

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

THE PROGRESSION ON INTIMACY | ADVENTURES IN DATING AND MARRIAGE

AARON BROCKETT | FEBRUARY 4, 2024

So good to be with you today. And before we get going I've got an invitation and a celebration to give to you.

First is the invitation. Mark your calendars for Thursday, February 22. We're going to be hosting another worship night here at this location. So all campuses under one roof. If you've never been to one of these, you want to make it a priority to get here that night. Come early to get a good seat. We expect it to fill up. And invite somebody to come with you.

The second thing is I want to celebrate the fact that we are going to be moving our Midtown campus. It has been portable, set up and tear down, for the past two years. We've going to be moving them into the new location at the corner of Keystone and east 62nd Street. I've got a picture of it behind me. It's a former Marsh building. That's what it looks like now.

And I just want to look right into the camera and address our Midtown campus. Campus pastor, Alex Diaz, that whole team—thank you guys for your grit, your commitment. I know two years of set up and tear down is not for the faint of heart, especially in an Indiana winter. Alright?

So, we just want to come along side you, celebrate this new facility. And I'm looking forward to seeing all that God is going to do with this piece of real estate to affect people's lives for generations to come.

All of this is possible... This is part of the Awaken vision, if you guys remember, moving Midtown into permanent. So I want to thank you guys for your commitment, your continued generosity that is making this a reality.

If you have a Bible, go ahead and get to Philippians, chapter 2—Philippians 2 is the passage that we're going to be camped out in here in just a moment.

And as you are finding that and getting settled in... The summer after my second year of college, I got a summer internship at a church that was in a different state. I didn't know anybody at this church. I applied for the job and I got it. So, I spent that summer by myself a lot.



And what made it worse is right before I packed up my car to head to this summer internship, the girl that I had been dating that semester broke up with me. Yeah, thank you. I appreciate the empathy that I can feel from the room.

Honestly, it was heartbreaking at the time. Looking back it was a good thing because in the words of the great theologian, Garth Brooks, “Sometimes God’s greatest gifts are unanswered prayers.” I’m sure she’s a fine person, if she’s listening.

So, I was kind of heart broken. I was lonely. And there was a... I’m going to date myself by saying this—there was a radio program that I listened to quite a lot that summer. It was called The Love Doctor. I don’t know why I listened to it. It was just part of the radio station that I had on at the time.

I was listening to this, you’ve probably heard shows very similar to this, it was a shock jock kind of character and then a physician who would... People would call into the radio program with their questions about love, relationships, and dating. I think they even threw a few marriage questions in there.

And the shock jock was there for the entertainment value, mostly he was just crass. And then you had the physician who was trying to legitimize it by trying to offer some answers. I don’t know how good of a job he did. I didn’t really learn much listening to the radio program.

But it brings up an interesting question. When it comes to love, dating, relationships, and marriage where do you turn? When you have questions about those things who or what are you listening to, in particular?

I think all of us want, in that area of our lives, a thriving, romantic relationship—a healthy marriage. So, the question is what makes a relationship or a marriage work and why is it that some fail?

I read an article, you’ve probably seen something similar to this, the title of the article was Tips on Love from Those Who Should Know. They interviewed kids between the ages of five and 10. And you’ve probably read these before. Here are three of my favorites that I’ve seen.

Question number one is: What do most people do on a date? And Michael, age 10, said, “On the first date people just tell each other lies. And that get’s them interested to go on a second date.” And I would say, “Michael, you’re not wrong. You’re not wrong.”

Here’s question number two: What is the best age to get married? Ella, age eight says, “Age 84, because at that age you don’t need to work anymore and both of you can just spend all of your time in your bedroom loving each other.” I’m looking forward to my 80s. I think that sounds amazing.

Here's the last question: How do you make a marriage work? Zack, age 10, "Tell your wife she looks pretty, even if she looks like a truck." Zack, you're going to go far in life.

Now, I just want you to know... Maybe some of you are here today and you're just not laughing because... I just want to speak to everybody regardless of your current relationship status.

