

Postmodernism & Morality

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we want to thank You for this day. Father, thank You for Your commitment to us to teach us. And Father, thank You that You are always gracious and never cynical toward us or dismissive. We pray, Father, that You will help us to learn to be the same toward one another and toward those around us and toward the things they write and create. Father, teach us to have that graciousness of heart that You have demonstrated so overwhelmingly toward us. We ask this for Jesus' sake. Amen.

During the last lesson we were just beginning to look at this issue of moral relativism. We are looking, if you remember, at the consequences of postmodernism in terms of how it is affecting people at the street level, so to speak. Our major point here is there are no transcendent moral commandments. People may continue to think that they are personally moral. Although, one of the fascinating things is to look at surveys and look at what people say about other people and what they say about themselves. It is a very good illustration of what the apostle Paul says in Romans 1 and 2 about condemning other people and then doing the same things yourself. In all the surveys that are done, the overwhelming majority of Americans today think that they personally are moral, highly moral, but are very critical of everybody else and what is taking place in the culture.

We were starting to look through this and I was saying that we have a series of ways this works itself out, this loss of a sense of transcendent moral commandments. The first is that everything is a matter of choice of the individual. Each person has his own moral views. Let me give a practical illustration of this. The Pope came to St. Louis a couple of years back. One of the fascinating things about that was the tremendous excitement generated by John Paul II coming here and the huge crowds of people who went out to hear him. At the time, it was said that was the biggest event in terms of public participation that had ever taken place in this city. He spoke at the TWA dome to an absolutely packed crowd of people. On the one hand, you have this tremendous respect with which John Paul II was greeted by Catholics and by others as well. But what is interesting is that the overwhelming majority of the people, including Roman Catholics, who went along to hear him with such excitement, had absolutely no intention of following his moral teaching. The Pope teaches very strongly about issues like abortion, sexual chastity before marriage, fidelity within marriage, and many other issues. But the majority of the people, including the majority of Roman Catholics, do not follow his teaching. This is not a criticism of Roman Catholics. It is just pointing out how people, no matter what they say they believe and what their convictions are, are going to live the way they want to when it actually comes down to it. They believe that in the end, even if they profess Christian commitment or submission to the Pope and his teachings, they have the freedom to live the way they wish. So the great majority of those present had no intention of obeying the Pope's moral teaching about sexual abstinence, abortion, or birth control—a particularly Catholic issue on which the Pope teaches very strongly. We should notice as well that this is true in evangelical churches. This is not simply a Catholic problem. We may teach very strongly about all sorts of moral issues in obedience to the Word of God, but the practical reality is that you can look at almost any social indicator and you will see that evangelical churches and their congregations are not very different from the rest of the culture when it comes to matters of abortion, fornication—we will use that blunt word—before marriage, matters of marital breakdown, adultery, etc. We may say a lot about a commitment to love Jesus Christ and obedience to His commandments, but when it comes down to it many of us are more shaped by the moral climate of the culture in which we live and its emphasis on the

individual making his or her own moral choices. We are more shaped by that than we are by obedience to Jesus Christ. I hope that all of you have the humility to recognize that this touches you too.

As I said in a previous lecture, you need to reflect on those passages of Scripture that you find difficult to read, those that you feel resistant to. One of the most obvious areas, and I already mentioned this, is what God's Word teaches about materialism and personal financial issues. We are far more shaped by the culture than we are by God's Word on those questions. If any of you would say to me that you are not shaped by the culture at all in that area, I think I simply would not believe you unless you could demonstrate it to me very clearly that that was a practical reality in your life. So, all of us are deeply touched by this. You see, we have assumed that it is simply part of being American, and what we understand to be freedom—to be able to do exactly what we want to with regard to issues of money, sexuality and many other questions.

