

# Learners Exchange: Relationship Marriage and Intimacy

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Date: 26 April 1987

Preacher: Harry Robinson

[ 0 : 00 ] 8, 9, 10. Thank you very much. When I was preparing this this week, I had a most wonderful inspiration.

And that was that Brian Telfer is really the man to do that. So when I saw him here this morning, I thought to myself, what a wonderful providence that he should really do this and I shouldn't be up here.

So I'd like him to help. And then we have Dr. Albert Menzies, who probably knows more about this and his little finger than I know about it if I was to put everything end to end. And all of you, well of course the difficulty about this is that we all have profound experiences, don't we, that we have to work from.

And I'm not going to tell you about mine and you don't tell me about yours and we'll all have a good time and pretend things are better than they are. And we can maintain our respectability.

When you talk about the biblical background, people are forever telling me the Bible is all about something. It's all about stewardship or it's all about ecology or things like that.

[ 1 : 28 ] But when you start thinking about the question of... Arlene, you were a bit shy about giving the title for this.

What was the title it went under? You, I think, avoided announcing that. What, today? Yeah. Oh, it's marriage, relationship, dating. But it was the dating game.

Oh, that's right. Wasn't... Well, here I am talking about that. The thing that I would like you to do is get your Bible out.

You haven't got one, so that's all right. I'd like you to look at a story called, which is familiar to you all, which is in Luke chapter 15 and it's the story of the prodigal son.

And the story is a very familiar kind of story that all of you know about. And if you were to take these two characters, that is, the two brothers involved in the story, and the story begins in verse 11.

[ 2 : 46 ] And there was a man who had two sons and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the share of the property that falls to me.

And he divided his living between them. And not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country.

And there he squandered his property in loose living. And he was going to take these two characters, which, and this doesn't work, but that's all right.

And you were to have to describe the character of the two, what sort of things would you put down about the younger brother?

Undisciplined. Undisciplined. That's a good one. I like that. Can I borrow your pen?

[ 3 : 47 ] He's undisciplined. I don't know how. Anything else you can say about him? Irresponsible. Irresponsible.

Gosh, he's getting into trouble, worse and worse all the time. Next, what can you say about him?

Immature. Immature. What else can you say about him?

Irresponsible. Adventuresome. Anything else you can say about him? Sorry? Like us. Like us. Well, you're getting to my point.

I mean, that's... I want... I don't want anything subjective like that.

Just objective observation. Fast lane. Fast lane type, Izzy. Okay, anything else you can put down? Rebellious. Self-centered.

[ 4 : 51 ] Self-centered. Anything else? Okay, let's try the other brother for a while. Let's see what we can do with him. What do you get out of him? Self-righteous. Self-righteous. What else?

What? He's traditional. He's traditional, Izzy. Okay, heavy with tradition. Responsible. Responsible. Responsible. Responsible. Responsible. Rebellious.

Okay, let's try the other brother for a while. See what we can do with him. What do you get out of him? Self-righteous. Self-righteous. What else? What? Traditional. What? Traditional.

He's traditional, Izzy. Okay, heavy with tradition. Responsible. Responsible.

Responsible with a capital R. What else? What? The older brother.

[ 5 : 47 ] Bridget. Okay. Anything else? There's lots more I'm sure about him. Jealous. What else? Unforgiving. What? Unforgiving. Unforgiving.

What else? Unforgiving. What else? Unforgiving. Unforgiving. Unforgiving. What else? Unforgiving. What else? Critical.

Well, I'm running out of paper now, so we can only have one more characteristic. What else can you put down a book? Workaholic. Okay, now to the ladies in the group, which one of these guys would you like to marry?

Just tell me. And some of you maybe can tell me which kind you did marry.

[ 7 : 01 ] Well, we won't explore that any further then. Now, if you could look at this in terms of the prodigal daughter, you know, and everything would be in order.

And then you had the same general characteristics maybe exhibited in a somewhat different way. And if you started to arrange a marriage relationship between a combination of the two prodigal sons and the two prodigal daughters, what do you think would be the best arrangement?

Who would you marry to whom?

You'd put the older sister with the younger brother and the older brother with the younger sister.

You think that would work out, do you? How long do you think that would last?

[ 8 : 20 ] What? You don't think either of those would last. What would happen if you put the two, the older brother and the older sister together?

Would that work better? And if you put the two younger ones together, what would happen?

That would be the real question. I see. Okay, well, there you have a kind of basic situation.

The reason I bring this up is because I think what happens very often in marriages is that two people that look very like this come to me and say they want to get married.