What I mean by that is that I know that there are a number of you who are kind of navigating the treacherous waters of single adulthood. Maybe you're kind of figuring out the dating scene, whether you're in high school, college, or beyond. Maybe you're married, whether you've been married a year or 10 years or more, and you're trying to keep things together and healthy for the long haul.

I think that, regardless of your current status, the one thing that we can all agree on is that romantic relationships are challenging and crazy complicated. Even the best relationships still go through ups and downs and twists and turns. That's why we've got to think of them like an adventure, because all adventures have those built into them.

And relationships require what I would call a lot of intentional effort; a lot of what I would say is preventative maintenance, and I would even say just good, old-fashioned hard work. And that's one thing that I think, oftentimes, we under estimate.

I remember talking to a couple in my office a few years ago. They were just going through some struggles in their marriage. I am not a counselor, but I am a pastor so I was just trying to pastor them through this. They were at a bit of an impasse. They really wanted to make it work, but I remember them just kind of sitting back on the couch in my office and they both were a bit exasperated after about an hour of conversation. And one of them just said through an exhale, "It just shouldn't be this hard." And I just wanted to say, "Who in the world told you that?" Hollywood?

Now, I want to make something very clear. I'm going to try to specify this throughout this series. I'm not talking about abuse. I'm not talking about ongoing deception. I'm not talking about narcissism. Those are the outliers. I'm talking about inside of that, you've got people who are just human. We're honest, we're trying to do the right thing, but we're still hurting each other. We're still at a bit of an impasse. It's going to take some work.

I do want to say that I know for many this subject is a source of a lot of pain, confusion, and anxiety. Maybe you came to church today, or you tuned in, and you had no idea what we are talking about today. Then you heard what the message series was and you were tempted to turn it off or walk out. And maybe even right now you're sitting there going, "Why am I staying? I don't really want to be here for this." And you've just got a lot of anxiety around this.

We're going to be in this for three weeks and you're just sort of dreading the next three weeks, for any number of reasons. It could be because your relationship category, the way that you would describe it is, "Man, it's just complicated."

Or maybe you are single and you don't want to be or you are single and you're okay with that, it's just that everybody else around you isn't. So they keep making comments to you and you're kind of tired of hearing it. Or maybe you're currently walking through a divorce or just came out of a divorce or maybe you and your spouse have been drifting apart.

I just want you to know—man, I get that. I really do. And if that's the case I want to encourage you to hang on and hang in with me over the next three weeks, because I really do believe that God has a word for you. I think He's going to potentially do a supernatural work in your life.

More than any of that, I want to come back to this question. When we have questions about relationships: dating, love, and marriage where do we turn? God's Word has a lot of wisdom on this. And I want us to look at God's wisdom on it because the wisdom of the world isn't working. We need to look at what God's Word has a tendency to say.

Now, here's what has happened. I'm a child of the 90s so I remember growing up going to youth group in the 90s and there was what was called the purity culture. Some of us are products of the purity culture, which wasn't all bad but it wasn't all good.

So some of us have kind of rejected what God's Word has to say because we thought it was kind of prudish and old fashioned. Here's kind of the misstep of purity culture. It said, "Hey, don't do it." But it didn't really say why not to do it.

I think what we need to do is we need to really look under the hood here to see that God really has our best interests in mind. And there is a lot of wisdom.

By the end of the three weeks... What I want to do each week, is I want to give you some really practical help and I want to give you some hope. And, if by the end of these three weeks I haven't given you help and hope, then I haven't done my job. So, I just want to encourage you to hold on through this.

In preparation for this series, I came across this article from the New York Times. Here is the title. Why Aren't More People Married?" And the article, I can save you some time from reading it, was basically saying that right now we're in a crisis because more and more children are growing up in single parent homes. Statistically, most of those single parents are women.

And really, this is sort of the after affect of the sexual revolutionary ideology that came out of the 1960s in which the mantra was: you do you, follow your heart, don't be tied down, sexual freedom, have multiple partners. And society is beginning to realize how

destructive this philosophy has been in people's relationships. Children—children are paying the highest price. And then societies at large.