It would have been unthinkable 20 years ago to have a public referendum on a matter like abortion, euthanasia, or homosexual marriage, but more and more states every year are having such referendum on moral issues. In fact, today people think that that is what democracy is, to consult the people on what they think is right and wrong. That would have been unthinkable to the founders of this nation whether they were individually Christian or not. Many of them were not. Many of them were deists or rationalists, like Jefferson and Franklin. But they all shared a common conviction that we are living in a moral universe where there is a transcendent moral order that is above us and that governs our lives. Whether they were individually Christians or not that was taken for granted by almost everybody a couple of hundred years ago. The notion that democracy meant consulting the people as to what was morally right and wrong in terms of sexuality or human life would not have entered anybody's mind. But we are living in a context where we have what Schaeffer used to call "sociological law"—that is, that laws and morality change with cultures, that there are no fixed standards by which a society should live. It is from that approach to moral issues that this matter of having a referendum on whether we are going to allow homosexual marriage, whether we are going to allow euthanasia, whether we are going to allow abortion or all sorts of other issues, is becoming increasingly common. Along with that notion is the consulting of opinion polls. You see politicians doing this all the time. The media constantly do it as though we can have an opinion poll on some moral issue and determine what is right and wrong for us. Of course it does not. Christians need to be very careful about how we approach these issues (moral questions) in our own states or in the nation as a whole because the majority can choose to do dreadful evil.

William Golding is an English novelist who won the Nobel Prize for literature some years ago. He wrote *Lord of the Flies*. It is his most famous book that was made into a movie, but he wrote many other novels as well—*The Spy*, *Free Fall*, and many, many others. He said, "If God is dead, if man is the highest, then good and evil is decided by majority vote." That is exactly what is happening when you have a referendum on a moral issue or when you simply consult an opinion poll. We Christians can never accept this as an appropriate way to make moral law or to discern what is right and wrong because obviously the majority can do dreadful evil. We have only to think about the history of our own nation and the practice of slavery to recognize that. The majority can do great wickedness and that is true in our own moment of history as well. We have not grown past that. So that is a second reality that we are going to find more and more—that is, that we consult the people to know what is right and wrong and what our laws should be about, all sorts of moral issues, and then simply go with the majority.

That brings us to the issue of "the will of the experts." One of the challenges that we face is that there are such rapid changes in the area of medical technology in particular that all sorts of moral questions that come up get left in the hands of the experts. Let me give you an illustration. Is it appropriate to

experiment on a human embryo? Initially these were embryos that were spare, so to speak—produced in the process of in vitro fertilization in order to help couples who were having a difficult time having a baby. So they were embryos created in a dish and then put into the mother’s womb. Regardless of what we think about that particular question (and there are all sorts of moral issues that are problematic with regard to it), the question I want to think about here is what is it appropriate to do with spare embryos that are created? Is it appropriate to create spare embryos? Is it morally right, and what do we do with them? There has been an enormous pressure from the medical and scientific community to purposely create spare embryos and to use those for medical research. How do we deal with such questions, because there are no laws addressing such issues? The issue itself was created by advances in medical technology. So how do we address such issues?

I will give you an illustration both from Britain and from the United States. In Britain the government was under the leadership of Mrs. Thatcher when she was Prime Minister. Many Christians just assumed that somehow Mrs. Thatcher was a friend of Christian morality. That is simply not true in all sorts of areas. That may be how she was presented here, but there are many areas where that simply is not so, and this is an illustration of it. Mrs. Thatcher’s government appointed a committee and it was given the title of the Warnock Committee. It was under the leadership of Baroness Warnock, and there were all sorts of doctors and philosophers and even some theologians appointed to this committee. They were asked by the government to address this question of experiments on human embryos and to come up with some recommendations. At the time, something like 95% of the British population was totally opposed to experiments on human embryos. There was an overwhelming majority against this, and I mention this not simply to come back to the previous point about opinion polls and majorities. But the overwhelming majority responded with moral revulsion to this—that it could not possibly be right to experiment on a developing human person even in early stages. About 90% of the British parliament was totally opposed to experiments on human embryos as well. This committee, which was appointed by Mrs. Thatcher’s government, came up with its recommendations, and parliament never had the opportunity to address the issue. A private members bill was introduced, just as can be done here in the United States, by a member of the parliament to prevent experiments on human embryos happening. The bill was never allowed by Mrs. Thatcher’s government at the time. It was just simply filibustered out of existence by the tiny minority of people who were against this bill because it would have passed overwhelmingly to prevent this from happening. The committee really only considered a few issues. It asked, “What is scientifically possible? Can we do this? Can we create embryos and do experiments on them?” And the answer to that was, “Yes we can.” At the moment, we can only keep them alive for about two weeks, but that is the situation. Scientific advances—I want to use the word “advance” carefully there; it is a neutral word—have an enormous number of impieties of their own. It is assumed that if you can do it, then you should do it simply because you can. That was their fundamental argument. We can do this so we should do it.

