

# You Are Here

“One day you will find ‘the one.’”

September 24, 2017

Today, we’re going to talk about our pursuit of marriage and relationships.

There is a deep-seated belief we have that “one day you will find the one.” As a single person, if you truly want to get married, then one day you’ll find that special person who completes you. If you’re married, then you’ve either found them or you’re finding out your spouse is not The One you signed up for and maybe you’re disappointed or frustrated or confused wondering what happened? Did I do something wrong? Maybe I need to get out of this marriage and try again?” After all, why isn’t my Prince Charming very charming?

A few weeks back, we talked about our American pursuit of happiness. I would argue there is nothing we pursue with more passion, fervor or hope for happiness than sex, romance and a significant other. In fact, I’d argue that most of the things we’ve talked about previously in this series are a means to get to this end. To find The One you just need to “follow your heart” and “do what makes you happy” but first “you need to find yourself” and “do good things” and then Mr/Mrs Right will come your way.

This is every romantic comedy movie ever. Any rom-com fans out there? The main character is with someone that we all know is not right for them but then there’s someone else that shows up, and then cue the music, slow-mo. Love at first sight. The movie is them discovering they are right for each other. Happily, ever after.

In fact, if you want to watch a movie that fully encapsulates this, one of my personal favorites, is the movie *Serendipity*. It’s so dumb and good!

Two very different ways you’ll see this idea get fleshed out and applied:

Our culture says:

Find your soulmate now! Life will be sad and lonely until you find The One. So, do whatever you can and take all the risks because that soulmate could be right around the corner. This is old Taylor Swift: “You Belong with Me” and “Love Story”.

You do you! Since you never know if the one you’ve got is really ‘the one’, keep your options open. Relationships tie you down. They can be the source of so much hurt and pain. So, keep your options open. Have fun but don’t settle down. This is new Taylor: “We are Never Ever Ever Getting Back Together” and “Look What You Made Me Do”. You may be thinking, “You all mentioned Taylor Swift last week. Do you all jam out to her music at the office?” To that I’d say...let’s just move on....

Now here’s the surprising thing, these two rival narratives didn’t just show up out of nowhere in our culture, in fact, both of these ideas are thousands of years old and rooted in bigger stories that I’m willing to bet most of us wouldn’t actually be fully on board with.

In ancient culture there were similar narratives competing with one another. One stemmed from Greek mythology and the other from Greek philosophy.

It’s actually straight from Greek mythology that we derive the idea “soul mate,” this idea that you must find the one that you connect with on a physical, emotional and spiritual level. According to the ancient thinker

Plato, human beings used to have four arms, four legs, and two faces but then Zeus was jealous and ripped apart human beings in two. So now our lives are spent trying to find our other half.

So over 2000 years, this idea has been completely separated from its original religious belief, but is still massively pressed down into our cultural beliefs where you will say, “I must find the one! There’s a part of me missing and I’m not complete until I find them!”

But there was a second competing narrative: Greek philosophy, particularly Stoicism. And Stoicism promoted this idea of singleness. Monogamy was seen as unnatural and not beneficial for happiness. Passion, love, and attachment were for the weak. And the wise should live beyond those fleeting things. If you want to find your true self, one should strive not to be attached to external things.

Again, you now see this same idea separated from its original belief. “Be single! Love is for the weak. You should strive to be an island and need no one.”

And it’s with this backdrop that Paul writes to the church in Corinth. They are hearing both of these narratives: “Marriage is the goal!” or “No, singleness is the goal!”, and they’re asking Paul, “Ok, so...which is it? Now that we are Christians which one should we strive for?” Paul’s response is pretty shocking...

#### **1 Corinthians 7:6-9**

Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

In one move, Paul confronts both of these ideas. Both singleness and marriage are gifts but not for the reasons you think. Each has advantages and disadvantages. According to verse 7, “each has his own gift from God. One of one kind and one of another.”

#### **1.) Singleness and marriage are both good gifts, each with unique benefits.**

He’s saying, “I have the gift of singleness. Whereas other people are married and therefore have the gift of marriage.” Here he contradicts both the mythology of romance and the philosophy of singleness. He’s saying, “Now that you know Jesus, you don’t need to look to marriage for your completion or lots of partners in singleness for your freedom in pleasure.”

The goal now for those who follow Jesus, whether single or married, is to give your life away. That you are to live in such a way to serve others, not to be served.