And then having got married on the basis that all these things were in place, they discovered they were more like this. And so that then they got divorced because, you know, you can't put two people like this together and then discover that they're really like this.

[ 9 : 45 ] And what the reason I'm giving you all this particular line of thought was because there's a book by Stephen Neal called something about Beyond Personality.

And in that he takes Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and says that every personality is a kind of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

And in that one personality, you have the sort of chemical means that he developed for changing himself from Dr. Jekyll, who was a professional, socially very responsible, hardworking, respected in the community, an older gentleman.

Everything about him was respected. But that what he enjoyed doing was becoming Mr. Hyde in which he became the younger brother.

And if you were to take the older brother and the younger brother as two different aspects of the same personality, then you begin to put together probably a better mix as to who you are and who I am than you normally get.

[ 11 : 17 ] Because the difficulty is that undoubtedly when we come to church on Sunday, we come dressed this way. And then when we want to go out on Saturday night, we want to go out this way.

And we get mixed up as to which person we really are. And we think the church is trying to make us into this person. And the world is trying to make us into this person.

And we relate to people on the basis of what we think they can accept. When you're a minister in a dog collar, you're always this kind of person.

That's who you are, your catalog, that's your role, everything about you is that. And then when you behave like that, people get very upset with you because they think that's very unbecoming behavior.

But it's just a different part of the same person. And that's the sort of theory that Stephen Neal presents. But he goes on to say, which I think is very helpful, that this person doesn't need to be saved.

[ 12 : 33 ] There's nothing wrong with him. This person very much needs to be saved. This is the person, this is the side of your personality that God loves.

And this is the side of your personality that God wants to redeem. And this is the side of your personality that God can relate to. And this very respected, traditional, straight-laced, responsible, rigid, unforgiving, critical person over here is for the most part a waste of time.

He doesn't need God and God doesn't need him. And that's why you find this sort of split in two personalities. And you get, I think, a clear picture that this is the person that God loves.

And certainly, I relate to this very strongly because I think my own sort of conversion experience at 18 years of age was essentially the discovery that while I tried very hard to be respectable in all those things, that this is who I really was.

And then I discovered that that's who God knew I was, that God knew I was this long before anybody else admitted it. And I knew who I was, and God knew who this person was, and that he understood and accepted this person.

[ 14 : 12 ] And I'm sure that that's why in the New Testament it says that publicans and harlots come crowding into the kingdom while the respectable people stand back.

And I think that they don't know that they really need the gospel. And until you see this side of your personality, I think until you recognize it and acknowledge it, then I don't think you understand the person that God loves.

And that's why in the New Testament, I think, is that this is, as Mr. Hyde is portrayed in Robert Louis Stevenson's story, he is younger, he is more vigorous, everybody is somewhat ashamed of him and wants to keep him out of respectable company.

They want to be very humble... They want to learn to refuse, much to leave, they want to let him beaters than him, it wanted to the truth. They want to shouldn't be■■■, they want to get rid of him, they want to pretend he doesn't, he isn't there,. And that's the kind of person that we discover ourselves to be, that they just zero-maîneers, the fault line makes and that is precisely the reason that there is, kind of vigorous, adventurous, break-all-the-rules kind of a person.

break all the rules kind of a person. And that's very difficult. And when you, in the course of courtship, are looking for this kind of person, and you discover this kind of person, then the courtship usually ends fairly quickly.

[ 16 : 08 ] But the fault that you make in that is that this is part of who you are, too. And that you need to relate to understand both these sides of who you are in order to establish some kind of a relationship.

And that the nature, the parallel between the fact that this is the person that God loves over here. And this is the person that enters into the intimacy of marriage, the person that you discover once you're married to them. Their social presentation may be over here, but the person that you live with is more this person over here.

And if you didn't know about that person, hadn't come to terms with that person, didn't recognize that person, then I should think that marriage would be in a lot of trouble.

And if the expectation is built into a marriage that this is the person I married, and this is who I want him or her to continue to be, and so that the marriage forces this person into the, you know, to be locked up in the back cupboard, and not to be revealed, then your marriages are in, relationships generally are in trouble.

[ 17 : 44 ] Because this is so much the dynamic force of who a person is, and that dynamic force reality wants to express itself in the relationship, and if it can't, then the relationship, I think, is doomed from the beginning.

You can't, you can't establish a relationship unless, unless this whole person is known by both the person involved in the relationship.

Now, that's a kind of basic thesis that I would like to explore with you and defend with you, but I, I, uh, I'd like to, uh, to go on, uh, with one other thing before I do it so that I have lots of ammunition for when you start asking questions.

