

RELATIVELY SPEAKING SERIES

Solo Mojo – 10/30/2011

Greg Boyd

That was a great job Theresa, fantastic. We're talking about singleness in this series that we're doing, Relatively Speaking. And maybe you're wondering, why are we talking about singles in a series about relationships and relatives and the reason is because, as we'll see here in a moment, the kingdom, the kingdom of God has a radically different perspective on the meaning of singleness. It transforms the meaning of singleness. And there is nothing, I believe, in the modern church that manifests the kingdom less than this general attitude of being single. The church has, to a large degree, appropriated, intensified even, this kind of stigma that we find out in the world that was reflected in this brilliant monologue that Theresa just did. The stigma of being single. So, as the topic on singleness, but we're going to be talking, as you'll see here in a moment about principles that apply to married people as well so everybody tune in. "Pod-rishioners" tune in. By the way, we've got a number of pod-rishioners here today, we've got Chris and Tom, is it? From Florida, and we've got a church from Chicago pod-rishioning, got a bunch of folks here. Don and we've got the Lifts here, we got a lotta people here and so we love ya. Good to have you here. Tom and Chris, he's a researcher it's incredible stuff. So we we're talking about the title of this message and I jokingly threw out 'Solo Mojo' and they liked it. That's the title, 'Solo Mojo'. And here's the stigma and Theresa captured it brilliantly. The idea is that if you're single, then really you're sort of in a pre-married status. You're defined by what you're not: namely you're unmarried. But the assumption is that you want to get out of that status. You want to get married, you're looking and so people are always offering their help, trying to help you Mr. Right, or whatever. The default setting of 'normal' is married. So if you get in your 30's and 40's and you're not married, well then you're not quite in the stream of 'normal'. There's a stigma on that. You're not complete; you're not whole until you're married. And that's changing somewhat, I think, in the broader culture. But it's certainly not changing in the church. There is a tremendous stigma in the church about being single. Al Mohler is the president of the Southern Baptist Convention and he wrote this thing, I actually lost it but I'll give you the essence here. He says, very explicitly, that in his view, according to scripture, for adults, is to be married. That God commands us all to be married and to bear children. And that we are created for the purpose of being married and bearing children. And that we glorify God by being married and raising children. Which of course, and he didn't say this, but the implication is that if you're not married and having children, well then, there's something

wrong with you. There's something off there. This stigma is intensified by our culture and what I call 'the myth of romantic completeness'. 'The myth of romantic completeness' and it's just this idea that out there, somewhere there is your soul mate, that Mr. or Mrs. Right. That person who is going to complete you. You complete me, Dr. Evil says to Mini Me. You complete me, people say that at weddings, you complete me, like I didn't have a life until I met you, you complete me. There's that one person out there, somewhere, the dream if only you can find them. The myth of romantic completeness. You're incomplete until you find that person. The purpose of life is to find that person. A lot of our pop songs express this myth of romantic completeness. I remember when I was in high school, some of you might remember this, some of you look old enough to remember this. In high school there was a band named America, titled America. They had a lot of good songs, Horse With No Name and other things. They had one song, which I think probably rates as the sappiest love song of all times. I would argue that. When it would come on, a friend of mine who had just been dumped by his girlfriend, would just start bawling. It was really embarrassing. The song was Lonely People, do you remember it? "This is for all you single people, thinking that life has passed you by. Don't give up until you drink from the silver cup and ride that highway in the sky, for I'm on my way" – oh it's just, Oooooowwwwooooo! "The silver cup, don't give up, thinking that life has passed you by, the love has passed you by, all you lonely, single people" Totally sap stuff. I process stuff with a team of people who kinda help me get the sermon in order on Mondays and they were saying, okay Greg, you gotta stop using songs from the 70's, use something a little more contemporary and so we were wondering if songs today are as sappy as they were in the 70's? And they gave me a bunch of songs and it turns out, they are! They're just as sappy now as ever. Taylor Swift is nothing but sappy songs. Romeo and Juliet. Enrique Iglesias... Enrique Iglesias, Can I Be Your Hero? He starts off a song with that, can I be your hero? And I got on, you know I'm doing research for the sermon and there's a video of 'Hero'. Has anyone seen that video? I couldn't make heads or tails of it; I can't make heads or tails of most videos these days. He's supposed to be a hero but he gets the stuff beat out of him at the end of the video. He's not a hero, he's a loser, he got beat up. The song is Can I Be Your Hero? I need a hero to rescue me, will you save my soul tonight and blah, blah, blah. But the award of sappy songs for contemporary people, so far as I can see, goes to The Backstreet Boys, the sappy award. They have a song called Incomplete. And I'm not even going to try to read it, I mean sing it, but I will read it to you. "Empty spaces fill me up with holes." Apparently he's a physicist, because he's talking about anti-matter or something, I don't know. Already the metaphors are not working for me. "Distant faces with no place left to go." What's that got to do with the price of tulips in China? "Distant faces with no place left to go, without you, within me." Apparently he got pregnant. I don't know. "I can't find no rest where I going is any bodies guess." Sorry, these are performers of unsurpassable worth, but the song's not so much. "I tried to go on like I never knew you. I'm awake but my world is half asleep, I pray for this heart to be unbroken, but without you all I'm

