

**Christ Community Covenant Church**  
**Spirit Filled Living in a Broken and Fallen World**  
**1 Corinthians 7 – Remaking relationships in the image of God, Part 3**  
**Pastor Dave Scherrer - January 29, 2017**

**The different ways we suffer**

The suffering of poverty and want  
The suffering of trauma and war  
The suffering of homelessness – the refugee  
The suffering of being falsely accused  
The suffering of persecution and bigotry  
The suffering of physical pain and disease  
The suffering of loss of status  
The suffering of unwanted change  
The suffering of the loss of a relationship

We cannot avoid the reality of suffering. John Calvin said . . .

"Whomever the Lord has adopted and deemed worthy of His fellowship ought to prepare themselves for a hard, toilsome, and unquiet life, crammed with very many and various kinds of evil."

Still I believe that the loss of relationship is the single greatest heartbreak in all humanity.

**The loss of relationship is the single greatest heartbreak in all humanity**

It is universal and cuts to the center of our reality. No one escapes. While we may escape poverty or trauma or pain or false accusation, everyone experiences loss of relationship. And it comes in all forms and strikes us all young and old;

- You are a thirteen-year-old girl, and you get a note from your best friend at school: "I don't want to be your friend anymore."
- You are dating, and you develop a sense that this could be going into something beautiful and lasting, and your girlfriend says, "I don't think we should keep seeing each other."
- You are engaged, and two months before the wedding, when everything is in full swing, your fiancé says, "I just can't do it. I can't go forward. I don't think this is going to work."
- You have tried over and over again to be a part of various groups at church or work, and nobody ever reaches out to you. Nobody ever follows up. All of your initiatives at friendship lead nowhere. And you are alone most of the time. Nobody calls. Nobody invites you to go anywhere or to do anything.
- You are deep into marriage and your spouse says it is over, your spouse contracts cancer, your spouse gets Alzheimer's and no longer knows you.

God hard wired into our souls the desire for relationship. Made in God's image, like the God-Head. At ancient Greek weddings, you would have seen their distinctive way of dancing . . . It's called *perichoresis*. There are not two dancers, but at least three. They start to go in circles, weaving in and out in this very beautiful pattern of motion. They start to go faster and faster and faster, all the while staying in perfect rhythm and in sync with each other. Eventually, they are dancing so quickly (yet so effortlessly) that as you look at them, it just becomes a blur. Their individual identities are part of a larger dance. The early church fathers and mothers looked at that dance (perichoresis) and said, "That's what the Trinity is like." It's a harmonious set of relationship in which there is mutual giving and receiving. This relationship is called love, and it's what the Trinity is all about. The perichoresis is the dance of love.

We too long to dance, to love, to be known intimately and to know intimately. To feel the significance of being important to someone and to know the peace of the security of love. God knows it to be true:

**Ecclesiastes 4:9-12**

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. <sup>10</sup> For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! <sup>11</sup> Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? <sup>12</sup> And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Every human longs for relationship and usually we misread it and misunderstand it. There are givers and takers but rarely 'sharers' who do not keep score. Every human feels the fear and loss and longing of the suffering of relationships that do not meet our expectation or hope. David writes in the Psalms . . .

We see Paul reflecting on the hardships of relationships in our letter we are studying.

**1 Corinthians 7:12-16** To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. <sup>13</sup> If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. <sup>14</sup> For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. <sup>15</sup> But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. <sup>16</sup> For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

### **The pain of intimacy without matrimony - The pain of matrimony without intimacy**

The reality is that good, Christ-exalting relationships very often fail before the ceremony, never to be recovered romantically. The pain cuts deeper and lingers longer than most pain young people have felt in their lives. I feel it deeply even typing these words. It's one of the hardest things for me to write or speak about: the pain of intimacy that fell short of matrimony.

God is clear and we have spoken about it. God's design, ***His First Best*** – is robust and unashamed sexual intimacy in a marriage of fidelity and trust and sexual celibacy in singleness. That is the plan and it has been the plan from Genesis 2. I cannot tell you how many times I have spoken to dating couples, dating teens or young engaged couples, where they experienced serial intimacy and essentially serial divorce. The statistics are discouraging. National Center for Health Statistics survey in 2010 found that 29% of men had 15 or more sexual partners, and 9% of women had sex with 15 or more men. However, it's also reported that 25% of women and 17% of men reported they had no more than one sexual partner in their entire life.

And living with the hope of matrimony having experienced the loss of intimacy and innocence in the hope of matrimony is one of the deep sadness's of life. The sense of regret and loss is profound. And like all sin and failings, God has an answer. His love and forgiveness and His call to obedience. This path gives us hope again to love.

But there is also the pain of matrimony without intimacy. Thousands upon thousands of married couples not only have no physical intimacy, but the relationship has been filled with emotional abandonment, emotional and physical abuse, spiritual intimidation, neglect and inconsiderate selfish behaviors. A marriage with these characteristics does not honor God. Many think that divorce is the answer and that does not honor God. And some will say, I don't care anymore. My needs aren't being met and I can't live like this. In these heartaches we feel pain and fear . . .

The pain of rejection  
The pain of broken dreams  
The fear of being alone

In this passage of Paul's letter to Corinth, he deals with all these circumstances. Being alone, being married to an unbeliever, being widowed, not ever marrying. These all speak to the pain and fear of

broken hearts and dashed hopes. He is dealing with the unmet expectations of the person who laments, "All I ever wanted was to be married and to have a happy home."