And that is just to review something of, uh, what happens to, uh, to, I think, to a Bible thinking Christian when they enter the wonderful world of dating and marriage and those kinds of things.

The Bible is, is a wonderful book, and almost all the characters in it are notoriously bad. And, uh, it, it portrays them very clearly, you know, so that you, you really understand what you're doing and what you're doing you, you really understand the, uh, you, you begin to understand that, that God

knows who you are.

[ 19 : 38 ] The Bible does not consistently set up models of perfect virtue and say, be like that. For the most part, it sets up moral and emotional disasters and says, don't be like that.

You know, there's gotta be an alternative. So that when you read the stories in Scripture, I find that you can relate much more closely to them because they portray, in many instances, the, the kind of weakness and the kind of failure and the kind of, of, uh, dynamic personal problems that, that we all run into in our own lives.

And, uh, so you have this sort of classical example of, uh, of, uh, David and Bathsheba and, and his lust for her and taking her and murdering her husband and then lying and having to be told.

And that becomes one of the primary models for human repentance. It's, it's played on all the way through Lent. The reading of Psalm 51, the recognition against thee only have I sinned and done that which is evil in thy sight.

The whole churning up and the reality of our failed relationship to God is wonderfully expressed in, in David in his, uh, arising out of his relationship to Bathsheba.

[ 21 : 24 ] Now, what I, what I think happens then is, is that for us in, in the business of finding a partner and living with a partner and maintaining a relationship to a partner that undoubtedly what scripture teaches us is the absolute unchallenged primacy of our relationship to Jesus Christ.

That is it. That is the dominant reality for us. And to that is the dominant reality for us.

that is the that that that could be complementary to that. It could in fact be, uh, be, uh, a model of that dominant relationship in the sense that, that, uh, marriage signifies unto us the mystical union between Christ and his church.

And so you, you, you find in the human relationship the model of your relationship to God. But the primary dimension in your life is that relationship to God as he has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ.

And that is the basis of your covenant with God, of our covenant with God. that's the kind of thing out of which we then build other relationships.

[ 23 : 03 ] And if that relationship is not primary and that relationship is not in place, then other relationships have to be built on other, and I would think, less stable foundations.

that is the primary relationship to Jesus Christ. Now the difficulty, I think, for, for all of us is that, uh, while we can acknowledge that in a, in a certain way, there's another way in which we find it very difficult to acknowledge.

In the same way, it's the same kind of parallel between, man shall not live by bread alone.

Man shall not live by bread alone. Well, yeah, but bread is terribly important. And so, uh, let's deal with it first.

And, you know, and you could almost say, man shall not live by sexual fulfillment alone. And, both those statements are, are true.

[ 24 : 16 ] That, that they are all secondary to a primary relationship, which is our relationship to God. And, uh, what happens, I think, in our searching of ourselves, and, and the, trying to understand who we are and how we work as persons, we're, you know, we're not satisfied with the relationship to ourselves.

Usually we're not. And we're looking for someone else. And that someone else that we're looking for, the one who can most deeply satisfy that longing is God Himself, as He has made Himself known to us in Jesus Christ.

But that longing also relates to, in a kind of, uh, uh, in a, in a kind of, they're, they're, closely linked to one another, that our search for God and our search for a life partner have, have a lot of parallels in common.

the, the longing for God and the longing being satisfied, uh, in, in certain ways in marriage, but never ultimately satisfied, apart from our, our relationship to God Himself, and the fulfillment of that relationship, when we ultimately come into His presence.

So that the two things are, are intimately and closely, locked together. But the primary relationship which belongs to us all, is available to us all, is a relationship to God in Christ.

[ 26 : 16 ] The possibility of marriage, the possibility of celibacy, the problems of health, all sorts of problems that might stand in the way of, of marriage ever taking place, do not in any way inhibit the primary relationship to God, as, as can be demonstrated.

And the reality of the fact is, that very often in marriage, we find a substitute, at least temporarily, for our relationship to God. So that, Jean Vanier in one of his books says, that it's a common thing in his experience, to find two young people, who are both seriously committed to Christian work and witness, once they are married, that commitment just falls away.

Because what they were looking for in their relationship to God, they have found at least temporarily satisfied in their relationship to one another, and their commitment to, to Christ and to the obedience of faith, drops away because of, because of that, of that happening.

And so, what, what I think takes place for us in, in, in marriage and in, in, in relationships, is that, is that, is that, primarily, we are seeking to be obedient to God.