going to be is incomplete. Voices tell me I should carry on, but I'm swimming in an ocean all alone." There you go, ya see, until you find that person and have that person in your life, you got a whole in your soul filled up with empty spaces, whatever that means, you don't know where you are, you're swimming in an ocean alone, life has passed you by, don't give up until you drink from the silver cup and the highway in the sky and on and on. Don't ya know, ya gotta find Mr. and Mrs. Right. Incomplete. Here's the thing. We gotta take a look at all this stuff in a kingdom light as we've said from the start and even though this myth of romantic completeness. This Sleepless in Seattle syndrome. Out there somewhere you're gonna find somebody to fill a hole in your soul, that's rather new. That's only been around for the last 200 years or so but I'll talk more about that here in a little bit. But the stigma of being single has been around since the dawn of human history and at the time of Jesus it was super intense. The assumption was that, not only is there something wrong with you if you're single, but there's something ungodly about you if you're single. Like Al Mohler, most Jews read Genesis as a command that all people are supposed to be married and all people are supposed to bear children. That was a command that's still in force. One rabbi said that the first question on judgment day that will be asked of people is, "Did you procreate?" And if you said no, apparently you're in trouble. The idea was that some people have reasons for not getting married but that's because they're cursed of God. You're cursed of God if you don't get married, so some folks have deformities or some folks have diseases or other issues that keep them from getting married and so that was seen as being cursed of God. No one chose to be cursed of God. No one chose it, no one thought hey, I'm going to be single. The default was strongly on being married. It was really tough on women because women couldn't choose to be married, they had to be chosen. So if they weren't married, it meant not only were they cursed by God but cursed among humans because nobody wants you. And so, one rabbi said that any woman that is not married by the age of 20 is cursed by God. Another rabbi said that any woman who doesn't bear children is desecrating the image of God. Ouch. So women you need to be married and bearing children to be the complete image of God, you can't do it alone. When Jesus comes on the scene and there is this kinda stigma on singleness all around. He revolutionizes everything. Now follow me on this. We've seen the last two weeks that the foundation of the society, as in most traditional cultures, the foundation of the ancient Jewish culture was the patriarchal family. The father defines the family; the blood line of the father is the family. The father has total authority over the family and you are first and foremost a child of your father. And your job is to honor the father and carry out his will. Your main allegiance is to the father and then to the family. The family is an extension of the father. That's the primary allegiance in the ancient world, the father and the family of the father. Jesus comes along and he takes that patriarchal paradigm and now he applies it to God. And so we find, in the New Testament, that those who submit to the father are born from above, right? Born again. Born from above. We are, in a very real sense, birthed from the father, we are, in a very real sense, his children. And now he becomes

not just the supreme being any more, he's *Abba* which is the Aramaic word for Dad, there's an intimacy that's there. The spirit in us cries, *Abba* father and we are children of the father and through his spirit he pours his DNA into us. And so all who submit to *Abba* father now have a sharing in his DNA and his character is being formed in us and we are seeking to do his will and this is the family of God. The family of God and then Jesus says that our primary allegiance is not to biological family, our biological mother and father, our biological mother and brothers and father. Our primary allegiance is now to *Abba* and his family. That radically revolutionizes the family structure that's why he's seen as being subversive. He was attacking the foundation of society as they understood it in the ancient world. Not promoting family values. And so he says things like this, and this is the kinda thing that got him crucified. He said:

Luke 14:26. "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes even life itself – such a person cannot be my disciple."

