

Patience for Relationships
Cross Culture – February 19, 2011
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As a pastoral team, we are aware that a topic like this can be a difficult thing to cover in a group of this diversity. We feel that the Lord is in this, but we're also aware that in a group this size, there are many different ages and stages represented. To be clear, it is important to acknowledge that how we each apply this message in our own homes and families is going to look different for everyone. We want to be faithful to raise the important issues and questions. Then, parents, it is necessary for you to be faithful and take it with your teens as you, together, think through it in a way that applies most to them.

Now, let me ask you a question: what is one example of away that you have heard labeled as "The Covenant Fellowship Way" of doing romantic relationships? (*Answers from those gathered.*)

Folks, here's how I want to begin this series with you. I want to begin by making it clear that there is no official "Covenant Fellowship Way" of doing relationships. Everything that you just said I have also heard as ways to describe our way of doing relationships. I want you to hear this loud and clear: we don't want the "Covenant Way" to be the first thought that comes into your mind as you approach this topic. Covenant is not first a "courting" church or a "dating" church. That is not the driving motive our heart. As pastors, we hope and pray that the way things are done here is only true for one reason: because it reflects biblical principles and directions.

And this is important...because there is an important distinction to make when it comes to how we do relationships. There are certain practices that we do need to obey and uphold, such as "Do not have sex before you're married." (That's an important one!) But in other areas, we don't have biblical authority to hold out one specific practice over another. So we can't say that you must court or you must date. We are bound to the Scriptures, and all we can do is be faithful to teach and hold out biblical principles. We want to be a people who focus more on the principles that God *has* inspired rather than on the well-intended practices we each establish to carry those principles out. The practice can be important and helpful, but only when the principles are set soundly in God's Word.

So...while I desire to say loud and clear that there is no official "Covenant Way" of doing relationships, we as your pastors believe very strongly that there are biblical values and principles for how to walk through our relationships. Consequently, that's what we will be attempting to address in this series. We believe that whether we eat or whether we drink - whether we date or whether we court - we should...and must...do all that we do for the glory of God.

So you will not hear us saying things like, "*This is how you do relationships here at Covenant, so get with the program!*" Nor will you hear us say, "*There are no*

guidelines for how we do relationships, so just try to be smart!” No. The goal of this series is to hold God’s Word out for all of us to see. Then, as a church called to honor and live under the wonderful Word of God, both parent and youth alike, we are called to root our convictions firmly in the Word of God. So, unless the Scriptures themselves lay out specific practices, we do not want to be devoted to a specific practice or a technique as “God’s way” or “Covenant’s way.” We want to love and delight in the principles and values God has provided because they are genuinely for our good.

This is especially helpful, folks, because God’s Word says very little about whether you should call it dating or courting. However, and this is crucial that you hear me on this the Bible **does** speak to relationships. It holds up **values** and **principles** for us that carry authority...and are designed to help us, both teens and parents. So, what are these principles. Well, over the next for months, we’re going to look at four of them.

1. **Patience and trust:** We are called to be patient and to trust God with every area of our lives, and not just take matters into our own hands. Patience for relationships and in relationships honors the Lord. And it ensures that we are able to have the very most that God desires for us. (This is going to be tonight’s theme.)
2. **Purposefulness:** In our culture, it’s so easy to do things without any real reason for it at all. You hear that everyone else has a boyfriend...so you want to go get a boyfriend. Everyone else dates multiple people... so you want to. However, in God’s economy, we are called to do all that we do for the glory of God. And when we gain a right perspective for why God gives us relationships in the first place, it focuses our teen years on what’s most important. It does away with so much of the confusion that surrounds this area.
3. **Purity:** God’s Word is very clear about the call to be pure, and as pastors we know that it is a challenge to remain pure when you are getting emotionally involved at the ages 14 or 15 or 16 or 17. It’s a challenge to remain pure, period. The teen years just make it that much more of a challenge. And our desire is help you see and embrace the biblical value of purity, causing you to see all potential and future relationships through that value. We hope you will see how it directly effects our thinking about the timing of when it is wise to start a relationship.
4. **Parents:** God’s Word is pretty clear on this point as well. Your parents are a gift to you in all of life. They are a **huge** gift to you in the area of relationships. Are they perfect? No. Are they the wisest people around? No. (Personally, I feel really bad for my kids when they grow up. They have to deal with me.) No parent is perfect. No parent has the corner on wisdom. However, your parents have been given to you by God and can help in this area.

