybody’s kids to himself, and telling the adults that their needs could wait because the kingdom of God consisted of people like these kids.
 - **In Luke 17** he said that if someone didn’t do right by their kid, it would be better for them that a millstone (think a 1 ton-rock) be hung around their neck and thrown into the sea than have to face God’s judgment for neglecting your kids.
 - **Paul in 1 Tim** said that if a man didn’t properly care for his family he was worse than an infidel and he made being a good dad (*if you have kids*) a requirement for being a church leader.

The point is--no one talked about the importance of commitment to our earthly families more than Jesus did.

- In fact, in Mark 7, Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites for using ‘religious obligations’ as an excuse for not providing for their parents.
- In every situation we have in the Bible, Jesus raised the commitment levels expected in earthly families.

And yet, Jesus consistently prioritized spiritual family over earthly. In Luke 18, right after he talked about the value of kids and the importance to God of how we treat them, he said “...no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life.” (Luke 18:29–30)

And I’m like, “Jesus is saying that to be a part of his kingdom you have to LEAVE wife and parents and CHILDREN for the sake of his Kingdom? Isn’t that the opposite of what he’d just taught?” In Luke 14, Jesus even said: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). “Hate?” Jesus said we can’t be his follower unless we hate our father and mother and wife and children? Wouldn’t that go against everything else Jesus taught?” His point, obviously, is not that we should actually hate our parents or our spouses or our kids; he’s saying that compared to the value we place on him and our spiritual family, our commitment to our biological family should seem like hate.

Listen, what I’m about to say is RADICAL. (As in, it’s gonna make you mad and you’re gonna go home and get your Bible to prove me wrong but then after study I’ll think you’ll conclude that what I’m about to say is right.) You ready? **The nuclear family is not the center of God’s Kingdom.** Now— don’t miss what I am saying: **The family unit is the building block of our society (and it should be, btw--God ordered it that way), but it is not the center of Jesus’s kingdom.** Jesus did not dis

the importance of the nuclear family--he just said it’s **not ultimate**, not the most important family connection we have in the Kingdom of God.)

Two more places I want to show you where Jesus teaches this and then we’ll draw some conclusions: **Luke 11:27** As Jesus was saying these things (as he was teaching some great truth), a woman in the crowd called out, “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!” (Y’all, I’m all into people talking back to me while I preach; I love it when someone says, “Preach it, Preacher”-- but this has to be one of the weirdest things ever said to someone while they were preaching: “Blessed are the breasts at which you nursed!”) Jesus turned and said (“Weird.” No, he said), “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”

- What were they saying? They were using a Jewish metaphor that doesn’t really translate. Basically, somebody said, “Jesus, how great it must be to be **related** to you!” And Jesus said, “**Nope. Those who obey the word of God are more blessed to me than even my own biological mother!**”
- **Think about it: How awesome would it be to have Jesus in your ancestry tree? If that were true, I’d be working that into any conversation I could. ‘Oh, you were related to some of the Pilgrims on the Mayflower? Well, my great great uncle was Jesus.’** I mean, anyone who knows me at all knows that if you give me half a chance I’ll tell you that my great, great, great, great, great Uncle was **Davy Crockett**. If you bring up Tennessee, Texas, or the 19th century in general--I’ll find a way to slip that into conversation.
- **But how cool would it be to be blood-related to Jesus? And yet Jesus says, ‘Being my brother? My mom? Not that big of a deal. Being in my family and having my Spirit dwell in you? Huge deal.’**

Christopher Yuan--a Christian author I really respect, and who has himself been single for years, says: “Our earthly families are

temporarily bound by blood, but the family of God is eternally bound by the blood of the lamb.” And that’s why it takes precedence.