Radical stuff. He doesn't mean this literally because he tells us that we're supposed to honor our mother and our father and he tells us that we're supposed to love everybody, even our worst enemies. We're not allowed to not love anybody. So he doesn't mean this literally. But what he's really getting at is this. This is a typical ancient Hebraic of stating something in an exaggeratory way for emphasis. It's called hyperbole and it's a common feature of Semitic languages. And so he's saying here, in a hyperbolic way, in an exaggeratory way is that our allegiance to *Abba* and the family of *Abba* has got to be so much greater than our allegiance to anything else. Our allegiance to biological family, our allegiance to nation, our allegiance to anything. It has to be so much greater, it's like the differences between love and hate. In other words, the followers of Jesus means you're not allowed to have any other competing allegiances. You're not allowed to have any competitors. We have to seek first the kingdom of God and so everything else is rendered insignificant. See, if we adopt that paradigm, that kingdom paradigm, it totally changes everything. Because now, if we're defined first and foremost, in fact exclusively in our relationship to God and then to our brothers and sisters as we seek to carry out his will on earth as it is in heaven and that defines us and it means: we're not defined by whether we're married or not. We're not defined by whether we're male or female. We're not defined by whether or not we're American or Iraqi. We're not defined by whether or not we're libertarian or socialist. We're not defined by whether or not we're rich or poor. Whether we're free or slaves. We're not defined by anything in this world, we're defined by our relationship with *Abba* father who has birthed us, given us this new life. We share it with his household. All the distinctions and the judgments and the filings that society put on people and classified people, all of them are rendered obsolete in the kingdom of God. Then that utterly, utterly changes the meaning of being single. Jesus takes this idea that being single is a curse and we're gonna see now he turns it on its head. In the kingdom it means something totally different. It starts right from the get-go where Jesus chooses not to get married. He

never got married and he chose that and in first century culture, that's weird, that's suspicious, something's wrong with this guy. He's not accepting the default of normal because what he's doing is giving a new normal. In fact, Jesus doesn't get married but yet he's held up throughout the New Testament as an example of what it is to be perfectly human. The perfect example of what it is to manifest the image of God. And so, clearly here he's going against the assumption that to manifest the image of God, you've got to be married. Not only that but Jesus puts forth being single as the preferred lifestyle within the kingdom. So for example he's having this debate with the Pharisees and the Sadducees and they're arguing about what are the justifiable grounds for divorcing somebody and getting remarried. This was a big issue in ancient Judaism. What are the grounds that allow you to feel self-righteous in divorcing your wife because only men could divorce women, women couldn't divorce men. And so that was the squabble and they tried to get Jesus to bite the bait and get involved in this thing. And Jesus just sort of subverts the whole discussion because he says, guys, don't you remember back in Genesis that two are to become one flesh and so what God has joined together should not be torn asunder, should never be torn apart. And what he's basically saying there is that this discussion and trying to feel self-righteous for any grounds of divorcing your wife and getting remarried is really the wrong discussion. You can't feel righteous, whatever your reasons are for being divorced and remarried. It's gonna happen, God allows it for the fallen world, but you can't go around feeling self-righteous about it. Now the disciples, when they hear this, they say this:

Matthew 19: 10-12. The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a man and wife, it is better not to marry..."

Because there's no justifiable grounds for divorcing, you can't feel self-righteous about it.

"Jesus replied," ...well you're right, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For some are eunuchs because they are born that way; others have been made eunuchs; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."

The one who can accept this should accept this, and the 'this' that he's talking about is a call to be single. In this fallen world marriage is tough and etc., etc. And so the disciples are right in saying, Lord, aren't you better off not getting married? But Jesus is saying, if you can accept that... Now not everyone can, but if it's given to you, if you have the ability, the God given ability to stay single, well then that is the preferred way to go. In first century culture that is bizarre. He's saying it to men and to women. If you can choose to be single then choose to be single. In fact it's even crazier than that because he's talking about eunuchs here. Eunuchs is somebody who, for whatever reasons, does not have a sex drive. Some people are born that way. Some people are made that way. Accident or something I suppose. I don't want to go into the details. It wouldn't be pleasant. Thank you, thank you. We thought you were like gonna...

