



HIS GARDEN

Part 4 of The Peasant Princess

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Song of Songs 3:6 - 5:1 | October 12, 2008

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Well, howdy, Mars Hill. We continue our study tonight of the Song of Songs. If you've got a Bible go to Chapter 3, Verse 6, and as you're going there, a couple things, just wanna you aware of. Quick business update: our fiscal year runs from July through June, so we just finished our first quarter of this fiscal year. It was July, August, September, and the accounting department's got us a report. Here's the basic summary. Percentage of attendance: Ballard's still our biggest campus, 47 percent of our people are in Ballard; then it's Bellevue at 16 percent, which has exploded; West Seattle at 13; Shoreline at 9; Downtown at 8; Lake City at 5; and Olympia at 2, and giving is roughly proportionate as well. The real issue is Ballard. The bottom line is this: Every campus is basically making budget, real close to it, except for Ballard.

And the problem is about half of our people are at Ballard. So when Ballard struggles, everyone struggles and this last year we set out budget number very low; we actually anticipated some of the economic situation that we all find ourselves in. So we stripped back the budget to bare-bones essentials. Senior leaders didn't get any raise or performance — I mean, we just froze everything. We're running very, very, very minimally, and we're growing very fast. We grew by a few thousand here recently, and many of those are new Christians, non-Christians. Our redemption groups have exploded with people who are addicted or abused and there's a lot going on. We're trying to help as many people as we possibly can across all of our campuses, so the bottom line is this. Everyone's doing okay except for Ballard.

So if you're tuning in and you're not in Ballard, pray for Ballard. Lots of people left Ballard to help launch the other campuses, and a lot of the people have come in are still new Christians, non-Christians, and just growing in faithfulness. Ballard is the least mature campus by have, by any statistical variable. We love the people at Ballard and we're glad that they're there, but there is a pain point. So I wanna be honest about that, and just say, if you're a Christian, do your part. If everyone does their part, we'll be okay. If not, we've got some real hard decisions to make at Ballard. They're almost \$500,000.00 behind in the first quarter. Keep that up, it's a few million dollars short this year, and, just so you know, we don't have a few million dollars laying around, and in this economy we don't have that kind of luxury. So that's where we find ourselves.

Everyone at the campuses keep doing your part, and everyone at Ballard, that's where we are at. I'll leave it at that, and we'll proceed forward. I'll pray. We'll get to work in the Song of Songs, and tonight is gonna be, I hope, a very helpful sermon for you and would just encourage you to hang in there and listen all the way through. Father God, I ask that you would give me the grace to serve you and to serve our people well. I thank you for the Scriptures, that through them we hear from you, and I pray, Lord God, that by your Spirit, through your Word, we would hear from you. That we would hear about your intentions for us and how they are good, and how we can overcome sin so that we might walk in the freedom and joy that you intend for us.

For that to happen, it is our prayer that Jesus would be honored, that the Scriptures would be taught, and that the Holy Spirit would enable us to learn, and we ask this in his good name. Amen. This week they get married. The book is a series of love songs between a husband and a wife, not necessarily in chronological order. So this week is a snapshot of their wedding, and so I thought it would be kind of fun to show you snapshots of our wedding. There we are. I'm the one on the right. That was a very cool pose in 1992. That is my lovely wife Grace. You'll see her a little later in the service. We met at age 17. We married at age 21, in 1992. We recently celebrated our 16th wedding anniversary at Bondi Beach for dinner in Sydney, Australia, and, yeah, I look young because I was. That was a long time ago.

And that is couple shots of Gracie and I, as well, and for those of you that are married couples that are tuning in, think through your wedding day: seeing your spouse; being together; getting your picture taken; all your family and friends coming around. This is a good day for those who are married to reflect back on their vows and their day of marriage, and if you're here with your spouse, feel free to hold hands and look back. That being said, we'll look at their wedding as recorded in Scripture, starting in Chapter 3, Verse 6, and so it begins. "What is that coming up from the wilderness like clouds of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the fragrant powders of a merchant?" So he's coming to pick up his lovely wife-to-be and escort her to their wedding, and he's covered in cologne and he smells very, very nice.

Verse 7: "Behold it is the litter," — or the couch — "Of Solomon." He has this custom couch built that would be on poles held by warrior men to carry his wife-to-be in to their wedding, very cool. He is the King, as it were. So this is a — an enormous national event. "Around it are 60 mighty men, some of the mighty men of Israel, all of them wearing swords and experts in war; each with his sword at his thigh, against terror by night. King Solomon made himself a carriage from the wood of Lebanon," — that's choice timber — "He made its posts of silver, its back of gold, its seat of purple. Its

interior was inlaid with love by the daughters of Jerusalem. Go out, oh daughters of Zion, and look upon King Solomon with a crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, on the day of his gladness of heart." This is their wedding day.

The wedding day is the most important day of your life, second only to the day of your salvation. The most important decision you'll ever make is: who is my God? The second most important decision, and therefore the second most important day, is: who is my spouse. The first is covenant relationship with God. The second is covenant relationship with spouse, and those two decisions pretty much determine the rest of your life and everything ensuing from it. So the most important day is the day of your salvation, the day you give your life to Jesus. The second most important day is the day of your marriage, the day you give yourself to your spouse, and this is the day of their marriage, and Biblically marriage is two things: it's covenant and consummation. Covenant: that you take vows and you bind yourself one to the other.

Consummation: that you have marital intimacy to consummate your relationship, and the way it would work in this culture, your first day of your wedding you would enter into covenant. That night you would consummate your relationship, and you would be together intimately, and the wedding celebration would ensue for many days. This also was true in the days of Jesus when his first miracle was at Cana of Galilee. A couple got married and they ran out of food and drink because they had such a long party and it lasted many days. So Jesus' first miracle was making wine for them to drink, and so the wedding would last many days, but on the first day they would exchange vows, enter into covenant, and consummate the relationship, thereby becoming a Biblical couple. And part of this as well, as we see again, it's a recurring refrain, is his protection of her.

