

All of this is shared with permission. The young couple came to me, and they asked me to do their premarital counseling. And I agreed under the conditions that we would go through the premarital counseling sessions before the wedding. As the weeks ticked by. It became clear to me that we were not going to get all of those sessions done. And the sessions that we were having were not great. Homework was not being completed. We would have a session scheduled and things were getting in the way of us getting that session finished or scheduled. It seemed like the focus was on everything else in their lives. The details of the wedding, jobs, money, apartment, adulting is hard I get it... Well, they were moving towards this wedding date. Without really understanding what their role was and what their job was in pursuing this marriage. And so, as we struggled through this. I began to challenge them with some of these shortcomings that I was seeing. In both of them, a lack of maturity, selfishness, how they were responding to each other in the stress of the upcoming ceremony, Not understanding the level of commitment and understanding that they need to have for each other. The wisdom that was needed.

For example, we were working through Rob Green's book Tying the Knot Great for premarital counseling. Pastor Nathan put me on it like he does with most people when it comes to good books, and we are talking about having Jesus at the Center. Now this is not just a preparing for marriage thing; this is an everyone who is a Christian thing. So married people, if you thought last week was your turn and this week you can sit back while I address the single people, you're wrong. This is for single people, married people, widowed people, young people, old people, really old people...anyway as we worked through our counseling, the attitude was very much, we already know this, (this is easy) oh really? What's your devotional time like again? "Not great. I'm busy." You said you're not praying together? No. Kind of like beating your head against the wall for an hour. "we already know this, does not equal we are doing this." Jesus says in

Mt 22:37-40 You shall love the Lord your God all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets."

This means Christian, Jesus wants you to love him with everything! No compartment of your life or your heart is off limits. Your affections must be for Christ first. Right now we could pause and start rooting around the corners of your heart and life and identify a couple places where our affections have turned elsewhere. Sin that needs to be confessed. I think you should be rather lethal about this in your own life. Meaning kill anything that's keeping you from loving God with everything. I know someone's kill

anything? I can think of a few people getting in the way of that! Not people...no that doesn't work because they fall into that "love your neighbor" category. There is a danger young couples face. A temptation to push aside love for God and others and making it about them. This is the person God has for me, so it must be important, the most important in my life in fact! So decisions begin to be made based on that priority. This can happen when a couple starts dating. A lot of decisions are made through the lens of: is this good for us and our relationship? This can be shortsighted and might I add a little annoying. If it is any kind of inconvenience, were out. You can come to church with his attitude, treat Cornerstone, your pastors, small group, your friends, as if you are the center of the universe. This is selfishness and it will manifest itself in your relationship eventually. One of those monsters that doesn't pop up until after you are married and you're looking at this person going where is this coming from?

Clip board: Life with you at the center is dangerous. But it seems this is how we approach marriage in the church at times under the influence of our culture. We put ourselves at the center. Marriage is about my happiness! Marriage exists to make me feel good. My spouse should meet my needs (emotional, sexual, spiritual, physical), affirm me, and make my life easier. This person will complete me! (I need someone to complete me or fill the empty places in my heart. Marriage is a destination for identity or meaning) I deserve to feel loved and be loved! Marriage is about compatibility (If we're compatible and share interests, we'll be fine!) A good match makes a good marriage just happen! (If we're meant for each other, marriage will work naturally, God willed it! If there's any problems I can change my spouse)

And then with some of those ideas in mind you fill in the rest of your life! God, family, church, kids, job, sports, money, hobbies, vacations, friends, bitcoin,

What does a healthy Christian look like? God, family (marriage, parent), church, career, finances, recreation. and you have responsibilities in all of these things and it takes wisdom to walk through life with Jesus as the center. This is actually what good marriage prep looks like understanding how to pursue God through all these things.

A Jesus at the center flow chart...Is Jesus at the center? No. Do you want him to be there? No. Do not get married, Yes, are you pursuing a relationship with God through the Word and prayer? No, do you want to? No. Do not get married, yes, do you love your family? Yes or no, serving at church? Yes or no...finances? Its all God's. His word convinces me of this! Nothing else.

