

Sex and the Single Guy (part 1)

From: <http://www.pureintimacy.org/piArticles/A000000531.cfm>

An interview with Scott Croft and Michael Lawrence about men and sex.

by Scott Croft and Michael Lawrence

Editor's note: After months of planning, we found ourselves in Washington, D.C., sitting in a musty library/meeting room off the main sanctuary of Capitol Hill Baptist Church. The place had the feeling of a well-loved really old brick building with stories to tell.

Present was the entire Boundless team. Steve Watters, Motte Brown and Candice Watters were set to conduct the interview. Ted Slater was set up to record everything to the hard drive of his PowerBook.

Across the table were the men we were there to interview: Scott Croft and Michael Lawrence. They were ready to be candid. The subject: guys and sex. And what they had to say was worth the effort to get there.

We almost didn't make it to the interview, stuck as we were in traffic on K Street in NW D.C. After sitting for a long time without inching forward, we saw what was holding us up. The sharpshooter riding outside and on top of the black SUV was the giveaway: We were on the waiting side of the Presidential motorcade. Once the long line of official cars, trucks, SUVs and ambulance passed, we were finally on our way. Good thing because what they had to say was a whole new way of looking at an age-old issue. So essential, so foundational, so traditional. It's nearly shocking. It's about time.

* * *

Boundless: Let's start by talking about Sex and the Supremacy of Christ. You two along with Matt Schmucker and Mark Dever were invited to speak at last year's Desiring God Ministries conference on the issue of sex and the single man. Tell us how that came about.

Michael Lawrence: The Genesis of this occurred here at Capitol Hill Baptist with a series of discussions that Mark and Matt in particular were having with single men in the church. And what came out of these discussions was the realization that we needed to do some teaching here in the church specifically to single young men on

both the whole question of sex and sexuality, and then marriage — why young single men should be thinking about marriage and pursuing it and what that should look like. And so we ran a seminar where Mark, Matt and I spoke on different aspects of those themes. So that's how it began. It began as a conversation among the pastors and staff of this church wanting to speak directly to single men in this church.

Boundless: What specifically were you seeing in the young men of CHBC that made the leaders of this church start thinking on these issues more intentionally?

ML: Well, I think two things. We saw the single men in this church not being at all serious about pursuing marriage — instead really enjoying their extended adolescence and all the freedom that came with that. We also saw the single men of this church, in that context, taking liberties with the women they were involved with physically and emotionally that we understood to be not just inappropriate but wrong biblically.

Boundless: There doesn't seem to be a great body of evidence about what Christian sexual activity is taking place. Have you seen more anecdotal evidence or are you aware of any good empirical evidence that this a problem in the church?

Scott Croft: It's been long enough since we put the original curriculum together that I don't have anything current, but the anecdotal evidence is pretty powerful.

ML: It's powerful.

Boundless: And is part of the problem just how open people are to actually talk about their sexual activity?

ML: Yeah, well one of the things that I learned, and I think I learned this the hard way, when I was on college campuses as a staff worker, I was often meeting with the young men and asking them questions about purity, seeking to hold them accountable. And I would hear, "I am struggling," and "pray for me." And we talk about it and we would pray. What I learned was I was asking vague questions and they were taking cover under the vagueness of my questions when some real serious sexual activity came to light. I took away from that and took it into my ministry a commitment to ask specific questions.

Boundless: So "struggle" could be anywhere along the —

ML: Yeah, so I specifically ask "Are you struggling?" "Yes." "Okay tell me what you are struggling with? Are you sleeping with her? Have you had intercourse? Yes or no? Okay, if it's no then what does 'struggle' mean? Are you touching her in these

inappropriate ways...." And I embarrass them because I understand that sin likes to hide in the dark. It loves the cover of anonymity and vagueness.

SC: And there is an additional cover for a lot of Christian single guys which is the assumption that intercourse is not really in play. Michael felt there were certain things that could be taken for granted so he was asking vague questions with one thing in his mind, the guy is giving a vague answer covering up sexual activity that was probably, not just maybe, but probably happening.

Boundless: So are you saying that most of them are not having intercourse but everything else?

ML: No that's not what I am saying. I am saying, though, that there is a high percentage of Christian men, evangelical men, leaders in their churches, in their college campus ministries who are having intercourse with their girlfriends.

Boundless: I have also heard, I think it was Al Mohler who said, you just assume now that young men are also struggling with online pornography.

ML/SC: Yes I think that's fair.

Boundless: So even if they are not acting out with their girlfriend, they are at least sexually promiscuous in their minds.

