

# Influencers for the Gospel

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 18 September 2016

Preacher: Chris Thornton

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Great. It's good to see you this morning. The sun is out. It's beautiful. And it's an amazing day to be worshipping God together collectively.

And last week we talked about older men and women. And this week, after this sermon, I may be looking for a job somewhere else in a distant country because this passage raises all kinds of sensitive issues.

And I'm aware as a guy that I'm speaking about a lot of things which I can't answer every question in 30 minutes here, which you may have.

And I'm not even going to try to answer every question that this passage raises. But my hope is that as we're kind of talking and we're going on this journey together as a family, that this is kind of the beginning of a conversation that we're talking about, what it means to be a family together, and in specifically the specific areas of our lives.

So I pray that this would ignite conversations in your CGs, in your marriages, in all the different things that you're going on in your life this week.

[ 1 : 1 6 ] And the problem with passages which deal with very much the nitty-gritty of life and like this is that we often get wrapped up in certain controversial words, but we miss actually what Paul is trying to say in the context of what he's writing.

And what he's trying to say is that the Christian community, and this is what we've been looking at over the last few weeks, the Christian community is meant to be a counter-cultural community, which is shaped by the gospel of Christ's love for us in a way which influences and attracts the culture to see how beautiful Jesus is.

And near where I lived before in the UK, there's a little village called Eam. You've probably not heard of it, but in British history, this place Eam is very, very significant.

Because in 1665, there was a huge plague that was spreading throughout the whole of the UK. And it was spread by fleas on rats.

And at one point, a parcel of cloth arrived in the village to a tailor who opened it, and unknown to him, this cloth was infected with the fleas of this plague, who carried this plague.

[ 2 : 3 5 ] A week later, the tailor was dead. 23 other villagers were dead. And at that point, all the other villagers were like, let's get out of here. Let's run, because this place is dangerous.

But the minister of the town, he persuaded them. He said, no, we have to quarantine ourselves. We have to isolate ourselves together from the rest of the country, so that this plague does not spread.

And do you know what they did? One year later, 260 out of 350 villagers had died, including the minister's wife, who had lovingly tended the sick.

But do you know why it's famous? It's because the actions of those villagers stopped the plague spreading in the whole of the rest of Britain. Countless thousands of lives were saved by the heroic actions of that group.

Now, there's something which I think is inspiring, is beautiful, about people willing to sacrifice themselves for the sake of others, even for them, for complete strangers.

[ 3 : 51 ] And the call for Christians is that our lives are to visibly display and represent the gospel of a God who does exactly the same, who lays down his life for us, who give himself for us on a cross.

Jesus, when you and I were at our worst, he came and died for us. That's the gospel. We know that. We say that week in, week out. And Jesus, when he came, he did not say kind of grudgingly, well, after all I've done for you, you know, created the world, given you life, after all these things, and now all I get is rejection on the cross.

I deserve a little bit of respect around here from you guys, so please give me some respect. Jesus doesn't say that. He keeps pouring his love and his grace out for people who don't deserve it.

It's the picture of the cross that we put up here. It's what shapes the whole of Christianity. And Jesus says, the reason I call you to be my people is because I'm going to shape you and your lives, individually and as a community, to look increasingly more like that.

But, you know, the culture sends us other messages about what love really means, because that sounds very painful. Piglet, when talking to Winnie the Pooh, asks, how do you spell love?

[ 5 : 31 ] And Winnie the Pooh says, you don't spell love, you feel it. And we kind of, we have these messages coming to us all the time. We think that love should kind of come naturally.

It's kind of this feeling which comes up. It's not gritty, hard, painful work. And as Justin Bieber says, all you've got to do is listen to your deepest feelings.

They don't ever lie. And that's what everyone tells us what love is. That's what the people in Crete, who Paul is writing to Titus, thought.

They thought love was all about self-performing. It's whether you get sex, money, pleasure. Love was all about satisfying my desire, my feelings, making me feel good to get what I want.

