

Hey, 7:15 crowd. Good to see you guys. Happy Palm Sunday. I chose to go that route rather than to say April Fools, but happy both to you. I'm really thankful to be here with you guys tonight.

Let's go to Philippians 2:1. We'll be looking at the first four verses in here. Paul says, **"So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."**

There's no question that Paul loved the Philippian church. He had great stories with the Philippian church. I'm not going to get into those stories, but they involved an earthquake, and they involved getting thrown in jail. It was the first church he ever planted in Europe. He loved the Philippians. This church had grown. It really had blossomed since he left Philippi.

So he's writing them a letter of encouragement. Philippians is primarily an encouraging letter, and he's saying some of the choicest things we have in our Christian vocabulary. He writes to them, "I thank God when I remember you. I'm thankful you are a partner in the gospel. I long for you with the affection of Christ Jesus." He loved the Philippians, and like any good pastor, he would exhort them to walk in the manner worthy of their calling. He also has concerns. He voices his concerns too. He doesn't have too many hang-ups with the Philippian church, but he does say (and we see really clearly in this passage) two things.

He says, "Temptations toward rivalry and conceit are at every turn, and Philippian church, if you want to lose the unity in the mission, if you want the unity to unravel and you want the mission to be hindered, then be full of rivalry and be full of conceit." But he doesn't want those things, so he says avoid those things and it keeps and sustains the unity and the mission of the church. He loved them, and really a snapshot is to say to the Philippians, "I love you, you encourage me, but rivalry and conceit will eat you alive. Remember Christ, press into him always."

I love this church. I love you guys. I especially love this service; it makes me (at 29) feel really young. I love the story of this campus of The Village. If you don't know, 20 to 30 years ago, this was a thriving church. It

had crazy reach into the city and people lined the streets to come here. Then, really over the course of two decades, people just left, and they left in droves. That had something to do with bad leadership and a few other things, but a few faithful (the remnant, if you will) prayed, and they asked for the Lord to continue to do a work here, because to be honest, they were having a hard time paying their bills.

All the while, a lot of people are coming from Dallas to Flower Mound (from like the far sides of Dallas to Flower Mound), and we began praying for a campus. So Steve Hardin spearheads this conversation with them, and three years ago, you have the birth of The Village campus here, The Village Church (Dallas Northway), and I love what the Lord is doing here among us.

Really, I love our black limousine shuttles we have that are so Dallas. I love the parking team that braves any weather, any kind of condition, except for the 111 degrees last summer. They were just like, "Man, I'm done. You all go park yourselves." I love them. I love those guys. I love the way Isaac leads us in prayer. I love our wild-man prophet, Steve Hardin, our campus pastor. I love him. I love the way he loves you. I love the way he counsels and pastors me.

There is so much about you guys to be encouraged about. I love that our elder-led prayers never get out on time because we're just praying. I love the gray hairs, and I love the new people. I love this campus. I understand maybe just a shadow of Paul's affection for a people because I have a deep affection for you guys, for this campus.

One thing I think particularly encourages me are the singles, because you guys make up a huge chunk of the pie here, and you just keep coming. This campus is a gathering of singles, and a reach to singles in Dallas, and you just keep coming. I mean, if you open a closet door somewhere in this campus, a single person is going to jump out of it. Really, you're everywhere, and I love it, and I love you. I love the makeup of this campus. God has been so faithful.

So my conviction, the Lord laid it on my heart to speak to you guys, so tonight this is a message to you, to the singles. It's the Word primarily *applied* to you, but I do think in speaking *to* you, I can speak *through* you to the church as well. So if you're like me and you're like, *Man, this is a singles' sermon. You all didn't tweet that out*, just hang with me. Hang with me because I think even if you're married or anything, I think there's something the Lord might show you through this.

I want to put my cards on the table. I want to tell you two things, singles. I want to say you encourage the mess out of me, and there are some things I'm really concerned about with some of you guys. I want to walk through what those two things are. I want to speak *to* you, and I want to speak *through* you, and I want

to speak a message that all of us need to hear. I want to emphasize that this is a word to the singles here at this campus. I'm not interested about talking about biblical singleness.

There are great resources and references I could point you to that take a higher approach. This is a word to you guys, so I pray that the Lord would be faithful. In verse 1, Paul says, "**So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy...**" He lists out these characteristics of Christ, and by God's grace there are. By God's grace these gifts are evident here among you guys.

Jenn Lagrone is one of my friends. She is a nurse practitioner. I think that's a fancy word for a nurse who can give you drugs. She wrote this blog post that kind of made me cry a little bit. The title of it is "Moving to Africa without a husband!?!? Yep. Sure am." It's this dialogue between her and the Lord about why she would go and how he's calling her and then some things she's working through, some lies that maybe she's heard or some pushback some people have given her.

