A Biblical View of Sexual Intimacy

Part 1 of 2: A Biblical View of Sexual Intimacy
with Darrell Bock, Gary Barnes, Debby Wade
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Welcome to the table. We discuss issues of God and culture, and today our topic is sexuality in the church. And our intent today is to introduce a whole array of issues that the church wrestles with, when it comes to sexuality.

Our culture is sexually charged, I think it would be fair to say. And because of that, the church is facing an array of challenges in terms of encouraging virtue and morality, on the one hand, and then what it's facing in populations that they minister to on the other.

My guests are – like I say, they're veterans of foreign wars here.

They've been here many times – Gary Barnes on my right and Debby Wade on my left. And they each are professional counselors who work in this area and bring, we think, expertise to the topic.

That's our hope anyway. And I'm just the little old theologian sitting here in the middle, adjudicating the conversation.

So the conference, which will be held on September 15th, at the seminary, is entitled: "Jerusalem Meets Vegas: Sexual Choices and Christian Community." And we're going to walk through a variety of issues.

And I thought to introduce this, I'd just walk through a couple of citations from Stan Jones and Mark Yarhouse's book, Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate, a book that goes back to 2000, and that even though it was written in 2000, on one level is already somewhat dated, I could say, in the way in which it's interacting with where society was at the time when they wrote it, versus where it is today.

But there's still some value, I think, in what they're saying. Here's one piece of what they say:

"There was a time when the seemingly undeniable realities of life and culture provided support and even confirmation for what Christians understood to be true about sexual ethics. Those days have past."
And they illustrate this with a list of things that have happened – really in the last several decades – that have changed the conversation. I'm just going to go through the list. "Effective contraceptive methods breaking the bond between sexual acts, conception, family life, and parenting. Breakdown in marriages and the expectation that marriage is permanent, and the moral view that sex should be reserved for marriage.

"More study and demystifying of and normalization of previously hidden behavior that had been seen as deviant. Urbanization and the rise of sexual minorities that have emphasized individual liberty and entitlement as a means of popular affirmation and legitimization.

"The triumph of what is called "essentialism." That's the view that designations like "homosexual" capture the real essence of a person's self – the essential person, if you will. The ready access, through media, of sexuality titillating material available at a click.

"A sexuality affirming culture that has made humorous all sorts of jokes about sexuality and treated all kinds of calls for restraint as puritanical. A change in tolerance levels in what used to be considered universally immoral, to the point that such claims about moral standards are called patriarchal, imperialistic, or hateful.

"Erosion of confidence in and escalating hostility to any sense that the Bible and Christian tradition should address the parameters for law, ethics, or virtue. The triumph of personal experience and desire over reflection on corporate societal impact. The rise of casual multiple relationships in the hookup generation. The rise in the number of broken families and children raised in broken homes.

"The way I summarize this is: life in the 21st century is very different when it comes to marriage and family than it was in my parents' generation, and is likely to be far different for my grandchildren's generation than it is for my own."

So what do you think? You all are counselors who work in this area. Is that a reflection of where we are, and where we've come to, and where we're going?
The Table Podcast  
A Biblical View of Sexual Intimacy

Dr. Gary Barnes  
You know, Darrell, I would say during these last several decades, there have been changes that have just been so far sweeping. And we don't really come to think about how all of these different ways come to bear on a whole new cultivated way to think about our sexuality, about families, about the individual sexual health.

And one of the things that you started off to say was: "I'm just a little theologian here in the middle."

Dr. Darrell Bock  
He's not going to let me get away with that.

Dr. Gary Barnes  
I'm not going to let you get away with that.

Dr. Darrell Bock  
I know him well enough to know that.

Dr. Gary Barnes  
Because we know that as well as being trained psychologically and sexually, the very best thing you can do for sexual health and family wellbeing is to be well grounded in theology.

So that little theologian's voice is a very important voice to be loud in the sweeping changes that we're going through.

Debby Wade  
Yes.

Dr. Darrell Bock  
And one of the things, of course, that has happened is that we have so secularized a lot of our conversation in this area, that the voice reflection of theology or even moral philosophy has basically been shunted off to the side as not necessarily being relevant. "This is strictly a discussion about human rights and human choice or human freedom."