So society has realized this, culture has realized this, so the response... The article is saying the response is that there has been this shift here lately where we're seeing that to single adults, single parents, mostly single women—well just get married. And that's brutal for them to hear because it's not like they don't want to. And it's not like they haven't tried.

The article is filled with multiple stories of people searching for somebody but they can't find anybody compatible. They can't find anybody who doesn't have so much monumental baggage in life to kind of sort through in order to get into a relationship. They don't want to connect emotionally or they are unable to. They don't even want to remain exclusively committed. And it's left many people feeling frustrated, disillusioned, and discouraged.

The reality is that there are a lot of failed relationships and there are a lot of reasons relationships fail. A lot of this is rooted back to before the relationship even starts. And its impact upon our world is significant.

I was talking to a lady in our church a few years ago who had been married, gone through a divorce, and was kind of back and ready to date again. She was getting on the dating apps. She was describing to me and to Lindsay her experience and she said, "There are a lot of men on the dating apps who will claim to be Christian, but then when she would express to them her boundaries, like she had no plan to be physically intimate with them on a date, they would bail, even though they were Christians. And they would claim this, "Well, I can't date somebody who is going to deprive me of my physical needs."

And with a sense of despair, she kind of looked at us and she asked this really pertinent question:

What does it even look like to do relationships God's way?

Man, that is a great question. And it's one that I want to encourage you today to ask for yourself, regardless of your current relationship status.

So, the next three weeks together are going to be centered around this fundamental truth. Don't dismiss it too easily. It might be simple but it's not simplistic. Here's the statement:

Relationships get better when they are done God's way.

What I mean by that is that you take the wisdom of God's Word and apply it to your relationships.

Now, here's what I'm not saying. Please don't hear me say your relationships get perfect. They don't. I'm not saying your relationships are problem free. I'm not saying they are going to be without some pain. I'm not saying, you do this God's way you're going to ride a tandem bike and sit in a hot tub shaped like a heart, just feed each other... That's not what I'm saying. Alright?

I am saying they'll get better. And the reason why I can say that so confidently, coming out of the last series we were in where we talked about being made in the image of God, is because God designed us, God designed relationships, God designed us for relationships. Therefore, He knows how they work best.

So, what do I mean by God's way? Well, that's a foundational statement. This is the foundational verse for this series. I want you to take a snapshot, look this up, write this on a little card. I want to encourage you to commit this verse to memory by the end of the series. You can probably even do it today. Let's just read it out loud together:

"In your relationships with one another, have this same mindset as Christ Jesus."
Philippians 2:5 (NIV)

In your relationships... What if you were to take that verse and apply that over your dating relationships, your love interests, and especially your marriage? "I'm going to bring the mindset of Jesus into this marriage relationship."

Now, what that verse is saying is that every relationship, for better or worse, is the sum of the mindset that two people bring to it. So, if you want a better relationship, it's got to start first, not necessarily with behavior, but with mindset. And behavior follows mindset. If you want a better mindset, you've got to model it after the mindset of Jesus.

Man, we just look at all of the carnage going on in the world today and look at all of the broken relationships that are out there... Statistically about half of all marriages will end in divorce. And we have to think to ourselves, "Man, there has to be a better way. There has to be a better mindset to develop."

So, I'm going to get super, super practical with you. Hopefully, this will be really helpful for you whether you are single or married. There is an actual love doctor, a PhD level Christian therapist and author who has spent years studying the Scriptures and the science of relationships. I love it when science and sociology catch up to the wisdom that is already in God's Word.

Doctor Jon Van Epp has written a couple of books. This first one is called *Becoming Better Together*. That's a pretty good book. I love the second one *How to Avoid Falling in Love With a Jerk*. Alright? That's a good one. Some of you are like, "I'm definitely getting that one."

He has spent over 25 years studying the science and God's Word on relationships. And here's what he shows. He's developed this visual called the:



Relationship Attachment Model

And these are like the five bonds to every relationship. There is:

Know

Trust

Rely

Commit

Touch

So, think about this going from left to right. The Relationship Attachment Model.