But Jesus is saying that people who don't have a sex drive. It is a gift. I knew I would not get a single 'amen' on that statement! To not have a sex drive is a gift. Now the reason we don't go 'amen' is that we in the West are so indoctrinated in the opposite direction. This goes against fundamental assumptions in our culture. We are bombarded, indoctrinated 24/7 by every kind of media you can imagine. The message is that sex is the core of our identity of being human beings. Forget about the fact that every animal in existence also has it. We think it's what the core of what it is to be a human being. It's the greatest thing of life. It's the meaning of life. The media gives this impression in movies and television shows and all this kind of stuff that people are basically walking hormones ready to pop at any moment. Perpetual feistiness. Which is why, in the movies, many of them anyways, as soon as you get a man and a woman together, it doesn't matter whether they're single or married or whatever, there's all the sudden this energy that they can't resist. If there's any possible chance they just jump on one another. It's like this irresistible force, you know, magnetism. We're walking hormones ready to pop any second. People just wake up in the morning, in the movies, and they're just [growling] ready to go. First thing and they don't even brush their teeth. That's so unrealistic. Waking up feisty in the morning I understand, but first you brush your teeth. Or is that just me? Because if I was feisty, first... morning breath... uh, no, it'd be gone. Ok, moving on. Too much information. It gives you this impression that people are perpetually horny and there's something wrong with you if you're not. And to live a full life, well you've gotta be having sex, there's something odd if you're not doing that. Life without sex, in our culture, is equivalent to hell. The movie, I didn't see it, but I was told about it, The 40 Year Old Virgin. The whole premise of the movie is that you're really weird if you're 40 years old and a virgin. You're abnormal, you're defective, you're crazy, that's terrible, it's a curse. And then, I guess, that person's trying to get out of that state. But the assumption is that you're not fully alive unless you've had sex and are having sex. And see, we just gotta say, from a kingdom perspective that that is a lie. That is a complete lie. Jesus never had sex and he was the most fully alive human being there ever was. Jesus never had sex but he manifested the image of God perfectly. This is not the essence of life, the fullness of life. Our culture lies to us. Now I want to be clear, in marriage, sex is a gift, in fact it's a really good gift and in marriage, all other things being equal, the more, the better. And I would encourage it and there'll be another sermon on that sometime, I'm sure. It's good in marriage but it doesn't complete your life. It has nothing to do with fullness of life. And yes, within marriage, sex is a gift, but what Jesus is saying here is this: if you are one of those who doesn't have a strong sex drive and are able to not get married, well that's a preferable gift, in fact even if you have a strong sex drive but have still sworn off marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, that is a preferred gift. And so Jesus takes this thing that was once was a curse and he says it is a gift and it is something good. And so from a kingdom perspective we have to say that whether you're a virgin or not, whether you have a strong sex drive or have no sex drive at all, because people are very varied on that matter. And whether you've chosen to be single or whether,

right now, singleness has chosen you. Whatever the case, in the kingdom of God, chastity and celibacy and singleness is not something that we're supposed to frown on or be embarrassed by or looked down on, no, it's something to be celebrated, it's something to be applauded. It's something in the kingdom of God that is virtuous and ought to be honored, amen? Amen. It's a totally different take on it than what we find in our culture and what Jesus had in his culture. And the main reason singleness is a gift, the main thing is that it frees you up to be more singularly devoted to the work of the kingdom, and to your Lord and to the family of God. Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 7. He starts out by saying,

"I wish that all of you were as I am."

He was single and was saying you know what? If you could all be like me, that would be better.

"But each of you has your own gift from God; One has this gift, another has that."

Some may have the gift to be able to live fully as singles and some don't because they have other gifts. And so he's really here repeating what Jesus just said. You can't do this unless it's given to you, but it is a gift if it is given to you. And then 1 Corinthians 7 verse 28 he says,

"Those who marry will face many troubles in this life..."

I knew I wouldn't get an 'amen' on that one either. I know you guys.

"...And I want to spare you this... I would like you to be free from concern."

In other words it would be good for you to be single like I am, free of that 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."