That’s where we are headed in this series. So, tonight, we’re going to start by looking at the biblical value of patience and trust.

Let's start just by admitting the truth. It can be very difficult to be patient for a relationship, can't it? The world is screaming at us to be in a relationship. Every movie that we watch makes us desire it more and more. And then there's the good desire for it. If we are Christians and have our eyes set on marriage someday, we're trying to figure out who will be that person we eventually marry. ...that we are going to kiss and sleep with for the rest of our life is. That's a big deal. Who wants to make a mistake with that? But here's the danger, guys. Because of how big it is, and because of all the emotions that are wrapped up in it, it is easy to leave God out of the equation. If the world and all of our friends are saying to get involved in a relationship, it's difficult to listen to God who calls you to wait patiently on him.

And so, we want to talk tonight about one of the essential biblical values for our relationships: patience and trust. And I hope to make it clear why this is so important. It is important to have vision for this value, because if you don't believe God is for you in this, you are not going to include him in it. You'll do it on your own and in your own way. So the verse that we are going to key off of tonight is Proverbs 3:5-6:

Proverbs 3:5-6 – “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”

And we're keying off of that verse because it speaks truth to the very heart of our need. First, it speaks to our temptation to lean on our own understanding. Second, it speaks to how we are tempted not to trust God. Let's look at the first one.

1. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart!” Note that it doesn't say, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart except for relationships.” No. This verse captures all of life. Relationships are included here. Trust in the Lord with ALL your heart.

I don't know about you, but when I was going through the teen years, I had a hard time believing that this was really true. I could trust God for school, family, sports, and friends. But when it came to relationships...I don't think so! Trust went out the window. *This one's on me. I'll figure this out. I'll take control.* Why? Because if I don't direct this, I might not get what I feel I need.

But people, let's stop and think about who this verse directs our trust toward. We're talking about God. Would it make any sense at all if he had perfect, sovereign control of every single thing in the universe *except* our relationships? Would it make sense if he said, “Yeah, I hold galaxies together with a word and know every detail about you, but I don't care at all about this area of your life?” *No, God is in control of every area of your life. And God can be trusted in every area of your life. The call for us is simple, “Trust Him.”*

2. “Lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.” – Oh, how easy it is to lean on our own understanding.

Particularly in relationships. We can sometimes hold our opinions and desires so strongly that we convince ourselves that our parents are just wrong and don't understand how real or right this is. We think we're old enough to figure this out.

I was talking with one of the senior guys recently, who kept saying how he felt like he was old enough to make his own decisions. After a while, I just stopped him and said, "Dude, we're never old enough to trust solely in ourselves. We always need help."

Here's what I'm getting at. I'm 28 years old, married for 6 years, have 4 kids, own a house, and serve as a pastor. But I don't buy a couch without going to guys in my fellowship group and asking for their thoughts on that decision. And that's not because I can't make my own decision, I'm certainly free to do so. It's because I believe God's Word is right when it says that we benefit from the perspective of those around us. (Proverbs 11:14) This is particularly true when our counselors point us to God.

I *could* do it by myself. You *could* try to do relationships by yourself. However, that simply is not best. "In all your ways acknowledge **him** and **he** will direct your paths." Humility before God goes a long way in relationships. Every day we hear the message of relationships and sexuality from the world's perspective. If we're not intentional with our thoughts and our hearts, we will lean on that rather than on God. And that is trouble.

Friends, trusting God is the best thing you can do in your life. It's important, though to understand what it means to trust him. You see, we create a real problem when we think that trusting God only brings sacrifice. *If we do things God's way – we lose this and this and never get to experience that.* But this is not truth. In reality, patiently trusting and waiting on God only benefits us. It brings personal, spiritual, and relational benefits to us. Why? Because God is for us in this.

This is what I want to look at for the remainder of our time together: the benefits (or perks) to waiting patiently on God for our relationships. Let's look at 7 of the perks.

Perk #1: You can know that God wants you to want this.

This is an incredible truth. Listen. God's Word says that wanting a relationship is a very good thing: *Proverbs 18:22 – "He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord."*

God has put in each and every one of us a desire for relationships and intimacy. We are wired with a desire for closeness to another person...and that's a good thing. Guys, God knows what you are feeling. He designed you to have those feelings. He created you to desire romance and love. Girls, God knows the longings and dreams that you have. He put those there and he designed you to desire them.