I just want to read this part of the blog. Here's the question: "Shouldn't you just wait in the U.S. until God gives you a husband? That would be much safer!!" Listen to her response. "Ha! Whose definition of safe?!" Then she quotes Psalm 91:4. "**He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart'**... I'm pretty sure if God can create every nation and people group from nothing, then He can provide a husband for me regardless of my location." I didn't just quote the one token missionary we have going to rural Africa. I didn't just pull that card out.

In fact, I don't have enough time here to tell you how encouraged I am by the singles at The Village Church. If I had more time, I would tell you about Sean Bryant, and if there's anything set up on this campus, Shawn Bryant probably had something to do with it. If I had more time, I'd tell you about Paul Galangco who is always here. He's always here and he's always available. He is our guard dog because if there is any ounce of shadiness anywhere, Paul is going to be there, like, he just sniffs it out. He kind of almost longs for it a little bit.

If I had more time, I'd tell you about Jessica Brazeal, a good friend of my family, who works at Genesis Women's Shelter, which is a shelter for battered women. I'd tell you about Ashley Marble and Jill Jackson, who live in one of the most criminalized, marginalized places in Dallas because they love Jesus and they want those people to know the Lord. The list goes on and on and on. So these qualities (encouraged by Christ, comforted by his love, participation in the Holy Spirit, the affection and the sympathy of Christ), do I see it? Yeah, I sure do and it's wonderful. You encourage me. The Lord is doing a good work here.

Paul is asking these questions not for us to doubt it, but to really provoke thought. That's why he asked it. That's why he listed these things. He's asking, "Is the life of Christ being manifest in you?" Because Paul knows (like we know) that when you meet Jesus, he changes you. He looks you in the eye, and you just start to look like him when you're converted to Christ. So my question to you is Paul's. Is Christ's love evidenced in you in love for one another and a love for Dallas? Do we see a divine transference of his love and his gifts from the heavens to you by the Spirit out to one another?

Because Paul takes these things and he says we can't stop here. That's what he says in verse 2. Let's look at it, all eyes on the text. We need to "**complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.**" Paul says it's not enough for all of you to be aware of Christ's presence in you. He says you have to go somewhere with it. You have to take your unique gifts and you have to unite. There has to be a collaboration, and look how he spells this out: a collaboration of one mind, one love, one Spirit, with the intention of one purpose, a unified church on mission to make Jesus glorious to one another and make them beautiful to the city of Dallas.

That is our distinct calling here, Village Church (Dallas Northway). If you notice, we're kind of strategic with the ministries we provide. We're not *better* than any other church, but we have a smaller offering of ministries we try to resource well. We try to do our ministries very, very well here. So we have like this Family Worship night coming up in a few weeks. Then we have a GroupConnect coming up where we're going to press multi-generational home groups.

The reason why we push those things is we want to facilitate as much face-to-face interaction among all of you guys as we can. So we want the young guys and the old guys together. We want the people who drive Buicks to hang out with the people who lease smart cars. We want you guys together. We want the young Dallas professionals with the good ol' boys. We want students with their parents. We want singles with the marrieds.

We want people who watch *Matlock* reruns to hang out with people who watch *Downton Abbey*. We want that. Okay, we want people who would rather go to Luby's to hang out with people who would rather go to Village Burger Bar. Even though Luby's is salty (and I'll give you that...high preservatives, weird taste), if you can hang out with your grandparents there, it's well worth it. I mean that. Luby's. It's great. Our desire here, our conviction, is not to overly compartmentalize, but to mix. We want different generations rubbing shoulders with one another.

This is Paul's idea, the diverse gifts and the diverse personalities of this church coming together with the same mind. Look at this in verse 2. "**...the same mind...**" It means thinking the same thing. "**...the same love...**" The love of Christ. "**...in full accord.**" I love this word. It means one soul. He wants this church to

have one soul and one mind. It means intent on one purpose, thinking one thing, a unified church on mission for the exaltation of Christ.

You need to remember this letter was written to the Philippian church. It was written to the saints in Philippi which means the redeemed in Christ. That could be 8-year-olds; that could be 80-year-olds. In fact, if you go back a little bit into the history of this church... My mom told me this; she wasn't a member here, but she grew up like half a mile from here. She told me that on Sundays in the late 70s and early 80s, Walnut Hill was hard to navigate because there were cars down both lines of the road all the way to Midway. She said those cars were coming here to Northway.

I did a little bit of investigative journalism, and I found out that the late 70s and the early 80s were a time when Northway was flourishing with a singles' ministry. In fact, this sweet, older couple came to me and said, "Yeah, we were here in '79. That's where we found each other." This is nothing new. I know you have to get past the bell-bottoms and the Vegas and (if we're talking early '80s) the flirting with the mullet. I know that, but if you can go back 32 to 35 years, however long ago, you can recognize this is nothing new for the Lord to do here on this campus among these people.