Now, I just want you to leave that up for a second. If you are single, this right here is the progression that God designed relationships to take in order to be healthy and fruitful. What that means is that you're getting to know someone—that could be dating or that could just be developing a friendship, which, by the way, I think is oftentimes underestimated and undervalued when it comes to romance.

This is part of the conversation with the girl who broke up with me. I mentioned it earlier and you all felt really bad about it. I know you felt bad. She said to me, "It's not you. It's me," which is a lie. And then she said, "I just like you as a friend." And I'm like, "Nooooo. I've been banished to the friend zone." Actually, that is not a bad place to go. Every romantic relationship needs to be built on a foundation of friendship.

I would even say this. If you are married right now and you are really struggling, nine times out of 10, if you can just focus on building the friendship again... Friendship is so important because romance, as great as it is... I'm going to talk about this in a minute—the chemicals, the dopamine, the rush, you know the butterflies—it's amazing. It doesn't last. It doesn't mean you can't keep romance alive in a marriage, it's just those chemicals will fade over time and what you are left with is a friendship.

Bodies will change over time. Nobody say, "Amen," to that. Bodies change over time. But friendship is the foundation. Kids come along, challenges—but you come back to the foundation.

That's all based on: Know. You get to know somebody and then through knowing somebody you learn whether or not they can be: Trusted. And then from that if you can Rely on this other person and they can rely on you, then you make a Commitment. The biblical word for that is marriage.

And when the Bible talks about marriage, it's talking about a covenant, not a contract. A contract is, "I will if you will, but if you don't then I won't." That will end the vast majority of marriages because that's our mindset. But this is a covenant, which says... A

covenant is what Jesus has made with you and me. A covenant promise with each other.

And then the last dial is: Touch.

If you are married, these five bonds—I want you to think about them sort of like faders on a soundboard. This is a way to monitor the health of your relationships. So, you're constantly looking at this going, "Do I need to make some adjustment? Are there any imbalances?"

If you are single, the word here is the word progression. That's the key word. That is so important. You progress through these stages. God is not a prude. He wants what is best for you.

If you are married, the word here is balance. It's a balancing of the bonds. So this is when you go on a date night and you communicate. This is what you are communicating, "How are we doing with the levels?" It's the tune ups, it's the counseling sessions to kind of dial up these bonds.

I want you to think about them as faders on a soundboard and the relationship is in harmony and in tune when these things are in balance. But when they get out of balance—and by the way, every healthy relationship will... Regardless of your best intentions the gravitational pull of life will be to kind of mess with the dials.

So, you'll get into a busy season or you'll be traveling for work or you're going through some financial strain or some health problems or crisis with the in-laws (I know nobody is dealing with that). Whatever it is—kids come along and you're not sleeping at night. All of this stuff.

Here's what happens. When the faders go down, when the know fader goes down because you're busy, the trust, rely, commitment are going to go down too. The touch is going all the way down. It's going to bottom out. That's what is going to happen.

And so, oftentimes, in our culture when you look at this Relationship Attachment Model, you maybe meet somebody for the first time, they friend you on Instagram, you're doing this scroll on the dating app thing—you barely know them. You certainly don't know how to trust, rely, and commit, and touch goes all the way up. And so we end up touching way earlier than we should. We're setting ourselves up for a lot of pain.

USA Today polled the younger generation and 48 percent agreed with this statement:

It's okay to have sex before the first date.

And a lot of dating advice says that you should not go past the third date for any sort of touching or sexual contact. Here's what the dating advice will say, "It's because they won't think that you are interested." Horrible advice.

Some people may say, “Well, we have to touch because how will we know whether or not we are compatible?” So, “We need to move in together. We need to have sex, just to see if it works.”

And I just want to say: Listen. What we know biologically, this is a biological fact, is that when you have sexual intimacy with somebody, when you touch them physically, you get bonded to them chemically. That is a fact.

So here is a question. Do you think that it is wise to be bonded to somebody before you really know them, trust them, rely on them, and are committed to them and them to you?

