April 23, 2017  The Birds and the Bees “Learning How to Love: Dating and Respect”

Scripture:
In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.  Matthew 7:12

Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God's will is—what is good and pleasing and mature...Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.  Romans 12:2, 9

God’s will is that your lives are dedicated to him. This means that you stay away from sexual immorality and learn how to control your own body in a pure and respectable way. Don't be controlled by your sexual urges like the Gentiles who don't know God. No one should mistreat or take advantage of their brother or sister in this issue. The Lord punishes people for all these things.  1 Thessalonians 4:3-6a

Keeping our paths pure
MONDAY 4.24.17  Psalm 119:9-11

Psalm 119 may be best known to casual Bible readers as “the longest chapter in the Bible” (it is 176 verses long). But the psalm is not a novelty—it's a record of a profound spiritual struggle, which speaks to people of all ages. Pastor Donald Williams wrote, “The psalmist is also engaged in a battle with himself. Thus he has shame (v. 6), is in danger of wandering (v. 10), and is vulnerable to sin (v. 11). His soul clings to the dust (v. 25); he has heaviness (v. 28), is vulnerable to lying (v. 29) and covetousness (v. 36), and has gone astray (vv. 67, 176). His soul faints (v. 81), he cries for help (v. 147), and he needs deliverance.” *

- The psalmist showed what a serious undertaking it was to keep his paths pure, writing “I have sought you with all my heart.” Do you have a sense of recognition of any of the issues the psalmist wrote about, as listed in the summary above? When have you found that seeking God and God’s ways with all your heart made a positive difference in your life, instead of robbing you of joy or love?
- “I keep your word close, in my heart,” the psalmist wrote. “The verb…means ‘store up, treasure, hide away’; here it may mean to memorize the Law.” ** What does it take to move the word from the printed page (or the screen) into your heart? Try the psalmist’s approach: choose a short Bible passage (e.g. John 3:16, Psalm 23, maybe Psalm 119:11 from today’s reading) and commit it to memory this week.

Prayer: Dear God, I want to whole-heartedly set my feet on the path of life, the path on which I live out your principles. I know I can’t do that in my own strength, and I ask you to empower me to live a pure life. Amen.
Jesus taught keys to healthy relating
TUESDAY 4.25.17  Matthew 5:27-30, 33-37
Wouldn’t it be great to learn about stronger relationships directly from Jesus? His Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matthew 5-7) offered much wisdom. Using “prophetic hyperbole,” Jesus taught the often-ignored truth that faithless hearts (and not just bodies) deeply damage relationships.
He stressed the value of honesty in what lies behind our words as well as in the words themselves. Our integrity shouldn’t come and go (“I swear I mean it this time”)—it should be a given.

• Adultery = sex with someone other than your spouse, right? Jesus expanded the idea of betrayal (as he did several other areas of life). He said our heart (our emotions and thoughts) can be faithless to our partner’s needs, even without an overt act. His hyperbolic images showed, not the need to mangle ourselves, but the challenge of doing what we need to keep our thoughts from wandering where they shouldn’t go. How might a deeper commitment to be faithful in your relationships change you at the heart level?

• Honesty begins with being honest with yourself and God. (Often a group, counselor or accountability partner helps us with this.) How well do you understand the inner or outer forces that most often tempt you to “shade” your words or promises to the people you care about? How are you doing at being honest with yourself and God?

Prayer: Lord God, you created me. You know more about how my mind works than I know myself. Help me grow to be a deeply faithful, trustworthy person. Amen.

Not for selfish purposes
WEDNESDAY 4.26.17  Philippians 2:1-4
Though he wrote some profound and challenging passages, the Apostle Paul was deeply practical. In verse 1 of today’s reading, he listed four lofty spiritual benefits that can be ours in Christ. But in verse 2-4, he appealed to his readers to live their day-to-day lives, including all their relationships, in ways that made those spiritual qualities into walking, breathing realities.

• In verse 2, Paul wrote, “Complete my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, being united, and agreeing with each other.” God created each of us unique, with our own minds and personalities. These differences often enhance our relationships. How can you live out the principles of this verse while honoring your God-given uniqueness?

• In verse 3, Paul wrote, “Don’t do anything for selfish purposes.” In verse 4 he urged his readers to “watch out for what is better for others.” What are some of the productive, healthy ways you can put the interests of others above your own in response to Christ’s self-giving love for you? What might this look like in your closest relationships?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, when I think of doing nothing for selfish purposes, that feels hard and scary. When I think of having a partner who does nothing for selfish purposes, that feels as though it would be wonderful! Make me that kind of partner. Amen.
Freedom to serve each other
THURSDAY 4.27.17   Galatians 5:13-16
In common usage, we think “freedom” means “the right to do what you want, make your own decisions, and express your own opinions.” * The apostle Paul, who had pondered Jesus’ definition and model of greatness, called us to move beyond selfish impulses that actually enslave us, to live with the right to do what God wants us to do. Abandoning the ways of the world for the way of Jesus is a radical step. Paul called Christians to let the Holy Spirit’s presence radically change their lives.