Listen, God truly desires that young men have a passion to be faithful, loving, crazy-romantic, fun-pursuing, intimacy-loving husbands. He wants that; that honors and

glorifies him. God wants young women to want to be faithful, loving, crazy-romantic, fun-pursuing, intimacy-loving wives. He genuinely does.

I start here as the first perk for a reason. Too often, when we talk about relationships, we only hear things like, “Don’t even think about liking a girl till you’re 28 years old! If you do, confess that to God right now!” But that’s not God’s heart! God has given us these things as gifts to desire. And it’s okay to think about and desire a relationship. It’s a sign that your functioning as God has designed you to function.

Perk #2: You can know that God wants this for you.

Not only does God want you to want it. God is committed to bringing it to you. Genesis 2:18 gives us a great example of God’s heart for this. *“Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’”* Guys, basically that means we need a lot of help. So, in order to help us, God has basically said, *“Here’s what I am going to do. I’m going to create a person perfectly fitted for you and the two of you can enjoy life together. You can fellowship with each other, serve one another, and enjoy sex together. Why am I going to do this? Because I’m a loving God who loves to give good gifts to his children.”*

Now, this is good stuff. Trusting God for our relationships should excite us more than anything, because it reminds us that he’s a good God who gives good gifts.

Perk #3: You can know that God’s plan is a thousand times better than your plan.

The temptation here is to trust God generally but not specifically. The temptation is to think that it’s ok to trust God with the big things. However, when it comes to satisfying our specific desires, we’re tempted to think that God might just drop the ball and we might end up with a spouse that smells funny and doesn’t have a romantic bone in their body. Isn’t that true? Isn’t that what we can think sometimes? Be honest.

In defense of our dreams and our desires, we give them far more value and authority that we give to God and his desires for us. We can think that our plan is most important and our dreams are the height of perfection. And we sell God short in thinking that he couldn’t possibly come up with something better for us than we can.

There was a girl I pursued before Ashley. I was convinced she was going to be the woman I would eventually marry. I pursued her for two full years certain she was what I needed to be happy. In my perspective she was perfect. Then, through a series of circumstances, the Lord led me away from that relationship. Two years...gone. It was only a few months later that God led me to Ashley. Talk about God blowing your dreams out of the water! My plan was no comparison to God’s plan.

Listen. When we wait on God, when we are patient before him, we can know beyond a shadow of a doubt that God has a far better plan for us than we can even imagine. So, let me ask you a couple questions at this point.

1. Do you believe that God is looking out for you?
2. Do you believe that he has a plan for you and is eager to provide for you?
3. Or are you preoccupied with relationships, because you don't really trust what God might do?

Oh folks...he's going to do amazing things. Trust him with all your heart.

Perk #4: You can know that God wants to do a really big work in your life before he gives you a relationship.

Here's the truth of the matter – God has a lot of work to do in you before you are ready for marriage. You are not who you are going to be in five years. You are not the same person that you are going to be when you get married. The nature of life is that we are always changing, particularly if we are Christians. God is constantly sanctifying us. We are learning and growing every day. If you compile five or six years of growth, you come to a sobering realization. You realize that when you are 21, you are going to have entirely new desires, new passions, new likes and dislikes that you don't have now.

That is a perfectly right and good thing, The danger comes in when you think you have an accurate read on who you are going to be and what you are going to want when you are ready for marriage. As a result, you begin to pursue a certain person now and give yourself to that person. But that person is not likely the one who is going to be your spouse. That's kind of scary, isn't it?

And this is where my heart has the greatest concern for many of you. I know many of you are thinking about relationships in this stage of your life. Maybe you are in a relationship or just thinking about a relationship. Some of you are unofficially in a relationship with someone. (This is when everyone knows you like each other...you just haven't made it official) My concern is that you are prematurely attaching yourselves to that guy or that girl. And you don't know what God has for you as it relates to a spouse. You are jumping the gun and not allowing God to do all that he wants to do in your life and in that other person's life.

These are some of the most formative years of your entire life. This is when you begin to find out who you really are in Christ. It is when you figure out what you really believe about most things. How sad it would be to spend these crucial years identifying yourself romantically with one person, assuming they are going to ultimately be your spouse. In the end, for most of you, you will discover that six years have gone by and that person so close to you now is marrying someone else. Then, you're left wondering who you really are.

People, God has so much more for you than that. He wants to use you in unbelievable ways in this church and in the world around us. He wants to take all of your energy and emotions and center them not on things that aren't going to last, but on him. Now is the

time to give yourself to him. Rather than spending all your thoughts and energies on things that won't last...give yourself to him.