Paul goes on to say the same thing about women. He's not saying that marriage is bad. Marriage is honorable, but there are certainly advantages to being unmarried and choosing to be single. Because of the fall, marriage is tough. Amen? It's not easy. Forging a relationship is a lot of work. It takes a lot of time. And then having kids if you're called to have kids is a lot of work. It takes a lot of time. To keep a family together, it takes a lot of work, it takes a lot of time, it takes a lot of money. And so if you're one who's been given the gift, if you can go without that and still be full. Well then that is the preferable way to go because now you're free to engage in the work of the Lord and invest in the family of God. Notice that the freedom Paul's talking about is not the kind of freedom the world celebrates. Like the freedom of not having to be inconvenienced by having to negotiate how you're going to arrange your bedroom or the freedom from having to deal with conflicts in a marriage thing. No, this isn't the freedom

of convenience or the freedom of doing what you please. The reason why you're a gift and the reason why this freedom is good is because now you're free to be more in service and to be doing the work of the Lord and to be putting God first. Your interests and obligations are not divided. Married folks, that doesn't mean that the single folks are supposed to be doing all the volunteering. But I want to encourage single people to take the extra time and energy and resources that you have and use them for the work of the kingdom and use them for the Lord. But the bottom line is this: however the world may stigmatize singleness and however the church may stigmatize singleness and celibacy, in the kingdom of God we are to say it is a gift. It is to be celebrated, it is honorable, it is good and we applaud you. Amen.

Now, in fifteen minutes... Someone tell the children's church we're going to go over by two or three minutes. I just sense the Spirit moving and it's gonna go a little bit over.

There's three implications of this, and follow me on this. There's three implications of this radical reframing of singleness that Jesus brought about in this world. Number one: it means that we must resist this myth of romantic completeness. This thing that we're bombarded with all the time. That there's this one true love out there that gonna complete you, we've got to resist that to the core of our being. Romance is good, and my wife will gladly tell you that I'm about the most romantic husband on the planet. I'm sure she would tell you that, I'm sure. I'm confident. I love romance, I'm a romantic guy, but it doesn't complete anything! The most romantic husband in the world, the most romantic wife in the world, the most romantic couple in the world, it wouldn't complete lives or complete their marriage or anything of the sort. In fact, no relationship of any kind with any human being is going to complete you at the core of your being. We all need relationships with other human beings and I'm going to talk about that in a second, but no relationship can fill you. The Backstreet Boys were right in one sense. There is a whole in our soul. There are empty spaces in the core of our being. There's a longing, there's an ache inside every human being. We want that to be filled but see here's the thing: no human being can do that. No human being can do that, at the core of your being that ache, to take away that ache and fill that hole. Human beings aren't supposed to do that. That ache, that craving, that longing, that sense of loneliness, that sense of incompleteness that we all have, that's put there by God as a homing device to draw us to him. Because only he can satisfy that hunger inside of us. The only one who can fill you is Jesus Christ. The only one who can complete you is Jesus Christ. The only one who can make your life worth living is Jesus Christ. The only one who can give you worth and unsurpassable significance is Jesus Christ. But see what happens with this myth of romantic completeness... the Devil deceives us in to thinking that that ache there will be solved if we find that one right person. He misdirects our homing device. So now instead of hungering and thirsting after God we hunger and thirst after that mythological person out there who's gonna complete us. And so you search and search and search and maybe find Mr. or Mrs. Right, uh they're not Mrs. Hopefully. Ms. Right. If they're

Mrs., they ain't right. Run away. So you find this person and sometimes there's this tremendous buzz, right? You fall in love. It's euphoric, it's wonderful, there's this chemical reaction that goes on in your being, you can't think straight, you take off your shoes and you put them in the refrigerator. You are in love. You are in love and there's a major buzz and so you think, oh this is finally it, I've found the one true love, and then they write songs about it or something. But see the thing is, that never lasts. It's nice if it happens to you, it happens to some but not to others, but it doesn't last. It's not an indication that you've found Mr. Right, that's for sure, or Ms. Right. It never lasts, so what happens is you fall in love and you fall out of love. Some people get addicted to falling in love so they move on to the next one to have that buzz again, like an alcoholic trying to get that first buzz that they got when they took that first drink. People love falling in love, they don't love people, they just love falling in love. Then they fall out of love with people and then maybe they get married and they fall out of love with them because maybe you don't feel that buzz anymore so you move on to the next one. It's all a lie of the devil and it's damaging to marriages and damaging to relationships.