The second argument or issue they considered was, “Might this be useful? “Might we learn something helpful from doing these experiments?” And they basically said, “Yes, we hope we will.” In particular, they mentioned that it might be useful dealing with the issue of Down syndrome and helping to prevent children being born with Down syndrome. At the time, the world’s leading expert in that area, Gerome Breen, testified against this and said it is not necessary. We are making advances anyway and it is not needed to experiment on human embryos to help. But their basic argument was that this might be useful.

Third, the only other issue they dealt with was “What will the public bear? What will the public put up with?” And they said, “Well, at the present time, we feel that even though the public appears to be against this, they will put up with us experimenting for the first couple of weeks of life.” In fact, they chose that cut off date because they could not keep them alive any longer at that point.

Those were the only issues they considered. There were no really moral issues addressed by the report. Then, at the end of the report, they recommended that the medical and scientific community appoint its own “watchdog” board to review what was being done. They recommended that there should be 16 laboratories around Britain that would be licensed to carry out experiments on human embryos, and they would simply police themselves. So, that is what happened, and of course it happened in many other laboratories as well because there is no law addressing the issue at all. There were no teeth to it whatsoever, and so experiments on human embryos have been carrying on in Britain now for the last 15 years or more.

Exactly the same thing has happened in the United States as well, though I will not go into all the details of the history of it. There are no laws that address the issues. It is simply self-policed, so to speak, by the medical scientific community. There are experiments taking place on human embryos all over the country. Who knows if those are simply the spare embryos produced by laboratories as they try to help infertile couples or if they are actually embryos created for the purpose of experimentation. There are all sorts of issues like this where basically moral issues are simply decided by experts, the people who are thought to be in the know about these issues. The only way they are really in the know is that they are the ones who developed these techniques. It does not mean they have any moral foundation whatsoever for addressing the issues. That is one of the biggest moral challenges of the moment we are living in.

We are facing all sorts of new moral dilemmas created by the advances of science and technology. We have no means of dealing with them, and our governments do not pass laws to address them. There is a doctor in the United States who says that he is going to be able to do human cloning, and he plans to do it. In this case, he feels that at the moment there are laws dealing with this issue in America, but there are plenty of other places in the world where he can go and do it. He is just going to go do it somewhere else. It is going to happen because there is such huge pressure for it since there is not any moral framework any longer within which to address such issues as to what is right and what is wrong, what should be done, and what should not be done. We are not very far, actually, from what happened in Nazi Germany in the 1930s. The scientific medical community worked together with Hitler in his programs of trying to ethnically cleanse the human race, to produce a superior race, and to prevent people who were considered to be inadequate in terms of their intelligence, physique, race, or anything else from being able to bear children. You should know that happened here in the United States as well in the 1920s and 1930s. In many places in this country, people who were considered to be inferior in some way were sterilized without their consent. So these are very serious problems that we need to reflect on here. We are living in a time where there is absolutely no context whatsoever in which these issues can be addressed in any way in order to find a constructive way forward because there is such enormous pressure from what is scientifically possible. And in the end what is scientifically possible is the primary deciding factor as to what should take place. So, the will of experts became the fundamental deciding factor.