Here’s another question. Do you think that it is wise to be emotionally bonded to multiple people? I’m not necessarily talking about at the same time. But I’m talking about if everybody you date and you’re sexually intimate with and you get chemically bonded to it becomes more and more difficult to chemically bond with somebody else. You’re setting yourself up for massive failure and heartbreak when you do eventually get married. And all of a sudden, God doesn’t sound like a prude, He sounds like He has your best interest in mind.

2 Timothy, chapter 2, verse 22 says:

“Run from anything that stimulates youthful lust. Instead, pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. Enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts.” (NLT)

See, part of the reason this is so important is that prior to you developing an emotional—what I would even call an emotional infatuation, is you need to... Before you do that, you need to have the necessary conversation around the figures on that dial with somebody who you might, potentially, date before you become blinded to some things that you can’t see because he’s so cute. You become blinded because you can’t see because she’s so gorgeous. And it happens to all of us.

So, you’ve got to do this before you develop any sort of physical bond. Most dating couples focus on their feelings of chemistry versus evaluating actual compatibility. So, I’m physically attracted and I’ve developed this infatuation, which, by the way, are not bad things. Those are gifts. Those are great things. They are just not everything. And, by the way, they blind us to some things.

Knowing someone requires time and objective, thoughtful observation. And it’s very difficult to do that when you are infatuated with somebody. So, what this means is that you’ve got to pay attention to who this person is under stress. Just observe. Get to know them.

It means, ladies, observing how he treats his mom, because that’s a pretty good indication of how he will treat you 10 years from now. It means watching how he lives out his faith and his values, or if he lives out his faith and his values. It means spending

enough time with him to where you catch a glimpse of who he really is when the mask starts to slide down a little bit. And it always will.

One of the things, kind of jokingly, but I'm mostly serious about with my teenaged daughters is that when they finally meet the young man they are ready to marry, you know, well into their 30s, I've told them, "Hey, before he asks me for my blessing," and he better ask me for my blessing, "I'd really like to take him on a trip just me and him. Maybe to a third world country somewhere." I mean, I'll bring him back. I'm not heartless. Alright. I'll bring him back.

But, what I'd like to do is get him in a stressful situation just to see how he reacts. And then I'll come back and report that to them. I don't think that they are all that excited about me doing that. But it sounds like a good idea.

See, here's what I mean. There is a lady named Dr. Helen Fisher who has done a lot of research on this. The University of London did a similar study, where they scanned the brains of dating couples—like MRI scans.

This is kind of interesting. Here's a scan of a couple who has been dating longer than 20 months. That's their brain activity. It seems pretty normal. But then they take those same couples and they scan their brains eight to 12 months into their dating relationship and you kind of see not as much activity. And then the first few months of a dating relationship, they scan the couples and [brain activity really small]. That's a joke, but it's based in reality. It's based in reality.

Here's what we know scientifically. When you meet somebody and you develop an infatuation, an attraction, the pre-frontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for critical decision making, shuts down. Did you know that?

A Harvard doctor by the name of Dr. Richard Schwartz, who looked at these brain scans said this, "When we are engaged in romantic love, the neural machinery responsible for making critical assessments of other people, including assessments of those with whom we are romantically involved shuts down." That's the neural basis for the ancient wisdom—love is blind.

You know this to be true in your own life, don't you? Have you ever looked back at an old flame, an older relationship? And you are like, "What in the world was I thinking?" You weren't. That's the point.

Now, listen. I know that there are some dating couples here. You guys, maybe this is your first date. Maybe you're here today. You're not really into church and she's into church so you're here and you're sitting together and things just got really awkward because the pastor just said you're not thinking, you're not using your brain.

And I don't want to offend anybody. Nobody likes to hear that his brain isn't working. So, I'm not trying to insult you. However, I will say, if your brain isn't working wouldn't you

want to know? Wouldn't you want to know that? I would want to know that. So, I would just simply say, give yourself some time. Try to be objective. Involve others whose brains are fully functioning to help you see what you cannot because you're blinded by infatuation.

Listen to Song of Solomon in chapter 8, verse 4. It says:

"Promise me... not to awaken love until the time is right." (NLT)

And society would say the time is right if you're attracted. The Bible's wisdom on this is, "No, no, no, no. Don't rush through the dials."