And I'll give you back, love, as long as you give to me. But if in any way I don't get back from you, then I'm going to withdraw from you. And that's the way the Cretan culture worked.

[ 6 : 26 ] It was fundamentally all about getting what I want. And people were throwing off the restrictions of saying, men and women were saying, hey, I want to be able to get sexually fulfilled so I can do it any way I want.

I can get what I want. And Jesus comes, and Paul comes with this counter-cultural message which says, if you want to gain your life, gain fulfillment, you've got to lose your life.

C.S. Lewis wrote, the more we get what we now call ourselves out of the way and let God take over, the more truly ourselves we become.

And we become these beautiful, attractive, inspiring people who attract people not to ourselves, but to a God who is amazing, a sacrifice for us. And so we're going to look at this idea of love and the community because that's what Paul is really talking about.

And I want to talk about a few things. I want to say that love is hard. Love, sacrificially love, is hard. I then want to talk about how love works out in relationships with the young women and the young men.

[ 7 : 39 ] And then I want to talk about the power to love. So here's, love is hard. You know, if I'm honest, I just don't think I'm actually very good at this.

I can do a nice talk, but I'm not actually in practice very good at sacrificial love. Because, here's a stupid example. A while ago, a friend of mine, I had to give something back to a friend of mine.

And I needed a bag to put it in. Okay? And I'm going through our selection of bags. And there's one cloth bag that I really like because it's just the right size for a lot of things that I like to carry.

And I'm going through, and I see this bag, and then I see another bag which is kind of tattered and old and this. And I think, okay, which bag shall I give him? And I'm going, nice bag, ugly bag.

Nice bag, ugly bag. And then I think, Chris, you work in a church. So I gave him the ugly bag. And it's just a bag.

[ 8 : 34 ] It's not a Rolex. It's a bag. But even in the most mundane things in life, which is so stupid, I struggle to even think about what it means to sacrifice.

And Paul knows that as well because what he says is, he says in verse 3, he says, older women are to teach what is good, and verse 4, and to train the young women to love their husbands and children.

Did you get that? He said, you have to train the younger women to love their husbands and children. What that means is, love doesn't come naturally.

You have to be trained how to love. Right? And remember, most of the young women here were probably 15 to 20, and most of them were, sorry, over 15 to 20, were probably married in the culture.

And so he's saying, love is the hardest thing in the world to do. It's the hardest thing in the world to do. And you need people to help you how to love because it doesn't come naturally.

[ 9 : 41 ] You know, especially if you are married, when your husband leaves the toilet seat up for the 15th time and forgets to tell you that he booked an evening out with his friends on your wedding anniversary, love doesn't come naturally at those points.

Plenty of other things come naturally at those points. You see, professional athletes hire coaches to train them to become better sportsmen and women. Students have teachers to help them to grow academically.

But why do we think with something that is infinitely more difficult than either sport or academics that we can kind of, and if you're single, any relationship of loving people, why do we think we can do it simply by ourselves without others to help us along the way?

Because do you know the phrase, it says, it takes a village to raise a child, right? Well, it actually takes a church to help us love people. Because you see, before in the past, you used to have a village of everyone would be around to help support you, but now with globalization and individualism, we're so private that we try and bear the weight of the responsibilities God has given us by ourselves.

And statistics show us we don't do a very good job at it. We're here, and it's not just the young men, it's the young, it's the, sorry, the young women, it's the men too, because Titus is there to be a model to them of what it looks like to love people.

[ 11 : 09 ] There's no room for privatized Christian faith in the Bible. You know, it's just me and Jesus by ourselves. There's no room for that. Because he says, each one of us has a responsibility as part of the family to help each other to love in whatever situation God has placed you in.

Because it's hard. You see, a sermon is not enough to shape you. If you're single, if you're married, you need a community of older and younger people around you who are walking alongside each other.