OK, one more: Mark 12:18 --For many people this is a confusing, and often mystifying, and even initially depressing passage: And the Sadducees, who say that there is no resurrection (which is why they were “Sad, you see”), asked him a question, (You gotta read this in a sanctimonious tone, because that’s totally what’s happening here.) [19] “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife, but leaves no child, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. [20] There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and when he died left no offspring. [21] And the second took her, and died, leaving no offspring. And the third likewise. (At this point, if you’re like potential husband #4, you probably should be like, “Hey. Nope.” But the bottom line this woman married 7 different men, and all died...) [22] And the seven left no offspring. Last of all the woman also died. [23] In the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife.” *I know, this sounds like the prologue to a Mormon joke...* [24] Jesus said to them, “You are wrong, knowing neither the Scriptures (what God has promised about the resurrection) nor the power of God (the incredible things God intends to do in the resurrection). [25] For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

- Jesus’ answer, simply: **in heaven, marriage and biological family, do not exist.**
- As I showed you the first week of this series, marriage was God’s first solution for dealing with our loneliness. But, it wasn’t his only plan, or even his **ultimate** one.
- **In heaven, in our ultimate, glorified, resurrected state, we won’t have lost our need for companionship; just that up there God will deal with our ‘aleness’ in a better way.**

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*

- **No one is married** up there, and **whomever** we’re married to down here we won’t be married to up there.
- **I’ll admit: Part of me finds this a little sad.** In heaven, when I see Veronica, there’s not going to be anything? Will I give at least her a wink and a suggestive nod, maybe?
- You say, “Well, this **makes me sad, too!**” And yet there’s **no sadness, of course, in heaven**, and that’s because in heaven, you see, our joys are not diminished at all; they are heightened. Transformed. Matured.
- **C.S. Lewis** in his book *Miracles* had a great analogy for this: **A toddler, he says, thinks** the single greatest thing in life is to eat candy. Imagine you are an elderly grandmother trying to explain to your **toddler granddaughter** some of the things you’ve most loved about life: The joy of friendship and falling in love; the joy of staring out over the grandeur of the Grand Canyon. And your toddler granddaughter says, “*Yeah, but can you eat Skittles while you do these things?*”
 - **You have a hard time explaining that these pleasures are so much better** that when you’re wrapped up in them you won’t even think about Skittles.
 - **Lewis said that we, like that child,** lack the ability to understand the joys of eternity. We know now the **pleasures of earthly things** like sex, married life and nuclear family; “**We do not know, except in glimpses, the other thing which, in Heaven, will leave no room for them.**”¹
 - **So whatever God has for us there** will be even better than what we have here. And that means however things go down up there (and I don’t know much about it, and I don’t think anybody else does either), what I’m sure of is that I’ll be even closer to my wife and kids there than I am here.² Which **makes me less sad.**

² “Heaven will be the best of both worlds. We’ll have the single person’s ability to focus 100% of all of our resources on God AND we, the church, will have all of the

So what's the implication of all of this? Listen to **John Piper**, talking about Jesus' shocking words in Mark 3, said: **Jesus called out a new family where single people in Christ are full-fledged family members on a par with all others, bearing fruit for God and becoming mothers and fathers of the eternal kind. Marriage is temporary (light, momentary!); and it will finally give way to the relationship to which it was pointing all along: Christ and the church—the way a picture is no longer needed when you see face to face.**³ **(When I travel, I carry around a picture of my family; I look at it when I miss them. But when I'm home, I put up the picture, because I have the reality. Marriage was just a picture, a distorted, blurry, fading picture of the love of Jesus and the beauty of his body—he's the intimacy and tenderness and unconditional love your soul craves, his body is the companionship you long for.)**

You say, ***"But, Pastor, that's sweet and spiritual, but I don't want to be alone at Christmases, and I don't want to grow older alone and have no one to take care of me." That's what I am trying to say.*** You're **not supposed to be** alone. *It's just that marriage is not the only way God takes care of that.*

Jesus had said in Luke: ***"Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more (watch this) in this time, AND in the age to come eternal life."*** **(Luke 18:28–30) Not just in eternity, NOW.**

- Y'all listen: In the book of Acts, the early church faces every sort of hardship a person could face--poverty, famine, getting stoned, being shipwrecked, being falsely accused, persecution. But the one thing they don't seem to have to deal with is loneliness. I can't find a single place in Acts where someone was lonely.

goodness of THE greatest marriage in the world as we, the bride of Christ, will finally be with our groom forever. Heaven is both, the best of the gift of singleness AND the best of the gift of marriage so put your hope there." Christopher Yuan

- **You should develop the kinds of relationships in the church** that you spend Christmas with. The kind that will take care of you as you get older.