If you are here right now and you're dating, maybe you're saying to yourself, "Man, Aaron. We have blown through those first four dials. We've taken the touch dial all the way to the top." Maybe you're feeling a level of conviction. And I hope this isn't the case but maybe a level of shame. I don't want you to feel that.

In fact, I would simply say this. Conviction is a good thing. And God is a God of grace. And God is a God of redemption. And this is His kindness over you. This is Him kind of like flagging, "Hey, you don't want to continue to go this road anymore, there is a better way." So, if you are here today, don't wallow in shame or feel as if you are condemned. No. This is an indication of God's grace to begin to do things His way.

I would just encourage you to do this. Take the touch dial all the way down. Put duct tape over it, lock it up, put crime tape around it, or buy a chastity belt. Do whatever you need to do man. Just back up and evaluate this.

You might be going, "Well, Aaron, how much touch is okay? How much do I really need to know about somebody to know what I need to know before I can touch them? And I would just simply say this. You decide ahead of time with this other person what the boundaries are and together you set up those boundaries. And you discuss them before you develop an emotional bond or infatuation or before you find yourself in an environment where you might be tempted to give in—you can't withstand it. And everybody knows what I'm talking about.

Here are a few little tips. When you are with this other person alone and you turn on Netflix, stay vertical not horizontal. You know what I'm talking about. Keep the lights on. Don't be alone really late at night, when you know where things might potentially lead. Allow others to have observations, speak into your life, ask the hard questions.

Can I just very gently, very pastorally address those of you who are living together. I understand. Maybe you were encouraged to do so by your parents. Maybe this is just what society has kind of said, "Due to financial pressures we need to do this." "We need to figure out if we're compatible or not." And I would say, "Guys, that's a test drive." And you're actually giving the most precious thing about yourself to somebody even though



you have every intention of making a covenant commitment, but you haven't done so quite yet.

I know lots of couples who lived together, broke up, and they take the wounding thing of that into the next relationship. It becomes so complicated in the next relationship.

Can I just very lovingly say this to you? Not to shame you, not to condemn you, to make you feel bad, I'm just saying that you're not setting yourself up for a healthy marriage with this person or somebody else.

And it's not the fact that you are living under the same roof with somebody that is bad, it's the fact that it's like sticking a piece of chocolate cake in front of a starving person, you are setting yourself up to give in to temptation. Make the difficult decision because it is an investment into your future marriage.

Dr. John Van Epp gives us a couple pieces of wisdom on this. He says, "If you're dating somebody:

How they treat you now is usually the ceiling for your marriage

What he means by that is, if you're dating somebody, you're getting the best version of them. So the way that they treat you now is likely the best that they will ever treat you. So, here's the question. Do you like how they are treating you? That's usually the ceiling.

Here's the second thing:

The bad in a dating relationship usually gets worse in marriage

Now, listen, there are exceptions to both of these things. I'm not saying that people can't grow or people can't change, especially if they come to Christ after they begin to date. But the norm is that usually the bad, when left unaddressed, like if you bring it up and he gets offensive or she deflects and brings it back on you, not willing to work on it, it is just going to get worse in marriage.

Maybe you're afraid of being alone. Maybe you like, "This is my last chance. Hopefully, he'll change." And it just gets worse.

See:

The most important decision you will make outside of your decision to follow Jesus is if you will marry and who you will marry.

Guys, it will make you or break you.

I don't want to over spiritualize things and I certainly don't want to blame everything on Satan, but I do have to acknowledge that he's involved in this because if marriage is a reflection of Jesus' relationship with the church, and Scripture clearly teaches us that it is, and if behind every great effective church that is accomplishing its mission is



relationships and marriages that are not perfect but they are honoring God and each other in the process—that's how God accomplishes His mission—guess what Satan goes after?

He'll go after your marriage. He hates your marriage. He'll go after it with everything that he can. So, why in the world would you give him any sort of a foothold in that area of your life? It's hard enough as it is.

The number one complaint in marital surveys: The feeling of not being known or understood by one's partner.