And if you've been a Christian for longer than a couple of years, the challenge of the gospel would be, who are you walking alongside? Who are you walking alongside to help them to love whoever it is who's around them?

That's the call of the gospel. Because it's too hard to do it by ourselves. Love's hard. Secondly, how sacrificial love works out in relationships.

The older women are to train the younger women to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, submissive to their own husband so that in everything the word of God is not reviled.

[ 12 : 27 ] God. So there's meant to be something which demonstrates the beauty of the gospel to other people. But did you notice some of the words that you said? And some of you may be thinking, well, Paul, I can't believe you said the S word.

And why is he only talking to young women here about marriage? Where are the husbands? Did you? And I don't know if you notice there's five things for the younger women in verse four, verse five, sorry, but there's only one thing for the younger men in verse six.

It seems a little bit unfair in here. But in the context, what Paul is focusing on, he's focusing on the young women because he's most concerned about the pressure that's being put on them to conform to the rest of Cretan cultural standards.

This is not his final word on marriage. We know that because you look in Ephesians and Colossians, other letters that he writes, he gives a much fuller picture of what marriage is like. And we know from these passages, this is what Paul is saying.

Paul says, the gospel says, marriage is a dance of love. Okay? It's a dance of love. It's a living picture of how Christ and the church are meant to relate to each other.

[ 13 : 40 ] It's meant to be beautiful. And at the heart of marriage is not self-centeredness. It's not self-fulfillment. It's not getting what I want, but it's loving and sacrificing for what the other will help the other to flourish.

So Paul says in Ephesians five, he says, the husbands are the head of the wife, but then he says this, husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, to present her to himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

Now, I don't even get what he's saying. He's saying, just as Jesus used his headship of the church to lay down his life to serve her, to make her radiant, flourishing.

So God has given husbands the responsibility before him to lead our wives to be radiant and flourishing.

That means with all their gifts, with all their talents, we are to lay down what we want so that they emotionally, physically, spiritually can flourish.

[ 14 : 54 ] Now, there are many things we could talk about and I've only got a brief time, but here's just a couple of things because this actually really challenges me.

Here's a question. Is it costing, if you're a husband, is it costing you daily, is it costing you daily to love your wife? Is there a cost to it?

You see, not just we're dutifully doing it because we don't want to get in trouble, but is there a joyful cost, which means maybe that I'm willing to lose nine arguments out of ten for her sake.

Is it that I'll study my wife so that I see how she experiences love, not how I think she should experience love, so I don't just assume that because I don't mind a lack of communication that she doesn't mind either.

and we need to be asking our wives, how can I love you better? It means if she's not giving you as much sex as you want right now, you're not going to withhold your emotional affection and your time as payback.

[ 16 : 07 ] No, because you are called to lay down your life for your wife. It's hard. It's costly. Jesus didn't die for us when we were most attractive, but you know, we can spend a fortune as guys on our kids' education, but you know, all the research showed us that by far the greatest educational experience your children will ever see is not taught in school, is not taught in kids' ministry, it's learned from seeing how you love your wife.

Do you know that? And our relationship with God, we need to invest in our relationship with God so that we can invest in our relationship with our wives. So how are we doing with that?

If you're a husband here, how are you doing with that? For the young women, it says, the way women are to play out this dance, this gospel dance, is in submission.

Now what does that mean? Here's what it doesn't mean, okay? Because we have so many loaded connotations of what this means. It doesn't mean women have to be a doormat and you can't confront your husband.

It doesn't mean you can't initiate anything and the man makes all the decisions. It doesn't mean you have to put up with an abusive husband. If you have an abusive husband, you need to get out of there and seek help.

[ 17 : 34 ] It doesn't mean that women are inferior to the husband. He's not saying that there are some jobs in the home that only women do. The Bible says nothing about who cooks, who cleans, who changes the kid's nappy or diaper.