And there are a variety of ways it gets – or human identity. I mean you can have all those elements in the equation. "But let's not think about categories that deal about virtue and morality and those kinds of areas. Because those make the discussion a little uncomfortable."

Dr. Gary Barnes  
Right. Right.

Debby Wade  
Squirmy.
Dr. Darrell Bock  Yeah. Debbie, what do you think?

Debby Wade  Well, I just think that we – in some ways, we want to make things so difficult. And when we come back just simply to God's design of us spiritually – Adam and Eve in the garden – He was pretty strict with some boundaries and guidelines and said, "Here's what I have for you. And then this is not for you."

And I think the way that Satan came to Adam and Eve in the garden is the same way he comes to us now.

Dr. Darrell Bock  "Has God really said?"

Debby Wade  "Has God really said you can't have this?"

Dr. Darrell Bock  Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Debby Wade  You know in some essence, the strategy of the evil one is the same. But we've just got more and more ways, I think, to express it, and to move those boundaries more and more. And so it seems that things are worse.

But it's our human nature, I think, with the encouragement of the evil one, that we're just going to stretch those boundaries wherever we can take them, however creative we can be.

Dr. Darrell Bock  And the hard thing about this is we do it, and then what I like to say is – we may think we're walking away from the consequences. But we actually meet the consequences around the corner.

Debby Wade  Absolutely.

Dr. Darrell Bock  That when we turn the corner, and we see what comes out of the choices that we make, oftentimes what happens is they've actually met us right in the face, and they've come back at us. And what you thought you were able to get away with, you, in fact, end up paying for in some type of concrete human toll, in one way or another.

Well, that's a good overview to launch us in. Let's start with – let's start, if I can do it this way, on a positive side, if you will.
Because I think the danger in this conversation is it ends up being negative only, and – "This is what you shouldn't be doing." When, in fact, sexuality is one of the more distinctive and powerful creations that God has given us.

So you've mentioned Genesis 1 and 2. I think I want to hear a female's take on Genesis 1 and 2. So tell me how you think about Genesis 1 and 2, as you look at it. And what is it telling us about sexuality?

I'm just going to come to the piece where God says – after he had designed everything. And he came back and said, "I created man and woman in my image – both male and female, we created them."

And then He says, "It's good." It's absolutely good. So I believe that Christ – I'm sorry – that God created us to be confident in our masculinity, confident in our femininity, knowing that we're created in His image. There's not anything to be ashamed of in our bodies. We're to delight in who we are.

That doesn't mean that we're to be provocative and seductive with them in an unmanageable way. But we are to delight in our sexuality, and to have confidence that it's a God given sexuality.

Okay. And Gary, what would you say about Genesis 1 and 2? And I'll let you speak for all –?

Yeah. I really agree with you, with this starting point.

Let's start on the right step here, rather than the wrong step.

Yeah. Yeah.

And a way I commonly start the conversation is to say, "Let's elevate our conversation." Because especially when it comes to conversations about sexuality, there tends to be this slippery slope, where we're sliding off to one side of demonizing.
But then we can actually slide down the other side of deifying it. You see?

And it becomes our god.

And to really elevate it to what we would call "sacred sexuality," we're getting back to God's thinking about sexuality. And, really, God's given us this awesome gift because it's God reflective.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Yes. Now this is actually where I very much want to go – is to talk about the way in which the – and I'm going to say it this way – the unique intimacy that is sexuality is a mirror of something quite profound.

*Debby Wade* Yes.

*Dr. Gary Barnes* Yes.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* It's not a casual thing. The analogy I like to use – it's not like getting a can of soda. You know? It's not that common, and it's not designed to be that common. You don't shop around for it – that kind of thing.

*Dr. Gary Barnes* Right. Right.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* It's designed to be special. And when we say that sexuality is sacred, part of what we're saying is: it's set apart.

*Dr. Gary Barnes* Yes.

*Debby Wade* Yes.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* It's sanctified. It's special.