In that obedience, we are seeking to find opportunity to serve Him. Serving Him demands imposing on ourselves a kind of self-discipline, in order to, in order to, find the time and the energy and the gifts and the commitment and the, and the, experience and knowledge that's necessary to serve God.

[ 28 : 12 ] All those are part of that. And in the dynamic of serving God, we come alongside that person who, with whom, we would then continue to, to serve God.

Not the person, with whom we can now abandon our service of God, because we found another deeply satisfying relationship, which can take the place of that relationship.

And that's, you know, that's what very often happens. And I think that's why Paul is very critical of marriage, in, in his epistle to the Corinthians, because he said, husbands seek to please their wives, wives seek to please their husbands, wives seek to be pleased, husbands seek to be pleased.

And, and they create that expectation for the other person. And the whole thrust of, uh, two people working together, in the service of Christ as Lord, is lost in their, in the kind of, infighting and, and, demands that they make on one another.

And, uh, so, that's the, I think the, the kind of biblical thrust, of the relationship between, uh, between men and women.

[ 29 : 42 ] And, uh, and it's, I think it's a corollary to that, that, that a marriage, which, uh, becomes the, the ultimate goal, of either or both the partners to it, is a disastrous marriage.

Because the ultimate goal, for both the individuals, and the couple together, is, to serve God, with, uh, with all the resources that they've been given. That's the ultimate goal. and the, uh, the ultimate goal.

And, marriage is, is, uh, a help and an encouragement, and, uh, partnership, in that service. And, a, uh, and the, uh, and a reflection, and partnership in that service, and a reflection in very real terms of, I mean, what you find in the relationship that is profoundly satisfying is regarded simply as a foretaste of a far deeper relationship to God himself, which God wants to draw you into.

And that ultimately that's where it heads. Well, I think I want to stop and let you ask questions, because I've got a lot more to say, and I found the subject so huge that it's hard to bring it down within any kind of limits, and it might be a help if some of you ask questions, and then I can perhaps share responsibility for giving answers as well.

Well, I would like to say, how do you get to know the other side of the individual, in the beginning of the situation, or before marriage? Not for the moment.

[ 31 : 56 ] Let me, let me, I'll, I'll, I'll think about that one, and, uh, come back to it. Uh, can anybody else give me an easier question to start with?

I think that's, uh, and I think a lot of times we're really careful of, um, showing our older brother's side, and I think it's just an area of being aware of the fact that we, um, we need to have our younger brother's side to show.

I, you know, I, I think probably that's right, Jill, that, that what happens is that in the course of a courtship, you are able to share with one another to the point where you do understand that, uh, that the older brother's side of us is, is not the whole story.

And I wonder also if one person is more interested in letting the younger brother's heart kill than the other person is, that after a while, and it can't be much about how much the other person is going to share, but if we share our younger brother's side, and, um, the other person, um, is uncomfortable with that, we'll find those, but if we like that, they'll do the same thing.

So it's kind of become, um, it kind of works itself out almost in that way, because I'm sure people who are afraid of doing that, um, would find it difficult to be close to somebody who wants to do it.

[ 33 : 41 ] So I wonder if that makes it sound like that. Yeah, and I think that, that that happens, and I think that, uh, I mean, time and time again, I see two beautifully matched people hating each other and getting a divorce, you know, and it, it shows how superficial my knowledge is of both of them, and how different their knowledge is of each other, you know, and that that is what they haven't been able to cope with.

Arlene? Um, one thing I've found is that, uh, a lot of times, same friends, um, as you've been close to them, in their family, it's been a video, I don't know, and that's not always possible, because it's a filmmaker around, but people tend to show the other brother's father, he's almost, without even thinking about it, when you're, with their siblings and sisters or parents, and, I think the more you can see them in your own family background situation, the more likely, you're capable of seeing, their whole personality, and not just the side, they show, I'm very different sometimes when I'm home, than when I'm out with my friends, and, yet when I'm at home, it's almost impossible for me to control, if I, the personality I have, that my friends often don't see, because there's so many children at home, and there's all the other things.

This reminds me of, one psychiatrist, who in his practice, with adult patients, made a routine practice, of, at some point in his assessment, making a home visit, to get to know this person, in the family setting, and he made a point, of having himself invited to dinner, because he feels that, what Irene is saying, is even more true, around the dinner table.

It's much harder, for the people to fake it, around the dinner table. Yeah. Karen.

I think that, if you're in a daily situation, you have investors, you have these opportunities, at dinner table, family, and you have these relationships.

[ 36 : 06 ] I think that, both sides, of, you have these children, and you have, other, other, shared relationships.