• In verse 13 Paul bluntly stated a truth we find painful to admit. We all have selfish impulses, especially when we’re able to choose freely. He pointed his readers to the one who can give us the ability to serve each other in love: the Holy Spirit. In what areas of life do you want to invite the Spirit to empower you to deny your selfish desires and love others as you love yourself more fully?

• Paul described the way of life he was talking about with the phrase “be guided by the Spirit.” When have you experienced what Pastor Hamilton sometimes calls “inner nudges” that move you toward the right choice, or away from what is harmful? How can you learn to be more attuned to the Holy Spirit’s leading in your life?

Prayer: O Lord, you call me to true freedom: not following all my own flawed, selfish impulses, but living guided by your presence and principles. Give me a willingness to trust you to shape and guide my life. Amen.

* From Macmillandictionary.com.

Don’t mistreat or take advantage of a brother or sister
FRIDAY 4.28.17   1 Thessalonians 4:1-8
New Testament Christians lived in a world where lust and immorality were a given. In many Roman and Greek cities, “temples” devoted to Aphrodite or Venus, goddesses of “love,” sold the services of prostitutes! 1 Thessalonians is probably the earliest of Paul’s letters. In it, as in many of his later letters, he made it clear to his converts that God was calling them to break from their culture, and live in new ways.

• Compare and contrast the attitudes and values about sex in the Greek and Roman world 2000 years ago with attitudes in our world today. How many films or TV shows suggest that you shouldn’t “be controlled by your sexual urges”? In what ways has our culture shaped your attitudes and life story, and those of people close to you?

• In verse 6 Paul chose verbs that mean “harm,” “wrong” and “take advantage of.” How much better would our world be if everyone resolved to never mistreat or take advantage of another person in the realm of sexual behavior? In what ways does this cast light on the type of spiritual damage that an impure life can do to both parties? How does this language speak to the common idea that prostitution or promiscuity are “victimless” activities?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I want to live a life dedicated to you. Guard my heart and mind from all the influences that seek to move me away from that kind of life, and help me to live as you call me to live. Amen.
Living in God’s grace, love and will
SATURDAY 4.29.17  1 John 2:1-6, 15-17

John 3:16 said God loved “the world.” Why would verse 15 of this passage tell us not to love the world? Scholar Craig Keener shows the point of these verses: “The world’…here means the system in competition with God. Just as Israel in the Old Testament repeatedly had to decide between allegiance to God and allegiance to the pagan nations around them, the Christians scattered among the nations had to choose Christ above whatever in their cultures conflicted with his demands.” * Like God, we are called to love all the people in our world. But we are called to separate ourselves from cultural, economic and political parts of “the system in competition with God,” just as much as possible.

- Verse 1 highlighted the tension John (and all Christians since him) dealt with. He was writing to his converts to urge them not to sin. How could anyone who takes God seriously do anything less? But he knew that at times they would sin—so he also reminded them that Jesus “is God’s way of dealing with our sins.” Are there any areas where you are ignoring a God-given inner conviction? When have you been honest about a flaw or struggle, and found that your honesty connected you with the Savior John described: “We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one”?

Prayer:
Lord Jesus, keep drawing me into your kingdom. I know that at times that will make me different from some of the “cool” people around me. Help to crave connection with you more than anything else. Amen.


Family Activity: Design a collage entitled, “Created in God’s Image.” Gather a wide variety of magazines. If someone in your family is artistic, also gather markers or crayons. Read Genesis 1:26-28 and Galatians 3:28. Discuss how God created each person in God’s image, and how we are all one in Christ no matter our gender, race, age or size. Cut out and/or draw pictures of different types of people. Include both male and female and a range of shapes, races, ages, ethnicities, sizes and backgrounds. Include pictures of your own family and friends! Celebrate that God created and loves every person, and that each person is made in the image of God. Thank God for creating you and all people.

Prayer Requests – cor.org/prayer
**Prayers for Peace & Comfort for:**
- Bob VanLandingham and family on the death of his wife Wilma VanLandingham, 4/19
- Don VanLandingham and family on the death of his mother Wilma VanLandingham, 4/19
- Sherrie Keeton and family on the death of her daughter, Kerrie McCown, 4/15
- Matt and Melissa Bolan and family on the death of their son, Jack Bolan, 4/15
- Pam Patton and family on the death of her grandson, Jack Bolan, 4/15
- Laurian Lytle and family on the death of her father, John Logan Casson, 4/13
- Joseph Lytle, Hannah Lytle, Julie Lytle, and Liz Ang on the death of their grandfather, John Logan Casson, 4/13
- Leslie Henzlik and family on the death of her mother, Delores Pfaff, 4/11
- Rick and Judy Tremblay and family on the death of their son, Jason Tremblay, 4/3
- Donna Allred and family on the death of her brother, Robert Caruso, 3/31
- John Allred, Jenna Allred, and Jackie Legg on the death of their uncle, Robert Caruso, 3/31