HERE'S THE POINT: Singleness is not a second-class, inferior state in God's kingdom.

- **Think about it:** Jesus was the most happy, fulfilled, fully alive person ever to walk the face of the earth and he was single.
- **At no point in the Gospels do we see even a *hint*** that Jesus' singleness was a source of dissatisfaction for him.
- His **singleness certainly didn't mean he didn't fully know the experience of love.** Right? Just before he died, he told his disciples: **"Greater love has no one than this,** (What is it? The honeymoon night? 50 years of marital faithfulness? No! Greater love has no one than this) **that someone lays down his life for his friends"** (John 15:13). "And you are my friends; you, the church," he told them. Jesus knew and experienced the GREATEST. LOVE. AVAILABLE.

You say, "Ah, but J.D., I really want to have kids." Let me respond to that with words from a letter I got from 1 of our single missionaries who had just come off the field where she'd served for almost 10 years. She said:

(For the first few years on the mission field, I grieved the "loss" of being able to have biological children, but God used that) "by grace and through tears, to make me the proudest and most joy-filled (spiritual) mom on the planet the day I saw my spiritual son baptized in the unreached corners of East Asia.

³ John Piper, ["Single in Christ: A Name Better than Sons and Daughters."](#) DesiringGod.org

I don't know what it's like to hold my own newborn baby for the first time. I'd imagine it feels like your heart's about to burst. I imagine that because that's how I felt as this young man came up from the baptismal waters.

The doctrine of spiritual children has by far been the most inspiring, joy-giving, biblical doctrine... maybe of my whole life.

And another perk... I only had to wait six months for a spiritual grandbaby."

As amazing as biological offspring is, Jesus prioritized spiritual offspring even more. It's **OK to mourn the lack of ability** to have biological kids... It's a real loss. But, by grace, even that real grief can be overshadowed by the real joy of having eternal spiritual children.

The only part of your life that will be truly unfulfilled if you are single is sexual. And that's a **legitimate earthly loss**, and I don't want to minimize that.

- But God says **he will give you a special *charisma*** (a spiritual empowerment) for that, too.⁴
- **God can enable you to live a happy and fulfilled life without sex. Remember**, the most joy-filled, love-filled Man ever to walk the face of the earth lived without sex.
- **But the other things** marriage supplies--companionship and offspring, God gives you now, in an ultimate form, in eternal form, through the **church**.
- **Rebecca McLaughlin**, again: *You won't wither without sex; you will wither without friend and family connection.*⁵

So, what does all that mean? 3 things. They should be obvious:

1. Don't make an idol out of earthly family

An idol isn't usually a bad thing; it's usually a good thing we've turned into an ultimate thing. Don't make an idol out of earthly family. And I say that to you whether you're single or married.

Reject the "marriage = completion" myth. It's a lie. And I'm not just talking to single people when I say that, either. For a lot of you married people, the reason you have so many marriage problems is that you founded your marriage on this myth and you both live by it. Throughout your whole marriage you've been looking for marriage to give you something it wasn't designed to give!

Gary Thomas, a marriage counselor, says: **"Marriage doesn't solve emptiness; it exposes it..."** Problems like loneliness and insecurity aren't solved by a relationship with another human; they are solved by a relationship with God.

It's why I said our first week that **you're not ready to date until you're ready not to date**. Because until you're ready not to date, you're going to try to use that marriage partner for something they weren't designed to give. That marriage partners will never meet your deepest soul needs. They can't supply the love that you crave; that complete acceptance where someone knows you completely and loves you anyway. The longing you've had to be loved completely and unconditionally. That hole is a God-shaped hole, not a "missing lover" shaped hole. You're looking for that missing person; that one perfect match who will complete you. I'm just telling you; that's not found at the marriage altar. It's found at the feet of Jesus.