The fourth issue is what I have called the loss of persuasion and rational discussion in the public square. We have already spoken a little bit about what James Davidson Hunter called the culture wars. We are in a context where once you have lost shared moral convictions in society as a whole it becomes increasingly difficult to have discussions which are carried on in a thoughtful, respectful, and rational manner. If you have lost the notion of truth and you only have individuals and groups with their views, and if you have lost the notion of a transcendent set of moral commandments, you just simply have groups with their own moral agenda. You see this going on all the time in the public square, whether you have somebody like Rush Limbaugh on one side or Howard Stern on the other. Basically, you have people just shouting at each other without any possibility of communicating with each other. Christians,

again, have to be very careful about getting caught up in this. The more we become a shouting, placard-holding, advertisement-producing, commercial-producing group, or lobby group, then we are simply dismissed by most of our contemporaries. We have to be very careful about how we participate in moral discussion in the public square. It is absolutely essential that we commit ourselves in obedience to God to treating people with honor and respect and engaging in discussion graciously whether we agree with people or not—for the sake of God, for the sake of the Gospel, and for the sake of the people to whom we are speaking. It becomes increasingly difficult to talk to each other once we have lost shared moral convictions. For the moment, we will go on to the next major heading: the breakdown of relationships at every level.

One of the challenges that we face as Christians at the present time is the loss of commitment to relationships in our culture. It is fundamentally related to the passionate commitment of our society to the freedom of the individual—that I do what I want to do for myself. However, that undermines relationships at every level, and I want to look at this in several areas.

The first area is the loss of trust and respect for marriage and the family. I do not need to tell you this but we are living in a time where people have less and less respect for the institutions of marriage and the family. We cannot simply look at the figures of divorce, for example, and say that somewhere between 60% and 2/3 of those who get married will end up getting divorced, and many of them several times. We live in a society in which commitment to marriage as an institution is breaking down. I am sure that divorced has touched your life in some way. There are a growing number of people who have no intention of ever getting married. I worked in L'Abri for many years in a residential setting. We met people, many of whom were Christians. My estimate would be that at any one time between 1/3 and 1/2 of all the people who came to stay with us came from situations of either broken marriages from their parents or very unhappy ones. I would say again that between 1/3 and 1/2 of the people were completely cynical about the possibility of marriage working. There are huge numbers of people in their 20s and 30s who have no intention of getting married because they have had such a negative experience of marriage in their own family setting. When we were over in Europe this past summer and I was leading the "How Should We Then Live" tour around various European cities, the tour guide who was appointed to us, who stayed with us for the whole of our 10 days together, was exactly like this. She had grown up in a situation where her parents had a very poor marriage and eventually divorced. She just said, "As a child, I decided I would never get myself into this situation." Here she is now in her 60s and has never had any kind of long-term, committed relationship with anyone because she is so suspicious and so cynical about the possibility of marriage working. So, there is that problem.

At the same time there is a weakening of the protective and educational functions of the family. Many parents do not have a sense that they are truly responsible for the education of their children. This is true of many Christian parents. I am a Presbyterian personally, and some of you are not. I often will be involved in the baptism of a child. One of the questions I will ask the parent when I am baptizing a baby as a child of the covenant—but I would say for those of you who are Baptist in your convictions that this is an issue you need to think about as well whether you believe in infant baptism or not—is, "Do you recognize that you have the primary responsibility to raise this child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? This is, first of all, your responsibility, not that of a church or of any educational institution, but it is yours. God has given this responsibility to you as the parents." Of course you may be glad for the help that you can get from the church, and I will always ask the church the question about their sense of responsibility to pray for this child and to be an example to the child and to help teach the child. So, of course you can be glad for the help of the church and of a school or whatever. But fundamentally, this is the parents' obligation according to the Word of God. Do we recognize that? In our culture, many, many people have lost the sense of responsibility for the education of their children. I am not talking here

about home education. That is not my point. The parents are the ones who, before God, have the fundamental responsibility of education. The same is true with protection. What you actually see in many homes (and this is another problem) is the isolation of family members in the privacy of their own worlds. You can go to many homes and there really is not a home at all. It is simply a house that people inhabit together and maybe from time to time share a meal together, but it is often not even that. Many of my son's friends in high school and college here in St. Louis never had meals with their parents. They never sat down to eat together as a family. People lived in isolation within the same building. They simply passed and said hello to each other a couple of times a day.