Like, the generation before us, the Lord used this campus to be a hub, a lighthouse for the singles. It was a place for the singles to gather, and it was a place for the singles to be reached. The Lord knows exactly what he's doing. He's fully aware of the fact that our campus looks the way it does. He knows the make-up looks like 25 babies per one retirement check cashed. He knows we're a young campus. He knows there are some families and there are some seasoned saints with gray hair who wear khakis.

If that's you, then I love you to death. Keep coming back and keep bringing your friends because we need more pleated khakis here among us at The Village Church (Dallas Northway). We need that kind of fashion. I mean that; I'm not trying to be goofy. We need older people, more seasoned people to come in here and be among us, especially in this service. So you all just invite your friends. Next weekend is a great time.

He's not scratching his head at the make-up of this campus. He's fully aware there are some families and there are a lot of young professionals and there are a ton of singles who are coming here. Our call here is the same as the Philippian church, to unite, to come together for one purpose, and that's to be aware of the fact that the Lord has given us a mantle like he gave this church a mantle 35 years ago. We have a mantle, we have a calling on our life here, and you singles are crucial to the calling because there are so many of you here.

In the middle of all of this, I feel like there are these lies and I feel like there are these half-truths some people say, some people say directly, some people say unintentionally, or some people say indirectly. I just want to walk through them, and I want to call them what they are because they're lies. The first lie is God is waiting to give you a spouse before he gives you a mission, and it's just not true. I feel there's this despondency among some of you singles where there is a tendency for you to believe you lack wisdom or you're not able to lead or you're able to counsel because you're not married or because you don't have kids or you just don't understand. You're not in the season of life. Maybe you'll figure it out down the road.

I'm just calling that what it is. It's a lie. That's not true. Marriage and family avail you to a kind of life where you grow in understanding in those things, but there's nothing about your singleness that precludes you from mission. There's nothing about your singleness that stops you from counseling and loving and leading. You are not relegated to the kids' table here; you're crucial to the mission. You're not junior varsity here; you're crucial to the mission.

Again, I need to say there's an argument from Scripture, and there's also an argument from reason. The argument from reason is that every ministry here at this campus...line them up...is sustained by singles. Did you get here on a shuttle bus? There's a good chance a single drove it. Were you greeted at the door? There's a good chance that person didn't have a ring on their finger, a *really* good chance. I think it's a good place to meet people, by the way. You get a lot of face time and exposure. (I just thought of that. That wasn't in my notes.) Seriously, even beyond that, we have single ministers and pastors among us at The Village Church. Do you understand what I'm saying?

A minister or a pastor has the implied authority of the elders to speak on their behalf. We do not denigrate singleness (it is not an ugly term), and neither should you. You are not the "third wheel" of this campus. You are redeemed, you're the bride of Christ, and all of us wear that ring on our finger, every one of us. We are the bride of Christ, and you need to be encouraged. It's encouraging to me that so many of you guys recognize this, and you are making much of the Lord in your singleness. You need to hear it, and if nobody is telling you, let me. I'm encouraged and I love you. It warms my heart to see the way you love the Lord. Hear that.

Married folks (the three of you all in here), thanks for coming (I'm kidding). They need to see the way you live, because even though you're not inherently wiser than they are, you are in a different season of life, and especially the younger guys, they need to get some recipes in their repertoire. They need to know more than hot dogs. They need to know how to change diapers. They need to see you love your spouse. There has to be a marination here.

This is what Paul is calling for. You need to involve them in your lives. Take the initiative because this generation (me and younger) is the product of more divorced homes and more fatherless homes than most in recent history. There's just a lack for some of the basic things of life and godliness, and we need you to step up your game. It's important, and I'm asking you to take the initiative in that.

So we get to verse 3, but before we get there, I think *warning* took a new meaning for me when I had a daughter. I have an 18-month-old daughter named Caroline who went from just lying there, to kind of bobbing her head, to standing up (and then falling), to walking with some regularity, and then walking pretty well, and then to running, and then now, every time the door is open or she has any escape route, to sprinting as fast as she can to the street.

Seriously, if there is room for something bad to happen, Caroline is going to run to the street. I look at it and it has just taken on new meaning as a dad to say, "Don't do that! Hold Daddy's hand! Don't do that! Don't do that! No! Under no circumstance are you allowed to not hold Daddy's hand." I understand, even if it's just a shadow, what Paul, the pastor to the Philippian church, means when he's about to warn this church. I understand the depth of concern, and I hope you see it too.

Let's look at it. He says in verse 3, "**Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit.**" Here's the turn in the text. He's saying to keep the unity, to stay on mission, there can't even be a shadowy hint of rivalry and conceit in the body of Christ. By *rivalry*, he means selfish ambition. I think that's better translation for this word. It is a Greek word that was used in politics. It meant unfair pursuit, a self-serving preservation of political life, building yourself up at the expense of tearing somebody else down.

