For seven weeks, we’ve been studying what the Bible says about the family in Ephesians 5:18-6:4. In that text, we’ve covered teaching for marriage, wives, husbands, children, and parents. And two weeks ago, we actually finished that section of teaching in Ephesians. But before we end this series, I want us to focus on one more topic that’s closely connected to the family. I want us to talk about dating. So for those of you who aren’t married, today we’re going to look at some biblical truths that should guide your dating life. We’re going to start in 2 Corinthians chapter 6 today. So go ahead and turn to 2 Corinthians 6. And before all you married people check out on me, let me explain why I hope you’ll listen closely today, as well. Many of you are parents and grandparents, and whether you realize it or not, you have a huge impact on what your children and grandchildren learn to look for in a spouse. You model for them what marriage should look like. And unfortunately, as a general rule, this is an area where we’re really struggling. Statistically speaking, the United States has one of the highest divorce rates in the world. One study reports that 41% of all first-time marriages end in divorce; 60% of second marriages end in divorce; and 73% of third marriages end in divorce. Numbers like that suggest that we’re making some really poor choices when it comes to dating and marriage. So today I want us to evaluate our dating habits in light of God’s Word. I thought about calling today’s sermon *Rating Your Dating While Waiting on Mating*, but some of you are pretty uptight, and I knew you wouldn’t want me to put that on the sign. Instead, the title of the sermon is *Highly Defective Dating Habits*. Based on the teaching of the Bible, we’re going to look at three of the most dangerous dating practices that you need to avoid at all costs. These three dating habits are dishonoring to God, and they’re devastating to your relationships.

The first highly defective dating habit we’re going to look at today is spiritual incompatibility. Look at 2 Corinthians chapter 6, and let’s read verses 14-16. 2 Corinthians 6:14-16. Paul writes, *“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be there God, and they will be my people.’”*

The first sentence of verse 14 gives us a very clear instruction for dating and marriage: Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. In other words, if you’re a Christian, you should not marry someone who’s not a Christian. And if you aren’t going to marry them, there’s no reason to date them. Don’t even start down that road.

Now, I know what some of you may be thinking. You may be thinking, “It’s already hard enough to find the right person. God’s making it even harder if He rules out an entire section of the playing field.” That’s not true. God’s not making it harder for you to find the right person when He tells you not to marry an unbeliever. God’s making it easier for you to find the right person, because He’s narrowing down the search for you. He’s ruling out all sorts of wrong persons right off the bat. Listen, God doesn’t give this command to restrict you, or to keep you from being happily married. God gives this command to protect you, because He knows this is the only way that you can be happily married. If you marry someone who is spiritually incompatible with you, the deck is already stacked against you from the very beginning. God wants to bless you with a healthy, happy, joy-filled marriage, and He knows that spiritual compatibility is the foundation for a good marriage.

A few years ago, Dr. Tom Elliff, who was the chairman of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Council on Family Life and is now the president of the International Mission Board, reported that for “Christian couples who marry… in the church after having received premarital counseling… and who attend church regularly and pray together, the divorce rate drops to .00256 percent, or one divorce out of nearly 39,000 marriages.” Let me interpret that statistic for you: It means that spiritual compatibility matters. A strong Christian foundation protects you from a lot of relational misery and heartache, and it greatly increases the likelihood that you will enjoy a happy, successful marriage.

We get a really good picture of why this is the case in verse 14. The word translated “yoked together” literally means “mismatched.” It’s what happens if you take two oxen that are very different in size and put a yoke on them have them plow a field together. You aren’t going to be able to plow in straight lines, because the bigger, stronger ox is going to be dragging the puny ox all over the place. And you’re going to spend all your time and effort trying to get them to go in the same direction, but it won’t work, because they’re unequally yoked. They’re mismatched.

That’s exactly what happens if you join two people together in marriage who are mismatched spiritually. They’re constantly headed in different directions, because they’ve got different values, different beliefs, different priorities. And they wind up spending all their time and effort just trying to head in the same direction, because they’re unequally yoked. They’re spiritually mismatched.