⁴ cf. 1 Corinthians 7

⁵ *Confronting Christianity*

Find your identity, security and happiness in Christ FIRST. And when you do that, marriage and singleness will begin to take on a different weight in your life.

- You might still want to be married. I'm not spiritualizing that or saying you won't care. What I am saying is that if God withholds good marriage from you for some reason, he will give you Spirit-empowerment to endure that well. In 1 Cor 7 Paul calls both marriage and singleness spiritual gifts, which means we need Spirit-empowerment to do either one well!
- (One of my single friends said that singleness can be like a fast--you go without something that you want, for a while, like food, and during those times of desire you learn that God can sustain you even without that thing.) And you don't have to ever give up asking for marriage, btw. I'm just saying you won't need it to be a complete person.

So, I urge you, Summit: Reject the **marriage = completion myth**. And that's a lot easier said than done, btw, because that myth is so ingrained EVERYWHERE in our culture. It's the theme of our favorite movies; it saturates the lyrics of our favorite songs.

- *"...I don't wanna think of anything else now that I thought of you. I've been sleeping so long in a 20-year dark-night; AND now I see daylight, I only see daylight."*⁶ And I'm not picking on Taylor Swift, all you Swifties, I'm not picking on you. ALL the songs we love say that.
- **But you gotta reject it.** Jesus is the daylight you're looking for. Only he can lead you out of your 20-year, or 40-year, or eternity of darkness.
- **Here's a story I've never told you.** *When Veronica and I got married, we were trying to figure out what song to use for our first dance, and we both loved (DON'T JUDGE) "There's No Way" by Alabama. It's an old country song. But I just couldn't bring myself*

to make that our first dance, and maybe I took myself too seriously back then, but I knew the chorus was patently untrue: "There's no way I could make it without you; there's no way that I'd even try; if I had to survive without you in my life, I know I wouldn't last a day; oh, baby, there's no way." It's a sweet song, and, I'll be honest, I didn't want to live any more days in my life without Veronica, and don't want to imagine any version of life anymore without her, but ultimately the words of that song are not true for us. As hard as it would be, I could make it without her, and she could make it without me. And that's because Jesus is our Savior, our daylight, our completion; and he's a Savior who promised he'd never leave us or forsake us, and one who proved that not even the grave could take away his presence from us. And it's true: I don't want to live without Veronica, but Jesus is MY life. And Jesus is hers, too. So, we opted not to go with that song. *Instead, we chose "Get Jiggy with It." Just kidding.*

2. Treat your church as family

When I say "the church is family," most of us think in terms of a weak metaphor, meaning we have some sentimental attachment to this church and feel about it like we do, say, our *alma mater*.

But for Jesus, saying "the church is family" was not some kind of weak metaphor. He thought of his body, the church, as his *actual* family and said that his commitment to this family was of the highest order imaginable. He'd give his life for them. And, as we saw, he consistently pointed to a day when marriage and biological relations would be no more, and all that would remain would be the church. **We're not there yet, but that reality should shape how we interact with each other in the church now.**

⁶ Thanks to Kyndall Winecoff, a college student at our Blue Ridge campus, for tracking this example down for us—and quickly, too!

I heard a story from one newer Christian lady whose husband suddenly collapsed one Sunday at church, and he ended up having to spend a week in the ICU. She said people from her small group volunteered to take off work to keep her kids; one even referred to her kids as “our kids”--not in some creepy kind of way--they were just making the point that this woman would never again have to carry these kinds of burdens alone. She said she’d never felt so loved and cared for in her whole life!

Y’all, I hear versions of that story over and over in our church. I can’t tell you how many times I reach out to somebody here who is going through something and they say, “Pastor, it’s been a hard time, but the church has been awesome.” And by that they don’t mean me or the staff. They mean “you” the members. They’ll say, “My small group has been here round the clock and made sure all of our needs are met.” Sometimes, y’all, it brings tears to my eyes just being on the phone and hearing someone on the other end of the line telling me how much you’ve loved them.