Paul is fully aware (as we should be, too, as students of the Word) that rivalry comes at us from three great temptations. It comes as a work of the flesh. It is part of the old man (Paul lists this word in Galatians 5), and by *old man* I mean even as the redeemed of Christ, even those who have the righteousness of Christ imputed to you, you still have a heart that, by the Spirit, has to be put to death, the fleshly things that come out of your heart.

Paul has listed rivalry (self-ambition) as something you still struggle with even in Christ. Even beyond that, this is the M.O. of the Enemy. This is how he operates. It's a scheme of the Enemy. Lucifer fell when his rivalry, when his self-ambition, trumped up against God and God said, "Absolutely no way." He still operates in that fashion. Then worldly influences. Rivalry comes through the world. Paul names, in this letter, men with selfish ambition in Philippi (their city) and said these men are fixated on earthly things. He calls them enemies of the cross.

Then beyond rivalry, he also says *conceit*. I love how the King James translates *conceit* as "vain glory." It is a highly exaggerated view of yourself, and it's loving the sound of your own name. So he puts these two things side by side (selfish ambition and vainglory) and he says these are enemies of our unity; they are enemies of our mission. They unravel the unity; they hinder the mission. Rivalry pursues personal goals; conceit pursues personal glory. The former is about self-centered aspirations, and the second is about an over-inflated image. The easiest way to derail your calling, Paul says to the Philippians, is to take your eyes off of Jesus and just be infatuated with yourselves.

How do we make much of Jesus, Dallas Campus? How do we make much of Jesus when we are constantly worried about ourselves? Because the application is unbelievably true for us in this city in the twenty-first century. The temptation toward rivalry, the temptation toward conceit, is still here. It's here in our city. Temptations toward self-ambition and vanity are rampant in the city of Dallas. Self-ambition and vanity are paragon virtues in the city of Dallas. They might be shrouded by their euphemisms of status and beauty, but our city screams, "You make it big by being beautiful, and you make it big by being successful. That's how you make it."

Beauty is measured by age and by physicality. Success is measured by income, position, the school you went to, where you live, what you're worth, and who you run with. It says if you want value, then you need to look good or you need to hang with people who look good, and you need to make a bunch of cash doing it. That's value; that's beauty. There's meaning in that." That's what this city says. There are status markers all about this in our city. If you went to a Mavericks game in the 80s or you went to a Cowboys game in the 70s, surely there were people there to be seen. They were venues for people to go to, of course.

But if you've been to the Cowboys Stadium or if you've been to the AAC in the last couple of years, you will know that the lower bowl of those two venues are chock-full of a few fans, really good fans, and a lot of people who love to show off the fact that they can buy those seats, those outrageous seats, and buy those outrageously priced concessions and show off what they have hanging on their shoulders. I've been to both, and I can vouch for it. It's there; it's part of our city.

Even beyond that, we (Dallas, Texas) coined the term *\$30,000 millionaire*. That's *Dallas*! That is a Dallas-coined term that has made its way across the United States. Beyond that, we have a show called *Dallas* that was game-changing for network television in the 80s. It was the first time they ever experimented with soap opera in primetime, and it was a show about these two things, vanity and conceit, power and beauty. It was this great interplay, a great soap opera about these things, so much so that TNT decided to get those geezers back from the first show, and get their kids back and then tell the story again.

So you have Larry Hagman, and you have Patrick Duffy, and you have their kids and they're trying to tell you the same story. The problem is it's not just a caricature, because stuff like that actually happens in our city. I mean, our city, Dallas, Texas, is more plastic, more in debt... Do you know Dallas is more in debt per capita than New York and Los Angeles? There are growing circles of pretention. We are over-inflated, and I really believe, if I'm discerning, the class system in Dallas is really being built out day by day, that there are just distinct classes here.

But beyond our temptations that come from the fallen world, from the city, we still are tempted by the Enemy. He's still a schemer. Do you remember what Ezekiel said about why the Enemy fell? Let's look at how he fell. He said, **"Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor."** He's a narcissist, he's in love with himself, and he prowls that people would mimic him. He influences so people would mimic him. Then beyond that, he's crafty, so he prowls to tempt people to mimic his narcissism, but in his craftiness he gets people to be narcissistic and in love with themselves and not even know they're that way.

That's the way he rolls. He's so crafty. He's so good at that. He's here and his minions are here and they prowl our city. Then beyond the temptations of the city and beyond the temptations of the Enemy, we still have the natural temptations of our flesh, and these three objectives of the Enemy come to us and they tell you, singles, that you are unfulfilled in Christ and that to be filled, you'll need to achieve or you'll need to acquire something because only then will you matter, only then will you have value, or only then will you be beautiful. That is the three-fold temptation of our flesh, of our city, and of the Enemy toward us.