And make sure you notice just how seriously Paul takes this spiritual mismatch. After he tells us not to be yoked with unbelievers, he asks five straight questions to emphasize why. He says, *“What do righteousness and wickedness have in common?”* Nothing. *“What fellowship can light have with darkness?”*  None. *“What harmony is there between Christ and Belial?”*  Belial’s another name for Satan. So what harmony is there between Christ and Satan? None. And therefore, *“What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?”* Nothing. *“What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?”* None. Five times Paul emphasizes that you have no foundation… no common ground… for a successful marriage if you’re spiritually incompatible. One of you is following Jesus and the other is not, and that means you’re headed in different directions. You’re constantly going to be pulling and tugging against each other, and you’re marriage is going to be an exhausting struggle instead of the beautiful partnership that God intends. And God wants to protect you from that by protecting you from the highly defective dating habit of spiritual incompatibility.

But it’s not just that spiritual incompatibility is a defective dating habit. It’s also that it’s dishonoring to God. Look at verse 16 again. Paul asks, *“What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?”* And look at what he says next, *“For we are the temple of the living God.”* When you trust Jesus, He cleanses you of your sins, and the Spirit of God comes to live in you. Your purified heart becomes the temple where God’s Spirit dwells. And remember what we saw in Ephesians 5 about marriage. Marriage is a one-flesh union where a man and woman are joined together intimately and permanently. And that means if you’re a believer and God’s Spirit dwells in you, and you marry an unbeliever who has not been cleansed of their sin by the sacrifice of Christ, then there is a sense in which you’re taking the Spirit of God and joining Him to a sinful unbeliever. Do you see how dishonoring that is to God? Do you see what an insult that is to God’s holiness? It is right for God to dwell in a believer, because that believer has been cleansed and purified through faith in Jesus. But it’s an insult to God’s glory for you to join Him in a one-flesh relationship with an unforgiven, uncleansed unbeliever. So the spiritual incompatibility of marrying an unbeliever is dishonoring to God.

You can also see this truth if you remember what Ephesians 5 taught us about marriage. It taught us that marriage is a picture of Jesus’ relationship with His Church. The husband represents Jesus, and the wife represents the church. So think about what this means. If you’re a girl, and you marry an unbelieving guy, you’re saying that unbeliever represents Jesus. And if you’re a guy, and you marry an unbelieving girl, you’re saying that unbeliever represents Jesus’ church. Both of those statements are dishonoring to God, because that’s not the picture that God intends for marriage to paint. There’s no chance that your marriage can be what God intends for it to be if one of you is not a believer, because the whole point of your marriage is that it’s supposed to be about Jesus and the Church.

So spiritual incompatibility is both devastating for your marriage and dishonoring to God. So if you’re dating someone who’s not a believer, the Bible tells you to break it off. Stop dating them. You can trust that God knows what’s best for you, and God wants what’s best for you. And it is never best for you to be yoked with an unbeliever.

Now, before we move on, let me answer one question that may be on some of your minds. What if you’re already married to an unbeliever? In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul says stay married, as long as they’re willing to stay with you. You stay with them and you live out the love of Jesus and you pray for their salvation. So if you’re already in the situation, don’t get out of the marriage just because they’re an unbeliever. But if you’re not in the situation, then don’t ever get into it. Don’t engage in the highly defective dating habit of spiritual incompatibility.

The second highly defective dating habit we’re going to look at today is sexual immorality. Turn back one book from 2 Corinthians to 1 Corinthians, and let’s read 1 Corinthians chapter 6, verses 13-20. 1 Corinthians 6:13-20. Paul writes, *“‘Food for the stomach and the stomach for food’—but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, ‘The two will become one flesh.’But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”*

There is more truth packed into this text than we can possibly cover today. And this summer, we’re going to start a series in 1 Corinthians, so we’ll eventually get back to this text and spend a lot more time here. But for today, here’s what I want you to see: The Bible has a very high view of sex. The Bible teaches that sex is a holy and precious gift from God. And God designed the sexual union between a husband and a wife to be a beautiful, dramatic picture of the spiritual union between Jesus and His people. You see this truth in verses 16-17. In verse 16, Paul tells us that any time you’re united with someone sexually, you become one with that person in body. And then in verse 17, Paul explains the deeper spiritual truth of being united with Jesus. He says, *“But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.”* And the application Paul makes in this text is that if you’re a believer who has been united to Jesus spiritually, then when you have sex with someone and unite with them physically, you’re also taking the Spirit of Christ who lives in you and uniting Him with that person physically. And the only time that is appropriate is in marriage, because it’s only in marriage that we get the picture of Jesus’ union with His people.