Again, let me challenge you by asking, "How much are you affected by this?" That is not what a family is biblically. It is not what a marriage is biblically, and that is not what parenting is biblically. You must be committed before God to sitting down and eating together. The Bible has a great deal to say about eating together. That is how God speaks about His relationship with us—that He is going to sit down and eat with us and us with Him. It is no accident that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a meal of fellowship with God, just as many of the things that took place in the tabernacle and temple in the Old Testament were. They were meals, fellowship meals. That is one of the primary contexts in which human relationships are made as we sit down and share at a table together. So I want to challenge you with this question: what kind of family life do you have? If you are newly married or considering getting married, what kind of family life are you planning to create? It is not going to happen accidentally. It is going to happen because you make choices to make it happen. You have to recognize that if you commit yourself to marriage and to having children you have an obligation before God to create time.

I was talking to a friend yesterday who has three little boys who are 4, 2 ½, and just about 1, and he said, "I used to hear lots of people talking about having quality time with your children. Maybe they need quality time, but they need quantity time. That is what they really need." You know, the average American father spends something like 20 seconds a week with his children. I mean, that is really what it is. You cannot possibly be a father. You might just as well not be there if that is what you think that being a father is and what family life is about. Children need quantity time—lots of it, a lot of time every day. It is not something that you can put off until vacation or even your one day off. You see so many guys who will just go out and do their own thing with their friends when they have a day off of work. Well, you have no right to be married if that is your attitude. I am very serious here. How much are we shaped by the culture at this point and its radical breakdown of the family and of the relationship of marriage? We see the fragmentation of life within the family. Do people actually know each other and spend time together within the context of a family? One of the primary reasons that so many teenagers have their primary input from their peer group is because their parents simply are not committed to spending quantity or quality time, or any kind of time, with them. You need to set a pattern early on to do this. There are things that are far more important than the amount of money you have or the size of house you have or the kinds of cars you drive or anything else like that. The time you spend in your marriage and the time you spend with your children are far more important than those things.

Here we are facing a problem not simply of an idea within a culture but of an idea that is central to the individual—that what is important to me more than anything else is my personal success and my vivid personal feelings because those are the two greatest idols of our contemporaries. Those are not my words. They are the words of Robert Bellah who is one of the most thoughtful commentators on our way of life. He says the two primary goals of Americans today are personal success and vivid personal feelings. As a Christian, my primary goals are loving God with my heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving my neighbor as myself—starting with my family. My primary goals are not vivid personal feelings and personal success, having a certain lifestyle, having a certain kind of house, or anything else like that. If we think those things, we just demonstrate that we are totally shaped by the culture rather

than by the Word of God. So we have a problem both in terms of the idea and the practical reality of our culture. This idea of the centrality of the individual and the happiness of the individual is not a biblical theme. It is not biblical that I have an absolute right to pursue my own personal happiness, though we may feel that that is what it means to be a member of this culture. You will not find that in the Bible anywhere. It is not what God teaches us that our calling is. This way of thinking is extraordinarily destructive of marriage and of family life.

Second, there is a difficulty in making relationships. In polls taken of our contemporaries, people say over and over again that their primary personal difficulty is personal loneliness. That is extraordinary. You think of all the contact we have with people in this culture, but people's number one identified problem is personal loneliness. People simply do not know how to make close relationships. It is the reason for the extraordinary proliferation of dating services, and this is not something to laugh about. It is not just a "lonely hearts" column in the paper. Dating services are a multi-billion dollar industry because people do not know how to meet people and make relationships. It is an extraordinary thing. That is the culture in which we live. Again, it is related to this centrality of the individual. Of course, if you love yourself only, how can you ever make any in-depth relationships?

