

So You Want to Get Married

A Topical Sermon

by Neale Pryor

Whenever I am asked to speak to young people, if they don't assign me a subject, this is the sermon they get. Whenever they do assign me a subject, and if I can talk them out of it, this is the sermon they get. This is my favorite sermon to preach to young people, not because it is the only one I have, but because I think it is the most important subject that could possibly be spoken to young people.

I was told one time that a couple came to church right before Sunday School and wanted the preacher to preach the wedding for them. He said, "We are about to have Sunday School and church, but if you will sit through the Sunday School and church, I will be glad to oblige you when church service is over." So they patiently sat through Sunday School and church.

Right at the end of the service, before the closing prayer, he said, "After prayer, those wishing to get married please come forward, and I will be glad to visit with you." At the conclusion of the prayer, one man and thirty-seven women came forward. I don't expect that type of response today, but I do want to talk on this subject: "So You Want to Get Married."

I want to divide the lesson into three points, and they all start with the letter P. You can remember three Ps—one short pod of "Ps." In case you start looking at your calendars and it looks as if I am not going to stop, the third point is very short. The second one is long, but the third one is very short.

I. THE PLAN

Number one P is God's *plan* for marriage. The one thing I want to stress in this point is that God's plan is that marriage is for keeps. Do you know what "keeps" is? When I was in the first or second grade, a little buddy went home with me from school to play marbles. We were over at the house playing marbles, and he said, "Do you want to play for keeps?" I didn't know what "keeps" was, but I didn't want him to think I was

dumb. I said, "Sure, keeps." So we played a little while, and an hour later he said, "I'm going home." I said, "Come on. Stay with me a little longer. Let's play some more." He said, "You don't have any more marbles." I said, "Of course I do. All of these marbles are mine." He said, "Oh, no, we played for keeps, and they are mine." And he took my marbles home with him. That is the first time I learned what playing for "keeps" meant. It is also the first time I lost my marbles.

Marriage is for keeps. It is not like trading in a car if you don't like the one you have. As I heard one man say, "I will just keep my wife until she is forty and then trade her in for two twenties." You don't do that. One of his friends said, "I don't think you are wired for two-twenty." At any rate, this is not the way it is. The one thing the Bible teaches is that marriage is for as long as you both shall live.

Turn with me to Matthew 19, where you see the threefold stage of God's plan for marriage: first, the way God planned it at the beginning; second, the way God tolerated it during the Old Testament days; and third, our Lord's statement which is applicable to you and me:

And there came unto him Pharisees, trying him, and saying, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said, Have ye not read, that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh? So that they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

Our Lord, first of all, took the people back to the way it was in the very beginning. When God saw that Adam needed a wife, He made one woman for him and that was it. He brought Eve to Adam and said, "Now choose a wife." That was about the only choice he had—either Eve or a giraffe. Maybe you heard the story about Adam and Eve in the garden, and Eve said, "Adam, do

you love me?" All wives ask that every now and then. He looked around the garden and then he looked at her. He said, "Pray tell me, who else?" He didn't have any choice to love anyone else, did he? The only choice he had was to take it or leave it.

Our Lord says God intended a lesson right there—one man and one woman for life. Here in Matthew 19:5 we have a quotation from Genesis 2: "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh." So this is the way God planned it at the beginning.

Stage two is the way man began to tamper with God's plan. We have, first of all, polygamy coming in. Do you know what polygamy is? Do you know what bigamy is? That is having two wives. Do you know what three wives is? That is trigonometry! And having many wives is polygamy. So we have deviations from God's plan of one man and one woman. I would really be impressed if any of you knew who was the first man to have more than one wife. It is a fellow in Genesis 4 named Lamech, a descendant of Cain. He had two wives named Adah and Zillah. That ought to be something to stump your teacher with when you get back to Sunday School. Later, Abraham had Sarah and Hagar. Jacob had Leah and Rachel. The ultimate in polygamy would have been Solomon. He had a thousand wives.

Not only did they practice such plurality of marriages, but they also indulged in divorce. Matthew 19:7 says, "They say unto him, Why then did Moses command to give a bill of divorcement, to put her away?" They were thinking about Deuteronomy 24:1-3. The law of divorce in the Old Testament is in Deuteronomy 24:1 and following. The Lord says there that if a man puts away his wife and she becomes the wife of another man, there is no way the first man can ever take her back. Even if the second husband dies, he can never take her back. In other words, when you let your wife go, you had better make sure you don't ever want to have her back again.