In other words, any time you have sex outside marriage, you’re telling a lie about Jesus. Adultery and premarital sex both send the message that Jesus isn’t faithful to His people… and that’s a lie. So sex outside marriage is an insult to Jesus and a lie about Jesus, because God intends for sex to give us a picture of Jesus’ union with His people, and you only get that picture between a husband and a wife in marriage.

So if you have sex before you’re married, you’re undermining the foundation of your relationship. You’re building your relationship on a lie, instead of building your relationship on Jesus. And that doesn’t bode well for the future of your relationship.

So once again, we see that God isn’t trying to restrict you or keep you from being happy. God is trying to protect you and help you be truly happy. God wants to protect you from sex outside marriage, because He knows it’s a dangerous trap that can destroy your relationships. And then God wants you to enjoy sex within marriage, because that’s what God intended when He created sex.

And at this point, it’s important for us to bring up a thought that some people have once they hear the Bible’s teaching about sex before marriage. Some people think, “OK, so I won’t have sex until I’m married, but there’s lots of other stuff I’ll do.” Teenagers, young adults, I know that sometimes people don’t respond to this issue for you, so I’m going to today. Look at verse 13 with me again. Paul says, *“The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.”* And then look at verses 19-20, “*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”*

Paul says your body is meant for the Lord, God bought you at a price, and therefore, you should honor God with your body. So any sexual behavior that’s technically not sex that you’ve got a question about, here’s how you figure out whether or not it’s okay to do that when you’re dating: Just ask yourself, “Am I doing this for Jesus? My body belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ, so am I using my body for Him when I do this?” Or you can ask it this way, “When I engage in this behavior, is my motivation to honor God with my body?” Here’s what you have to see: This discussion is about so much more than just not having sex. This discussion is about honoring God with your body. It’s about glorifying God with your sexual behavior. So not having sex is not enough. The question is, “Are you glorifying God with the way you use your body?” You see, it’s not about drawing this imaginary line and then seeing how close you can get to the line without going over. No, it’s about pursuing Jesus and living for God’s glory. And if you’re focused on Him, you’re not even going to be looking at the line. In other words, if you’re asking, “How far is too far?” you’re already asking the wrong question. The question you should be asking is, “How can I be more like Jesus? How can I be pure like Him?”

And guys, let me challenge you right here. You need to be the Christ-like leaders you should be when you’re dating. Don’t wait until you’re married. You start being the spiritual leader when you’re dating. You set the boundaries. You be excessively respectful of your girlfriend physically. You need to realize that someone else may marry her, and you need to treat her the way you would want them to treat your future wife. So listen, guys, don’t be pushy. Don’t go as far as you can and make the girl be the strong one who says “Stop” every time. You be the spiritual leader who honors God with your body.

And let me tell you what may happen if you really get serious about honoring God with your body: A lot of you may decide that it would be best if you don’t even kiss someone while you’re dating them. You may decide that even kissing causes you to think about things that are reserved for marriage instead of causing you to think about God’s glory, so you decide not to do it. That’s an awesome way for you to honor God with your body. Now, don’t me wrong, I’m not making a biblical pronouncement that you can’t kiss somebody. But I am encouraging you to be way more passionate about following Jesus than you are about any physical aspect of your dating relationship.

And I know this is a radically different way of thinking than what you hear in the world today. But the world’s way of thinking isn’t working. Almost every other marriage in this country ends in divorce. The world’s way of thinking is setting you up for failure. That’s because the world didn’t create marriage, and the world doesn’t know what marriage is about. God created marriage, and God knows what marriage is about. Marriage is about Jesus’ relationship with His people. And that means all forms of sexual intimacy should be reserved for marriage, because that’s one of the main ways you honor God with your body.

And before we move on, let’s talk about a related issue for just a minute. Ladies, in our world today, one of the biggest areas where you can make a decision to honor God with your body is in the way you dress. And you might think I’m just talking to the younger girls, but I’m not. I’m talking to all of you. Our culture tries to convince you that everything you wear needs to be skin-tight, low-cut, and hiked-up. Listen, it doesn’t honor God when you reveal to everyone things that God intended for your husband’s eyes only. It’s important to remember that modesty is commanded in the Bible (1 Timothy 2:9). So ladies, wage war against our culture and resolve to honor God with your wardrobe. Make a commitment to avoid clothes that reveal your cleavage or show your stomach or barely cover your thighs. Your body is for the Lord, not for every guy who looks your way.