There are many practical issues as well. I am not suggesting that it is primarily, or only, the area of ideas that affects us in these regards. There are all sorts of sociological factors as well. You can demonstrate, for example, on the issue of marriage that if a young couple is moved by their job away from the support of their extended family, they are much more likely to get a divorce. Why should we be surprised by that? People need the support of their parents and extended family when they are newly married. The Christian cannot just look at this and say that it is either the result of an idea or that it is the result of personal sinfulness only. There are all sorts of other issues involved when we look at matters like this in our culture. Business has not been a friend of the family because it is very often moving people around all over the place. Actually, it simply increases divorce. If you put too much pressure on couples they will not survive. Let me give you a practical illustration. One of my brothers-in-law was married when he and his wife went through medical school. For years, older doctors have had the view that since residency and internship were so difficult and because they were worked so hard that they will make you work hard too. When he and his wife went through medical residency, their marriage was the only marriage that survived. It was not simply because of personal sin or postmodern ideas. It was just the practical pressure of the situation. They saw each other for two minutes a day at breakfast. One of them worked 12 hours a day from eight in the morning to eight at night, and the other worked the other shift. And they had a baby at the same time. Yet, their marriage was the only marriage that survived that situation in their medical school. I was up in Rochester, Minnesota a week and a half ago speaking at the L'Abri conference. I spoke to a group of medical residents and they are facing this issue right now. All around them people's marriages are falling apart. So there are lots of practical reasons as well as ideas that affect us.

Let us get back to this issue of the difficulty of making relationships. People simply do not know how to make close relationships. If they have no pattern of that in their families—either their parents abandoned each other or got along very poorly—how will they learn? I remember a story from one of my younger son's friends. When I think of my boys in high school, every one of their friends came from a home that had either a broken marriage or one in a very bad state of repair. One of them said to my son Philip one day, "I had a dream last night about your dad, and he was shouting at me." Then he said, "And this of course was completely unreal because I have never heard your dad shout at anybody, and I know he would not have been shouting at me or you for that matter. If it had been my dad I would have understood it perfectly well because that is how he reacts to us all of the time. He just yells." That was his experience of family, and consequently he has no idea of how to make relationships.

This is one of the very great challenges to the Christian. Are we going to commit ourselves to the practice of hospitality, to deep friendships with people? For many of them, the only way they are going to learn to make relationships themselves is if they see an example in our lives. It is one of the very great challenges to the church right now. You cannot just tell people that this is what it takes to make a relationship. People have to see it in practice. Most of us have homes that we would never consider letting anybody inside to see what our marriage is like or our family life is like. One of the very great needs for the church right now is the practice of hospitality, and I do not mean entertaining once a year and showing your home or china off or what a good cook you are. I mean really welcoming people into your home at any time, whether it is convenient or not. That is what hospitality is biblically. Hospitality literally, biblically, means to love a stranger. The Greek word is *philozenia*—to love a stranger. That is why Jesus says when you have a meal do not just invite your relatives and close friends who are going to invite you back. Invite the people who are really in need. I think of the friends of my youngest son here in high school, and I do not say this to boast about myself. That is not my point at all. I am just trying to use this as an illustration. They have learned far more about marriage and what family life is about from the many, many times they have been in our home and had meals in our home than they have ever learned from their own families. They saw for the first time a marriage where there was respect and tenderness and love and cherishing. They saw a family life for the first time where there was respect and care and appreciation. Those things were enormously powerful. When my youngest son was married a year and a half ago, five of his friends here from high school in St. Louis came all the way to England for his wedding. None of them are Christians, but the reason they came was because they had been so welcomed in our home. They really felt a part of our family. They had begun to learn something about human relationships as well as about the Gospel from spending so much time in our home. The wedding was the first time any of them had been to church. God used it very powerfully in their lives because, for the first time, they heard some teaching that went with what they had been experiencing in our home for the previous three or four years. It affected them all very powerfully. People simply will not learn what it takes to make relationships in marriage or the family unless you give them an example. The only way you can do that is by having an open home.