"Why was this permitted?" the Jews asked. Then Jesus says in Matthew 19:8, "He saith unto them, Moses for your hardness of heart suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it hath not been so." It looks like He is saying that "you were not morally mature enough

as people to live according to God's strict ordinance." And God tolerated this, at least, for the time being.

And that is stage two. Now if you are going to go to sleep or tune me out, you had better not do it right now. This is the most important thing I am going to say. If I were at school, I would say, "This is going to be on a test." That wakes everybody up. I've seen them come to life and grab their pencils. This is going to be on a test, not on a written test but on a living test. If you are going to forget anything, don't forget this. If you are going to remember anything, remember this.

Stage three, what does our Lord say for you and me? Matthew 19:9 says, "And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and he that marrieth her when she is put away committeth adultery." Our Lord restated the way it was in the beginning and gave one exception: that is, if your partner is guilty of fornication, you have the right to put him or her away. Fornication, in case you want me to spell it out for you, is extramarital sex. It can be homosexual acts; it can be premarital sex; it can be adultery, which is between married people. But He is saying here that sexual unfaithfulness is the only thing that gives a person the privilege or the right to put away his wife or husband and marry again.

Now the Bible doesn't say you have to put the unfaithful one away. I believe you should stay with the marriage nearly every time you possibly can. Work it out. Stay together. But if the situation is irreconcilable and your partner has committed fornication, then you have the scriptural right to divorce and remarry. If your wife lies, steals, and cheats, you still can't marry again. If she drinks, if she eats crackers in bed, you still can't marry again. You might want to get twin beds. If she is a murderess, you can't marry again. You may want to move before she poisons you. You may want to eat out for a while, but you can't marry again. There are provisions in other places for a possible separation and instances where maybe these would be advised, such as when a partner is being abused. But the right to remarry is found only if the person is guilty of fornication.

People can get in messes that even Solomon could not have straightened out. Someone might

say, "What am I going to do? I've got four husbands. My second one and I had three kids, I had four by the third one, and two by the first one, and six by the fourth one. What am I going to do?" I don't know what that person could do. Young people, you are not in that mess, are you? There is no excuse for anyone of you getting in that mess. That is why I came here today to keep you from getting in a mess like that. Don't come to me years from now saying, "What am I going to do? I have four husbands and twelve kids." I am going to say, "Get out of here." I am going to say, "Back in March of 1982 I told you not to do that. Shame on you." No, I can't straighten out all of them. Personally, if I or my wife either one did not have a scriptural divorce and right to marry, I don't believe I could live together with her. I would have to live a life of celibacy. Personally, I believe that is the answer. That is the safe way. But I am not going to stand here as the know-it-all on this subject.

Not long ago a girl called me long distance from Mississippi and said, "I am so-and-so. I was in your Bible class. Do you remember me?" I tried hard to remember her. I thought I did. She said, "I am engaged to this young man, and I want you to tell me if you think we can get married." I said, "Maybe I can tell you. Is he a Christian?" "Oh, yes, we met at church," she said. Then I asked, "Has he been married before?" She got quiet for a little bit and said, "Yes, he has." I said, "Does he have a scriptural divorce?" I didn't have to tell her what one was. She knew what one was. Then she got very quiet. She said, "No, he doesn't." I said, "Then, you can't marry him." She paused a minute and said, "I just knew you would say that! I just knew you would say that!" If you are going to call me up and ask me this, I will save you your money. No, you can't do it.

Just this past month I got another call from one of my former students. She said, "I can't get the preacher here to marry me. Am I going to have to get a Justice of the Peace in order to marry this fellow?" I said, "What is wrong? Has he been married before?" She said, "Yes." I said, "Does he have a scriptural divorce?" She said, "No." I said, "I don't think you ought to marry him, Justice of the Peace or anybody." It is just as simple as that. No, you can't do it.

I wish I could tell everybody that they are fine; just go out and marry whom you want to. But my job is a teacher and a preacher of the word of God. This is what the Lord Jesus Christ said, and I have no right to add to it or take from it: "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and he that marrieth her when she is put away committeth adultery."

