

Koinonia – Choosing God’s Best – November 18, 2006
Presentation by: Rob Leatherwood

Slide 1 – Choosing God’s Best
The Risen Christ was painted by Fran Tyner Maye

Thank everyone for attending Koinonia.

I would also like to thank Mike Marburger for the honor of doing the presentation this evening and I pray it will be a blessing to everyone here.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we come to you in the name of Jesus as your humble servants and we pray in agreement according to Matthew 18:19. Father we ask for the Holy Spirit to be present with us right now and that our hearts, minds and spirits would be open to receive and apply your Word and the principles of Christianity in all of our relationships and especially in the area of relationships with the opposite sex. We thank you in advance Father for answering our prayer and we give you all of the honor, glory and praise. In Jesus name. Amen.

Questions:

1. How many of you have children?
2. How many of you have been married and divorced?

Before we do the PowerPoints, I would first like to share my testimony about my experiences with dating and marriage.

When I was 28, I reconnected with my high-school sweetheart after we both graduated from college. We got married and had my oldest daughter, Rene. Several years later we had Robyn, my youngest daughter.

Rene is 17 and Robyn is now 12, My first divorce occurred when Rene was 5 and Robyn was just 1 month old. It was a very painful, agonizing process and it damaged most if not all of the relationships in my life. After that I went through a few more dating relationships but each of those ended in failure including more pain and agony.

One of those relationships was with a woman that I met on the Internet. We exchanged emails for a couple of months and decided to meet in person by going on a dinner date. This woman was attractive, intelligent, vivacious and had a good job as a middle school teacher. We dated, became closer and were engaged to be married without a set date for a wedding. After we had been together for almost 2 years, I discovered she had been sleeping with her 3rd ex-husband. Despite my having evidence of her cheating, she completely denied it and never did admit what she had been doing. I left her of course and I was absolutely devastated.

After that disaster I was alone and did not want anything to do with women at all. Then one Wednesday evening in the fall of 2001, when I was crying and still grieving my loss, God spoke to me in my heart and said "Go To Lakewood". I was like what? I felt it again: "Go To Lakewood". Being too worn out to argue, I washed my face, brushed my teeth, combed my hair, got in my truck and with only a memory of the little map on the TV, I set out to find Lakewood.

I got off of 610 one exit too soon, went North, went east and a little more North. Nothing. I turned around and started going South. In the distance I could see a glowing light in the sky. It was the parking lot lights at the old campus. I parked, said a prayer and went into the main sanctuary. I was warmly greeted, welcomed, given a program, and ushered to a seat. Immediately I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit and by the end of the night, I knew I had finally found a church I could call home.

While my wonderful parents took us to church from a young age and I was baptized at 14, I never felt at home in any church until that first night at Lakewood. About two weeks later, with my heart beating really fast during the alter call, I stood up, went forward said the salvation prayer and was born again. It was November 17th, 2001 and it was one of the best days of my life. I came to Koinonia that same night for the first time and just knew that God had a better plan for me than what I had experienced prior to that.

A month later, I brought both of my daughters with me and without any prompting at all they both went forward for the alter call and accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Words can not described how happy I felt knowing that I would see both of my daughters in heaven.

The next week I felt the Holy Spirit telling me to witness to a woman I had known in business for about 10 years. I argued with God for a week or so but then finally gave in and mustered up the courage to call her and go to her house and tell her about Jesus. She was receptive at first but then clammed up and asked me to leave. Three days later she called me and said that I was right about her needing Jesus and said she wanted to go to Lakewood with me. She accepted Jesus the first night.

We started dating and coming to church together. We got engaged and after a very short time were married at Lakewood on Valentine's Day 2002. Unfortunately, right after we got married, she no longer wanted to go to church because of my involvement with my friends at Koinonia. Being a baby Christian and not knowing any better I decided to respect my bride's desires and I quit coming too. Several months later I asked her to come with me to Lakewood but this time she said "No. I feel too embarrassed to go since we have not been in so long." I tried to get her to go several more times but to no avail. Mistakenly, I did not come to church without her.