He's looking out for her safety and her well-being, and this is something that a man has the great opportunity to do with the woman that he loves. In our day, this would include: safe car, living in a place that is safe and well-lit and not dangerous and crime-infested. This would include: wife gets a cell phone so that if emergency comes, she can contact you, you're accessible and available. This would also include things like medical insurance, life insurance, so that even in the occasion of your death you're still providing for her and/or your children. He's a man who thinks through issues of safety and protection. Provision: he's coming to pick her up. 60 warriors carrying her into town: enormous wedding day. The kind of wedding day that little girls dress up like princesses for, and practice beginning at a very young age for this kind of amazing wedding day.

Now, they will have a discussion before their consummation, and what you will see is that he is very visual, and she is very verbal. And the book is 3,000 years old, but men and women are still pretty much the same. Men want to see everything, and women want to talk about everything, okay? And one of the ways that — and this is still statistically true. Men are visual. Women are verbal, and so one of the ways that we love and serve one another is, a man lovingly speaks to his wife. He will do that, and she lets him see, as she will. Chapter 4, Verse 1. He speaks to her about what he sees. "Behold, you are beautiful, my love. Behold, you are beautiful." He speaks about specific parts of her appearance that he really appreciates. "Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats leaping down the slopes of Gilead." Now that seems weird to us.

"Your head is like a goat." Well, let me explain this to you. There would be hills — and she came from the farm country — there were hills and cascading down the hills — running down the hills — would be flocks of goats that had dark, black hair that would sort of shine in the sunlight, and what's he's saying is, "Your hair crowns your head and comes down your neck and you shoulders in that beautiful, glorious way." Very poetic. The next one is also peculiar. "Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them has lost its young." What he's saying is, "You have all your teeth." So we know she's not British or a hockey player, or from Kentucky. She's special. She just is. She has all of her teeth and they are white, and he really appreciates that.

And in a culture that didn't have great dental care, a woman with a wonderful smile was quite a treasure indeed. "Your lips are like a scarlet thread. Your mouth is lovely. Your cheeks are like the halves of pomegranate," — so she's got rosy cheeks — "Behind your veil. Your neck is like the Tower of David, built in rows of stone. On it hang a thousand shields, all of them shields of warriors." She has a huge neck, a huge, long neck. She's already told us, "I don't meet the cultural standard of beauty." And he looks at her and he says, "You have a very long neck and I like it. I find it attractive, and I like the fact that you can put so much jewelry on that long neck. That's unique." Okay? And so every person knows you're not without flaw, but the key is for the spouse to say that the flaw is, for them, attractive. She has a long neck and she met a guy who likes long neck.

That's beautiful. That's good. So he encourages her. She might have been a little self-conscious, and he tells her, "No, it's beautiful. I love your long neck." The next one is, additionally, interesting. Verse 5: "Your two breasts are like two fawns, twine of a gazelle, that graze among the lilies." Now, this is very peculiar, right? Honeymoon night, she's a virgin, chaste. She undresses for her husband, first time, and he says, "Small, furry woodland animals." You say, "That doesn't seem he's off on a good foot. That seems like — hey, what is he saying here? What is he saying? This is a very peculiar thing." No woman is hoping to hear that on her wedding night. Now if you think about it, two fawns, twins of a gazelle, what are those? Those are baby deer. Okay. When you think of baby deer, what do you think?

Oh, they're perky. They're playful. They're fun. They're — you know — and if you go to the zoo, let's say in the spring, where are the baby deer? They're in the petting zoo. All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable. All the men said? Amen. Okay. What he tells her is — she undresses — and he says, "Oh, the petting zoo is now open." Now some of you women may ask, "Why does my husband always grab me?" He's Biblical. He's just Spirit-led. That's all, and I just gave him a new life verse. Chapter 4, Verse 5, okay? And so he's talking about how much he likes to see her, and how much fun he has exploring her body. We'll keep going.

"Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, I will go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense," — probably, again, talking about "We're gonna be together all night. We're gonna take our time. We're gonna have lots of fun. We're gonna explore one another's bodies. We're gonna consummate our marriage in a way that is fun for us, and he's probably here again speaking of her breasts, speaking of these two hills. He goes on, "You are altogether lovely my — you are altogether beautiful," — rather — "My love. There is no flaw in you." Now do you think that was true? No flaw. Have you ever seen any human being with no flaw? There's no one that has that body. Now the key is this. He couldn't say this unless she was

his standard of beauty.

This is why we tell you, “Don’t cohabitate. Don’t fornicate. Don’t look at pornography. Don’t create a standard of beauty that is not your spouse and then compare your spouse to the standard of beauty. Have your spouse be your standard of beauty.” This is the Biblical principle: one-woman man.; the Bible’s against lust; those kinds of things. If she is his standard of beauty, then there is no flaw in her because she looks like her. He’s not comparing her to other women, and the same is true for both husbands and wives. Your standard of beauty is your spouse. There is not a standard of beauty that you evaluate your spouse by, and this is one of the great devastating effects of pornography. You lust after people, compare your spouse to them. It’s impossible to be satisfied in your marriage if you don’t have a standard that is Biblical.

The standard is always your spouse. So then he declares, “Come with me from Lebanon, my bride. Come with me from Lebanon. Depart from the peak of Amanah, from the peak of Senir and Hermon, from the den of lions, from the mountains of leopards.” Now what he’s talking about here is different peaks of the mountains. Some of you are climbers or hikers, and so you know, “Well, we gotta go to this peak and then we gotta go to this peak and we go to this peak.” And what he’s saying is, “We’re going to be together all night, we’re going to take our time, we’re going to go from one height of passion or another height of passion, and we’ll continue to enjoy one another as we scale the proverbial heights of passion.”