It's, it's just that, if you're in love with someone, you choose, you choose to get up, the pieces that you're doing, and you regret, because it's precious, the parts you don't like.

And then once you're married, um, welcome to, and you zero in on the things you don't have. I think, I think it's all there. I do, I don't think, I don't think you have a plan on it.

That's not, maybe there's some exceptions, I think most of the deal. There's our exceptions.

Mm-hmm. No, I wouldn't get over that.

You have to really, really, really look at yourself, and look at, look at what you want, and, um, what your expectations are, and, um, I think you can do it.

[ 37 : 18 ] You have to want to. I think that, uh, people are very, uh, complex as well. I think it's, you know, constant of time, really, I'm in a million different situations, in which you really get a chance to, to know the person.

I have a very good friend in, uh, New Mexico. I'd say he's my best friend, and that, uh, even after three years, that I didn't, I realized that I didn't know him as I thought I knew.

And I think that time is, is a very, very important, um, that just gives me a little song. I think, we've, the other thing, we haven't talked about the father here, and I think that, if, if the expectations we put out, are only show me, your older brother's side, don't disappoint me, you know, I'm so perfect, I want you to be perfect too, the father is the, is the forgiving character here, and he doesn't mind, he understands that the, the younger brother is not always going to be perfect, and so, when, when you, having relationship with each other, if we don't put out the expectation, that we expect perfection, people won't be afraid to show us their real nature, and if you're open, forgiving, uh, attitude, rather than a, than a don't disappoint me attitude, there's a lot more, and if you don't mind seeing the human side of people, then you may, you may see it.

I'd like to tie in with that, to come back to, what you were saying, Harry, because, in, in response to the question, how to get to, to know people, I think you've opened up a very helpful hint, that's a new idea to me, and that is, you have offered the guideline, of, of looking, for, the older, the older brother side, and the younger brother side, in ourselves, and in the other person, and I think if we have that question in our mind, you know, that framework in our mind, when we start a new relationship, with someone, then we have a much better chance, of accomplishing, the, goal of getting to know, what we have, what we have, that person in ourselves.

Yeah, and I, I, I don't know where this is, your experience, but it, it really, I mean, when, when you get that prayer, at the beginning of the communion service, Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be opened, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid, God, as my friend, Desmond Hunt says, I think I'll go home now, because we don't want to carry on with that relationship, you know, to

explore that any further, you know, that we run away from that, and yet, it's the fact that, it is the same God, to whom all things, you know, to whom, from whom nothing is hid, that has loved us, and given Christ, to die for us.

[ 40 : 44 ] That's, who the God is, whom we worship, and, who's, you know, in, in who, in the faith of whom, we live out our lives, and that, therefore, in the, in the, human relationship, that the same thing, seems to me, to be, necessary.

It's not, that, that, that, that, that, that the bad things, as you say, Karen, are, only come out after marriage, which, I'm sure they do, but, it's, it's the capacity, to, to exercise, love, towards that person, you know, it's, it's, bringing that person, that person growing, that person being redeemed, that person, finding, finding, I mean, the only way you can deal with that kind of thing, is to bring it into the light, and deal with it, and the marriage relationship, should be, the, the sort, sort of one of the primary ways, by which you do that, and, and that's, that's a lot to demand, of a relationship, relationship, but I think it's, I think it's built in as an essential part of any relationship, that, that, that we can say to one another, you know, you are the one to whom, my heart is open, and, and, and, from whom, no secrets are, are hidden, what happens, you know, if you ask the question, what happens, if, if God knows, everything about you, does he condemn you, or does he love you, and the fact of the gospel, is that he loves you, what happens, if another person, knows everything about you, do they condemn you, or do they love you, and that's, that's the great human dilemma, you know, the one that, that we have to, have to work with, and, and, you see, it seems to me that, the strangest kind of thing, that, that our membership in the church, often, seems that the first thing we ask is, don't tell me who you really are, except who I pretend to be, and I'll accept who you pretend to be, and we'll live happily ever after, and let's not go beyond that, and the enormous amount of energy, that goes into maintaining that, is, is,

I think, quite unbelievable, is, is, is, is, I think, quite unbelievable. Brian, I'm sure you can't sit still any longer.

I think that within a, in America, there is also, a, which is, almost like, we might think, in the context of what we've been saying this morning, a legalistic statement, that is, that we know that God expects, that this marriage, will continue forever, and that there is a commitment between us, and if I discover, for example, in Judy, she doesn't have much of the role, she's sort of, of actually, an older between the two, I guess, I don't see great sort of, demonstrations, of, the wild, racy person on the left, morally, Thank you.