Things in my second marriage starting falling apart in June of 2005. I tried to encourage my wife to come with me to church, suggested we go to counseling, etc., but none of it worked. My second wife filed for divorce on November 16, I was served on December the 5th. Merry Christmas.

I immediately started coming to church again and decided to aggressively work on my online ministry, SavedByHisBlood.com. I re-dedicated my life to Jesus on January 4th of this year. Despite my begging my wife to drop the lawsuit and reconcile our differences, she moved out on January 14th just one month short of what would have been our 4th anniversary.

Since then I have been coming to Lakewood every Wednesday for Bible Study, every Saturday for church and Koinonia. I have also attended many of the wonderful classes here at Lakewood including completing the Divorce Recovery Class and attending the Men's Victory Encounter.

As you can tell from my testimony, dating has not worked for me. Not even once. Based on my life experience, I am convinced without a doubt that dating is a recipe for divorce and that courting is the only way to go, not only from a practical perspective but also more importantly because it is the Word of God and His method for finding and choosing His best mate for us.

One thing to remember is that no matter what you decide to do, God always gets His way. It is my opinion that as maturing Christians in mid-life, we should do everything we can to work with God and base our decisions on His perfect Word.

Thank you for hearing my testimony.

Now I would like to present some valuable information about Current Divorce Rates, The Shortcomings of Dating and The Benefits of Courtship and Relating Without Dating. I will also give you some suggested next action steps that may help you become a better person as well as becoming a better choice for the God's Best in your life.

This information is valuable because your choices in marriage will definitely affect all the relationships in your life including your parents, your children, brothers, sisters, in-laws, friends, neighbors and co-workers. This includes the relationships you have now plus the ones you may or may not have in the future as a result of your choices.

Lets move on to the slides.

Slide 2 – I Thessalonians 4:3-7 (Amplified)

“For this is the will of God, that you should be consecrated (separated and set apart for pure and holy living): that you should abstain and shrink from all sexual vice.”

In the past I often wondered why God would give us the wonderful gift of sex and then tell us to abstain from it except inside of marriage.

God is awesome and God is wise. As you'll see there are some very good reasons why we should only have sex within the sanctity, safety and security of the covenant relationship of marriage.

Let's take a look:

Slide 3 – Current Divorce Rates

These statistics prove that something major is wrong. Could it be that dating, having sex outside of marriage and living together is the root of the problem? I think that's possible.

Statistically I personally only have a 13% chance of having a successful marriage. That serves as a barometer on how much work I have to do.

Slide 4 – Shortcomings Of The Dating Process

People are forced into playing a masquerading game

Masquerading is a game where people enhance and reveal their best attributes while covering up their flaws, failures, problems, baggage and other less desirable qualities. While all humans tend to do this anyway, the courtship process makes this masking nearly impossible. In dating it is encouraged, quite easy and even expected.

People often have sex before they even become friends

Sex before marriage builds a hidden spirit of distrust into a relationship. If they will have sex with me before marriage, its possible that they will have sex with someone else too without being married. Is that two people feeling counterfeit oneness or what? This sense of mistrust is greatly magnified when either of the people were married to a cheater.

Engagements can be trial marriages that last for years

Often, after the dating auditions are passed, engagement occurs without a set wedding date. These trial marriages do not have God's blessings or protection. The result can be a lengthy engagement and a very painful break-up instead of a covenant relationship that lasts a lifetime.

Slide 5 – Benefits of Courtship & Relating Without Dating

Its all about becoming friends and building trust over time

A solid friendship built over a long period of time is the foundation of a strong marriage. Since the two people are not having sex, they know they can trust each other to not have sex with someone else outside of marriage.