And then he says, Verse 9, “You have captivated my heart, my sister, my bride. You have captivated my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace.” He calls her two things: my sister and my bride. Every relationship that is Christian should start as sister, right? Paul tells Timothy that single men should treat single women like sisters, okay? You can talk to; love, enjoy, get to know; have a friendship with; serve God with, a woman, if you’re a single man, and then as the relationship blooms and blossoms and grows, it moves toward a romantic direction, ultimately leading toward engagement, marriage, covenant, and consummation. That’s why we don’t want to build our relationship on sex or hobbies or anything other than God. Okay? Gracie is my sister and my bride. She’s my sister in Christ. We read the Bible together. We pray together.

We confess our sins to one another. We do ministry together. We worship God together. We’re a Christian family together, and she’s my bride. She’s my best friend and my bride. We also have a marital relationship that is unique and exclusive and unlike any other relationship that we have, but it’s really the friendship and the spiritual worship of God together that is the foundation on which we build all the other intimacy in the relationship: my sister, my bride. We worship and serve God together, and we enjoy the additional blessing and benefit of being a married couple with all of the pleasures that are accompanied with covenant marriage. Then proceeds to talk about how much he enjoys her — Verse 10: “How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride; how much better is your love than wine and the fragrance of your oils than any spice.”

Ladies smell different than guys, okay, and they smell better. Every — I can tell you this. Every time I walk into a home I can tell you whether or not a woman lives there, quickly, because it smells different, right? Potpourri: woman. Chalupa: no woman. You can just tell. I asked one guy. I said, “How did you know that your wife was the woman for you?” He’s a friend of mine in the department. He said, “I had to marry her. She smelled like vanilla ice cream.” Like, “Really?” He said, “Yeah, I could just wake up every day. I love looking at her and smelling vanilla ice cream.” Okay, ladies, don’t underestimate the great treasure that it is just to have the presence of a woman. For a man, a sweet woman and her scent and her presence is a great gift.

My wife asked me this a while back. She said, “Well, what can I do for you?” I said, “Just be with me. Just having you there and looking at you, smelling you, I like that.” I do. Gotta hurry this sermon up; go see how she’s doing. Verse 11, “Your lips,” — he talks about kissing her; should Christian couples kiss? Absolutely. “Your lips drink nectar, my bride. Honey and milk are under your tongue. The fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon.” It’s not French kissing. This is long before France. This is Bible kissing: husbands and wives loving one another, kissing one another, enjoying one another, absolutely Biblical. He then goes on to speak of her body in general, but a particular private portion of her anatomy in specific, in Verse 12. “A garden locked up is my sister, my bride, a spring locked, a fountain sealed.”

Here’s what he’s saying. Her body is a private garden, not a public park. Ladies need to know, God intends your body to be a private garden, not a public park. Public park is open for business, feel free to come and enjoy. Private garden, in that day, would’ve been hewn in with a rock wall, protected. The only person that was allowed to enter into it was the one for whom it was their garden. What he’s saying is this. “She’s chaste, pure, virgin; never been with a man. She is a kept garden, and on her wedding night, as we consummate the relationship, she will give her body to me as a gift, as a gift.” And this is true for husbands and wives. In the future weeks we’ll look at how he gives his body to her, and she receives it as a gift.

But you need to know that your body is a gift that you steward and safeguard with chastity before marriage, and fidelity in marriage, and it’s a gift that you give to your spouse. This is what I Corinthians 7 says, that “Your body doesn’t belong to you. You give it to your spouse.” Now, in marriage, if only one person gives their body, that’s an abusive relationship, but if both give for the purpose of mutual service — I tend to my body and I give it to Grace. She tends to her body, gives hers to me. We give ourselves to one another. We serve one another. We take care of one another. We enjoy one another. That’s a Biblical marriage. So what he tells her is, “I really appreciate the fact that you are a closed garden, a private garden, not a public park.” And then he speaks specifically.

“Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates with choice fruits, henna with nard, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all the trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all chief spices, a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams in Lebanon.” What he’s saying is this. In the middle of every garden would be a fountain with fresh water. He said, “Your body is a garden, and one part of your body, in particular, is the most sacred part of the garden, and you smell amazing. You look amazing. You feel amazing, and you taste amazing.” He’s enjoying his wife with all of his senses, as he should, as he should. Now some of you may be shocked to hear that this is actually in your Bible. God made marriage. God made the body. God made sexuality. God’s intention is that husbands and wives would enjoy one another.

So, then, we are told in Verse 16, “Awake, oh north wind, come, south wind, blow on my garden, let its spices flow.” Up until this point, the refrain of

the book has been “Do not arouse or awaken love until its time,” which is like “Don’t get started until you’re married.” Now it’s time to awaken love. It’s time to arouse passion and pleasure and desire. It’s that time, and so then she will invite him. She says, “Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its choicest fruits.” This is not a woman who is being forced upon, intimidated, harmed, disrespected, shamed. This is a woman who is loved, and who invites her husband to enjoy her. There’s a great difference between being imposed on by your spouse and inviting in your spouse as they are prepared, their love is awakened.

They’re in that passionate moment. It’s that moment of consummation. She looks at him and says, “I invite you to be my husband,” so that he knows he’s not pressuring her. He’s not hurting her. He’s not intimidating her that she invites him, and this is very frank what she’s asking for. She knows what she would like to try, and she invites him to do so. D.A. Carson in the new Bible commentary — he’s one of the best Bible teachers in the world. He’ll be here lecturing and preaching in December. He says it this way. “She now invites him to come into the garden of her life in the fullest possible way. It may be locked to others, but it is certainly not locked to him. The phrase, quote, ‘I could eat you,’ is not such a modern expression. Here she invites him to do that very thing.” The goal is to invite your spouse to enjoy your body. Husbands and wives mutually.

Here she invites him. Now the question that some of you are probably asking is: what does God think about all of this? Is this okay? The next verse is debated. Someone speaks in and says, “This is wonderful.” Some commentators would suggest that these are her friends. I doubt it. I hope they weren’t there, all right? Other commentators would suggest that it is God here who speaks for the first and only time in the book. I think that understanding is preferable, and he says this. Here’s what the husband says, “I came to my garden, my sister, my bride. I gathered my myrrh with my spice. I ate my honeycomb with my milk. I drank my wine with my milk.” You looked amazing. You tasted phenomenal. You felt great, and I love you, and God says, “Eat, friends, drink, and be drunk with love.” God says, “This is beautiful.”