Don’t use your singleness in a selfish way that it is centered on you, how much money you can make, what experiences and trips can you take, or even how many people you can sleep with. To do this is to waste the singleness that God has given you. Rather, give your life away to look more like Jesus.

Don’t use your marriage in a selfish way that it is centered on you, how happy can your partner make you or what you get out of it. And then Paul will say why - because of what Jesus has done for you. He willfully laid down His life in self-giving, sacrificial, committed love.

Questions for singles and married folks: Whether you’re single or married, in what ways are you selfishly focused on yourself? In what ways have you so believed the cultural narratives about sex and romance that you’re refusing to trust Jesus and submit to His commands? Take a moment to write these down.

The Bible's view on singleness and marriage are counter-cultural but it's when you see that things are good but not ultimate, that you can leverage your circumstances, your time, your finances, to point to something bigger than yourself. The alternative is, if you view relationships as your ultimate goal you are inevitably going to be crushed and this is the real problem underlying both of the cultural narratives.

Which brings us to the second point.

## **2.) When romance becomes god, disappointment will follow.**

In fact, in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, we see a long historical narrative about what happens when love, sex, and romance become ultimate and a god.

In Genesis 29, we come across one of the patriarchs of the Jewish faith, Jacob, wandering in the desert.

He's looking for someone that will give him love and fulfillment and then he sees this woman, Rachel, and it's love at first sight. Now what's interesting is Jacob has been wandering in the desert and Rachel is the first woman he sees. I would think if you grew up in the desert with an older brother and then get lost in the desert for a long time I would think the first woman you saw would probably look pretty good too.

And the narrative goes, Jacob falls in love at first sight. He runs up and kisses her before they even say anything. That's not a good sign. And then Jacob asks her dad, Laban, for her hand in marriage:

### **Genesis 29:15-20**

Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

As modernists we're tempted to look at this and think... "Oh wow. Now that's love. That's some Notebook/Nicholas Sparks level stuff." But the narrative is supposed to concern us. We're supposed to think, "Uh-oh, this Jacob is an idiot." In fact, in that culture, it was custom to work for a father-in-law as a way to win their daughter's hand in marriage but the average time was only two years. So not only is the offer to work seven years ridiculous, notice this: Laban is not the one who suggests the seven years, Jacob does. We're to read that and think, "Whoa Jacob. Seven years? You don't even know her. What are you doing?" We're supposed to see within this offer how desperate Jacob truly is.

Can you imagine what Laban's reaction must have been? "So you want to marry my daughter huh? Well, you gotta prove yourself to me, I'm not just gonna give her to any---" - "I'll work for you for seven years!" - "Uh....ok. Sure!".

Why is Jacob so insecure?

This is supposed to shock us just how illogical Jacob is being here and how far he is willing to go when he makes romantic love ultimate. "Why is he so controlled, reckless in these ways? Well if you look in Jacob's backstory he actually has a ton of insecurity. Prior to this chapter, he's on the run from his family - he never got the love he wanted from his dad, his older brother hates him and wants him dead and Jacob is aimless and searching for something that will give him the fulfillment he's been looking for all his life.

Similarly, our past wounds, insecurities, and brokenness are actually driving a lot of our current approaches to romance and sex. We only fall for the soulmate lie because we believe there is something empty in us that needs to be fulfilled.

And it's here the Bible is showing us that if we think "The One" is out there waiting for us, then we will do whatever it takes and throw away all rationality to get them. If we believe a partner will complete us we will be like Jacob and toss logic out the window. We will make desperate excuses like:

- I know they have a checkered past, but I can fix them.
- I know they don't have the best dating history, but they haven't dated me.
- I know we've only been dating a little bit, but I know that they're The One.
- I know things shouldn't get physical too quickly, but I need to be fulfilled and they might dump me if I say no. (I know we've crossed boundaries the past 9 months, but we're getting better/loves me.)
- I know I shouldn't compromise my beliefs, but we can make it work.
- I know we broke up, but we had a spark.

Or if you are married, the excuses could be:

- My partner is not making me happy, maybe I should get out of this marriage.
- Marriage is not what I thought it was going to be.

And the story goes, Jacob works for seven years and at the end of the seven years he's asking Rachel's dad, "Ok, hold up your end of the deal. Give me my woman. I'm desperate."

And then comes the twist. The seven years is over and there's a wedding celebration, Jacob probably has a little too much to drink and it's getting late and Jacob wants to consummate his marriage to his bride. (And it was ancient custom that the bride was completely veiled, totally covered up. So, it's dark, Jacob's drunk, his wife is covered up, and they consummate the marriage. And when Jacob wakes up, it's Leah he married and slept with, not Rachel. Laban pulls the switcharoo. Why? Because Laban actually sees Jacob's romantic desperation, whereas Jacob is completely blinded to it, so Laban takes advantage of him.