The number one complaint in marital surveys is the feeling of not being known or understood by one's partner, "I thought I knew this person. I don't even know him anymore. We've changed so much. I just feel like we've drifted apart. We've gotten so wrapped up in our careers. We've been raising kids. We just kind of feel like glorified roommates. I'm just looking over at this other person and it's like he is a stranger to me now."

It's because we've stopped investing in the know.

Psalm, chapter 139, verses 1-4 says:

"Oh Lord, you have examined my heart and you know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do. You know what I'm going to say even before I say it, Lord." (NLT)

That's an amazing passage. Now, what if we took the wisdom of that and we really strive to know our spouse like God knows us. And some of you are like, "Well, I'm not God." You're right. You're not. But what if we were to take that wisdom...

Guys, think about this, especially the guys in the room. When you found that girl you were like, "Man, I just met my future wife." You went on a hunting expedition is what you did. You went after her and you were rolling up the red carpet. You were pursuing her.

And then—I hear so many ladies say this, "We get married. We've been married a few years and he stopped pursuing me." In other words, "He stopped trying to know me. He's no longer a student of me." And obviously the opposite is true as well.

Philippians 12, verse 2 says:

"Make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another," now this last part is so important, "and working together with one mind and purpose." (NLT)

It's a struggle to know your spouse well. Part of it is because men and women are incredibly different—they are incredibly different in the way that they communicate. And

most conflicts in marriage—and I feel like I can kind of safely say this one, Lindsay and I will be married 25 years this next summer and I feel like I can say this from personal experience—most conflicts in marriage are misunderstandings.

You say one thing but your spouse hears another. You know what I'm talking about. It's complicated. So, you say something, you get into a fight. There is what I think I said but then there's what she thinks I said. There is what I really said, but then there's what she thinks I really said. There's why I said what I said, but then there's what she thinks why I said what I said. And this is how I felt about what I said and this is how she feels about what I said.

Does this make anybody's brain want to explode? It makes you want to give up, kind of wave the white flag, get passive aggressive. You can't. You've got to fight for understanding. You've got to fight for your spouse, not against.

Maybe it starts here with this:

Your spouse's perception is your reality

Your spouse's perception is your reality whether you like it or not. Doctor John Van Epp says, "You can validate your partner's perspective even when you feel you have been unjustifiably cast in a negative light."

If our first response is defensiveness, it shuts down communication. So, what do we end up doing? Maybe I say something absent mindedly and it offends her and so she says to me, "I can't believe you said that." And instead of seeking to be soft-hearted and to really know her and understand, I might say something like this. By the way, this is totally hypothetical, I've never done this. This is just for illustration.

I might say, "I'm sorry you heard it that way." Oh, man. That's passive aggressive. Or, "That's not what I meant." That's defensiveness. Or, "You're so much like your mother." That's just low. That's just low. So you're not validating.

You can validate their perspective. Maybe they were totally wrong but you're still validating their perspective. What it does is open up the lines of communication. Instead you can say this, "Oh, man. Thank you for telling me that, I'm so sorry I came across that way. Tell me how that hits you. Tell me your experience."

Philippians, chapter 2, verses 3-4 says:

"Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself."

Verse 4 could save a lot of marriages:

"Don't look out only for your own interests, but take interest in others, too." (NLT)

I've heard that verse and I've always thought, "Well, that's for friends and family and co-workers." What about your spouse? What about that person you're in a dating relationship with? Take interest in them too.

See, here's what I mean. You've got to become a student of your spouse for the duration, because:

Your spouse is always changing, and if you don't continue to invest in knowing them, the gap just grows wider and wider

Your spouse is always changing, and if you don't continue to invest in knowing them, here's what happens. The gap just grows wider and wider and wider and wider. People do not get divorced overnight. It's a year-long process of drifting and then most affairs, most deceptions happen because you've been drifting.

Lindsay and I have been married almost 25 years. We started dating 27 years ago. And she has changed, for the better. Alright? I want to be clear about that. In fact, we were together this last week and I was working on this sermon and I turned to her and I asked her, "Here's the way that I think you've changed. Is this true?" And she validated this.