*Debby Wade* Yes.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* And that's part of what makes it important. And it also mirrors a level of intimacy that exists in relationships. Because that exchange that takes place in sexuality is a really uniquely intimate thing that's going on.
The Table Podcast | A Biblical View of Sexual Intimacy

*Dr. Gary Barnes* Yes.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* It's not a casual thing that's going on.

*Dr. Gary Barnes* No. No.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* People may pretend it's casual, but it's not. And all of this feeds into how we see the area.

*Dr. Gary Barnes* Right. I keep hanging on to one of my favorite quotes of Dan Allender, where he's talking about sexuality and intimate allies. And he says, "Sex is a window into the heart of God."

*Dr. Gary Barnes* That's a good one to think about.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* That is. Yeah, that is. You can pause and think about that in a whole lot of ways.

*Dr. Gary Barnes* Yeah.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Yeah. And so it matters. The other part is it matters.

*Debby Wade* Absolutely.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* It's not like a lottery ticket. You know? You buy one, and then buy another one the next week, and the next one the next week, and hope that somewhere, at some point, you cash in.

*Dr. Gary Barnes* Yeah. Yeah. The thing that's tricky for us is that it does involve a tricky interplay. Because as humans created in God's image, whether we're single or married, we're still sexual beings.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* That's right.

*Dr. Gary Barnes* You don't become a sexual being once you get married.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Right.
And so we all have this God reflective thing going on with sexuality. And we're participants in it. We're actually key participants in it. But even the experience of sexuality is not primarily about us.

It's elevated above us – as to what it points us to. See?

Now let's develop this. Because I think that one of the things that you're dealing with in the culture is that sexuality isn't – it isn't not only not about us; sexuality, for a lot of people, is just about me.

Right. Right. Right. Right.

Okay? So we've got two highways going in an opposite direction here.

Right. Right. Right. Right.

And so if that's the case, then how do we –? Let's talk about – okay, it's not just about us. It's taking us to a higher place. Let's talk about both the "us-ness" of what we're talking about and also the other place that it's taking us to.

Yes.

Let's do both of us those things. Because both of them are positive, and both of them are important. What do you think, Debbie?

I want to make sure I know exactly what direction you're going here.

Well, you can take that however you – that is me fly fishing. Okay?

It's just a lobbed ball. Yeah.
You know I want to come back that I think that when God seeks us
and pursues us relationally – and He designed us in a way that we
would be responsive and receptive to Him.

You know Scripture says that His Word is to be penetrating heart
and soul. And so I think when we look at how He designed us as
sexual beings and as man and woman coming together, that it's a
beautiful metaphor of what He wants in a relationship with us
intimately, that as He pursues and seeks, we are to be responsive.
For a man and woman to come together, one has to pursue and
penetrate, and one has to be responsive and receptive.

And so I think we have this beautiful metaphor that God says, "I
don't want to control you. I want you to be responsive to me. I want
you to surrender, and I want to be giving."

And so I think when we look at husbands and wives coming
together, there's not room for selfishness. I mean there really has to
be a surrendering and a receptiveness, a penetration, and a
responsiveness, a vulnerability coming together for intimacy.

And it's at a spiritual soul level, not just a body level. And,
unfortunately, I think so much of society just wants to make sex
about body parts and positions and techniques, and completely miss
out on the soul interaction piece that involves God.

And in the process, you lose the sense of the giftedness of what is
going on here, and the specialness of what's going on in the
process. The whole thing is leveled out to a place that really makes
it less than what it could or should be, in many ways.

Right.

Yeah. So I think whenever it takes a self-focus, you've already
gone off the slippery slope. You've removed yourself from being
able to elevate it in its design. So getting back to that theologian's
voice –

One of my favorite books on sexuality is not by a psychologist. It's
by a theologian – Stanley Grenz. Sexual Ethics.
Dr. Gary Barnes: He really helps me get this God picture of how this is God reflective. And it's God's really special, unique way of getting a special not just knowledge about God, but even experience of God.

And this is also true, whether you're single or married. I think a lot of times, we only think, as Christians, about the experience of sexuality as – unless you're married, you're not sexual and certainly don't do it. See?

But he really brings out this role of the otherness, and how this is so central to the Trinity itself. Three persons, one being. And we don't really think of them individual, apart from the Trinity, and we don't think of the Trinity apart from the persons.