Stephanie Coontz wrote this book a fascinating book: Marriage a History, From Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage. She's an historian and I've only read sections of this in preparation for this sermon but it looks like a really interesting work. And she's argues, I think convincingly, that nothing has done more to undermine marriages in the modern western world than this myth. This idea that when you find that romantic one and have that romantic encounter, well then you're gonna be full. It never works out. Two people are disappointed and sometimes get divorced. The reality is this: God never intended marriage to complete us. He intended him to complete us. Marriages can't complete you. Marriages work the way God intended them to work if you have a life before you go into the marriage. Get a life! When two people who are empty come in to the marriage thinking the other person is going to fulfill them, what you get are two people that are suction, major vacuums and you get a giant black hole now and both parties are disappointed and they say, well you're supposed to fulfill me, no you're supposed to fulfill me, and no one's getting fulfilled at all because marriages are supposed to fulfill you. Only Jesus Christ can fulfill you, so whether you're single or married, I'm telling you get a life, and the life is Jesus Christ. Amen. Let him pour life into you, your worth, your significance and your value. And then if God calls you to do it, you come and you share your fullness with that other person. But you share your fullness you don't share your emptiness.

So point number one: resist the myth of romantic completeness. Number two: While the deepest longings in our soul can only be met by God, it's also true that we are made for relationships with other people. We are made in the image of a triune God, a God whose very nature is relationship and because we're in that image, we manifest that image by being in relationships. It's our capacity for relationships that distinguishes us as human beings. We

reflect God's image that way. That's why it says in Genesis that it's not good for a human being to be alone. Genesis 2:18. It's not good. God saw Adam; it's not good that you're alone. That usually has been taken to mean, it's not good that you don't have a person of the opposite sex to be married to. And in Genesis 2, certainly marriage is certainly held up as the paradigmatic example of what it is to be in a relationship, but notice this: Jesus as I said before, he was single and never had sex and never got married, and yet he was the perfect image of God. So clearly the statement, it's not good for man to be alone, is not equal then to the statement, it's not good for a human not to be married. What it means is that it's not good for a human being to be alone. It's not good for people to live in isolation. It's not good for a human being to not have relationships with others. It's not good for a human being to not be plugged in to a community. What it means is that we're supposed to have deep meaningful relationships with other human beings but you don't have to be married to have that. Even if you are married you have to have other relationships, other friendships to meet other needs in your life. Coontz shows this in her book, it's just an amazing thing. There's a major shift – and this is going to be extremely important here, I'm almost certain that 99% of the people listening to this have never heard this, but it explains a lot and it reframes a lot. Here's the thing, Stephanie Coontz, in this book on marriage, Marriage a History... she demonstrates in this book that there was a shift in history in the 19th and 20th century, and the essence of the shift was this: we lost the concept of having intimate, passionate, committed but not erotic relationships - relationships that are passionate and committed but they're not sexual, but they're deep and profound. Before this time it was not unusual, not one thought it was gay for two women or two guys to embrace each other publically or to walk hand in hand or even shoulder and shoulder and to share affectionate but not erotic kisses. It wasn't odd for them to express their love in very deep, profound ways that even sound kind of romantic but there's nothing sexual about it. It was just deep, profound relationships. And Coontz gives a number of examples of this. Abraham Lincoln and Joshua Speed had a life-long deep friendship where they lived together even after Abraham Lincoln got married. There was this profound commitment they had to one another. Another famous example is Emily Dickenson. She had a profound relationship with her sister-in-law, Susan Gilbert and you read some of their letters that were exchanged there and this love was incredible. She says, Sue my darling, words cannot express my love for you. When we come together no words will be necessary as you hold my hand our eyes will communicate our love for one another. That sounds romantic, in fact some scholars have coined this term for these friendships that we've now lost as romantic, non-erotic friendships. It's romantic, it's deep, it's profound and intimate, they're committed but it's non-erotic. But because we don't have this category some people look back on this and think, oh, they must have been gay, but that's because we don't have any other way of processing this strong love that people had up until recently. A lot of cultures still have this. If you go to Cambodia, I went there thirteen years or so ago and that is actually a culture that has a strong stigma against homosexuality, but