She used to be a night owl. When we first got married she would stay up late into the night. And I would wake up in the morning and the whole house could be rearranged. She would just stay up late into the night. Now she goes to bed early. She's changed.

She used to love Little Debbie Nutty Bars. Can I get a good amen? Right? That's a good woman right there. Now she doesn't touch them. She used to love 1990s Shania Twain and Mariah Carey. That's who she listened to all of the time. Now she listens to Ella Fitzgerald and Nat King Cole. She's an old soul. She's changed. My point is this. If I don't keep up with the know fader and continue to be a student of her then the gap grows wider and wider.

In a 17-year longitudinal study on divorce, the top two reasons people get divorced are these:

We grew apart

We stopped talking

We grew apart because we stopped talking. And when the know fader goes down it affects every other part of the relationship. The average couple speaks less than 20 minutes compared to most people who watch two-and-a-half hours of social media and spend over three hours watching TV.

Here's a big mistake that a lot of couples can make. When your kids are between the ages of zero and 18, what ends up happening is you become busy raising them, taking them to recitals, taking them to games, investing in them—and you should, you should.

But, here's the mistake many married couples make. If you were to be honest, you know your kids better than your spouse.

Massive mistake—the reason why is because eventually they are going to grow up and leave you, they will move out, and your spouse is still there. This is why many marriages end in divorce when the kids go off to college. You look over and you're like, "You are a stranger." It's because you stopped investing in the know.

Here are the take aways for today. If you are single, and you look at that Relationship Attachment Model that I had behind me, focus on knowing before you progress to the next step.

If not, have a course correcting conversation today. If he freaks out on you, if she gets upset with you because you want to have a course correcting conversation, that's a good indicator he or she is not the one you want to build a life with, because when the storms of life hit, character collapses.

If you are married, just go back to the friendship. Go back to the know. Schedule a regular date night.

Get into a group. Fellas, men are so lonely in these days. And if you're dealing with stuff and if you're not vocalizing it to anybody, then you need some brothers who will speak into your life and hold you accountable, pray for you.

See a counselor before you need one. You don't wait for the car engine to blow before you take it in for an oil change; you take it in ahead of time. The same is true for your marriage and your relationships.

Move toward Jesus. Maybe today just go, "Man, I don't know if we can make this work because it just seems so complicated." And that's where today what both of you can do is just re-commit yourself, not just to Jesus, but to developing the mindset of Jesus. Bring that as step one into your relationship.

I realize that I have likely just opened up a whole can of worms. It's not lost on me. When I was driving in today I thought, "Man, there may be some awkward silences in the car on the way home today."

This sermon might cause some arguments and might surface some things. Can we just give each other some grace? Can we just invite the Holy Spirit in to do a work? Even right now in this space right here, I just want to have a sacred moment, a holy moment, where...

Maybe you're afraid to make eye contact with your boyfriend or girlfriend or your spouse because of some things that I've just said. Could we just have a moment here where the Holy Spirit meets you right where you are? Just softens both of your hearts.



Some of you are here and you're not with your boyfriend or girlfriend or your spouse because they won't come with you. It just makes you sad. We just want to come around you as a church and pray over you and pray with you.

So we'll have prayer counselors down front and around the room. I know some of you may not want to walk all of the way down here. I understand. We'll have prayer counselors in the middle of the room. Let's spend a little bit of time, just a few moments praying asking God to do what only He can do.

Father, we come to You right now. I know that this is a subject of great joy and fulfillment in so many of our lives, something that we want. We want a soul mate. We want a romantic interest. We want a healthy marriage. And it eludes so many of us. There are all kinds of reasons for that.

Father, right now, today, I just know that there are quite possibly a lot of hurting hearts. I just pray that Your Holy Spirit would do some surgery, bring some healing, extend some grace.

I pray that everybody here would know that they are not a lost cause. They are not damaged goods. But You have a plan and a purpose. It is not too late to begin to develop the mindset of Jesus and do this Your way.

God, what many of us need right now is a miracle. We need a miracle. I pray that You would save some marriages. I pray that You would transform some hearts, that You would purify us so that we can do this a better way.

So, meet us right now where we are, wherever that may be. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