Jacob works all those years, finally gets a bride, but it's not the bride he wanted, after all those years he married the wrong person. He doesn't get what he wanted. Jacob literally wakes up and realizes how insane he was to chase someone for so long. And then, Laban once again takes advantage of Jacob's romantic blindness and says, "Yeah man, my bad. So...how's another seven years of work sound to you?" This time it's Laban, not Jacob, who suggests the seven years because Laban sees that Jacob is addicted to this fantasy version of love. And you would think Jacob would protest. That he would wake up from his disappointment and walk away or demand justice from Laban. But instead Jacob says, "...ok.". He works another seven years to marry Rachel. Romantic love, rather than giving him fulfillment, it has enslaved him.

We see the Bible is giving us insight here: When it comes to romance and sex and marriage, we are particularly susceptible to making the same mistakes over and over again. Have you noticed that?

Romance idolatry, this idea that one day you will find the one, when we buy into that, we will do whatever it takes to get it, it makes us susceptible to pain and foolishness. Your friends, your family, or even LifeGroup may even be warning you to all the red flags, out of their love for you they may say, "I don't think you should be pursuing this person. This is a damaging relationship." And yet rather than listen to people who care for you, you will blindly run into heartbreak because, after all, what if they are "The One"?

Not only is disappointment inevitable if you prop romance as a god, but we have to come to the realization that there is no such thing as the perfect "one" for anyone. To cite theologian and Duke professor Stanley Hauerwas:

**Stanley Hauerwas**

The assumption is that there is someone just right for us to marry and that if we look closely enough, we will find that just right person. This overlooks a crucial fact, and that fact is this: that we always marry the wrong person. We never know whom it is we marry; we just think we do. And even if we do marry the right person, just give it a while and he or she will change. For marriage, being the enormous thing it is, means we will not be able to stay the same person after entering into it that we were before. [The great challenge then is] learning how to love and care for the stranger to whom you find yourself married.

This happens to Leah. Later on in the chapter, the story begins to turn. After all, just picture yourself in this real-life story. What is marriage like for Leah? She knows she's not really her husband's treasure, his beloved. She constantly feels inadequate and like she has to work for his love.

Meanwhile Rachel is the treasured, beloved... She gets what she's always wanted but her husband is a busted-up sinner. He's not a hero. He's broken. There's no way these marriages don't involve all kinds of conflict and tension and jealousy.

At the end of the chapter, the narrative shifts to Jacob's wife, Leah.

**Genesis 29:31-34**

**31** When the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. **32** And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, for she said, "Because the Lord has looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me." **33** She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Because the Lord has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also." And she called his name Simeon. **34** Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, "Now this time my husband will be attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." Therefore his name was called Levi.

Do you see what's happening here? Leah is caught up in the lies of romantic love too. She thinks, "I will finally get the love I want if I only I do more. If I have more sons, my husband will be proud of me. If I just work more, do more, I will earn his love." Some of you feel this everyday in your marriages - that you need to earn your spouse's love and affection on a daily basis. If there is tension or conflict, it's because maybe you're not doing enough. Some of you singles don't realize how terrible this would be. "The loneliest place in the world is a loveless marriage." This is what Leah feels.

She's caught up in believing this for years and years until finally she gets to this realization that changes the trajectory of her life and marriage. And in the midst of it God sees Leah in her rejection and neediness, and has particular love for her. (This is what God always does. Notices the weak.) Look with me at verse 35:

**Genesis 29:35**

And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "This time I will praise the Lord." Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she ceased bearing.

Do you see what's happening here? Finally! This is beautiful insight for us. Leah finally figures out what Jacob never could: that true satisfaction and fulfillment can only come from God. Only God is able to give you what your heart really longs for - meaning, purpose, unconditional love and acceptance.

You see the story of Jacob is not a story of romance. It's a story of the danger and disappointment wrapped up in thinking relational fulfillment will satisfy you. Jacob, Leah, and Rachel are all the victims of what happens when you pursue love to the point that it's a god.

That brings us to the third point...

### 3.) Find contentment in God's love that won't ever disappoint.

For marrieds in the room, your spouse is not the One who will give you what you're really looking for.

For singles in the room, your future partner is not the One who will make you completely happy.