I have been ambitious as long as I can remember, just an ambitious dude. I memorized presidential placemats when I was a kid. I'll just get my "nerdness" out there. I went to A&M where, when you go to college and you don't really do much except study, you have a lot of time to dream. I had great dreams and great aspirations, and this is really what my dreams looked like. They were perpetuated, I can say, they were influenced by a lot of *Friends* (*Friends*, the 10-season NBC show). I was watching a lot of that while I was there.

I was then disciplined by a lot of people and sadly, I've been disciplined by Monica and Chandler and Joey and Ross and all those guys, because I really did think the delayed adolescence and the idealism of *Friends* was something I could find myself. These were my plans. "Hey, Lord, I'm going to graduate A&M, and I'm going to go to Georgetown Law School. I'm going to go to Georgetown Law School, and I'm going to graduate with high marks and I'm going to get a job in a firm. Then I'm going to come back to Dallas, and I'm going to make my way up the ranks in Dallas. I'm going to make some connections, I'm going to get to know people, and then in my late thirties, I'll probably think on my first senatorial campaign."

I mean that; I'm not lying. This isn't fabricated; that's what I said. I had it all mapped out. All the while there were two things that were very clear. One, at 19 years old, the Lord called me to ministry, called me to do this for a living; and secondly, there was a girl (and a great girl, a girl who loved Jesus), and I didn't want either one. I just didn't want it. I didn't want ministry because, frankly, I thought pastors didn't get paid a lot, and I didn't want the girl because there was nothing more boring and nothing more settling than being 22 years old and married. That's what grandparents do.

I wanted Joey's life. I wanted Chandler's life. I wanted to move to a big city and live in an apartment in the middle of the city, and I wanted to go to college. I just wanted this delayed flirtation, you know, this kind of game of flirting where you just kind of cherry-pick and go through the buffet and flirt and not think you're flirting. That's what I wanted, and I told God, "These are my plans." It was *me, me, me, I, I, I*. That was the common denominator of my story. I didn't want the life he had put before me. I wanted *Friends*. That's what I wanted.

The Lord has been so kind over the last five years to discipline the mess out of my heart and to let me see the severity of my sin in breaking hearts. Guys, he just busted me. He so clearly pointed out my selfish ambition (*I'm headed here; I'm going to out-work you all*). He so clearly pointed out my vain conceit (*It will be nice at the top*). I gave in to the flesh, I was lured by the Enemy, and I bought into the virtues of the city in which I was raised. I didn't want to be a senator to make much of Christ; I wanted to be a senator to make much of myself. The Lord has just been kind to reveal these things to me.

Some of you guys, some of you singles (not all of you; I need to stress this) are really here. You are self-consumed. You have your fists clenched around something, and you're believing the lie that your life really only has purpose or you'll really only matter or you'll really only be lovely when you have this thing. Let's look where Paul goes to really get us out of this rut. Continuing in verse 3. He says, **"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."**

Paul says the secret to getting out of the rut of self-infatuation is to humbly love people and count them more significant than yourself. In other words, he says you need to take your concern off of yourself, and you need to concern yourself with others. Here's the thing. This isn't simply an appeal to the will. Paul is better than that. Paul is smarter than that. Paul loves Jesus more than to just give us a platitude by which we have to hold ourselves. Do you understand what Paul is saying here? He's not just saying, "You selfish sinner, get over yourself." The reason I know this is because of the use of *humility* here.

By using this word, this is an appeal back to Christ. This is another encouragement to the Philippian church. He says, "You're struggling with vanity. You're struggling with self-absorption. So do I. Let me

direct your gaze to Christ." The reason I know this is because *humility* is not a word he pulled from the modern vernacular. The word he uses in this text for humility, *lowliness of mind*, is a distinctly Christian idea and it would have immediately piqued the interest of the Philippians to know that he was talking about Jesus. It's the first time in the New Testament that he uses this word *humility*. There is no extra-biblical literature at this time that uses this word. It's a distinctly Christian ideal, *humility*.

Then what he does over the next few verses is he bursts out in gospel song. This is poetry. This is Paul being poetic, and he's saying something to this effect. "Remember Jesus. Remember when we didn't realize just how glory-thieving and self-promoting we were, he left the throne of glory to rescue us from this. Remember him who served us and taught us, how low he made himself to make us his treasure. Remember the pain he endured so we would have blessing. Remember the pleasures he left behind so he would love us purely. Remember his ambition was to lose everything he had for us to give us everything we ever needed in him."

He says, "Remember that when Christ came and he lived and he died and he resurrected, all of your meaning, all of your value, and all of your beauty were caught up in the fact that he came for you to take your gaze off of idols and to fix your gaze onto him. He forgave you, and he accepted you." He's pointing them back to Christ. This is Paul doing gospel reenactment. All he does in the New Testament is gospel reenactment. He's saying, "You remember his humility. You remember God becoming low. You remember he redeemed you from yourself, so you have nothing to prove. His ambition was to love others more than himself."