The Bible wants us to be naked without shame. This is one example of that. She has no shame, because there’s no sin. She’s not been sinning. She’s gotten married. She has strong desires. She invites her husband. They enjoy one another, and God says, “That’s the way it’s supposed to be.” It’s beautiful. Again, for us, as we examined in the first week, sex is not gross. Sex is not God. We don’t think it’s disgusting, and we don’t think it’s the most important thing in the world. We believe it’s a gift that God gave us to share with our spouse, and that’s what they do, and God then encourages and speaks to them and says, “This is beautiful. This is what I intended for you. This is what I command of you. I rejoice in your relationship.” That’s what we want. That’s what we want.

Now were this a Hollywood story, it would then end, “And they lived happily ever after.” And the credits would roll, and everyone who’s been married for longer than a day knows that’s not true. The question that then arises is this, and it’s one many of you have asked, and I’ve saved it for this sermon. How could this man with this woman blow it so badly? Is she not enjoyable? She seems very enjoyable? Is she not loving? She seems very loving. Then how could he move into their home 700 wives and 300 girlfriends, which is what he does? How could she go from being this amazing wife, to being part of the harem that makes the Playboy mansion look junior varsity? What happened? I Kings, Chapter 11 answers that question. I’ll read it to you and then we’ll spend the preponderance of our time together examining what happened to this marriage.

I Kings 11, Verse 1 says this. “Now, King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh, an Egyptian woman. Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonite and Hittite women,” — the Bible here is not just speaking against racial groups. These are religious groups. This would be like saying, “Solomon loved Mormon gals and Buddhist gals and Hindu gals and Muslim gals,” — “From the nations, concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel, ‘You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their Gods.’” God has always said, “Don’t date non-Christians. Don’t get emotionally, physically, romantically entangled with non-Christians. Don’t get engaged to non-Christians. Don’t marry non-Christians.” God has been emphatic about this.

One of the most devastating parts of this series for me emotionally — and I’ll be honest with you, I’m emotionally pretty tapped out today — is that, in love, I teach the Bible, and in pride so many people push back and say, “But we are the exception to the rule.” You’re not. You’re not. Some of you will say, “But the person I’m dating believes in God.” And I would say, “All of the women that Solomon married believed in God.” Different gods, different religions, ultimately demons; just so you know, false religions are established and promulgated by powerful demons who do counterfeit signs, wonders, and miracles, and those demons elicit worship in an effort to present themselves as God. It’s not enough to marry someone who believes in God. James says that “Even demons know that God exists.”

You need to marry someone who not only believes in God, but worships Jesus as God. Worships Jesus as God. We’ll keep reading. “Solomon clung to these in love.” He had 700 wives and 300 concubines — girlfriends. “And his wives turned away his heart, for when Solomon was old,” — it wasn’t like this his whole life. He wrote books of the Bible. He built the temple. The presence of God came and dwelt in the midst of the temple that he made, but his heart wandered from God when he was old. “His wives turned away his heart after other gods and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David, his father.” In mentioning David, it raises this question: how could this man not learn from the example of his father? Do you remember his parents were David and Bathsheba?

David saw Bathsheba bathing, naked, lusted after her. Committed adultery with her; murdered her husband, Uriah the Hittite; took Bathsheba to be his wife. Those are Solomon’s parents. When your father is an adulterer and a murderer, and your mom is an adulterer, you would think that you would grow up despising adultery, and the truth is this. Many people fail to acknowledge how evil and wicked their parents were, and, in so doing, are doomed to repeat their folly. The home you’re born into you assume is normative, unless you read the scriptures and interpret it Biblically, and if there are things that your parents did that were did Biblical, rather than defending them, you could still love them.

You don’t need to hate them, despise them, or become embittered against them, but you need to honestly evaluate them and ask: what was in my home growing up that I need reject because it’s not Biblical? Of all the people who should’ve known the pain of adultery, it should’ve been Solomon, and he

does it himself. “For Solomon,” — Verse 5 — “Went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not wholly follow the Lord as his father David had done. Then Solomon built a high place,” — it’s not enough that he allowed his wives to worship other gods. He built their churches and temples. “He built a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites on the mountain east of Jerusalem.”

That’s the Mount of Olives where Jesus would later ascend to heaven from. “And so he did for all his foreign wives who made offerings and sacrifice to their gods.” Some of you don’t even understand why this is a problem. You say, “We live in Seattle. Isn’t this just religious pluralism and spiritual diversity and ecumenical agreement? What’s the big deal? We pray with Buddhists and Hindus and Muslims and sometimes we get together for worship services. That’s just Seattle, right?” No, it’s demonic. There’s the God of the Bible and then there’s demons who present themselves as false gods. The Bible says — the first two commandments, there’s one God. You worship him alone. Again, it’s not enough to be with someone who believes in God. You need to worship Jesus and marry someone who worships Jesus. How did God feel about this?

Not very tolerant and diverse. Verse 9: “The Lord was angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel who appeared to him twice.” God came down and talked to him twice about this — “And had commanded him concerning this thing that he should not go after other Gods, but he did not keep what the Lord commanded.” Just read the end of the chapter, Verse 41. “Now the rest of the acts of Solomon and all that he did and his wisdom, are they not written in the book of the acts of Solomon and the time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was 40 years. And Solomon slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David his father and Rehoboam his son reigned in his place.” Here’s Solomon. He’s richer than Bill Gates. He’s smarter than Albert Einstein. He’s more spiritually influential than the Pope.