There is nothing in the Bible about that. That's cultural context. That's not what the Bible is talking about. What he does mean is this. Marriage is so often a power play between who can get control and nobody is willing to back down at any stage.

And the gospel of self-sacrificing love calls first of all everyone to submit to God but then it calls wives to have a heart attitude that seeks to help your husband in his role of leading the family to flourish in Christ rather than undermining his role.

Okay? So we don't, it seeks to help him to be the person that he should be in Christ not by constantly criticizing, not by trying to force your way but by creating an environment where he can flourish and love and serve the family as he's supposed to.

Sometimes that means you're going to have to confront him. Sometimes that means you're going to have to be patient with him, with his faults, not nag him because you know what happens? Nagging never helps a husband to love, it causes a husband to withdraw.

[ 19 : 05 ] You see, it's not expecting our husbands to be kind of a pre-packaged, already sculpted sculpture, perfect in every way to fulfill my wishes, but rather seeing him as a block of marble who needs sculpting and shaping to be the man God has called him to be.

You see, it's all about the other person. The husband is to be about the wife. The wife is to be about the husband. Kathy Keller, who was the wife of Pastor Tim Keller, said this.

He said, I discovered that my submission in marriage was a gift I offered, not a duty coerced. If a husband tells you to submit, he's missed the whole point of the picture.

His love should woo you to submit. He does not call you to submit. And she tells a story of Tim Keller who, when they were going to plant a church in New York, Tim Keller wanted to go.

She disagreed. And then finally, Tim says, okay, if you don't want to go, we won't go. And Kathy Keller at that point said, no. You're letting me make the decision here.

[ 20 : 12 ] You have to make it. Submission means you have to make the best decision, the decision in the best interest of the family, and you have to bear the responsibility before God.

Don't put that one on me. Because she knows her husband, and she knows what needs to help sculpt him is that he's passive in that time, and he's avoiding responsibility.

Now, every situation will look different. Every marriage, it will look different. And the thing is, if you struggle with that idea, and a lot of people do, I ask you just to look at the Christian marriages around you who are living this out, and you'll see a picture which is not an oppressive picture, but it's an attractive picture, because that's what the gospel is about.

Your marriages should show people how attractive God is in our lives. And I know for some of us that is a very difficult, a marriage is often not ideal.

If you have a stubborn, selfish husband, Keller says, you can respond in one or two ways. You can confront him, but if he still doesn't change, you can say, okay, I'm going to be selfish back.

[ 21 : 31 ] Or you can say, even if he isn't the husband he should be, I'm going to be the wife that I should be. And that's the same the other way around. If the same for men as well, that if your wife is, you're struggling in your marriage with your wife, well, as a husband, you be the husband you are called to be.

Because it's about self-sacrificing love which reflects the gospel. And I know that there are some very difficult situations in the church and I can't speak into all of them, but I don't want to minimize the difficulty it is in relationships.

And if you're struggling, the Bible says don't do it alone. Come and talk to your CG leader, open up to other women, other men, because there is grace that is sufficient for you.

We walk alongside each other. That's the beauty of the marriage picture. But he also says to women, young women, they'll be working at home.

And again, he's not saying women can't work outside the home. We know that's not true because in Proverbs 31, he says, the picture of an ideal woman is someone who's running her own business.

[ 22 : 50 ] And secondly, we know that only rich women in Paul's time could afford not to work. Everyone else had to work. So actually, this church would have not been a church filled with rich people, so they would have been working.

What is he saying? He's saying, if God has given you a husband and children, or if you are single, God has given you other responsibilities in your life, whether it's towards your family, your parents, or other things, don't neglect them.

Don't neglect them because you feel that pursuing your career, pursuing your other interests, is more fulfilling. Don't neglect what God has called you to do.

And that may mean that some of us have to face real sacrifices for the sake of our family. And many of us, I know, in the congregation have done that. But the primary goal for both women and for men is not about fulfilling ourselves.