Of course we will say we have God at the center and tell people that but then use one of our responsibilities as a shield to avoid doing what God is calling us to do. It's the "Jesus is at

the center until I decide I need something different plan.” One of my favorite times of my life was having our kids and then using them to get us out of all kinds of stuff! Parents, You know what I’m talking about...oh we’d love to drive two hours for the thing and hang out all day but we have this baby! Oh and we had our babies during the pandemic! It was glorious. We didn’t have to do anything we didn’t want to! Haha We’d love to sign up and be there but this baby! And there’s some truth to that! But a pattern can begin to emerge cant it? ...there is no end to using kids as an excuse...the baby, as they get older then its school, or travel sports, you can even use other people kids as an excuse, grandparents im looking at you!

You can even use church as a shield, I know there’s a need but I serve! I just helped at fall fest! And I’ll see you there next year! See I’m Faithful! Oh, I can’t join the church. I’ve had a bad experience. I’d love to be a deacon or serve on a board but my job is in the way, I’d love to give but finances are too tight right now, Sundays are just a bad day for me...that’s my recovery day before work Monday! Not sure who I said that for because they aren’t here!

So, one week, after hearing some excuses of why the reading wasn't done, the passages weren't memorized. Concerns about being a part of the body of Christ, I just said OK. That's enough. I cannot in good conscience continue forward with this counseling. It's also my recommendation that you postpone your wedding. And until you're ready to take this seriously, you should not get married. Mind you, this is three weeks away from their wedding day.

Now, as a youth pastor, a lot of the advice that I typically give to students isn't coming in where the stakes are so high. I meet with a student, and they tell me that they're pursuing a career in the NBA. And it's pretty easy for me to squash that. And look at this 13 year old and just say if you were going to play in the NBA, people would know who you are. Then there would be scouts and scholarships and all kinds of attention, and you can't even beat me in basketball. How are you going to go to the NBA? And. You know, the student might respond back. Well, you know, Michael Jordan got cut from his JV team. And so there you go. You're, you're Michael Jordan. Great. So these these types of confrontations are much lower stakes. Or dealing with some of my younger students with problems like my sibling took my toy. And its not all small stuff. Conflict resolution is needed all the time. We have a hard time obeying and submitting to our parents. It’s all important conversations. Necessary. and I’m giving sound biblical advice pointing them to the gospel with the goal of changing their life and seeing growth but there are life events where the needle is going to be moving at a bigger degree than other times.

Now what do you think this young couple did when I confronted them with the idea of calling off their wedding and postponing it? They took my advice, of course. It was hard and a little embarrassing. You have to call and tell people the wedding is off. Cancel the flights, hotels, plans etc...now I had to place a call to one of the fathers who has decades of ministry experience and as I'm calling I'm realized oh no...I have some experience in counseling and just 12 years of marriage and that feels inadequate to give marital advice, did I do the right thing? Was that too much? So I did find myself a little sheepish trying to justify why I told the no longer happy couple to postpone and all the reasons and how they were embarrassed about the situation and the family might be feeling some of that and he said...whoa, whoa, Pyper, listen, you know what's more embarrassing than calling off your wedding? Having to call everyone two years into your marriage and tell everyone you're getting a divorce. So, what do they need to hear to get back on track? What do they need to do? If you are going to prepare for marriage, pursue marriage God's way? Now when you're told you're pursuing something or someone you love the wrong way, there's an emotional response. Anger, sadness. Part of me wondered if that was it for this couple. Feels like a wedding got turned into a funeral. That they would not recover and as they retreated to their families they would quietly split and never get back together. They were questioning if they loved each other, what love really was, would they be able to come back together? I got a text a couple weeks after the dust had settled, we are still together, we do not have a new wedding date, but we would like to restart the counseling from the beginning and take it seriously this time. No end date, no wedding date, and not rushing through anything. Could you do that with us? HAHA! YES!

So what do you say to a couple that has just been through something traumatic like a breakup? Or whatever thing God has brought into your life that has shaken you and brought doubt and fear about the future? Jesus is for you! Jesus is still in the middle of it all and at the center of your life! God's plan is about him and getting glory from your life and pursuing his kingdom and his plan! Which is so much better than your plans so zoom out! So where are you going Christian? What's at the end of the path were walking in this world??! We do this all the time with the students, because it's not about someone messing up your week, or taking your toy, or the fight you had in the kitchen last night...its not about you! It is about God and his plan to save you and bring you to himself for all eternity to the praise of his glory! Nathan mentioned last week how the bible begins and ends with a wedding. The bride and groom chosen by God at both weddings. Adam and his bride, Eve in Genesis and then at the end in the book of Revelation Christ and his bride the Church! It all points to him, your earthly relationships are just sign posts pointing you to God! And whether you

participate in earthly marriage or not you are preparing for an eternal marriage where Christ is united to his bride!