C. S. Lewis says this so succinctly. He says that humility is not thinking less of yourself; it's thinking of yourself less because you know you're spoken for. At your deepest heart level, you're spoken for by the righteousness of Christ being given to you, and it means that everything in the world is better than okay. Here's where I think, Dallas singles, that some of us... And this is not a comprehensive list; neither will all you struggle with these two things, but here's where I think some of you guys are really hung up to believe the promises of God and where I think you're tempted toward rivalry and conceit.

I think the power culture of Dallas, the status thing, has really brought itself into church. To put it another way, I think you've brought the Dallas power culture into the church. I think some of you guys really exhibit these negative qualities because you're struggling with the same things I struggled with. You have a lot of time on your hands and you're a go-getter. Your life is revolving around your careers, it's revolving around your earning potential, and it's revolving around your desires to step into elite Dallas society and get the recognition therein. Some of you are having success climbing the ranks, but you're unsatisfied.

You've made the self-imposed ceiling that you're never going to hit, and you've given yourself this mysterious line you're never going to cross because you just keep working and you keep working. You think you're going to be patient, but you're not going to be patient. You're just going to keep working, and it's going to keep going. You think that because you tithe, it's okay. You think because you're in the seat now and because you tithe, it's okay. You think that by your hard work, you're tithing prospects will be better down the road. So you're giving your tithe check now, and you think that, man, in 10, 20, or 30 years, you're going to be able to give all kinds of bank to the church.

Can I tell you something? God isn't interested in your money. He doesn't want your money. He doesn't need your money. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. He pulls coins out of fishes' mouths. He doesn't want your money, and he does whatever he wants. He wants your heart. That's why the Old Testament prophets are so clear that you rend your hearts, not your garments. You're deceived, and you're feeding this idol and just giving away a little portion and thinking God is happy with your money. He does whatever he pleases. He sits in the heavens, and he wants your heart.

You just have this terrified thought of failing in your job or losing your job or losing the next promotion. There's this new craze in our city that you don't just need to have status and you don't just need to be beautiful or have beauty on your arm, but you need to acquire those two things *early*. The *crème de la crème*, the highest mark we can reach in Dallas culture, according to Dallas, is to be young, to be beautiful, and to be rich, to have everything you want and to have it very early on in your life.

So it exacerbates this desire for you guys to achieve *early*. You think about, *Hey, are we going to have the country-club lifestyle in our 30s as opposed to our 50s?* These are concerns you guys have. Your added time in singleness isn't given to your mission; it's given to thoughts about your net worth and the neighborhood you live in. You keep telling yourself that you're going to slow down, but your flesh is consumed. Dallas knows what you're doing. You've given into those temptations, and it really has its talons wrapped around your heart. Your coworkers know very little about Jesus, the bride of Christ with whom you are a part, because it's very, very, very clear that you are married to your jobs.

What Paul tells status seekers is he's reminding you of the one who left more wealth and more status than you and I could ever dream and became poor for you so that you, a poor man or poor woman, could actually be rich in him. He's reminding you of the God who knew you would be chasing these miserable idols, so he came down and allured your heart to chase him. He's reminding you of the gospel. He's freed you *from* competition and vanity, and he's freed you *to* service and humility. He's speaking to the deepest idols in your heart, that all the approval and all the acclaim you've ever needed have been given to you in Christ.

Just a challenge for you guys. Most of your jobs (not all of them), if you look at the human resource manual, give you an hour or an hour and a half for lunch. You're afforded that right to take it, but a lot of you don't take it because you don't want to be the lazy person. You don't want to take a lunch when everybody else is not taking a lunch, and you don't want your boss to be mad at you. Man, what if you were the one who took a lunch every day and you disciplined somebody or you were disciplined by somebody or you took another coworker out to lunch.

Do you know what countercultural-gospel beauty this is, how gospel-beautiful this is? What if you were the guy who, while you worked hard, your coworkers knew you were not absorbed by your work because of how much you were absorbed by their welfare, the welfare of the people the Lord has called you to work with. I just think some of you guys need to see and hear the gospel. You need to recognize that there's vanity and there's conceit in your life. But that's not the half of it. The other part of it is relationship. I think this beauty/relationship culture has found its way in our church as well.

You're telling yourself, *I'll really only have value, I'll really only matter, I'll only really only be beautiful when I can gain or keep the attention of another person.* I see this fleshing out in two things: the institution of marriage and the trophy. By the institution of marriage, I mean some of you believe that until your love story comes, you're not fulfilled. Your dating prospects might be varied. Maybe you've dated this week; maybe it's been 15 years since you've dated. Maybe you've never dated. Maybe you've never kissed a person. Maybe you've never been on a date.