I mean this is a mind-boggling thing to try to understand, of course.

Dr. Darrell Bock: Plus, and the way in which that whole discussion proceeds is – the direction of what's going on is there's a mutual – I don't know what other phrase to use – a mutual kind of exchange and a move towards the other, if I can say it that way, outside of the self, towards the other, in the way they are able to work together – as you think about the Trinity working.

Dr. Gary Barnes: Right.

Dr. Darrell Bock: That also is something that not just the sexual relationship, but the entire marriage relationship is supposed to reflect.

Debby Wade: Right. Right.

Dr. Gary Barnes: Exactly.

Dr. Darrell Bock: I mean that's – and when we move to the way in which people relate to one another, even outside of marriage, and the way in which the genders relate to each other outside of marriage – because I do have more than one female friend.

Dr. Gary Barnes: That's healthy.

Dr. Darrell Bock: Yeah, that's good. Well, I appreciate the affirmation.
You know we really are talking about learning how to relate well.

Dr. Gary Barnes

Exactly. And this is the theme that I refer to is cover-to-cover in the Bible – that is also to be a part of our experience and how we reflect God – is this experience of oneness that's not based in sameness.

And so you see it clearly in the marriage of husband and wife being one, yet not the same. You see it in God's creation, how he had man and woman both as reflections of Him. Male alone is not a good enough image bearer of God.

Even female alone is not a sufficient image bearer of God.

I think God's also designed this in terms of the marriage relationship bearing a unique way of God being oneness, not based in sameness. But also singles, sexually speaking, also bearing a unique way about God. See?

And so in the covenant relationship with marriage, we bear God's image in the exclusive nature of the connection. But in singles, we see an inclusive nature.

So there's a unique way that all of healthy maleness and all of healthy femaleness come together in an experience that's not a sexual, erotic experience. But it is the sexual maleness and sexual femaleness in a oneness, not based on sameness, interaction.

Debby Wade

Right.

Dr. Darrell Bock

So it's gender relatedness.

Dr. Gary Barnes

Yes. Very much so. And we have a hard time, as a church, helping singles know how to do this. So we kind of give them the message of: "There's no way that singles are sexually image bearers of God." And so it's kind of an all or nothing thing. See?

And we really need to help singles – I don't know if this term is ever going to catch on or not. But Doug Rosenau now uses the term of "righteous flirting."
And so the idea there is – there's a full maleness and full femaleness that come together at a point of exchange that's fully for the sake of the other. And it's not a self-serving exchange.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* And in the midst of that, there's a relating. And, of course, we're talking here about a completely – I'm taking it that the expression is used for a whole variety of ways of relating.

*Dr. Gary Barnes* Yes. And this is a term that is sometimes referred to as "social sexuality." It's not an erotic exchange.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Yeah.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* Right.

*Dr. Gary Barnes* That's fully healthy and full righteous.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* I want to come back to the singles thing. Because I think you're right. I think there's a whole – there's a void that the church has in ministering to singles. And I think they pay the price for the void. Because what the single person oftentimes does is say, "The church isn't ministering to me in any way, shape, or form. So why should I even be engaged with the church?"

*Dr. Gary Barnes* That's right.

*Dr. Darrell Bock* That's important. And we'll come back to that. Because that overlaps with another concern that I think we're seeing. And that is how people, once they graduate and go to college and become single and become adult, walk away from the church and establish adult patterns, which then they don't –

It isn't the case, as it used to be the case, where they would get married younger and come back, and they'd start to ask, "Well, what should we do with our kids?" They would come back as a way – now their adult patterns are getting sufficiently established independent of the church, that when they marry, they're not interested in going there.

And so you lose them because of the whole emerging adulthood thing, which we've also talked about on many podcasts with other folks.
So Debbie, let's talk about this. Let's continue to develop this relational side – the aspect of gender relatedness that's outside of sexuality. But that obviously if you develop a healthy personality, as you're learning to relate well to the other gender in general – if I can say it that way – you also are better equipped to minister to your spouse, should you be married. These things do play off each other. Don't they?