II. THE PERSON

The second P is the person who you should marry. In four different ways, I want to impress upon you as you have never had impressed upon you before that Christians should marry Christians. I mean members of the church should marry members of the church. I have four reasons for that, and anyone of them is enough to stand by itself.

Reason number one is for the sake of the Scriptures themselves. In Deuteronomy 7 Moses is preparing the children of Israel to enter the Promised Land. He says, "Don't have a thing to do with those Canaanites in that land. You tear down their altars, and you burn their idols." Then in Deuteronomy 7:3, 4, he says, "Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods. . . ." For a long time I thought that God did not want Jews to marry people of another race or nation. The main thing God wanted was for them to not marry people of another religion. He says, "If you marry these people, they will turn your heart away from your God." If you want a classic example of that, turn to 1 Kings 11. Verses 1 and 2 say, "But king Solomon loved many strange women, . . . Of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not marry them, nor shall you go into them; for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: these Solomon clave to in marriage." Solomon went after the gods of these women. When he was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods. This was the sin that led to the division of the kingdom. Ten tribes went north; two tribes went south. The kingdom was split in two and stayed that way. Do you know what was the sin basically that caused it? It was Solomon's sin in

marrying these women. It is ironic that the smartest, the wisest man in the world did one of the dumbest things anybody could do. But that is exactly what happened.

I know what some of you are sitting there thinking, "That is the Old Testament. Can you give me something out of the New Testament?" I am so glad you asked. Come to 1 Corinthians 7. Paul, in verse 39, is talking about widows, Christian widows! "A wife is bound for so long time as her husband liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is free to be married to whom she will. . . ." Are you ready for this? ". . . only in the Lord," Among other things, I believe that means to marry a Christian. Some of you are saying, "What about the first time? This is the second marriage." With the first marriage she probably wasn't a Christian. Besides that, do you know who usually arranged those first marriages? Mama and Daddy. Aren't you glad that doesn't work today? Wouldn't that be awful? She didn't have much choice about whom to marry the first time. But now in this particular framework she has the freedom to choose, and Paul says to marry only in the Lord.

Let me give you another one while you are listening: 1 Corinthians 9:5. It says, "Have we no right to lead about a wife that is a believer, even as the rest of the apostles, and the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?" Paul says, "I have the right to get married." He was an old bachelor. Notice whom he gave himself the right to marry? He says, "I have the right to marry a sister." Do you want to guess what a sister is? A sister is a believer. Some of you have Bibles probably that say "a wife who is a believer." Paul didn't even think about marrying someone who wasn't a Christian. He said, "The brethren of the Lord married Christians. Peter married a Christian, The other apostles married Christians." It looks to me as if you and I should marry Christians. Doesn't that look like the normal conclusion?

Can you imagine Paul marrying somebody who wasn't a Christian? I can't. Can't you just see someone saying, "Where is Mrs. Paul today? Why isn't she at the services?" and someone answering, "Oh, she took the kids over to the Baal temple today. They had the sacrifice and the orgy today and she doesn't want to miss that every year." Or can you imagine the church elders wanting him to come and preach in a

meeting and Paul saying, "I can't that week because the wife goes to the Diana temple and they have the big Easter egg roll and all of the big outfit up there. And I really I can't leave the kids here alone." That sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? But at any rate, Paul says, "I have the right to marry someone who is a Christian," and he left it at that.

Honestly, I can't understand how a Christian and a non-Christian could be so compatible that they would fall in love, get engaged, and get married. It looks to me like if you were really committed to the Lord as you should be, you would have so many fusses and squabbles and fights that you never would get along with a non-Christian. It looks to me like you would be so different in the way you are living and the way you think that there is no way in the world you could be compatible. That is just my personal opinion.