Revelation 19:6-9

⁶ Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

“Hallelujah!

For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.

⁷ Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;

⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure”—

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

⁹ And the angel said^[a] to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.”

You might say that’s great how do we get there? What’s the vehicle? Brothers and sisters it is the gospel! Jesus is for you! God has seen fit to send his son Jesus to die on the cross for your sin and pay the penalty for sin you deserve, giving you his righteousness. Jesus rose from the dead victorious and is seated on the throne interceding for us. He has given you a new identity more brilliant than anything this world has seen, he has made you his friend instead of his enemy (John 15) you are free no longer bound to the power of sin, Romans 6, you are adopted into his family no longer a spiritual orphan Gal 4

Romans 8 stands tall as the magna carta of this gospel life in the spirit! Verse 1 says no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8: ³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be^[a] against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than

that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.^[b]
³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

Brother and sister you don't need any tips or tricks or lifehacks. Romans 8 says You need nothing. God gave you everything you need. He gave you his son and now he will give you everything else...what if I had a rough background or are carrying a lot of hurt? You're not bound to your past or to your sin or to past struggles, the Christian cant stop his promises! God is for you, his opinion is the only one that matters, you are secure in this gospel no matter what!!!!

So that's what I told them. He is for you! This vision of God, and his glory and his plan and his kingdom, keeping Jesus at the center is fuel to keep you going until heaven. It completely reoriented how we were doing our counseling sessions. Coming in sharing about what was memorized, what God is teaching us, what was encouraging from our time in the Scriptures, talking about what serving opportunities were available at church and having spiritual conversations as a couple. And as the weeks went on I saw joy in God, I saw love for God and one another, the past wrongs becoming small and forgiveness and willingness to cover small things in love. I remember during one session listening to this couple share about what God is doing in their life and how they are pursuing him and I just couldn't stop smiling, and they're looking at me like what? and I'm like wow when's the wedding? And we just took some time and celebrated. Just being their biggest cheerleader.

Your pastors here at Cornerstone are for you as well. Especially our members. We do our best to pray through the membership directory keeping you in our prayers before the throne of God. Yes, students I'm willing to talk about hard things with you, but by the grace of God I want to see you have success. So we are going to celebrate the wins, when we see you growing in Christ we will applaud with thanksgiving to God. When you take God at his Word it brings joy to everyone's heart. 3rd John says I have no greater joy than to see my children walk in truth!

Are you growing in faith? Are you walking in the truth? Galatians 5 says walk in the Spirit, don't walk in the flesh. The faith that saves you by grace through faith in Jesus alone. Does not remain alone. Phil 2:12 says We work out our salvation with fear and trembling. ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Because of sin we will never be perfect this side of heaven. But Its coming!

Revelation 19

it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure” —

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

Until then each person has work to do! Marriage is hard work. Your taking two people and all their problems and putting them together with no trial period. You are going to have blind spots and you're going to need your spouse and other believers to help you work through those. In his book on Marriage “What Did You Expect?” Paul Tripp talks about these blind spots about needing to get in the habit of pulling weeds and planting seeds. So I would ask. Married couples. When's the last time you went through the garden of your marriage and addressed your selfishness, business, inattention? Self-righteousness, fear, laziness?