He’s more politically powerful than the President, and he’s got a harem bigger than Hugh Hefner’s, and his heart turns away from God. There’s a couple things I wanna highlight from Solomon’s life. The first is this. The last day of your marriage is far more important than the first day of your marriage. Too many couples make too much of their wedding day, and I’m not saying you don’t have a big wedding and have your friends over and celebrate, but if you don’t plan for the last day, you’re a fool. The goal is not to have an amazing wedding. The goal is to have an amazing marriage. If you don’t go through premarital counseling; if you don’t work out your differences; if you don’t go about things in the Biblical way; if you don’t work from a Biblical framework, you may have a wonderful wedding, and a horrible marriage. I married Gracie when I was 21.

One of the things I’ve asked God, and I’ve asked God for many things regarding Gracie, but one of the things I’ve asked is, “God, I want to outlive her. I want to grow old with her and wrinkled with her, and I wanna be with her, and I wanna outlive her so I can take care of her and look after her and make sure she’s okay her whole life.” And I’ve asked God, “Please let me preach her funeral.” I’ve asked him this many times. Let me take care of her all the way to the end. If she gets sick, let me look after her. If she gets bedridden, let me look after her. I love her. This is my girl. I wanna make sure she’s okay, and I wanna get up at the end and I wanna speak well of her and I wanna be the one who concludes her life, with her, at her side, in love, in prayer, with Jesus. I want my face to be the last one she sees before she sees the face of Jesus. That’s what I want.

You need to prepare for that day. What will the last day be? Will it be the day of divorce? Will be it the day of devastation and destruction? Or will it be growing old together? Worshipping Jesus together? Statistically sociologists tell us that at year 35 couples experience the same degree of intimacy as they did on their honeymoon. I’m looking forward to year 35. The last day is more important than the first day. That is not to discount or dishonor or disregard the first day, but the last day is more important. What will the last day be? Number 2: if you walk away from God, you are capable of anything, and that includes the most atrocious of evils. Some people look at Solomon and say, “I can’t believe he did that.” Walk away from God and see what you do as a totally depraved sinner. To me this is terrifying, and it’s sobering.

He worshiped — it lists the gods and goddesses, Ashtoreth, the Canaanite God of sex. They had the Ashtoreth polls named after — it was the male phallic symbol that people would gather around for sex and prostitution. He built one of those, Milcom, which was the Ammonite chief God, and Chemosh, who was the Moabite God; Chemosh was a demon that required child sacrifice. To worship Chemosh, people had to slaughter their own children. He also mentions Molech. You had to worship this demon by also sacrificing your children, but you would do so through the fire. You would literally burn your child to death in worship to this god. Now I want you to be careful with this because we can have chronological snobbery, is what C.S. Lewis calls it, to where we say, “Oh, those primitive people. That is very primitive.” You know what?

We slaughter more kids than Chemosh and Molech ever did. We call it choice. They called it worship. They would go to the temple. We go to Planned Parenthood. Just so you know, we don’t have the moral high ground over those who worshiped Chemosh and Molech. Even in this church I know there are guys who even said they were Christians, got their girlfriend pregnant, and really pressured her to get an abortion because they worship Chemosh or Molech, and not Jesus. You need to be very careful not to take the moral high ground when, statistically, we’ve slaughtered way more kids in the worship of sex than they ever did. If you walk away from God, you are capable of anything, even the murder of your own child. Some of you don’t believe me. You need to so that you carry yourself with some fear and reverence and sobriety.

Number 3: some of us would look at him and say, “That’s disgusting, 700 wives and 300 concubines. What a disgusting harem.” And the truth is the average man has a digital mental harem bigger than that. Jesus says, in Matthew 5, that “Lust is a matter of the heart.” Some men can’t afford a harem that big, so rather than housing one in their home, they house one on their computer or in their video collection or in their magazine collection. We live in a day when we have harems. Some of us have literal harems. Some of us have digital, mental, visual harems: lust of the heart; pornography; sexual six of all sorts and kinds, and the truth is, we live in a culture when a guy like Hugh Hefner is lifted up as the patron saint of sexuality, and so many guys want to be like him.

And Solomon was: huge house; thousand women; his own harem, and how many guys think, “Boy, that would be a great life right there.” Hugh Hefner’s 82. The news reported this week his 28-year-old girlfriend Holly, who’s part of his inner harem, that gets to sleep in his bed, is dumping him

because she wants to get married and have kids. So, in her place, the 82-year-old man is auditioning twin sisters who are 19 years old, and the average American male thinks, "That is an amazing life. I wish I had it." Again, we can look at Solomon — self-righteous, religious and proud — and say, "He's disgusting. I would never be like that," or we could say, "If I walked away from God, I would be capable of the same thing. I would lust and sin and commit idolatry and maybe even abort a kid. I'm capable of it if I wander from God."

That's why I'm begging you, those of you who are single, don't just marry someone who believes in God. Marry someone who walks with him; who worships him; who repents of sin to him; who runs to him. Number 4: the longer you wait to repent of your sin, the more devastating the consequences for yourself, your marriage, your children, your friends, your sphere of influence, and the generations that ensue in your wake. I believe that Solomon wrote the Song of Songs when he was he was young and in love and walking with God. I believe the Proverbs were collected over the course of his life. I believe that when he grew old, his heart turned from the Lord, and I believe he wrote the book of Ecclesiastes as a book of repentance, to where he came to his senses near the end of his life, and he closes Ecclesiastes saying this.

"Now that all has been heard, here's the conclusion of the matter. Fear God and keep his commandments." He says it this way in Ecclesiastes 2:1, "I said to my heart, come now, I will test you with pleasure. Enjoy yourself, but, behold, this also was vanity." Some of your translations will say "meaningless". What he's saying is, "Trust me. It's not a good idea to walk away from God and to become sexually confused and perverted. It's not a good idea." And so many will hear this, and my fear is that they'll think that he got it wrong and they'll get it right. He says it this way in Ecclesiastes 9:9. "Enjoy life with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil in which you labor under the sun, on the earth." He says, "Had I to do it over again, here's what I'd do. Enjoy my wife."