Let me show you another one, though. 2 Corinthians 6:14, 15 says, "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? or what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what portion hath a believer with an unbeliever?" I have heard some say, "That means to not be *unequally* yoked with them. You can be *equally* yoked; but you can't be *unequally* yoked." Now come on. You are putting me on. He is saying, "Don't be mismatched with unbelievers." Any yoking with an unbeliever is a mismatch. I have heard some say, "It doesn't say anything about marriage." I ask, "What is it talking about then?" "Well, it is talking about business deals," they say. That is the one you usually get on this one, isn't it? I don't see business deals in here either, do you? I see a general principle of yoking. Don't be yoked with unbelievers. If there is any yoking in this world, it is being married. Isn't that right? Amen. Ask those who know. Paul is saying, "Don't get in entanglements like that." Someone might say, "Yes, but Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 says to stay married with an unbeliever." I know that. Paul is dealing with a situation where a believer and an unbeliever were married, and one of them has become a Christian in the marriage. So he says, "Stay with that person. Maybe you can win him over." But here he is dealing with a situation where you have the freedom to choose. You are a Christian

already. Now you are going to choose a wife. What kind of wife should you choose? He says you should choose a Christian.

I feel so strongly about this that I refuse to perform a marriage ceremony between a Christian and a non-Christian. I believe it is wrong. It wasn't too many years ago a friend of ours called me up and wanted me to preach her wedding for her. I didn't know the man. I said, "Is he a Christian?" She said, "No, he is not." I said, "Well, I am sorry. I can't perform the wedding. I know you will probably get married anyway, but I do not believe that you as a Christian girl should marry this man. I cannot condone what you are doing, and I will not be a part of it." That may sound a little harsh to you, but I believe that if marrying outside the church is not a sin, it is the dumbest thing you can do. I honestly believe that.

For the sake of the Scriptures themselves, marry a Christian.

Reason number two is for the sake of your soul. I heard a man speak in chapel when I was a student at Harding many years ago. He said when he was courting the girls and would find a good prospect, he would pray, "God, help me to have her if she would help me to go heaven." How do you like that? I told this to one of my classes, and some boy in the class said, "Let me tell you something better than that. Pray to God, 'Help me have her if it would help us both to go to heaven.'" I believe that is even better, don't you?

Young people, it will be hard for you to be faithful to the Lord all of your life. Even with all of the pressures that you have to be good and the encouragement that is around you, the chances are that 15 to 20 percent of you in this room right now will be unfaithful to the Lord before you die. How many do we have here? I would say about nine hundred. The odds are that over a hundred of you will be unfaithful to the Lord before you die. Just go right down the line and look. About every eighth person will be unfaithful. That is tragic, isn't it?

Young people, you need a partner in life who will encourage you to do what is right, to be faithful. You not only need a Christian, but you need someone with the same *degree of commitment* to the Lord that you have. I would hate to be married to somebody I had to keep dragging to church all the time, someone I had to keep pick-

ing at and keep nagging at to do what is right. I need a wife who says, "Get out of that bed and get ready. We are going to serve the Lord today." I need a wife who says, "Get ready. We are going to church. I don't care if you are tired this Wednesday night. We are going to worship the Lord." I need a wife who encourages me. You need a wife like that. You need a husband like that.

One thing that aggravates me about as much as anything is these sweet little girls at Harding who find the sorriest boys they can, think they are in love with them, and set out trying to reform them and marry them. I guess it is the mother instinct in girls. Is that what it is? A girl came into my office a few years ago. Her name was Sandy. I had known her ever since she was a little girl. In fact, I had preached where she went to church when I was a student. She said, "Brother Pryor, I am going with this boy back home. He is not a Christian. He has had a hard life." (They have all had a hard life.) When they start, I can almost finish the story for them. "Brother Pryor, he goes with me to church on Sunday night some. He's not drinking like he used to, brother Pryor. Brother Pryor, do you have any Scriptures I could use on him? We are going to get married this summer." She had her Bible and her paper and pencil there.

I just chunked everything I had learned about counseling, rared back in my seat, and said, "You need that fellow like you need a hole in the head." I believe in the subtle approach, don't you? I said, "You have gone back home and found the sorriest thing there probably and think that he is the one you are going to marry when you have literally hundreds of dedicated Christian boys right here on this campus." She said, "But, brother Pryor, I think I can help him." You know that is a big line: "I can always help him." That is that mother instinct coming out again.

I said, "You are so much in love you couldn't help anybody. You can't even see straight much less help anyone. If you want to be a missionary and straighten out sorry boys, go to it. There are plenty to work on. But when you are looking for a husband, don't look for sorry boys. You are looking in the wrong place."