Time is spent in Christian group activities with other friends

By being mostly in group settings such as church, personal growth classes and other group activities the two people are building their own friendship and friendships with

other Christians while not placing themselves in tempting situations where sex is likely or in some cases almost unavoidable. They are also experiencing each other in a setting that is very close to what they will experience being married. Doing the dating thing and spending lots of time alone is definitely not like what healthy married life will be like.

The two people don't confuse themselves or each other

In courtship, the two people do not confuse themselves or each other about their relationship because they are building a strong friendship. As we know from the Bible, confusion does not come from God. Confusion comes from the enemy, the great deceiver, Satan.

The two people define good boundaries and respect them

When two people are courting, they define and establish good boundaries as to what behavior is appropriate and what is not. A good rule of thumb in the courtship process is that anything you would do with a brother or sister is ok. Anything else is not ok until Phase Five on the chart - Courtship and Accountability. At this point the two people have already laid the foundation have established that each other is in fact God's Best. They are just one step away from a brief engagement that lasts just long enough to make plans, get everyone in town and take their vows. After that, the real test begins.

Courtship is God's plan for finding and keeping a mate

The benefit of the last point is obvious. James 4:8 tells us that as we draw closer to God, He will draw closer to us. Making the choice to court instead of date is an act of obedience to God. Choosing God's Best means you have to ignore self and rely on God. Let's face it. God does everything MUCH better than we ever will.

Slide 6 – Next Action Steps

Learn everything you can about the courting process

Do not expect to learn about the courting process or to break the dating thought mode and habits overnight. It took years to learn the dating game and it's perhaps been a habit for decades. Don't be surprised if you spend 6 months or more on it before you see significant progress.

Complete a Bible-based Divorce Recovery Class

If you have been through a divorce yourself or if your parents are divorced, completing a Divorce Recovery Class is essential. Even if you have never been married, going to Divorce Recovery is an excellent way to see what happens to people when marriages end in divorce. Although it is possible to court and marry and still end up in divorce court, it's much less likely than is the case with dating. It may help to think of it this way: Starting in God's court can keep you out of the other ones.

Attend a Men's or Women's Lakewood 24-Hour Encounter

Attending a Lakewood Encounter weekend is a great way to learn more about yourself, discover new possibilities for your life and make new friendships with people of the same sex. I attended one last spring and really got a lot out of it. Realize that like anything else, you will only get out of an Encounter weekend what you put into it.

Read your Bible daily and learn God's Word

Read your Bible on a daily basis. God's Word is the ultimate instruction manual for your life. Remember that it is better to read 5 minutes a day than it is to read an hour once a week or not at all. Get a small bible and keep it in your console or purse and read while you are waiting in line. That has worked really well for me and it may work for you too.

Pray to God and be patient for His answers

It is impossible to pray and not affect a situation. Often we will pray and not hear anything coming back from God. Be patient. God's Word does not come back void. In time you will get the answers you are asking for. God loves you and will tell you what you need to know when you are ready to hear it.

Keep God in first place in your life especially after marriage

I know that if I had kept God in first place in my life, things would have been different and I might have avoided going through a second painful and agonizing divorce. Regardless of whether you marry, marry again or stay single, God will reward you for keeping Him where He has always been which is in First Place.

Slide 7 – This Presentation Is Available Online

I realize that we have covered a lot of material in just a few minutes. I am however completely convinced that courtship is vastly superior to dating. For your convenience I have put this presentation online so you can review or share it as you are led.

Thank you Mike for the honor of presenting this material.

Thank you Wendell for leading Koinonia as a world-class singles ministry.

Thanks to my Mom, Dad and God for my life and for loving me no matter what.

Thank you Lakewood for a place to grow and become all that God made me to be.

And thanks to each of you for your time and considering the courtship process as a superior method to finding a mate and a marriage that will last the rest of your life.

Finally, may God richly bless each of us all of the days of our lives.

Thank you Jesus!!!