Take laziness as an example:

We've been going through Proverbs with the students on Wed night...Listen to what Proverbs has to say about laziness. Proverbs 20 verse 4 The sluggard will not plow by reason of the winter, therefore he shall beg and harvest and have nothing. Proverbs 22::3 The sluggard says there is a lion outside. I shall be killed in the streets. Proverbs 15:19. The way of a sluggard is like a hedge of thorns, but the path of the upright is a level highway. Proverbs 24:30 to 31. I passed by the field of the sluggard. At the vineyard of a man lacking sense, and behold, it was overgrown with thorns. The ground was covered with netels and its stone wall was broken down. proverbs 21:15 the desire of the sluggard kills him for his hand refuses to labor Proverbs 6:6 go to the Ant thou sluggard consider her ways and be wise. These proverbs. Capture the excuses we make for laziness. Hey, I'm not on the hook here. There's a reason I'm not doing what I'm supposed to do for my spouse. That leads to disappointment, discouragement, discontentment. Laziness is just punting the ball further down the road causing more problems in the future. Laziness is rooted in self-love. We believe good things should come to us without having to work for them, opting for what's comfortable rather than what's best for us or for our marriage. Undisciplined. Unmotivated. Laziness permits us to be passive. You see why this needs to be uprooted?

Kids, teenagers, Single people you're not getting out of this... if you want to get married and you are doing nothing to address your selfishness, anger, laziness, they will be carried right

into your marriage. We talk about how as Christians each day we wake up and we have to make a choice. I heard Pastor Mike say just two choices on the shelf and there was like an eye rolls from 40 year olds like ugh we know! Pleasing God or pleasing self! Whose Kingdom are we living for? Who's at the center of our life? If you're at the center, you're going to wake up in the morning and go get what you want, from who you want, how you want it. And if anyone tries to cross you, you're going to be selfish in your response. And so that means you will go on a family vacation and if things are not going your way, you will make the decision to make sure everyone has the most miserable time possible, you will commit to doing everything you can to sabotage and ruin it for everyone. Or you'll go to a family get together and you will make it very obvious that you are not speaking to so and so, and we'll make sure that everyone in the room feels that tension as you decide to selfishly pursue your own agenda instead of pursuing love. Set aside the fact. That these are all sinful responses. We're supposed to love those around us. We're supposed to love our families. We're supposed to walk in obedience to God's Word. So it's still not enough for you to say OK, well, I was going to do all this evil to these people, but I'm just going to not do it. Oh, God, are you happy? Well, that's not going to cut it. That's where some of my students seem like they're going to fall out of their chair when I'm telling them, hey, instead of doing that evil, you should actually be looking to do good to them and show kindness to them as Christ has shown you. You should be looking for ways to serve them. What if your approach was, I'm going to make sure my brother or sister have the best vacation possible. Or I'm going to seek forgiveness and repent with this family member that I have tension with and love them instead of embracing bitterness. Instead of giving them the cold shoulder or instead of doing something evil, I'm going to go to this person and make this right. If there's sin, I'm going to repent and confess and put this behind us so we can move forward. This is what we're called to do as Christians, and I think this is what's so hard. When you put Jesus at the center and you make your life about glorifying God and fulfilling his Kingdom, this becomes a war with your flesh. And it's a choice. Are you going to fight sin or are you going to give in to sin? Are you going to walk in the Spirit? Are going to are you going to walk according to the flesh, the Christian walks according to the Spirit? And when we sow according to the Spirit, we reap the fruit of the Spirit. And the fruit of the spirit that we should be reaping in our lives, whether you're married or single or preparing for marriage, wherever you're at. As a believer, there should be a harvest of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

I will have you know that I am doing a wedding on Saturday for the couple I've been sharing with you about. Marriage is worth it! It's a wonderful picture of Christ and the church. You will understand more about the depths of mercy and forgiveness Christ gave you at the cross. You will see your own sin and need for repentance, And you will get a picture of God's purpose for redemption, his glory, and kingdom.

I don't know what your step of obedience is today. For you married people, some of you need to be reminded of your vows and need to pull some weeds this week. If you said any kind of traditional vows, check out the back table and grab a copy and remind yourself of the commitments you made to your spouse. Use it as an inventory list. How is it going? Where have you pushed Jesus out and put yourself in the center? Single people grab one as well. Look at what commitments you will make before God if he takes you down the path of marriage. READ #3

Maybe there's a confession of sin to God and repentance and you need to seek someone out and have a broken relationship restored.

Or you need to take a step of obedience in your role as a part of the body of Christ, you need to join and be a member, you need to get involved serving, you need to grow in Christ in a grow group. We have someone taking that step of obedience today in Aaliyah Brown! I'm going to pull her up here and we will take her into membership. Ok so pick something and do it!