The church *IS* family, **and that means you should invest in it as family.** Don’t treat this like some kind of religious weekend pep talk where I’m your motivational speaker. If that’s how you treat this church, and it’s how a lot of you do, then you’re only experiencing a fraction of the blessing Jesus intended the church to be. You say, “What are you telling us to do?”

- **Be in a small group; volunteer:** BTW, they say that for new people, unless you have 7 personal relationships in a church your first year, you likely won’t be there the 2nd year. When I meet someone new, I can pretty much predict if you’re gonna be here next year, and it’s got nothing to do with my preaching or the quality of the worship. Maybe that stuff impresses you now. But the novelty will wear off. It’s the relationships that’ll keep you in a church.

- **Parents, get your kids KNOWN here!** I saw a study that showed that the single greatest predictor of whether your kid will continue on in the Lord after he goes to college is if he has 5 meaningful relationships in the church with other adults who know their name and invest in them. That’s the single greatest predictor of whether a kid continues to follow the Lord in college. So, get your kid known here. And at our church, we’ve put all the coolest adults in the student ministry anyway. Go check it out. You’ll see what I’m talking about.
- **Invest in others outside of your family: Whether you’re married or not,** invest in the kids of this church. Be the spiritual aunts and uncles to the kids in your small group. **Men, get involved in the men’s ministry** or volunteer in the student ministry where you can speak wisdom into the lives of younger men who are growing up without a father. **Ladies, do the same for the women’s ministry.** Part of how God fulfills his promise to be a father to the fatherless and a mother to the motherless is by providing those relationships through the church.
- **Here’s another: Don’t rush in and out of here so fast** like you’re trying to beat the traffic out of a football game that your team has clearly lost. It’s like, every week, as soon as I’m done, some of you act like it’s the 4th quarter in the UNC/JMU game and you’re down by 25 and there’s no way you can come back, so you might as well go ahead and leave and beat the traffic. Y’all, listen, Jesus has already won, so stick around for the full celebration.
 - I always challenge our staff to do their best to be available for the first 7 minutes before and after church, because that’s where we can help this church feel less like production and more like family.

- **Rebecca McLaughlin wrote a blog in 2018 called “Why I Don’t Sit with My Husband (and sometimes my kids) in Church.”**⁷ It was a great article, but she said that some of the response she got to it was if she had suggested stomping on puppies in Sunday School: *“How dare you undermine the family in church?”* they said. **But, she said, she also got a ton of messages** from single Christians who explained how much pain they feel in church when they sit alone. (And sure, sometimes people want to be alone at church--there can be a season for that; but, in general, she says, **“We come to be together (as the family of God), not to have our private moment with the Lord.”** She offers 3 rules: **#1: An alone person in our gatherings is an emergency. #2: Friends can wait. #3: Introduce a newcomer to someone else.** (Listen, I’m just charismatic enough to believe that if you notice a new person at church by themselves, the Holy Spirit wants you to notice them and go to talk with them. So, don’t be disobedient. Be looking around for people at the beginning and end of service.)
 - **Your friends can wait.** Meet them at Chipotle later. At church, find those people who look alone and introduce yourself to them, and then introduce them to someone else. This is our spiritual family.
- **Summit Family: What if we reserved the 7 minutes right before and the 7 minutes right after church just to do *this*?** I know, to be here 7 minutes early means that some of you are gonna have to leave your house 30 minutes earlier. But wouldn’t that one thing be a great way of saying “Hey! You’re not invisible to Jesus! He sees you, AND WE see you!” Wouldn’t it be great to be part of a church like that?

One more thing on this, before I go to point 3: *treating the church* like family means committing to the church like family.

⁷ In Christianity Today, April 19, 2018, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/april-web-only/why-i-dont-sit-with-my-husband-at-church.html>.