Some of you feel called to work with young people in church youth ministry. Let me tell you this: you cannot possibly do that work in any biblical manner unless your home is open to those kids, because young people, whether they have been raised in Christian homes or not or whether they are believers or not, all desperately need to see the example of love, respect, and care that you carry out in the context of your home. For those of you who feel called to be pastors, I would say the same thing to you. One of the biblical requirements for a pastor is to practice hospitality. It is just as much a requirement to be hospitable as it is to not be greedy or to be faithful to your wife or to be able to teach God's Word. What I am saying here is very challenging; I intend it to be. We are so much more shaped by the culture here and its emphasis on individualism than we are by the Word of God, but we need to be shaped by the Word of God. If God has called you to minister His word, He calls you to have an open home, to really have an open home so that people can come there—so that people can come whether you have invited them or not. They should be able to come at any time and you not come to the door and say, "What are you doing here" or behave in such a way that you communicate that. This is the Gospel. There is not any other Gospel in the Bible than this kind of Gospel that teaches us to share our lives with people and to share our homes with them.

A comment was made about a man choosing singleness so that he could pursue his career. That is something that we really need to reflect about biblically because Jesus Himself makes the point that there are some who choose to be single for the sake of the kingdom of God. Paul adds his comments in 1 Corinthians 7 that one must only make that choice if one has the gift of singleness. He uses the word

“charisma” there—the same is for a gift of the spirit. In other words, if one has the gift of singleness given by God then one should be prepared to make that choice because clearly a person who is single is able to do all sorts of things in his life that a person who is married with a family cannot. For example, John Stott is a personal friend of mine. I am privileged to know him very well. I think of him because I just got a letter from him a couple of days ago. He is one of the best-known Bible teachers in the world today in the evangelical community. He felt called to singleness and, as a consequence, he has been able to give his life to studying God’s Word, to teaching God’s Word, to preaching, to speaking at conferences, and to writing, in a way that somebody like me who is married never could. No, I do not envy him. I am very glad to be married. I love my wife and I am glad to have a family, but there is no way I could ever produce the kind of stuff that he has produced. It would not be appropriate if I did, because if I did, it would show that I was not living faithfully as a husband and a father. This is something we need to reflect about because there is a low view of singleness within the evangelical community, as if there is somehow something wrong with you if you choose to be single. Well, Scripture does not speak that way. It does not regard the state of singleness as a superior moral state. That is a mistake that the Catholic Church made because it, in the end, has a low view of sexuality, so singleness is seen as superior. Scripture does not teach that, but it does teach us that it is something we need to think about. Is God calling me to singleness? If I reflect on that, I have to ask the question, “Has He gifted me for singleness or would this be unbearable for me to try to live the life of a single man or woman?”

I have been asked about the challenge of communicating the issue of absolute truth. In relationship to my father, what sort of issues can I address Well, we are going to come back to this over and over again, but let me just give you this illustration right now. We, as Christians, acknowledge that we are living in a universe where there is truth—truth that God has made known, absolute truth, but people around us are denying that and saying there is only personal truth. How do I ever get from this circle to this one? Where can I communicate? If we were living in completely separate universes then communication would be impossible. But this is not an accurate picture of the situation. We might present it more accurately and say that there is always an overlap. Every individual is living, we might say, between two worlds. This is true for the unbeliever, and it is true for you and me as believers. We have been talking about this in terms of the issue of our marriages and our families and hospitality. We, as Christians, know very well what God’s Word has to say about these things, but we do not practice them because we are deeply influenced by the emphasis of our culture on individual fulfillment and personal happiness. So we think of our home as a place where we have an absolute right of privacy and nobody is allowed there. Even pastors think like this and would be horrified if people turned up at their doorstep. There are many pastors who hardly ever have people over for a meal except on some special occasion where, like everybody else, we are going to show off our china and house (which has to be perfectly tidy for the situation, and they will get the children out of the way so that it will be). Well, that is not anything to do with biblical hospitality.