So as a guy, we're not just about pursuing our career to the neglect of our families. Sometimes you may have to lay aside a promotion for the sake of spending time with your family.

[ 24 : 03 ] But here, the call is very much, don't find your identity in what you do. Find your identity in who you are in Christ.

Because the thing is this, our culture tells us, it tells women, young women, older women, it tells you, your identity and fulfillment is found in being a wife and a mother.

Okay? You look at all the blogs and everything, your identity is found in being a wife and a mother. So if you are not a wife and a mother, and you are single, and you're over 30, you're often told that you're somehow less.

That's what people say in this culture. That somehow you're missing something. But it also tells us, that's on the one hand, so if you're single and you're a working woman and you're doing amazingly in career, sometimes so many women feel like I'm still missing out because I don't have the other thing.

I don't have the family, the husband and the kids. But on the other hand, it also tells us our society that your identity and fulfillment is found in career success. So if you don't have the successful career, so if you've actually given that up and you're a homemaker and you're spending time with your family, it tells you that you're missing out.

[ 25 : 19 ] You're somehow less. And the gospel says both of those are wrong. Your identity and fulfillment is neither found in career success nor is it found in motherhood or being a wife.

Your identity is found in the fact that you're a child of God. You are loved by God who has called you to himself. You're his child.

And whatever he has called you into, whatever he has given you, be faithful with what he is and find your pleasure in serving him. That doesn't mean you can't have kids and work.

No, you can. But just be faithful with what he's given you. Be faithful. faithful because, and this is for guys as well, if we try and find our self-fulfillment in anything other than serving God and what he's given us, do you know what happens?

What happens is you pursue your own self-fulfillment, other people who get in the way of that will just become objects to get out. Your kids can become annoyances because they're stopping you getting on and doing what you want.

[ 26 : 30 ] Your friends, if they don't help you become more ambitious, you will remove them, you'll get rid of them because you just have to get fulfillment through your career, through these other things. And the gospel says if you neglect other things because you just want to get fulfilled by yourself, you're going to end up empty and lacking those things that you chase most.

But be faithful. Guys, women, whatever God has called you to at this season of life, be faithful and know his pleasure on your life.

Because joy comes from serving him. Whatever he has called you to, joy comes from serving and knowing him. That's tough for us because we actually live in a culture which tells us totally different things.

But it's beautiful. people. And he goes on to talk about young men now. And young men, and he says one thing to the young men.

One thing. Okay? He says, be self- controlled. Why does he only say one thing to the young men?

[ 27 : 52 ] Because basically that summarizes pretty much every challenge that a young man faces. If he gets this one right, you know, everything else falls into place. And actually it's the same call he gives to everybody actually, but the young men particularly.

He's saying be self-controlled. He's not saying have a British kind of stiff upper lip. He's not saying repress your feelings. He's saying don't let your desires rule over you. It's not instant gratification above long-term character.

You see, what destroys men and consequently damages the people around them, what locks us up in shame, so many of us, and I know this for myself, what stops us doing mighty things for God is a lack of self-control.

You see, I tend to think that we're actually a little bit like the cookie monster. If you've seen the cookie monster out of Sesame Street, he goes, me want cookie, me eat cookie now.

Right? And so, sex, arguments, shopping, beer, food, you name it, me want, me have, now.

[ 29 : 03 ] And we click on porn sites at will. We say whatever we want, whatever we feel at the moment, we let anger come out of our mouths rather than holding our tongues. We neglect to communicate with those we love because we just have to finish this last email.

And we fail to display the sacrificial love of Christ because we just want to get what we want now. But that's not how Christ does it.

You see, there's this amazing experiment. I don't know if you've seen it. Have you heard of the marshmallow test? About 50 years ago in Stanford University, researchers did this test where basically they got kids in a room and they said, they gave them a marshmallow and they said, you can either eat this marshmallow now or you can wait 15 minutes and then we'll give you two.