Here's a practical thought for us as a community. If we are seeking to trust God for our relationships, it's not helpful when we make relationships the constant topic of conversation. I'm not saying that you can't talk about guys and girls and even have desires. Those conversations can be helpful if done in the light and in integrity before God. But if we talk about them excessively, we forfeit opportunities to help each other focus on what will last. That's God. Let God have his way in your life.

Perk #5: You can know that you are not needlessly playing with the heart of another person's spouse.

Here's an interesting thought: That guy or that girl that you have a thing for right now might end up to be your Community Group Leader, or your Community Group Leader's wife, in 10 years. It's true. It is likely that the person you are infatuated with now will be married to someone else in ten years.

We've already admitted that you don't have a clue who we are going to be in five years. This means that you also don't know who you are going to want to marry then. If that's true (and it is), why allow yourself to be distracted by the person God does not have for you? And why distract the heart of this person you care about with someone they will not marry either?

James 4:13-14 says, *"Come now you who say tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there, and trade and make a profit, yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring!"* We don't know what tomorrow will bring. It's frightening to realize that we act like we do.

The exciting thing about trusting God for our relationships is that we take full advantage of all that God has for us now. We have as few regrets as possible in ten years, when we actually may know who it is we are going to marry...or may even be married.

You men have an opportunity to protect the hearts of the ladies in this room. You ought not play with their hearts, but rather protect them at all cost. Ladies, you have an opportunity to run hard after God and protect the hearts and thought-life of the guys in this room. You ought not put yourselves out there to be noticed or desired.

It's a scary thing to think about having to give an account to God for having kept that guy or that girl from living for God as much as they could have. It's scary...but real.

Perk #6 – You can know that God's grace is bigger than your weakness.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understandings. In all your ways acknowledge Him and he will make straight your paths." If he is making straight our paths, that means that at one point, our paths were not straight.

I believe some of you are feeling very convicted by how you have not trusted God for your relationships. Maybe you are preoccupied with the subject of relationships, talking and thinking about it too much. Maybe you've been hiding certain things from your parents. Maybe you've begun sending suggestive and explicit texts that no one knows about. Maybe it's actual sexual sin and fornication. I don't know what it is, but as you hear me talk condemnation is crushing you. Regrets weigh heavily upon you. Shame is knocking. As you look at your life thus far, you are aware it has been very crooked.

This because of your weakness. You are guilty before God because you have leaned on your own understanding rather than trusting him. You have done what you have wanted to do in the way that you have wanted to do it, and it has not produced the joy and freedom you thought it would. You are under the judgment of God, and you know it.

If this is you...if this is true about you...I want you to hear this – God is bigger than your sin. We are small and weak people; God is bigger and stronger. In this particularly tempting area for most of us, we need to know that God's grace is great. He is faithful when we have been faithless. You stand condemned, but you don't have to bear that condemnation forever.

Jesus Christ came to this earth for those who are condemned. He came for you. He came to pull you out of the lusts of the flesh and make you his own. There is no crooked path that the gospel cannot make straight. Our God makes all things new. He calls to you right now, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28) Bottom line: no one has sinned their way beyond the reach of God's grace.

As I was preparing this message, I had a clear sense that there are some guys and girls here who feel trapped by certain relationship situations they have gotten themselves into. You thought you knew what you were doing, but things have run away from you. You feel like it's almost beyond your own control. You feel trapped. You don't know how to end it.

Listen. As long as Jesus Christ stands in heaven, you are not trapped. He is able to save you from your sin and out of that situation. Yes, it requires humility and a willingness to walk in the light. But he is mighty to save. Confess your situation to him and then go to your parents, go to one of the A-team members, go to a friend who brought you, and confess it and ask for help.

God's grace is bigger than your sin. What an amazing thing!

Perk #7 – You can know that God wants you to want this.

Did I already mention this? Of course I did. But it's so true and I did not want us to forget this. My prayer for this series is that God would take our small, weak vision for relationships and blow them out of the water. I want God to give us a much bigger vision

for relationships. A vision that captures all that he can do. A vision that excites us so much that it causes us to trust him more fully and lean on him more completely as we are patient in our relationships. As a community, I want all of us to be able to say, "I trust you, God. I'll follow you. I will be patient and wait for your timing. My wisdom is insufficient. I'll depend upon you. I want all that you have for me.

Is that what you want? Let's commit to helping each other honor God, trust God, and lean on God in this area of our lives. Amen?? Amen.