And he says it this way in Proverbs 5. "Let your fountain be blessed and rejoice in the wife of your youth. A lovely doe, a graceful deer; let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love." Now some of you who hear this say, "I don't think God's upset with me. Yeah, I'm fornicating. I'm cohabitating. I'm looking at porn. I'm committing adultery, lust in my heart, yeah, but you know what? I still got my job. I still got my health. Everything seems fine." Solomon did not suffer. 40 years of unparalleled, unprecedented peace and prosperity, and God was angry at him, and if you continue to read, the consequences came to his children and his grandchildren and the nation and his family and his friends and everyone else suffered because of his sin. Just because your life isn't hard doesn't mean that God is blessing. Here's the bottom line.

Without Jesus, your marriage is doomed: bottom line, bottom line. Statistically it has been said, and I have said it, and I will correct that, that Christians are just as likely to divorce as non-Christians. Did a lot of statistical work; hired a PhD this week to do research — great guy, sociologist. Here's the statistic. People who say they're Christians are just as likely to commit adultery and get divorced as non-Christians, but not everybody who says they're a Christian is. If you put a few filters in place, a few variables like, do you attending church? Do you read your Bible? Do you pray? Are you in a Small Group? Adultery and divorce goes way down. Way down. If two people are walking with Jesus, it's not the silver bullet, but it's pretty close. I'll give you the non-Christian sociological evidence.

This comes from non-Christian sociological reviews and major Universities. Divorce is 2.4 times higher among couples where neither spouse attends than among couples where each spouse attends religious services every week. Those who frequently attend religious services are only about half as likely to separate. Those who do not attend religious services are 2.5 times more likely to have been divorced than respondents who attend religious services regularly. Couples who do not share the same religious denomination, or have no religious affiliation, are significantly more likely to divorce; couples with different religious backgrounds, like a Christian and a Mormon or a Christian and Muslim, are more than 120 percent more likely to divorce.

Couples who share the same denomination — you agree on what kind of church you want to go to. One that believes in the Bible or not; one that has women pastors or not; one that has a certain theology of family or not — are 42 percent more likely to be very happy than couples who do not. Couples who are theologically conservative — okay, this is non-Christian sociological statistical evidence. It's for me to say, "Well, the Bible says it," and then I would say, "And the statisticians confirm it." Couples who are theologically conservative, believe the Bible and regularly attend church together, report greater marital happiness.

Both married men and women, ages 18 to 55 who attend religious services regularly — that's several times a month or more — have happier marriages, though the influence of church-going appears to be markedly stronger for married men. See, a lot of women already go to church. Men who go to church, they experience the biggest life change. Here's the bottom line. Some of you think you're the exception to the rule. I've been doing this job long enough, and I've talk to enough people today, and here's the painful, brutal truth.

Everyone wants me to affirm their lifestyle, because if they can get me to sign off on their lifestyle, they feel like they're acceptable in the sight of God, and so many people want to say, "Well, I know that's what the Bible says, but that's not what it really means. What it really means is we get to cohabitate. What it really means is we get to look at porn. What it really means is we get to commit adultery. What is really means is, if we don't feel like we're in love, we get to break our covenant vows, because we're the exception to the rule. We have extenuating circumstances that are very complicated and you need to agree with us. Otherwise you're not loving, tolerant, diverse and kind." I'm not tolerate, loving and diverse, but I am kind. I want the best for you.

I want you to walk with Jesus. Read your Bible. Pray. Become a member of the church. Get in a community group. Start learning, growing, reading, repenting; change of mind; change of heart; change of life. Want you to marry someone who is like that, and I want you to read your Bible together and I want you to pray together, and I want you to confess your sins together. I want you to attend church together, and I want you to walk with Jesus together, and, statistically, if you do, your odds of adultery go down. Your odds of separation go down. Your odds of divorce go down, and your odds of happiness go up. Just want you to be happy. Sin leads to death. It always has, it always will. You're not the exception to the rule. You're not

smarter than God.

And, the truth is, Solomon has already tried and tells us that not walking with God leads to devastation, death, and destruction, and we can go about this one of two ways. We could say, "Well, that's his opinion." Or, "That's God's word and I trust it." So let me ask you: how's your walk with Jesus? If you don't have regular church participation, in a community group with Godly people speaking into your life, in a redemption group dealing with your abuse or addiction, when crisis comes — and it's not if crisis comes, it's when it comes — you'll do one of two things. You'll just go with your gut and make the big life decisions about divorce and fidelity, and you're going to blow up. Two: you'll just get frustrated and talk to whoever's in front of you, coworker, family, friend.

You'll just blurt it out in a moment of emotionalism, and you're gonna get bad counsel, and invite everybody else into your business. Number 3: you're going to bring your family into it. You're going to call your mom, your dad, your brothers, your sisters, and you're going to bring all your family into your personal mess and you're gonna blow up your whole family and they're gonna take your side and just tell you to leave the bum, or, Number 4: you're gonna run into Mars Hill church, at the last minute, and want us to give you a magic answer that'll fix everything. I've been doing this job 12 years. I've worked with hundreds and thousands of couples, and it's just shocking to me that people will not walk with God for years, and when it all falls apart, they want a fix that's instantaneous.

Had people walk in today. "I've been looking at porn for years. Cheated on my spouse. We hate each other. We live parallel lives. I'm seeing someone else, what — you know, what should I do to fix it?" And you start talking to them, and they're looking at their watch. You say, "What are you doing looking at your watch?" "Well, I'm in a hurry." "So two minutes to fix it?" Took 20 years to destroy it; we'll give it 2 minutes. Preventative measures: walking with Jesus; rowing in holiness; having good relationships; being a member of a church; getting in a community group; working through a redemption group through addictive or abuse. Those are the ways that you safeguard against future destruction, and I want you to be happy, and we're here to help and we're here to serve.