Paul's answer isn't five steps to repairing your marriage or nine ways to get a wife or *three things you can do to lead your spouse to Christ*. No he says essentially "In all things, Christ is supreme, in all things, Christ has authority. Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness and all these other things we long for will have their proper place and satisfaction."

The false stigma and awkward social reality of single again can be heartbreaking and confusing. The church should be the best, but through the years the church has been often hurtful rather than helpful.

Then there is the heartbreaking loss of a child.

### **The heartbreaking loss of a child**

I cannot relate to this sadness. I have heard it said that there is something unnatural about a parent burying a child. Of course and I cannot imagine. Psychologists tell us that the traumatic death of a child can be a grief that in some cases cannot be overcome. It is so profound that the rest of us don't know how to react, how to comfort because we simply cannot truly empathize. This is why support groups for this kind of loss are so important. People who have experience the same devastating loss have authority to speak into each other's lives in a way that the rest of us cannot. Still I have two thoughts for us on this kind of loss . . .

**Sadness is not a problem to be fixed.  
Instead recognize that grief is a journey of loneliness and faith.**

"I don't know what to say, but I am sad too."

"A very painful thing, when you've had a loss, is when those around you never acknowledge it."

Without being unkind, the problem when we speak of loss in relationship is because we think of people as almost our possession. We look to our boyfriend or wife or child or parent as an answer to our significance and security needs, rather than God. The relationship becomes an idol. This is a hard reality and is certainly not very comforting in the midst of loss. That is why it must be said here, so that we can test our hearts and see where our loyalties really lie – to Christ or to another . . .

"For me, a change occurred in my grief as I changed my thinking about my three-year-old daughter who died of a brain tumor. Formerly, I had thought about her as being MINE, MINE by right — she was MY daughter. Thus, I felt justified in my anger and bitterness because, after all, I had been robbed of what was MINE! But when I began thinking about my daughter as a gift to me, a gift that ultimately *belonged* to God, not to me, then my anger over losing her from my life began to give way to gratitude over having had her in my life at all." ~ *Daniel T. Hans, Second Presbyterian Church, Lexington, KY*

Then there is the loss of a long time spouse . . . Spending the rest of my life without the best of my life . . .

### **The rest of my life without the best of my life**

Again I cannot relate. I have not gone through this door as has some of this fellowship family. Susan has stood at death's door, actually she more like had stepped through the door. But I was even spared the helpless feeling of knowing there was nothing I could do on one occasion when God gave me the chance to donate a kidney to her. So I don't know this type of grief. But CS Lewis did . . .

"For in grief nothing "stays put." One keeps on emerging from a phase, but it always recurs. Round and round. Everything repeats. Am I going in circles, or dare I hope I am on a spiral?"

But if a spiral, am I going up or down it?

How often -- will it be for always? -- how often will the vast emptiness astonish me like a complete novelty and make me say, "I never realized my loss till this moment? The same leg is cut off time after time."

~ C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*

There is an answer to all this grief. We spoke about it last week. All things belong to the Lord so we are to be content. To achieve this blessed state, Scripture tells us we must not just see some things as loss but rather we must count everything as loss for Christ's sake. What does it mean? What does it mean to renounce all that we have, all that we love, for Christ's sake?

Paul said he does this. "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8). And a few verses later he said, "Brothers, join in imitating me" (3:17).

So this is commanded of all believers. This is Basic Christianity. This is what it means to be a Christian. It is not advanced discipleship; it is basic Christianity. This is confirmed in Jesus's words, "Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33). Renouncing all we have is the same as "counting everything as loss." This is what happens in conversion. You can't be a disciple without it. Jesus describes this conversion in a parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field" Selling all you have with joy, in order to have the treasure of the kingdom, is a parable-way of saying: count everything as loss in order to gain Christ.

So, to become a Christian is to awaken from the blindness of spiritual death and find Jesus so all-sufficient and all-satisfying that 1) we count everything as loss, 2) we renounce all our possessions, including our people, and, in parable-language, 3) we sell all we have to possess the treasure of Christ. That is, in smaller losses we will not grumble (Philippians 2:14), and in greater losses we will grieve, but not as those who have no hope.

**1 Thessalonians 4:13** <sup>13</sup> But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. In everyday practical terms, what does it mean to do this?

It means at least these four things:

1. Renouncing all (counting all as loss) means that, if we must choose between Christ and anything else, we will choose Christ. That is, even though God does not bring us to the crisis of either-or at every point, nevertheless, we are ready, and have resolved in our hearts that, if the choice must be made, we will choose Christ.
2. Renouncing all (counting all as loss) means that we will deal with everything in ways that draw us nearer to Christ, so that we gain more of Christ, and enjoy more of him, by the way we relate to everything. That is, we will embrace everything pleasant, by being thankful to Christ; and we will endure everything hurtful, by being patient through Christ.
3. Renouncing all (counting all as loss) means that we will seek to deal with the things of this world in ways that show that they are not our treasure, but rather that Christ is our treasure. That is, we will hold things loosely, share things generously, and ascribe value to things in relation to Christ. We will seek to live the paradox of 1 Corinthians 7:30–31, "Let [Christians] buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it."
4. Renouncing all (counting all as loss) means that if we lose any or all the things this world can offer, we will not lose our joy, or our treasure, or our life — because Christ is our joy and our treasure and our life.

**Jeremiah 29:11**

<sup>11</sup> For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

**Prayer**