Debby Wade

I think so. Gary, you are always so great about bringing out the oneness piece in that, and not sameness. And I think what ends up happening often in marriage – and maybe we even do this in families sometimes with our kids – but we kind of go with this aspect of sameness, instead of oneness, trying to either make our kids alike – whether it's siblings – brothers and sisters ought to be the same.

Then in coupleship, we will have a tendency to do that same thing – that if God put men at the head of the ship, what he's really asking for is sameness.

Dr. Darrell Bock

Yeah.

Debby Wade

And I think we really –

Dr. Darrell Bock

So every marriage the same – is what you're saying?

Debby Wade

Well, and every marriage to be the same – and that husbands and wives to be the same.

Dr. Darrell Bock

Right. Right.

Debby Wade

And I think that is so diminishing what God designed to flourish – is oneness, and in our differences that we would complement one another, not crush or feel that we'd have to squelch and be the same. But He wants us to flourish in that.

And so I think, one, is working with singles – how to flourish in their single sexuality – again, another term that Doug Rosenau now coined for men and for women is a "soul sexy femininity" and a "soul sexy masculinity," being able to delight in the confidence in that, in singleness.
And so that we feel confident in who we are when we come into marriage. And I think we come into marriage to complement, not complete. Because if it's about completion, it comes close to sameness – instead of complementing one another in our differences, which is more about oneness.

Dr. Darrell Bock
Interesting. Yeah. I've got about three different places I want to go, and I can't go to all of them at once. Because there are a variety of things that strike me here. One is the impact of being able to relate at a healthy level across genders, outside of marriage and outside of issues of sexuality, which sets the stage for all that happens there.

The impact of family models on all this – how your mom and dad or in some – and the other reality that we're dealing with today is in many homes, we're not dealing with a mom and a dad.

We're dealing with one parent only or maybe a grandparent or something like that.

Dr. Gary Barnes
Grandparent.

Debby Wade
Right.

Dr. Darrell Bock
So that's a whole other dimension. So this is part of the brokenness, as we talk about this in terms of design and the way it's ideally designed to function.

The reality is we're dealing with a whole array of different configurations that people actually grow up in, as you're trying to encourage them, at least from a church standpoint and from a theological standpoint, to think about: this is the way God has designed this area.

And there are all these bumps along the way, as a result, that can get in the way of how this happens, making it a much more complicated exercise. So let me see if I can segment it there. That was an overview.
Let me see if I can segment this out. Let's talk first about how – let's talk about how people form their responses to the different genders. And I realize I'm asking for something a little bit hard here.

Because one of the things that we're dealing with is that different people are different, and so they react differently to these kinds of categories. But generally speaking, what are some things we should keep our eyes out for, as we're thinking about crossing the bridge from my being a male, to interacting with a female or vice versa? What are the elements that go into that?

Obviously family background goes into that. But what else is in play here that we need to be sensitive to, as we think about that kind of identity development?

So are you asking us to – let's unpack, a little, what the barriers are to doing that well? Or?

Could be. Could be. I mean it's an open-ended – a completely open-ended question.

What helps us – one, what helps us get there and form it, particularly, perhaps, in a context where – and maybe this is why you raised the issue of barriers – how does a person form that, if they grow up in a home that only has one parent?

Okay? Where I've got – if I can say it this way – a gender imbalance in the home.

Right.

And so how do I fill that gap?

Yeah. Well, this is, of course, where it's very helpful to think about the family of God and the extended family.

Especially as the nuclear family's going to take on many different sizes, shapes, and forms, at this point.

Exactly.
**The Table Podcast**  
**A Biblical View of Sexual Intimacy**

**Dr. Gary Barnes**  
I recall at our church, when we had a little Cub Scout group. And I was a den mother for that.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**  
You know I look at you, and I don't think den mother. That just doesn't leap out at me.

**Debby Wade**  
That's not where you go.

**Dr. Gary Barnes**  
It was the term they had at the time. So there were a dozen of our kids – little cubbies. And there were two cubbies that had intact families. Ten were single-parent families.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**  
Whoa.

**Dr. Gary Barnes**  
So when it comes time for the Pinewood Derby –

**Dr. Darrell Bock**  
Yes. Right.

**Dr. Gary Barnes**  
And you have ten moms trying to help their sons in a Pinewood Derby, you get all different kinds of outcomes.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**  
I suspect some of them were not good.