what's totally amazing is that you find men and women holding hands and their arms around each other and affectionately roughing up each other's hair and giving each other kisses and almost flirting with each other, but in the cultural context it's not sensual, it's showing a strong love for one another. And, in fact, you find this in the Bible. The classic case is David and Jonathan. You read 1 Samuel 18-20 and you'll find here that these two love each other. It says over and over again that they love each other more than their own life. And they were committed to each other, they exchanged some precious stuff they had as a life-long covenant, pledging themselves to one another as friends. And then when Jonathan died David said this,

2 Samuel 1:26 "I grieve for you my brother, for you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women."

Look at that. Now it reflects a profound, intimate, passionate, life-long committed relationship here, but it's not erotic. He's just saying that the fulfillment in this relationship that I had with you is greater than that which I had with women, and he had a lot of wives. See, here's the thing, if I were to say this to one of my guy friends, you know, some of my deep... Dave Churchill and Paul Eddy... Our love is wonderful, more wonderful than that of women... See? Things have changed. First of all my wife would be a little ticked off, I'm thinking. But people would assume that I must be gay. But that's a recent thing. It's because, what Coontz shows is this concept, for a variety of reasons, this concept of profound, intimate, non-erotic relationship has been lost. And what happened was that passion and intimacy and life-long commitment and physical affection, that got almost completely associated with marriage. That's the only place for romance, the only place for physical affection, the only place for profound commitment. And that was damaging both to marriages and to non-marriage relationships. It's damaging to marriage because now the whole weight of finding profound, fulfilling, passionate friendships is in the marriage. And most marriages can't do that. And it's damaging to non-married folks because now this has delegitimized having deep, profound, committed friendships with other people. It really has fed into this myth of romantic completeness because now all the eggs are in the marriage basket, in that nuclear family. And you can't have those kinds of deep, fulfilling, committed relationships until you're married. So now everyone's longing for this mythological, satisfying romance in marriage. And that's where we get this stigma today about singleness. We must be looking for that. And a lot of people in the marriages are saying, well this isn't what it's cracked up to be, because no marriage can carry that weight. Coontz doesn't address this, but I suspect that this shift that went on in the 19th century has messed up a lot of other people as well. I mean, people who have a strong love for a person of the same sex, we don't have a category for that. When they want to be life-long committed, we don't have a category for that except that people just have to assume that they're gay. But very frequently there's not an erotic component to that, but we just don't have any other category for this, we delegitimize it. And I think it's also been tremendously unfair to

Christian gay people because it's forced them into some terrible choices. There was a gay couple, monogamous, committed gay couple that was here several years ago and in their course of growing in Christ, and we are all in process, they became convicted of having sexual relationships and they had some friendships here in the church and so they talked about that with these friends and these friends affirmed that that was a good growth thing in their life. Unfortunately they and the friends assumed that that meant that they had to break up. Here's the thing, abstaining from sex in the relationship maybe was challenging, but not that challenging because in their relationship as is true of every monogamous relationship, sex isn't the main thing, in fact, sex is rather incidental. So they could give up that. But what was killing them is that they loved each other. Profoundly loved each other and were committed to each other and the thought of going through life without that was killing them. And I was fortunately invited in on this discussion and I showed them Jonathan and David and what I said was, look it, you can honor this conviction that you have about abstaining from sex but it doesn't mean you've got to get rid of the relationship. The love that ya have for one another and the commitment that ya have for one another is good. 200 years ago people wouldn't have thought anything of it, but that's a good kingdom thing. But see, we just don't have this category of a non-erotic, non-sexual friendship in our culture today. We all need relationships like that. We in the kingdom have got to recover this idea of deep, profound, committed, passionate friendships with people... that doesn't involve sex! We got to be a people who understand that in the kingdom we can forge relationships with brothers and sisters that are fulfilling and deep. You don't have to be married to do it. No, it's in the friendship. This idea we have of the nuclear family, the family as self-contained. A husband, a wife and the kids and they're sort of right there by themselves and that's supposed to fulfill them... It is profoundly unbiblical and it's profoundly damaging. It's an extension of Western individualism but now applied to a couple more people. We're doing life solo. Whether you're married or single, we were meant to be in community. We're supposed to be part of a broader family. Whether we're married or single we're supposed to have relationships with other people that are deep and fulfilling because no marriage on its own can possibly satisfy that and it's those relationships that alleviate need that we have, that address the need that we have to model the image of God. I'm blessed to have my wife as my best friend. My lover and my friend, but I thank God that we are both embedded in a community and we have relationships, profound meaningful relationships with people outside the marriage because that's the way it's supposed to be. I can't possibly meet all of her friendship needs and she can't possibly meet all of my friendship needs. So we have a broader community, we all need that. And married folks, let me tell ya, and single folks, it shouldn't be the case that our relationships are divided along class lines as to whether you're married or single. It's really sick that we've got two classes in the church. You've got the married people and you've got the single people and they're almost completely segregated. See, that's one of these cultural walls that we need to be tearing down. Single people reach out to married folks