The proof is to look at the Cross of Jesus. Jesus, loved you not because you were lovely, He loved you even when you wanted nothing to do with Him. Where Jacob worked 14 years to get his bride, Jesus worked a lifetime and gave up His life to earn you.

You don't have to be like Jacob or Leah, earning your love. Jesus has earned that love for you.

And the key to living a fulfilled life no matter your relationship status is to be content in this reality: that the love of Jesus is all you need. Jesus-centered contentment says, "No matter my circumstances or season of life, my hope is grounded in something bigger and greater than me. I may be shaken but I am not crushed. I may be hurting but I am not destroyed." If you are crushed and disappointed in your relationships, Jesus is inviting to place your hope in something better.

He's inviting you to hope in Him as your source of all joy, all hope, and all fulfillment because only He will give you the true love you're looking for.

My concern is if you are someone who is constantly anxious and fretting about your relationship status, what that may reveal about your heart is that your hope is rooted in another person. And it's only a matter of time before you will inevitably be disappointed. One day you will wake up and be disappointed like Jacob or Leah. Wishing for someone to complete you only to find out that you are a slave to romantic love and no one can truly complete you.

And what Jesus would say to you is, "Come to me, all who are weak and burdened. All who are single and married. All who are lonely and frustrated, and I will give you rest."

For singles, once you let this sink into your heart you become freed up to take the pressure off and pursue a relationship because you see that it won't ultimately make you or break you. You can date with discernment and wisdom to ask yourself, is this someone I should really pursue or not? You can throw away your superficial list of - is this person into the same hobbies as me? Do they look this particular way? Do they come from this type of family? And instead you can ask the questions that really matter, like "Do they really, truly love Jesus? Are they committed to a church family? Are we headed in compatible directions?"

You can even bring the family of God in on the decision, knowing that you love them and they love you, and I can give you objective advice on what to do.

For singles, when you look at Jesus as your source of ultimate fulfillment you no longer have to believe the lie that you need a spouse to make you happy. You can, like Jesus, live a completely fulfilled life as a single human being. You can leverage your singleness for ministry purposes.

For marrieds, when you look at Jesus as your source of ultimate fulfillment:

- Trust in the sovereignty of God that you are with the one you're supposed to be with.
- You can have fights and arguments *and* know that you are still committed to one another.
- You won't be shocked that you're both busted-up sinners.
- You can extend grace to them and they can extend grace to you.

- Don't let yourself daydream about other possibilities.
- Love the one you're with. Encourage them. Be on their team. Date them.

Wherever you are this morning, when you look to Jesus you can find satisfaction and hope no matter your season of life.

For some of us here, you have been single longer than you'd like and you've given up hope in finding a partner or you think "Nobody could love someone like me." And Jesus is reminding you that He loved you just as you are, when you were dead in your sin and wanting nothing to do with Him, Jesus saw you as valuable and worth giving His life for. So run to Him and pour your life out in the process.

For others here, perhaps you're mourning the loss of a spouse. And it's here that Jesus is weeping alongside you, He is angry at death and went to great lengths to do something about so that one day you will never experience loss ever again.

For some of us, you've gone through a painful divorce. And you tried reconciling but it didn't work out, and you're feeling bitterness and wondering, "How can God redeem this?" And there's good news for you too, Jesus is calling you to place your hope in Him. Because He is in the business of taking the broken pieces of your life and putting them together in such a way that you will better see His beauty.

To prove it to you, take a look at verse 35 again. Notice the name of Leah's last son. It's Judah. Judah would later become the line by which King David would be born and most especially - Jesus is from the line of Judah. Which means, God used the disappointment of Jacob and Leah's jacked-up relationship and still redeemed it for His glory, and He offers that for you as well.

After all, this is what all of our relationships and all of our circumstances point to: Jesus. The Bible actually calls His church, the people he saves and who put their trust in Him, as His Bride. That all of Christianity is one great love story of how far Jesus is willing to go to rescue His beloved.

In the words of John Piper:

**John Piper**

Marriage is temporary; 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.

One day all of us will experience what our souls have longed for. One day Jesus, the groom, will finally get His Bride free from all sin. His Church will be spotless and blameless. While we only know His love in part, one day we will know it fully. While we experience His friendship now, we will one day experience His friendship free from all pain, all disappointment, all conflict and tears. All of those things will get swallowed up and forgotten in the beauty of God's love for you.

It's not that one day you will find the one, it's that for those who place their hope and trust in Jesus, we have already found the One and we need not find it anyone else.