She left and I didn't know whether she would ever come back again or not. That was in the fall semester. In the spring semester she came back knocking on the door. She had her roommate

Sharon with her, and I opened the door, invited them in, and told them to sit down. She said, "Brother Pryor, Sharon is about to marry a boy who is not a Christian. Will you give her the same speech you gave me?"

We sat down there and talked to Sharon. Sandy said, "Brother Pryor, I have been telling her that, but she won't listen to me. See, Sharon." So we really worked on Sharon. Sharon left and never came back.

Several years later I was in a meeting in Rolla, Missouri, I think. Who would walk in the church door but Sandy and her husband who was a Christian, by the way. She had broken off with that other fellow and married a Christian. I said, "Sandy, while we are here, tell me about Sharon. What happened to her?" She said, "Oh, she married a Christian." Two out of two! I don't do that well very often. Two out of two! I am proud of that. Two Christian homes. Christians who married Christians.

Young people, when you are looking for someone to live your life with, you need to pick someone who will be the greatest spiritual encouragement to you that you can find. Every once in a while I will be at a youth rally and the girls especially will come up to me and say, "I tried to get my boyfriend to come today, but I can't get him to come to things like this." That ought to ring a bell! You have the wrong boyfriend. That ought to teach you something right there. I have never even seen your boyfriend, but I already know something about him. He is the wrong one for you. You need a boyfriend who says, "Come on, get in this bus. We are all going up there together." That is what you need, and not someone you have to keep dragging to church and dragging through life all your life. What a miserable way to live!

I read this in a church bulletin, so I know it is true. Of forty-nine Christians who marry outside the church, twenty-eight of them will leave the church. Only twenty-one will remain faithful. That is less than half. Of course the fact that they married non-Christians shows their spiritual interest was not too high, and you may have lost half of them regardless of whom they married. Of the twenty-one who remain faithful, twelve will go to church by themselves all their lives and try to rear their kids in the faith by themselves with no encouragement. Only nine

of the original forty-nine will ever convert their partners and have Christian homes. That is less than one in five. Some of you are thinking, "My mama converted my daddy" or "My daddy converted my mama." How many is that true of in here? I figured there would be more than that. For everyone of you who raised your hand, there are four who are not here.

Suppose you were out by my house and there was a big field there beside it. You say, "The field looks sort of snaky out there." I say, "Yes, there are rattlesnakes out there, but only four out of five people who go out there get bit." Would you go across it? Suppose I said one out of five get bit. Would you go across it? Suppose I said one got bit last year. Would you go across it? I am talking to you about something far more important than a rattlesnake bite. I am talking to you about a soul, about a Christian home. If you marry outside the church, the odds are less than 20 percent that you will ever have a Christian home. If that boy you marry is a non-Christian, you are cutting the odds to less than 20 percent that your children will ever have a Christian father. I think that is dumb, if you want to know what I think about it.

Of course, the greatest influence on whether or not you are going to be faithful to the Lord is your home. Outside of your home I think there are two factors that enter in more than any others. Number one, did you go to a Christian college? Number two, did you marry a Christian? You find young people in the church who did these two things, and we keep around 80 to 85 percent of them. But of those young people who did neither of these, do you know what percent we keep in the Lord's church? We are fortunate if we keep 15 percent of them. Some estimates have gone as low as 10, a few as high as 20. I have never heard of any higher than 20 percent.

I went back to a church I had preached for when I was in graduate school and held a gospel meeting. I wanted to check on the young people. They were already grown and married and had families of their own. I wanted see how many of them were faithful. Oh, we had had wiener roasts, skating parties, youth rallies, and teenage classes. We had really done it right. With one exception, everyone of those young people who married Christians was faithful to the Lord, and every-

one of them who married outside the Lord was unfaithful. One elder's daughter had married outside the Lord and was still faithful. But I might add, eighteen years later she still has a husband who is not a believer. Her children have been reared with no Christian father. I thought, "Maybe I should have forgotten about all these other things and taught on the importance of marrying Christians." I realize other factors enter in besides the marriage partner, but I am firmly convinced that this is one of the most important.

For the sake of your soul, marry a Christian.