Do you know the Psalms say God is your strength and your shield? Do you know the fact that you've never been on a date is just the Lord shielding you and showing you that he's your strength? That's a beautiful thing. He's not just looking down going, *Oh man, what's wrong with that one?* That's just not the case. Beyond that, this perpetual loneliness some of you all are walking in that you believe won't be alleviated until your wedding... Then life will start; then you'll be complete. Can I just encourage you to two things? You're the bride of Christ, and I don't care if that's cliché. Just because you've heard it a lot of times doesn't mean it isn't true.

We all wear that ring and all of us in this room look forward to a wedding ceremony that will be more meaningful and more wonderful than any ceremony we've ever been through and any ceremony that so many of you all will walk through one day. That is the ceremony we long for, our return to our Maker when we see him face to face. We're all caught up in that. You're the bride of Christ. But beyond that, I just want to say...Your singleness? It's not ugly.

In fact, it's a gift. It's referred to as a gift, and marriage is God's idea. That speaks a lot of life and hope into a guy like me because part of my discipline from the Lord was to realize that I had very little game. I just

don't have any game. I'm not good at relationships. That girl I kept breaking up with and breaking her heart, became my wife. When I broke up with her the last time, I sat down with my friends and I was thinking that they were going to console me. They just went, "Dude, why do you break up with her? Like, she's the only one who is ever going to like you. You know, dude, she is, like, a 10. You're like a 6 and she's like a 10. She's a home run. What's wrong with you?"

It took me realizing marriage was God's idea, and I just had to trust him because he was calling me to marry her. Beyond that, Adam wakes up from a nap and there's Eve. That's why if you ask 10 different people their marriage stories, you'll get 10 different stories, because at the end of it, foundationally at a baseline level, marriage is God's idea, and he's causative in every detail as to how it happens and when it comes about. The other thing, too, is that your desire for a spouse is a good desire. **"He who finds a wife finds a good thing."** So you can pray to that end. You can pray constantly for that. You can pray all the time for your future spouse. I would encourage you, just don't elevate it. Don't make it an idol.

The Song of Solomon is a book celebrating sex. It's a celebration of sex in the context of covenant marriage, so it gets really graphic really quick. Some people are uncomfortable with it; I think it's awesome. But I think one of the most profound verses in the Song of Solomon actually has nothing to do with the graphic detail of the marital relationship, but Song of Solomon 2:7 where it says, **"I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases."**

It's just not time for some of you guys, and that's okay. It's okay and the Lord will be causative in whether or not it happens and whether or not it happens has absolutely no stake on how lovely you are in his eyes. So you wait well, and you redeem this 1-Corinthians-7 time in your life where you get to make much of the Lord, free from the anxieties of marriage. Beyond that, there's the trophy, and the trophy really is the snapshot that I struggled with of delayed adolescence and the idealism. Again, this is some of you all struggling, not all of you, but it certainly is some of you guys and you're struggling with this.

By the trophy, I mean it has more to do with the game leading up to marriage than the actual institution of marriage. It's not as concerned about the wedding date as it is concerned with the details going in. You're more concerned about the timing. You're more concerned about who you'll marry. You're more concerned about what they look like, what kind of stock they come from, the genetics involved. You're more concerned about the future athletic prospects of your children.

You're more concerned with all of the details, and under all of it you're concerned with whether or not it fits in your plan. You are okay with the game. You're okay with being the big flirt. You're okay with being the big tease. You're okay with being the big mystery, and it may look like one of two things. It may look

like you never date anyone because no one is ever good enough. It may look like you dating all the time with this growing trail of heartbreaks because nobody meets your standards.

By *standards*, what I'm really saying is *ideals*. I think for some of you, that's just another word for pickiness. There is too much Dallas in you. There are too many operating assumptions of the flesh. There is too much vanity. There is too much superficiality. There is too much you and not enough pursuit of Jesus, because when you're looking for a trophy, all you're really saying is, "What is this guy going to do for my image? Is she a head-turner? Is she going to look good on my shoulder? Is he going to make bank?"

You're just self-concerned. You're just consumed, some of you. You're just consumed with your image and your own PR. The more insecure you are about failures in your physicality, the uglier you think you are, the more you're going to try to make up for your ugliness in the person you're with or the person you're marrying. If you think you're a 3, you're going to have to find a 12. Among the bride of Christ here, I've heard some of your hang-ups with one another. I've heard your "I know he loves Jesus, but this..."

Frankly, I don't understand because I have heard all the following: "Yeah, he's cool. Yeah, she's cool, but they're not tall enough and I don't like the way he laughs. On our third date, there was like seven minutes of awkward silence, and I don't know what to do with it." Come to my house. Once a day, there's awkward silence. "He has funny eyebrows. His personality is weird." Did I say "not tall enough" already? That one especially hurts me.