**Dr. Gary Barnes**  
And so there were a couple of kids in our group that had Pinewood Derby's that would not go down the ramp.

**Dr. Darrell Bock**  
Right. Exactly.

**Dr. Gary Barnes**  
So we needed to –

**Debby Wade**  
They looked good though.

**Dr. Gary Barnes**  
We needed a little quick action before the actual Pinewood Derby started to do a little fine-tuning. See? And that's a great example of the extended family – the body of Christ being able to fill some gaps.
And the hard part is – the flip side of this, it seems to me, is that when churches are so built around families and presenting families in their ideal mode, the danger is you drive away some of the very people you can minister to.

Exactly. Exactly.

Right.

Yeah.

And so that's a missed opportunity on both sides.

Right. Exactly. Because people can minister to one another in that regard.

If I could come back to – I think what you were asking, too – what all may impact how we relate to each other as male and female? Or what might impair healthy relating?

Certainly it can be about family of origin issues – whether the family was an intact family or not. You know I think abuse and trauma make a difference. Maybe very hyper-religious rituals or hyper-religious teaching without a lot of relationship can often impair them relating –

You're almost building a spectrum here.

I feel like we're jumping from one end to the other. It's good. Okay.

So you know I think there are a lot of things for us to look at that may impair that. And then I think we always want to go back to the positive piece though – is that the healing and restoration in getting to a healthy component all comes back to, I think, a healthy relationship with the Lord, and then what we model, as the church, of healthy embracing.
One of my favorite quotes from Michael Sytsma talks about – he's talking about sexual issues in those that are wounded – how they come to the church and a question we're going to have to respond to the Creator when he says, "What did you do with my wounded lambs? Did you help them to heal? Or did you send them away bleeding?"

And so I love what you all are doing here in helping the church tackle very difficult topics that are very rampant and out there. Because I think many churches are sending the wounded away bleeding, instead of us, as a church – and when I say church, of course I'm not talking about the building – us as the people of the church helping these to heal, to do healthy relationships.

Dr. Darrell Bock Yeah. And I think that one of the things that has struck me really, in preparing for this, are some interesting statistics. I ran a set of statistics on unmarried births as of 2011.

Debby Wade Wow.

Dr. Darrell Bock Okay. Just listen to this. This is stunning. And we're going to be moving back and forth. In 2011, there were 46 births for every 1,000 unmarried women in the United States. The number has remained relatively steadily since 1994. But in 1980, there were 29 births per 1,000. So the 2011 numbers represent a 59 percent increase since 1980. In 2011, the rate for 20 to 24-year-olds was 70 per 1,000, and for 25 to 29-year-olds, it was 69 per 1,000. So for 20-year-olds, the rate is almost 66 percent higher than the average.

Here's the one that blew me away. Three in ten women today are in cohabitating relationships. They're living with someone, but they're not married. Okay? In 1980, 18.4 percent of all births were to unmarried mothers. In 2011, that number is up to 40.7 percent, more than double the older ratio. In 2009 was the highest percentage at 41 percent flat. Nearly half of first births were to unmarried women of any age in the year 2010.

Dr. Gary Barnes Right.

Dr. Darrell Bock And here's another one. Almost three-fourths of first births to women under the age of 25 were non-marital.
And these differentiations fluctuate widely by race. Seventy-two percent of all births to black women in 2011 were in non-married homes – 66 percent in American Indians or Alaskan Native women, 53 percent to Hispanic women, compared to 29 percent for white women and 17 percent for Asian and Pacific Islander women. So we're all over the map.

But the point of all those statistics is there are many, many, many families – we aren't even talking about the divorced families here, where there's one parent.

**Dr. Gary Barnes** Right. Right.

**Dr. Darrell Bock** This is where you start out with what I would label a non-established home, a home that doesn't have both parents in it, from the beginning. That's a wide swath of the population.

And my guess is that the church, generally speaking, isn't doing such a great job with this demographic. You see this from the counseling side. Is that a fair conclusion?