Number three is for the sake of your home. Wouldn't you love to be married to somebody who fusses and complains every time you go to church? Wouldn't you love to be married to somebody who resents the money you give to the Lord, the time that you spend, doesn't like the friends you have because they are Christian friends? Wouldn't that be a ball? I have never known of anyone to marry outside the church who recommended that other people do it. I have never known of anyone to marry outside the church to tell me, "My home is happier than if we both were Christians." I have issued that challenge many times and have never had a taker.

Jesus said in John 12:32, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself." You have your partner pulling you one way, and the Lord pulling you another way. Something has to give. Your relation with your partner is going to be strained; your relation to the Lord is going to be strained. It will be one or the other, or you will be split down the middle. But you find a Christian partner who has the same beliefs and goals in life that you have, and you have something that will hold that home together, and the devil himself can't destroy it.

For the sake of your home marry a Christian.

Number four and final—can you guess what this one will be? I was preaching in Illinois and got a phone call about ten o'clock one night. One of the fellows who goes to church where I preach was on the phone. He said, "You have to help us. My wife goes to her church; I go to where you are preaching. We have three kids. The oldest one is about 10 years old. We can't keep dragging them back and forth. What are we going to do?" I felt like saying, "It is a fine time for you to think

about that," and hang up on him. But being the sweet fellow I am, you know I didn't do that. It struck me as odd that he would be married twelve years before he thought of what a foolish thing he had done. It looks as if he would have thought of that about eleven years before at least.

Have you figured out what the fourth point is yet? Let me give you another clue. I was out playing with my little buddy Phil. We were about 9 or 10 years old, and one Saturday afternoon we were sitting on the curb visiting. All of a sudden he just grabbed his head and said, "Oh, no, tomorrow is Sunday. I hate Sundays." I never hated Sunday. Monday was the bad one for me. I said, "What is wrong with Sunday? We can play all afternoon." He said, "Oh, it is terrible at my house on Sunday. Mama says, 'Go to church with me,' and Daddy says, 'Go to church with me,' and Daddy starts yelling and Mama starts crying. I hate Sundays." Have you figured out point number four yet?

Number four is for the sake of your children. Your children don't have any choice about the parents they get. They have no say at all about whether they are brought up in a Christian home or not. But you do. The greatest gift you could bestow on your children is not a great inheritance or even an education, for that matter. The greatest gift you could bestow on them would be a Christian home. The greatest thing you girls could give your children would be a Christian father. The greatest thing you boys could ever give your children would be a Christian mother. And you have the right to choose that.

Girls, you had better back off and look at that fellow you are thinking about. He may be the greatest lover in the world and the most wonderful thing you have ever seen on two legs. He may be able to run the 100-yard dash in 9.0, and he may be able to stuff the basketball and do all these other things that are so important. But I will tell you one thing: you had better look at him again if he is going to be the father of your children. All of a sudden these other things don't look very important, do they?

And that girl just may be the sweetest sweetheart and just send your heart a flutter, boys, as she flutters those eyelashes, even if they are false. She may be the sweetest thing in the world to you and the ultimate of your dreams. But you

had better back off and look at her again because if you marry her, she is going to be the mother of your children. What kind of mother do you want your children to have?

My children have a Christian mother. It is really a comforting thought that while I am gone they are going to be at church, that when they eat they are going to pray and before they go to bed they are going to pray to God, that whatever comes up it is going to be dealt with from the biblical standpoint. That is a big, nice, warm feeling down in my tummy. Do you know why my children have a Christian mother? I bet you never could guess. Go ahead and try. I married a Christian. It is so obvious, you would think somebody else would think of it, wouldn't you? You would think it would be so obvious that everyone would want to do it. I married a Christian. Long after the beauty trophies that she has sitting there on the shelf and her basketball trophies that she shines up every now and then and whatever else she has around there to remind her of younger days and glories pretty well fade out, do you know what really shines in that woman to me today? She is a Christian. She loves the Lord and she has trained her children to love the Lord. The greatest thing I have ever given my children is a Christian home and that happened because I married a Christian.

III. THE PREPARATION

Number three P is *preparation* for marriage. I have three quick things to say to you.