- When you have a family member that is annoying (raise your hand if you’ve got an annoying family member—keep it up if they’re in the building right now... no don’t, I’m kidding), you don’t just kick them out. You may want to, but you know, for family, the rules are different. Sometimes you roll your eyes and say, “Well, that’s Uncle Billy.”
- I’m not talking about ever tolerating sin or racism, just that in church, you’re going to encounter people who rub you the wrong way. Sometimes they love the music that you hate. Sometimes they express political perspectives that drive you crazy. Sometimes, when you sit next to them in church, they sing off-key. *Anybody in here sit next to someone who sang off-key this morning?* (Just kidding, don’t raise your hand.) Sometimes they smell weird. But, if we’re family, you can’t just say, “Well, you are not my favorite relationship, so I’m out.” We’re not consumers, we’re family, and that means bearing with people when they are not our favorite people. It also means confronting them lovingly when they are doing or believing something harmful and not just going somewhere else.⁸

OK, last one... **3. Prioritize expanding God’s family**

- Not every person in here will have ‘biological’ or ‘earthly’ family, but we all can have spiritual family.
- And, as important as investing in your biological family is (and let me be clear, again: Jesus said it was very important), your earthly family is not the only family you should invest in; it shouldn’t really even be the primary one you invest in.
- If you’re single, maybe you don’t have biological offspring. But you can have sons and daughters in the faith. That’s what Jesus

⁸ Inspired by McLaughlin, *No Greater Love*, p. 45.

said, and he loved them as much as anyone has ever loved their biological kids.

- Let me apply this one other direction: Sometimes I hear older people talk as if the only thing they plan to do when they retire is invest in their grandkids, hang around their grandkids, as if biological family is everything, it's the victory lap.
- And, again, let me be clear--investing in your grandkids is a great ministry. It should be where you start. I hope you grandparents are like mine and Veronica's parents, very intentional with your grandkids; taking them out on special trips and out to special dinners and discipling them.
- But if you're a follower of Jesus, even more fundamental than investing in your earthly family is investing in that eternal one.
- **Don't make your earthly family an idol.** *"Who are my mother and my brothers?"* Jesus said. *"All those God is bringing into his kingdom."* So, as you invest in your grandkids, don't lose the centrality, and the primacy, of the Kingdom of God. (Hey *newsflash*: your kids probably don't want you around that much anyway. They have enough to deal with w/o feeling like they have to always take care of you.)
- You say, "But J.D., when I'm retired, I'll be old and tired to get involved in some ministry." To quote our current President (who I don't quote very often), that's malarkey.
 - You arguably have the most to add in this stage. Paul tells Timothy that older women should be diligent to mentor younger women and older men should invest in younger, faithful men.
- (That's not to mention the great things for God's kingdom that some people start in retirement. **Caleb** in the book of Joshua was 80 when he pointed at a mountain and said, *"That one. I'm going to take that mountain for God."* **John Wesley** was in his 70's when he headed out to preach the gospel and plant churches in the American Midwest. Harlan Sanders was 65 when he launched

the first KFC. That's not really a Kingdom thing, but it's still awesome. So, there's a lot you could still do.)

VAMP

1. Don't make an idol out of earthly family. 2. Treat your church as family. 3. Prioritize expanding God's family.

"Finding Love." Jesus came to give us life, and life more abundantly." Finding and showing love is the essence of the Christian life, because God is love, the Apostle John said, and the ones who know God are the ones who love like he loves.

Jesus called you to family. He called you to love.

BOW YOUR HEADS:

2 questions: 1. Have you ever just received his love? It's literally there waiting for you, as a gift. Jesus saw all your sin and shame and came to earth to die to forgive you of it and make you new. But you have to receive it. Have you ever done that? You can *right now*...

Question 2: *Are you ready to commit to doing this God's way?* To say, God, I trust you. Ps 84:11 says 'no good thing will he withhold from those whose hearts are steadfast toward him,' which means if you're single, he's not withholding anything good from you. Can you, "Jesus, teach me how to love and be family like you were. I trust you."