**Dr. Gary Barnes** Yeah. People in the counseling office don't see the church as a resource in this regard. Because they aren't up to speed enough to be received in the circle.

**Dr. Darrell Bock** The church isn't up to speed enough to be received –?

**Dr. Gary Barnes** No. As my family unit isn't the family unit it needs to be, in order for the church to receive it and have a program for it.

**Dr. Darrell Bock** I see. I see. Well, the other question is: is the church ready to – if they came, would the church be ready to minister to them, given where they're coming from?

**Dr. Gary Barnes** Well, they've got the right theology for it.

**Dr. Darrell Bock** Yeah.

**Dr. Gary Barnes** It's just about making it operational.
Dr. Darrell Bock

Kind of like the little theologian. So yeah. I really do think this is a major concern and blind spot, in terms of the church's readiness – I mean I think there's all the willingness in the world to want to go there and to try and go there. And any church that has a sense of mission wants to think about going in this direction.

Dr. Gary Barnes

Yeah.

Dr. Darrell Bock

But there really is a whole swath of society that without some real intentionality, I think, built into going there – you're not going to go there on your automatic pilot mode.

Dr. Gary Barnes

Right. Right.

Debby Wade

You know I will share this. Because I thought this church did this well. As part of a women's ministry, I had the opportunity of being a part of a program that a church in Canton did. On Valentine's weekend, they had a day for the single parents.

It was mainly single moms – but single parents. They provided childcare. They had several of us come in as speakers and do a keynote address on – there were different topics, everything from deepening your relationship with the Lord to feeling confident in your singleness, and breakout sessions – one on how to interview for jobs, one of them how to dress and present yourself.

One of them was on parenting as a single and what to watch for. And then they would do gift giveaways. Come in for a break and time of praise and worship. And then they may have another keynote. They served them lunch. The kids did crafts, and they were served lunch.

They came back in the afternoon and had other small breakout sessions to attend. And all of them in helping them deal – one of them was doing personality inventories to know how they better work in groups or work in positions. Then they came back for dinner – served them dinner.
And all the men of the church wore tuxes or suits to serve them dinner. And they had another presentation and a music group that came in and performed for them.

And so the women and all that attended that then, throughout the year – I mean that's how they would start it off, and then, throughout the year, put them in with mentoring families to help them with age-appropriate teaching with their kids, to finding positions, if they did not have jobs.

And then they would follow – as long as they were present and willing to come, they would follow them out. And if the kids wanted to go to school – to colleges – they were trying to set up funds that would provide college funds for the kids. That church was beginning to do that well.

I haven't gone back to visit to know how that program's doing. But they were trying to do single families well.

*Dr. Darrell Bock*  
And you saw something really intentional at work.

*Dr. Gary Barnes*  
Right.

*Debby Wade*  
It was intentional and deliberate. The church backed it. But the people supported it because they saw the need.

*Dr. Darrell Bock*  
Yeah.

*Debby Wade*  
I had to throw a positive experience in there. Was that good?

*Dr. Darrell Bock*  
Right. Right.

*Dr. Gary Barnes*  
I've got one to add to it. This is fresh from last night.

*Dr. Darrell Bock*  
Okay.

*Dr. Gary Barnes*  
I went to a pre-kindergarten graduation service last night.

*Dr. Darrell Bock*  
Okay. I'm putting all those together.
Yeah, those are phrases that don't normally link up.

Dr. Gary Barnes That's right. And so this is a church that my son and daughter-in-law go to. And so my oldest grandson was in the graduation.

Dr. Darrell Bock Okay. There you go.

Dr. Gary Barnes And so this is a remarkable example as well. Boy, I don't remember how many total kids they had. But it was maybe 35. And it was extremely diverse in every way you could think of – diverse by color and diverse by socioeconomic, by intact families, not intact families.

And to see how this church school had embraced all of the different forms of these families, and how the kids had formed a new family with each other, which also helped their family units to connect with each other –

Dr. Darrell Bock Yeah. Because they're getting cross connections –

Dr. Gary Barnes It was awesome.

Dr. Darrell Bock Yeah.

Dr. Gary Barnes And then to see afterwards, in the ice cream social, just how the mix went. It was truly a wonderful picture of oneness not based on sameness.