Here's the thing, guys. You have been bombarded with it. One of two things, and probably for some of you, too, you've been bombarded with sexually laced imagery, objectifying men or objectifying women to sell you pretty much everything you've needed to buy for the last two decades. You had that, and then some of you all walk in pronounced sexual sin, where for years and years and years and years, you've objectified the other sex into the realm of fantasy. That fantasy has entered into your reality world and you just believe your future spouse is in a tier that really is unrealistic, or more than likely, might not even exist because it's fantasy.

Christ's love for his church is the most compelling, the most captivating love story that's ever been told. His love for you, his pursuit, the prize in mind, the length and the depth and the width with which he endured himself to make you his treasure, the cost involved... He had more to gain and more to lose than any other love story ever told, and it smashes these misconceptions of love that you have in your head. Jesus' love for you is not a fantasy. It's not a fairy tale, but your idea of attraction might very well be a fairy tale. It might very, very well be a fairy tale.

I'm not saying that attraction does not factor into the equation, but what I am saying is some of you are attracted to the wrong things and some of you may not even know what biblical attraction is because you're not looking for somebody you can share in a ministry of Christ with to make much of Christ and the humility of Christ. You're looking for someone to bolster your ego. I'm telling you that beauty is something or someone who embodies the qualities of Christ, because Christ was the most beautiful thing God ever sent this earth.

Some of you guys, your heart is so sick when it comes to this idea of attraction. Your heart is so sick that you need help, because listen. Men, there are beautiful, beautiful, I mean, biblically attractive women who love the Lord here. They love the Lord and they love Jesus, and they would be a killer spouse. Generations of faithfulness would come from their lines. They love the Lord. Some of you guys who aren't attracted to them need to be attracted to them because your view of biblical attraction is skewed, and you're looking at the wrong things. There are some women in here you need to be attracted to. There are a lot and you're not attracted to them and I think, some of you, it's because your heart is sick.

Ladies, there are some guys who are going to get some courage to pursue you. They may have funny eyebrows and they may laugh funny and they may have a crooked tooth and they may not be 6'3" and they may not be jacked. They may not be "country strong." They may not be well educated. They may not speak French. They may not, but if they love the Lord and they're humble, you need to give them a huge shot and you need to trust the Lord. I'm not saying all of you guys are going to marry one another, as much as that's my dream, but I'm just saying, guys, you need to pursue ladies. You need to know what biblical attraction is. You need to stop being so hung up on yourself, and you need to look at the one who gave his life away as a model for you.

Ladies, Tim Tebow is not leaving the New York Jets to come to the Dallas Campus, to come to Dallas Northway to say, "Beloved, I've been pursuing you my whole life." He's not coming. Tim Tebow is not on his way here for you. This delayed adolescence and this idealism is rampant. Guys, the reason I know this is because I've struggled with it. I struggled with this very thing. I'll just tell you as I wrap up that one of the clearest evidences of grace of God in my life was showing me just how right he was when I married Dana Roebuck Younger four years ago.

Just how right he was, just how beautiful she is, just how sinful I was, just how profound a scale had to fall off my eyes, how unbelievably physically beautiful she is, how much her internal beauty and her humility and her love for others accentuates her external beauty. She is more captivating, more compelling, more beautiful to me right now than she was the day I married her when she looked like a 10 in that dress. It's because the Lord is at work among the saints, showing us what's beautiful.

So you need to press in and you need to press into men and you need to press into women. That's why we have multi-gen home groups, and that's why we have Recovery groups. As much as I would like to pair you up individually with mentors, those are where the people are. So that's where you need to be. That's where our guys are who can help you in this. If your heart is sick, make it known. If you need help, make it known. Ask for prayer. I've been through this.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus is walking up to Jerusalem and he has ascended up the hill. He's a week away from dying, and the Jews who have been subjugated to oppression by the Roman colony think, *It's finally here. The day is finally here. The Christ is here. He's going to get the Romans out of here. He's going to establish us right here on this hill, and we're going to have all the blessing we ever needed.* They're singing, "Hosanna! Hosanna! **Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!**" They're singing, "Save us! Save us! Redeem us! Help us!"

The ironic thing is that's exactly what Jesus is doing, but he's not saving them from the things they want; he's saving them from the things they need. He's not saving them from their circumstances; he's saving them from themselves. So many of you guys have to be saved from yourselves. So one church, one people, one diverse crowd coming together as one body, one soul, making much of Christ, not ambitious, not selfishly ambitious, not full of conceit, but loving one another because the gospel has so penetrated our hearts. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for the goodness of God in Christ. Thank you for the story that is real to us and has been made real by the life of Christ. I just pray where you need to do work, you do work. Wherever you need to do it, will you do it right now among the gathering of saints, Lord? Will you do the hard work that you need to do? We trust you. We press into you. We ask for your Spirit just to fall now and to minister to us. Lord, help us. Help us. We need you. It's in Christ's name, amen.