But the truth is, if you've broken everything, we can't just fix it. It's gonna take a lot of work, a lot of time, and, for a lot of people, they're not willing to do that, and they become yet another statistic. And we don't want that for you, for your children, for your grandchildren. We don't want that, and I know these are hard words, and I believe hard words produce soft people. And I believe that soft words produce hard people, and if your heart is hard, I want it to be soft, so that you'll walk with God. Okay? That being said, I'll bring out my lovely wife, Grace, and we'll answer a few questions. Just a few; we're pressed for time. Hi, sweetie-pie. Maybe the guys in the booth could throw the first one up, we'll take a look at it. West Seattle: "Is it possible to lust after your own wife?" I would recommend it. It depends on how you define lust.

If lust is defined as, you know, sinful, sexual desire, then no, but should your desires be for your spouse? Is it okay to think of your spouse sexually? Is it okay to close your mind and have redeemed images of them intimately with you, and is it good to e-mail and to text and to call, and "I can't wait to get home. And I can't get you off my mind. I'm thinking about you and I just can't wait to be with you, and I'm consumed just always thinking about you." Yep, that's a good idea. That's a good idea, right? Because your goal is not to be nonsexual; your goal is to be martially compelled. I don't know. You wanna take that one?

Grace Driscoll: No, I think you did a great job. I think you can worship your wife, if you put her above God, but I think that desires — Godly desires for your wife, absolutely. That's what you're encouraging and what you're preaching.

Mark Driscoll: Thank you. All right, we'll do another one. Bellevue: "I am 14. How old should I be before I consider dating?" Well, old enough to take her out on something other than a bike would be a good start. You know, I mean, to me the point of dating is ultimately marriage. So until you're at a season where marriage is on the horizon in the near future, dating is premature. Otherwise, like, let's say 14, let's say you — you say, "Oh, I got to finish college and then I'll get married at 23, 24, whatever." That's going to be eight, nine years. You're not gonna be sexually, emotionally pure eight or nine years. So, I don't know, we've got an 11-year-old daughter, and until she's ready to be married, there's no point, as I can see it in having, you know, intimate, emotional relationships. I don't know. You wanna take this?

Grace Driscoll: Yeah, that age can vary, male and female, you know —

Maturity.

Grace Driscoll: — maturity levels. Also what your parents believe. If they're Godly people, you wanna consult them too, but, yeah, I mean, I think, like he's saying, it's hard to remain pure. So you wanna continue to look at people — that people God brings into your life, but don't automatically, at 14, pursue that for marriage.

Mark Driscoll: Nope. All right, we'll do another one. Ballard: "My fiancé is a Godly man, but he previously struggled with porn and had sexual relationships. Will I ever be his standard of beauty?" Well, it all depends on what he does with his sin. Jesus died for sin so that we could put sin to death, and if he's become a Christian with a regenerated heart and new desires, and is walking by the Spirit — Bible talks about all this stuff — it is possible. Now if he didn't get any help; he hasn't been through a redemption group; he doesn't have guys around him for accountability, be worried. If a guy just says, "Oh, I'm fine." Well, yeah. Don't let him diagnose himself. Okay? People who are addicted or abused, the redemption groups are really good for them. Accountability, Bible teaching, but is it possible to have a renewed mind? Yes. It is. I know guys who do have a renewed mind.

They think differently. Repentance starts in the mind. Right, you think differently. You're no longer conformed to the pattern of this world. You're transformed by the renewing of your mind. You think differently, and what you used to think was interesting, now you see as wicked. That changes your desires. That changes your actions. Is it possible, as a man gets a regenerated heart, a renewed mind, and Scripture, that he has a different lens? It is

possible, but he has to repent well and be in accountable community to make sure he doesn't fall back into sinful proclivity. I don't know.

Grace Driscoll: And with the redemption groups, the spouses are asked to go through that group with them, so you can learn how to learn how to walk through that redemption process with him. So you don't feel like you're out here and he's working it through, or — you know how to ask questions, lovingly and respectfully, and keep a check in that area for him. So that's an important group to get into.

Mark Driscoll: Yeah, and if you're not in the premarital class at Mars Hill, please get in one. You're suicidal if you don't go through premarital counseling. It's very, very, very good, and a first-year mentoring couple will then be with you through your first year of marriage and a Bible study to help you. We've got all this set up, and we do so very intentionally, and part of this is confessing and working through all your past sin. And so if you're doing that, praise God, this is good, and one of the things I would say is if your fiancé is a guy who's told you all of his sin, that's pretty demonstrative that he's repentant. "Here's what I was doing. Here's where I was at. I want to be honest with you." That indicates a repentant heart. I mean, if a guy doesn't tell you, then you've got real danger, but he's trying to be honest.

And so premarital counseling, redemption group, accountability: those are the good next steps if you're already not doing them. What would you say to a woman, honey, who, she's fearful. I mean, her husband-to-be has had a pornography addiction or compulsion. Statistically most guys do, and she's wondering, "Will I ever be enough?"

Grace Driscoll: Yeah, that's why I say to walk through the redemption group process with him because there are ways that you can ask questions and be a part of that honest conversation with him. So that you're not nagging at him, but you're being a loving accountability to him, and I would say a lot of consistent prayer, too, is necessary. There's gonna be battles with lies in your own mind of: am I good enough? Am I attractive enough? Am I, you know, whatever he needs? We have that whether or not the fiancé or spouse has had a porn addiction. Women just have those lies that are constantly coming in, so that only adds to that pressure. So you're gonna need to be prayerful against those things coming in constantly, and you're gonna — I would say to do the battle with him instead of standing outside and condemning him.

Grace Driscoll: If he really is repentant, it's gonna be important that he's going to see that you want to walk through the other side of that with him.

Mark Driscoll: Yeah. I'll do another one. Ballard: "Can singles have a standard of beauty?" No. No. You need to marry someone you're attracted to, and I'm talking attraction in the holistic sense. You're spiritually attracted to them. They love and serve Jesus. You're attracted to their ministry and what they're doing to serve and love others. You — you're attracted to them mentally. You like conversing with them and learning with them. You're attracted to them emotionally. You feel safe with them, you feel connected to them. You're attracted to them physically, all right? Attraction is a holistic issue. And, to me, this is again one of the disgusting things of, you know, friends with benefits, and hooking up and cohabitation and porn. It's not a whole attraction. It's just a physical attraction. That's it.