And dads, let me challenge you with what we’ve seen over the past several weeks about your role as the spiritual leader and protector of your family. Listen, if your teenage daughter is dressing provocatively, you need to wake up and step up. You know what men think when they see those clothes. Are you okay with them thinking that about your daughter? Lead out in your family by talking to your daughter about the message she’s sending by the way she dresses. If she doesn’t mean to send that message, you need to help her understand how to keep from sending it. And if she does mean to send it, you need to have an even longer talk.

So girls, ladies, we want to live and talk and even dress in a way that is God-honoring and Christ-exalting. And by the way, I’m not saying that you can’t be fashionable. You can look great without dressing inappropriately. Christy does it all the time. In fact, I’d say it takes a lot more fashion sense to look nice than it does to just give away the farm. I’ve got a good pastor friend who says, “Modest is hottest!” It makes me laugh every time he says it, but he makes a really good point. From a spiritual perspective, a truly beautiful woman is a woman who reserves for her husband the things that should be reserved for her husband instead of flaunting it for the world to see. So girls, ladies, dress modestly to the glory of God. Honor your husband or your future-husband, and even more, honor God with your body.

So the second highly defective dating habit is sexual immorality. Don’t undermine the foundation of your relationship with any type of sexual immorality.

The third highly defective dating habit we’re going to look at today is seeking your identity in marriage. Here’s what I mean: Some people believe the goal of life is to get married, and if they can ever just get married, all their problems will be solved and everything will be great. That isn’t true, for several reasons. First of all, whatever problems you have before marriage, you’re going to take them with you into marriage if you don’t fix them beforehand. Second, there is only one Savior, and His name is Jesus Christ. If you expect your spouse to be your Savior, you are setting them up for epic failure. They cannot be for you what only Jesus can. Third, remember that marriage is the picture, and your relationship with Jesus is the real thing. I hope you’ve heard me say that over and over and over. God created marriage to be a picture of Jesus’ relationship with His church. And that means if you make your life about marriage, you’re missing what marriage is about, because marriage isn’t just about marriage. Marriage is about Jesus. So don’t stop with the picture. Don’t think that you’ll find your identity in marriage. Go on to the real thing, and find your identity in Jesus.

And what I hope you realize is that this truth applies to all of us, whether married or single. Ephesians 5 has already taught us that marriage is about Jesus. And 1 Corinthians 7 teaches us the same thing about singleness. Singleness is also about Jesus. Look at 1 Corinthians 7 with me, and let’s read verses 32-35. Paul writes, *“I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs – how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world – how he can please his wife – and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world – how she can please her husband. I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.”*

Paul says that the primary benefit of singleness is that it allows you to commit yourself fully to the cause of Jesus. When you’re single, all the time, energy, and money that would have gone toward your spouse and children and family is freed up to be given to the cause of Jesus. Singleness frees you to serve Jesus in a way that a married person never can.

So the purpose of marriage is to be a picture of Jesus, and the purpose of singleness is to serve Jesus. It’s all about Jesus. If you’re married, it’s about Jesus. And if you’re single, it’s about Jesus. And that’s why seeking your identity in marriage is such a highly defective dating habit. If that’s your mindset when you’re dating, you’ve already got the wrong view of marriage, so it’s very possible that you’ll make some bad decisions about marriage. But if you’re focused on Jesus, and you’re growing in your love for Him, then He’s going to shape you into the person you need to be. And for however long Jesus calls you to be single, you find your identity in Him and you see your singleness as a blessing, because it frees you to serve Jesus. And then if the day comes when Jesus calls you to get married, you still find your identity in Him, and you see your marriage as a blessing, because it allows you to paint a picture of Jesus and the church.

So whether you’re married or single, your relationship with Jesus is the real thing. Your identity and worth and value and purpose and meaning and life are all found in Jesus, not in marriage. So don’t get sucked into the highly defective dating habit of seeking your identity in marriage. Find your identity in Jesus. The goal of your life isn’t just to get married. The goal of your life is to know Jesus.

So for all of you who aren’t yet married, I pray that you will listen to God’s Word and learn from God’s wisdom. I pray that you will avoid the highly defective dating habits of spiritual incompatibility, sexual immorality, and seeking your identity in marriage. I pray that you’ll only date followers of Jesus, that you’ll reserve all sexual intimacy for marriage, and that you’ll find your identity in Jesus.

And then for all of us… married, single, husbands, wives, parents, children… as we wrap up this series on the family, I pray that our lives will be about Jesus and that He will be exalted in our families.