Number one is this: Don't get in a hurry to get married. A girl about 16 years old finds out she doesn't have a steady boyfriend. Oh, it makes her so nervous. She thinks, "Everybody else is going steady. I am going to be an old maid." Then she gets out of high school. Everybody gets married in the class except her, and there is nothing left for her to do but go to Harding or some other Christian school. Then she goes all the way through college, about four years, and really hits the panic button when she graduates and still nothing is in sight. Don't get in a hurry to get married. Anybody can get married. That is no big deal. Marrying the right person—that is a big deal. Being married to the wrong person is a whole lot worse than not being married at all.

We have young people at Harding whom I have known elsewhere that are 19, 20, 21 years

old and have already married and divorced, already wrecked their lives and their homes. They are just now getting old enough to start dating and really learning and enjoying this kind of relationship. They have already blown the whole thing. The reason so many teenage marriages don't last is that people grow up after they get married and find out they don't even like each other and are not even compatible. Young people, don't get married now. You can do better a little later. You are getting prettier, more handsome, more mature, wiser, more suave and debonair. You can do better when you are 21 than when you are 16 or 18. Wait until you go down the other side and then grab a husband. I said that one time and one girl came up and said, "I am already down the other side. What do I do now?" Start back up, I guess. I don't know. Don't get in a hurry to get married. This is the second most important decision you will ever make, second only to your decision to be a Christian. It could well affect your faithfulness to that most important decision.

Suggestion number two is this: You have to go where they are if you are going to get a good Christian mate. It is just like fishing. It doesn't matter how great a fisherman you are and how expensive is your equipment. If you fish in a bathtub, you will never catch anything because there is nothing in there. You have to go where they are. A girl wrote Ann Landers one time and said, "Why is it that every man I meet down at the bar turns out to be no good?" You would think she could have read that over and saved the postage. Go to Christian camps. Go to youth meetings. Go to services.

My mother told me a long time ago, "When you go to a strange place, choose your friends from the Wednesday night crowd at church. You don't have to see everybody in town and check them out. They will weed themselves out automatically. Just see who shows up. They are the ones who are really interested in what you should be interested in. Around you right now are the best prospects you could find in this whole end of the country. Look around you. These are the best.

I remember when I was in high school, I thought there must not have been over three of four good Christian girls. There were two where I went to church. One of them didn't want me

and I didn't want the other one. So that pretty well took care of that. Then I went to Freed-Hardeman College, and I felt like the little boy who fell in the barrel of molasses. He said, "Lord, make me equal to the opportunity that lies before me." I never saw the like of Christian girls, all there just ready to be asked out, ready to "be went with." Go to a Christian school. Go where they are.

We parents can't determine whom our children will marry. But we surely can stack the odds in our favor. We can put our children on a Christian campus where there are about 90 percent Christians. Go where they are.

Third, you must be the right kind to catch the right kind. Again, finding a mate is a lot like fishing. By the bait you drop in the water, you attract certain fish and repel other fish. By the way you dress or don't dress, by the way you talk, by the places you go, the people you associate with, by the things you engage in or don't engage in, you are attracting certain ones of the opposite sex. They are saying, "That is my kind of person." And you are repelling the others. If you are a loose girl, certain boys will beat a path to your door. But who wants any of them? If you are an outstanding Christian girl, who dresses and talks and behaves in a decent manner and keeps herself pure and holy in God's sight and is a good influence on others, there are good, de-

cent Christian boys who are looking for you and would give anything they have to find a girl like you. They are the ones worth finding. The opposite is true, too, boys. There are good Christian girls there, but they will not give you a second look until you shape up and until you have advertised by the way you look, by the way you talk, by the way you dress, by your interests, by your love for the Lord that this is what you are really serious about. You have to be the right kind to attract the right kind.

CONCLUSION

Young people, don't trade your soul for a husband or a wife. Don't lose your head. Put first things first. You may hear better sermons than this, better organized, shorter, more scholarly or more eloquently delivered or whatever else you want to say. But I promise you one thing: you will never hear a more important sermon than this one at your stage in life when you are looking forward into marriage. I am convinced of that.

May God help you live up to that commitment, and may God give you the wisdom to make that decision. Pray to God and give Him the opportunity to guide you to that one who can lead you to heaven and bring your family to the Lord. Because, when you come right down to it, that is all there is in life anyway.

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