And the problem is, if you only have a physical attraction, your marriage is doomed because your appearance changes over time. You saw my wedding photos. Grace still looks the same. You know, and — but at 80, we're both gonna look different than we did when we married at 21. So if your spouse is your standard of beauty, as they age, your standard of beauty adjusts, right? So Grace and I at 80, we're one another's standard of beauty at 80. So I would say, the problem is, if you're single, and you set a standard of beauty, you're looking just at the physical. You need to look at it. Consider it, but not just that. And what about when you do get married and they grow or change, and wife has a baby, and you both get older? You'll be dissatisfied, because you'll have a standard of beauty rather than a spouse.

Your goal is not to have a standard of beauty. Your goal is to have a spouse. Should you be attracted to your spouse? Yes, in a holistic sense. Good enough? Okay. We'll do one more. Ballard: "What are your feelings about married couples who are both Christians but attend different churches because of how they were raised?" Suicide is the first word that comes to mind, suicide. There is no way we would ever let our children marry someone under those circumstances. No way in the world, because what you're saying is no just "We attend different churches. We have different theologies. We have different views of God, and sin and family, and when we disagree we have different courts of arbitration." Those are parallel lives. If you can't worship God together, you're not one.

I mean, let's say you disagree on something, and he says, "Well, my pastor says." And she says, "Well, my pastor says." Good luck resolving anything. Good luck.

Grace Driscoll: And how confusing is that to the kids? You know, who do — where do you — who do you take where and you wanna be able to serve as a family together in one body, be a part of one body together. Yeah, it just leads to a lot of disunity, which, in marriage, you're trying to build unity. We've already got enough things coming at us that build disunity. So it just seems like not a wise thing to do.

Mark Driscoll: Well — and how can the man be the spiritual head of the home, you know, teaching the Bible to the kids and leading the family spiritually if mom has a completely different theological conviction, completely different church attendance, completely different world framework of how she does life? That's not one. That's just not, and I think you're right. I think it sets a devastating example for the kids, and I think it's nothing but trouble in the home. So, you know, that's why, if you're protestant, and you wanna marry a Catholic, you better figure that out. You say, "We're both Christian." Great, but those are very different, okay? I was raised Catholic. Some Catholics love Jesus, but Catholic, protestant: different. Church with women elders; not with women elders: different view of the Bible. You gotta agree on those things.

And if you can't, that breach won't just be in Sunday worship, because if you can't hold hands together; be under the same leadership; hear the same teaching; and worship God, good luck building unity downstream in the rest of the relationship. You just can't do it. I couldn't imagine if you went to another church. That would so bum me out. I would be totally unemployed, yeah. "Where's your wife?" "Oh, she's at the Mormon temple." Oh my,

gosh, all right. I'll ask you one — don't worry. Thank you. Thank you. I'll ask you one final question that we keep getting, so — and it's this question. "We're married, Christian, how often should we be together?"

Grace Driscoll: Well, there's not a number in the Bible.

That's not what they wanted to hear. That's not what they want to hear.

Grace Driscoll: I would say there's a principle in I Corinthians 7. "Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourself to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." The principle there is to desire to be together. You're both Christians. You both love the Lord, wanna walk with the Lord, and learning through the years what freedom means in marriage and sexuality together. So it should — if you don't want that, then the question is: why don't we want that? Why don't we want to have that intimacy? If there's problems that need to be dealt with underneath that, then be willing to not be afraid of dealing with those things.

Like what kind of problems would be —

Grace Driscoll: Whether it's abuse or just don't wanna deal with past sins from your life, or sins against you. There's a lot of issues that can come in disturb the sexual intimacy, and a lot of times it just seems like it's easier to not deal with it, but the freedom that God wants for us is a beautiful thing. Once we've been willing to repent and walk through those things, and it builds an intimacy to walk through those things even, and we've walked through a lot of those kinds of things. And had — and God has blessed that. So I think it's not an issue of how often do we need to be together, it's — you should desire to be together frequently, and that's gonna look different in different seasons of life, too: after your children and sickness, travel, whatever the issues may be, but, yeah, we should desire to be with one another.

Grace Driscoll: And if not, then ask the hard questions and walk through what it looks like to come to the other side of that.

Mark Driscoll: So couple's together: there's no abuse. They do love each other. The marriage is in order. There's nothing traumatic, and one person wants to be together regularly, like daily, and the other person is always sort of pushing back and delaying and there's frustration because one feels like "I'm not getting taken care of sexually." What's the answer?

Grace Driscoll: Well, if that's the woman that's not wanting to be together, there's usually fear under there. There's usually something that needs to be talked through and worked through, patiently, lovingly, and she needs to not desire to live in fear of anything other than the Lord, and that may be stepping outside of the comfort zone and being willing to take risks with her husband, even though it's not ultimately a risk if he loves the Lord and loves her, but it can feel that way, but to be willing to serve each other.

Mark Driscoll: Cool. I like looking at you. Why don't you — I'm sorry. I embarrassed you. I do, though. Could you close our time in prayer? We'll hand it over to the campus pastors or — are you okay?

Grace Driscoll: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for what you've taught us tonight. I pray that you would continue to challenge us — challenge single people to desire freedom now in their relationship with you alone, and then, as you bring someone into their life, that they would want to keep that a pure relationship, Lord, and for married people, that they would be willing to walk in repentance and look for the redemption that you have for them, Lord. You can walk us through so much, and we need to live in trust that you will walk us through those things. So I just pray that we would desire to be close to you and not stray from that so that we don't end up, in the end, with being a terrible statistic like so many, Lord. So just give us the grace and power to walk with you daily and faithfully, in Jesus' name.

Mark Driscoll: Amen. Thanks, babe.