and married folks reach out to single folks and manifest the beauty of the kingdom that doesn't make being married or single the defining characteristics of our life. And those things are always rewarding. Shelley and I had, for seven years, Trevor Ford living with us when he was single and he blessed us and we blessed him and that's the way it's supposed to be in the kingdom. I thank God that we're friends, my wife's my best friend but we have relationships outside of that. I'll end with this trivial example, well, it's not trivial to me. But, my kitchen's falling apart because we've got an old home, the cabinets are all falling apart and coming undone and so we need to fix this and so we thought, we're just gonna revamp this, let's redo the kitchen since we gotta fix it anyways. Shelley loves design. Shelley loves to talk about design. Shelley gets conflicted about where the stove should go, where the fridge should go and cabinets and what kind should we get and blah, blah, blah. I have zero interest in all such matters. If she changed it all up, I probably wouldn't notice it, I just have zero interest and I have zero knowledge about this stuff and so my capacity to enter in and learn about this stuff is very limited and so two minutes into it I'm ready to go crazy. I just can't do it. Thank God for friends. The other day they came over and she was in a processing mood and she loves to process and process and fortunately some of them love to process too and they care about kitchens and the way they look and their design. So they come over and they start processing and going back and forth and back and forth and all the while I'm going thank you Jesus for friends. Thank you Jesus, hallelujah, hallelujah. See that's just a little example of how we need to be reaching out. Whether you're married or single we're all made for these deep friendships.

Now, I'm not going to get to the third point, I kinda already gave it so we're gonna end right here. But we need these deep friendships. So single folks listen, in fact all of us listen: don't ever, ever by the lie that there's anything sub-normal, abnormal, defective, imperfect or anything about being single. No, in the kingdom of God that's a gift. Now you may be open to being married, may be some of you are called to it maybe it's not, but as it is right now accept that as a gift and use it as a gift. In the kingdom of God we've got to applaud that and hold that in high esteem. Marriage is honorable; singleness is also honorable, praise God. We've all got to forge these relationships. Stop putting everything on marriage as though that's going to solve anything. No, no it's the quality of friendships that we have throughout the kingdom. Whether they're married or single, whether they're in our social class or not, whether they're our ethnicity or not, none of that's relevant. They share our DNA and we're supposed to be meeting our friendship needs. Coming together in Jesus' name. I'm going to close in prayer and as I do I'm going to as the prayer team to come up here. If you have any need whatsoever that you'd like to have prayer for, I encourage you to come up and get that need prayed for and everything you share will be held in confidence. And apologize to the kid's church when you go by that I was so long winded this morning, ok? I'm in trouble. Alright.

Father, God we just thank you for calling us your children and making us children of *Abba* father. And for pouring your DNA into us and making us brothers and sisters in Christ. And we pray Lord God that that would be the defining characteristic of our life. That that wouldn't be the defining characteristic in our lives and we pray Lord God for the single folks among us, we thank you for the gift that they are. We pray that you'd lead them and guide them as you lead and guide all of us. And we pray Lord God that the stigma that is often attached in the church and in the broader culture would just be entirely rebuked and we'd be freed from that. Pray Lord God that you'd be in our midst, forging relationships between married folks and single folks and building friendships that are deep, passionate, committed and non-erotic in the kingdom of God, and all God's people said, Amen!

Amen, God bless you guys, go out and build the kingdom.