Okay? And you can watch some of the YouTube videos. It's fascinating. Because what you get is you get some kids who are just like, oh. And then like 15 minutes later they're kind of regretting it.

You get then other kids who are kind of, who are looking at it. And some of them are like, ah, like this. And some of them, they're kind of like banging on the table.

[ 30 : 21 ] And some of them are kind of walking around trying to distract themselves. And the best one is there's this kid who's like, who starts kind of licking the, not just the marshmallow, but the table next to it.

And they do anything to try and control themselves. Because, and what they discovered was they kind of looked later on in life at the kids who actually had self-control and were able to just hold themselves for 15 minutes.

And they found that those kids were actually the most successful people in all of the rest of their lives. Whether in family, in job, in all the other things. The ones who couldn't control themselves were the ones who later on in their lives, actually made a mess of their lives.

Fascinating. And some of us know that we right now, like the kids who have to eat the marshmallow straight away, we have to get what we want straight away.

And you know what it does? It often leads you, you see the consequences of that lived out in your life. John Piper, pastor, he says, there are many young men who are who are not sharing their faith with other people because they have a pornography problem that grips them.

[ 31 : 39 ] And there's so much shame that comes along with that, you feel like, how can I ever share with anybody else? And he says, what we need to do is to learn gutsy guilt.

We need to learn that when we fail in self-control, we don't say that's me and then we just keep kind of eating the marshmallow. We keep doing whatever we've been doing as a habit and just in this cycle of destructiveness.

He says, Christ died to bring us more satisfaction than what this is offering me right now. I don't know what your marshmallow is right now, but Christ died to give you more satisfaction than that.

It's not just so that I should keep gratifying myself. It's not that I should not do this because it's wrong. It's I need not do this because in Christ there is more satisfaction, more long-term gain, more joy, more freedom, and I can be the man God has called me to be.

You see, whether it's in our relationships, and by the way, this doesn't just refer to men as well. It refers to all of us, right? Hands up, you know, and we all struggle with that.

[ 32 : 55 ] And the gospel says if you want to begin to look more like this, it's going to impact those relationships. It's going to impact the way you view your desires because God wants to do something which is going to change us to look beautiful in a world which is all about just getting what I want when I want it.



And finally, the final thing is how do we then have the power to love? How do we love the power to love? You see, you can't just be, you can't just try harder to love people.

Like, try loving a selfish spouse day in, day out, and man, after a while, you're going to grow hard. Try being self-controlled day in, day out, and you may manage in one area, but in other areas, you're going to drop the ball.

Paul says to Titus, show yourself in all respects, in all respects, to be a model of good works. He says, show yourself. That means other people need to see something which helps them to see that there's a different way to live.

You know when Jesus called his disciples, do you know what he said? He said, come follow me, right? Be with me. Follow me. Look at me. See what I do.

[ 34 : 15 ] Hear what I teach. Look at me, right? That's what Jesus does. And then afterwards, he sends out his disciples and says, now, the world is going to look at you, right?

If we're going to be a Christian community of love, you cannot be the husband you're called to be by yourself. You cannot be the wife you're called to be by yourself.

You cannot be the single you are called to be by yourself. You cannot be because it's too hard by ourselves. The only way that you can be who God is calling you to be, begin to be sculpted in who he wants you to be, is when you see that there is a love that is greater than the love that you've ever had.

When you see the love and the forgiveness of a God for you when you were at your worst and most unlovely, and he died for you at that point, whether you struggle with self-control, whether you're struggling in marriage, you see, pornography can't satisfy you.

Your spouse can't fulfill that craving for love. Everyone is always going to disappoint you at some point, but only Christ loves perfectly.

[ 35 : 47 ] And you need to watch him. You need to see him. You need to look at him. And as you look at what he does, day in, day out, you think about the cross. As you see that, what you see happens is this.

You begin to see how then you treat your spouse, you treat your friends, you treat the people around you, and you see the gap. You see there's this gap. And it causes you to come into confession and repentance, and you see, wow, if he could love me that much, wow, I don't love the people around me that much.