As a Christian, I am living between two worlds. That is why Paul says to me in Romans 12: “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Scripture recognizes that we are constantly being shaped by the ideas and practices of the culture in which we live. We have to resist that. We know that we have committed ourselves to serving God, to loving Him, and to trying to think about life as He calls us to think about it whether it is regarding questions of absolute truth or questions of hospitality. We are trying to think in a way that is obedient to God and to make our thoughts captive and obedient to Christ, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5. The unbeliever in this situation is also living between two worlds because there is nowhere else for an unbeliever to live except the universe that God has made. Whether they acknowledge God or not, whether they worship Him or not, or

whether they acknowledge that they are created by Him in His image or not, that is who they are and they cannot escape that. So they are always living in God's universe.

Now, in terms of talking to your dad or anybody else about absolute truth or absolute morality of any other issue, what you need to find is those areas in his life where he is holding on to God's truth and it is important to him. I used the example earlier of my dad who was a Marxist. There were three areas where I could start communicating to him, where he was holding on to God's truth. One was his commitment to marriage and the family, which for him was an absolute. The second was his understanding of moral values, which were basically the second half of the Ten Commandments. He did not think the first half was necessary, but he thought the second half was self-evidently true. The third was his understanding of economic justice. At many points what he had to say about the way employers treat their workers was exactly what God's Word has to say. Those were three points where we could start to talk. With your own father, or whoever you are reaching out to, you need to find where it is that he is constrained by the reality of God's truth whether it is a question of absolute truth, absolute morality, or anything else. You need to find where he is constrained by the reality of God's truth and where this is precious to him. Those things that are precious to him that come from God's Word, God's truth, may have no place whatsoever in his postmodern universe or his Marxist universe, his gay universe, or whatever it is. Remember that I taught you about identifying bridges. Those are the points where you are going to start being able to communicate with anybody, the point where they are still holding God's truth in their own lives. Anybody that you ever talk to is going to have points in his life where truth really matters to him. For example, the president telling the truth or not may be a very practical issue. Wherever it is that matters to him is the point where you are going to be able to start talking. It needs to be something that really matters to him, which does not fit into his view of reality but at the same time is absolutely so precious to his heart that he will not let go of it. That is where you can start talking.

The comment was made that some of the people who are most lonely are people who are very difficult to get to know and will run away from any attempt to get to know them. Yes, that is true. Sometimes there are very practical reasons for that. Many people who are deeply lonely and alienated from relationships are people who have been terribly hurt by others—children who have been abused by their parents in all sorts of ways or people who have had relationships in which they have been abused. There are all sorts of people out there who are really hurting and who are afraid of relationships because of the damage that has been done to them when they trusted. I remember, for example, someone who came to stay with us years and years ago. She was abandoned at birth by her mother and had gone through a series of difficult things. She lived in an orphanage and then at various times was taken into someone's home for a few weeks to see whether or not they wanted her. People decided they did not want her because she was too difficult. Well, after you have gone through that a few times you stop trusting anybody. You cannot afford to make yourself vulnerable to getting close to anyone because you are hurt so deeply when you do. That is an extreme example, of course, but many people who are very lonely have never experienced any kind of relationship that they have found fulfilling to them personally. The only way to get through to somebody like that is with patience, lots of patience, for the long term. You commit yourself to getting to know somebody, to caring for him or her, to getting alongside him or her whether or not they are easy or difficult. Again, it means lots of hospitality—really opening yourself to somebody and actually sharing your life with them in a way that is costly. You see, love is costly, and you cannot ever get to know lonely people unless you are prepared to live in a costly manner. God has not called us just to get to know people who are easy to get to know. Scripture says a great deal about how God commits Himself to caring for the lonely. There are many passages like this. There are beautiful passages at the end of Isaiah addressing that issue of God's commitment to care for those who are alienated and lonely. This in the ministry of Christ Himself, and it takes time.