But then you see that when he shows you your worst, you see, he loves you to the stars. And we say this every week because it's what we need to hear every week.

And here's the thing. When you begin to see him, truly see him and his love for you right now, whatever you're going through, then that propels you to go out and to love the people around you you find most difficult to love.

And you can then call other people to look at you and say, I'm not perfect, but here is what God is doing in me.

[ 37 : 11 ] Don Carson, who's a Christian theologian, tells a story of when he's leading a Bible study, and he didn't know how to answer some questions, and he had a skeptical friend with him.

So he takes his skeptical friend with him to see his friend Dave. And his skeptical friend says to him, I go to church, but I don't believe Jesus is God. I don't believe he really rose from the dead.

Give me a break. But my home is a good home. My parents love me. We worship God. We do good in the community. What do you think you have that I don't have? And Dave looks at him for two minutes and says, watch me.

The guy says, what? He says, watch me. Watch me, Dave says. I've got an extra bed. Move in with me. Be my guest. I don't advise this necessarily, but I'll pay for the food.

You go to your classes. Do whatever you have to do, but watch me. You watch me when I get up, when I interact with people, what I say, what moves me, what I live for, what I want in life. You watch me for the rest of the semester, and then you tell me at the end of it whether or not there's a difference.

[ 38 : 19 ] The friend didn't take him up on the offer, but he did watch him. And you know that friend has now become a medical missionary in Africa because God touched his heart through seeing the example.

Not a perfect example. He's a messed up guy. And that's the call if you're an older person or if you're a younger person. The call is, watch me.

You and I need to be involved in relationships with each other where we can say to each other, watch me. And that's scary.

Because when I think about that, I suddenly think of all the things that I don't want you to see in my marriage, in my self-control, in all the other areas. And that's precisely the point.

Because if you want to grow, if you want to grow, God wants to show you where you need to grow. And God wants us to see that he is not looking.

[ 39 : 23 ] See, if you think that by being a perfect Christian, here's the thing. We live looking as if we're good on the outside.

We come to church. We want everyone to see that our marriages are fine, that our single relationships are fine, that we're all doing fine. And we don't want to invite people to see what we're really like. Because when people see what we're really like, what they see is actually we're a bit of a mess.

All of us, right? And so we keep up these pretenses. But then what does that do, say to everybody else? Because everybody is watching you.

It doesn't matter whether you want them to watch you or not. They are. And if all they see is somebody who's nice and perfect and doesn't let you in to see their lives, then all they're going to go away thinking is Christianity is just for people who are already perfect.

And so if you're not a Christian and you're struggling, you're going to say, well, I can't go with them because how can I? I'm not as good as them. But the call for us as a church is, listen, if you've been a Christian for a while, invite, if you're married, invite a single out for lunch.

[ 40 : 38 ] Right? Invite a single. How do you think singles are going to learn about marriage? How do you think they're not going to think Winnie the Pooh is correct about love? By seeing the reality of just the fact that, you know, we're broken.

But we don't point them to ourselves. We say, hey, I'm broken, but you know, there's a Savior who is great. And you know, we're working through a whole lot of stuff. Just come and be involved in our lives. If you're in your early 20s or your 30s, be involved with other people who are younger than you or who are younger spiritually than you.

Get involved in their lives. Just let them hang out with you. Let them see your life. And just involve them. We're so scared to be the people God has called us to be because we think that we have to live up to the standard but we fail to see that we are loved by a God who loves us to the skies.

We don't have to pretend. We can help each other to love because some of us are more experienced and we can walk along this journey together. Let's pray.

Father, I pray that you'd help us to see that we don't have to be perfect in our lives but you call us to watch you first and then to be people who others can watch and see how confession and repentance works and to see how our lives are called to be like you.

[ 42 : 20 ] Please help us to be those people. In your name. Amen.