SC: Interestingly I think there is a strong connection between this lack of pursuit of marriage that Michael mentioned and the increasing pervasiveness of online pornography. If you talk to a professing evangelical Christian single man and ask him if he is remaining pure and he says yes, he may well again in the vagueness of that question have in his mind I am not sinning live with another woman. And some guys say they are not ready for marriage or that they may be called to celibacy because they say they aren't struggling. Well, then you start asking questions like, OK does your idea of not struggling mean that you are not masturbating, and looking at Internet pornography, and that you don't have intimate friendships with women who are satisfying your, what Al Mohler has called "intermediate needs." It used to be that being single meant very limited association with the opposite sex and that when all of the sexual desires that come with maturity kicked in, marriage or at least pursuit of marriage was the result. But now there are a number of ways to meet the need —

Boundless: — to open the release valve.

SC: Yeah that's right, both sexually and even in terms of companionship.

Boundless: So most men should be preparing for marriage. In that preparation, getting back to your writing, Michael, you go beyond Dos and Don'ts and say that the theology of sex is important for men to understand in pursuing marriage. Why is that important?

ML: Because men typically think of sex as something that is pleasurable and therefore an end in itself. What the Bible presents is that the sexual act is the sign of, and the means of creating, a covenant relationship. Marriage is a covenant and the sign that seals that covenant visually and physically is sex itself. This is what's behind the force of Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 6, when he talks about the absurdity of somebody casually having sex with a prostitute. He says, "Don't you realize that you are being united with her? You are actually forming a covenant relationship with her. And yet you have covenanted yourself to the Lord. What are you doing? You know this wasn't just a one-night stand. This wasn't just something that gave you physical pleasure. Something spiritual happened there and it shouldn't have."

Boundless: I saw a B movie one time that had this guy trying to talk his girlfriend into having sex and she is saying do you really love me? Do you really want to be one with me? He says yes and they have sex, and they wake up in the morning and they are physically joined. And I thought you don't get to see that many object lessons in the secular world but it should be what is going through every guy's mind. I am becoming physically one and being joined to this other person.

ML: I make the analogy with baptism. We are united with Christ when we repent of our sins and place our faith in His death on our behalf. There is a union, a spiritual union that happens. Well there is a sign of that covenant union that visually pictures for us what was going on there: the ordinance of baptism. The same sort of thing is going on in the relationship between sex and marriage. A covenant union is created in marriage. The picture of that union and the thing that actually affects it — and without it, there is no marriage — is this physical union of sexual intercourse. Now then, I think it's important for us to ask what is sex? And is sex just intercourse? Well I would argue no. I would argue that part of our problem is we have tried to create boundaries and draw lines within a whole category of activity that we call an experience as sexual intimacy. And we think we can draw the line here or here or here and all Christians probably agree we have to at least draw the line at sexual intercourse. And then we get into trouble when we do that, right? When we draw our

line we say OK we will go this far physically but no further. And then what do we do? Well we come right up to the line because that's what lines invite us to do. We come right up to the edge of that line and we fall over it. And we are surprised? We shouldn't be surprised because there really is no qualitative difference between the kind of activity on one side of the line and the kind of activity on the other side of the line. It's all sexual activity and God created it that way.

SC: And biblically all such lines are synthetic. They are artificial.

ML: That's right, they're all artificial, they're all synthetic. So I don't want to create new boundaries within that sphere of sexual activity. I actually want to move the boundary to outside of sexual activity. That's where the real boundary should be. Biblically, the boundary is between sexual activity and not sexual activity, not between the kinds of sexual activity we are going to engage in. And married couples understand this I think because married couples engage in a lot more than just sexual intercourse. They do all the things in their love making that an unmarried couple does on what they consider the safe side of the boundary. And they do all of that and they enjoy it and they call it foreplay. And they do it because it leads, in a same way that an on-ramp inevitably leads you up onto the highway, all of that foreplay, does a really great job of leading you onto the highway of sexual intercourse.

Boundless: So is it OK for a dating couple to be affectionate in non-sexual ways? You mentioned that you should treat women as either your sister or your mother or your wife. What about the woman who is your intended? Is there any distinction between the intended and your sister or mother?

ML: Sexually no, because the Rubicon you've got to cross is marriage.

Boundless: All right but is there affection that you would show your intended that you don't show your sister or mother?

ML: Well I want to talk about what the intent is and how public and committed that intent is. So let's talk about engagement, let's just not talk about girlfriend. Let's say you have intended to marry this woman, you have made a public commitment to do so. And basically the only reason you are not married to her is because it takes a certain amount of time to plan and pull off a wedding in our society. OK, in that context, yes, you have made a commitment, it's a unique commitment, and it's not the way you relate to all the other women in the world. And so there must be legitimate means of expressing that commitment including the emotional affection

that you feel towards her. That should not include anything sexual, biblically. Because sex is what affects the marriage along with the words "I do, until death do us apart."

Boundless: So kissing, how does that fit into it?

ML: Well I would say it doesn't fit. When you kiss a woman, particularly if you are kissing her on the mouth, if you are kissing her for any extended period of time, things ... can I be really direct here?

Boundless: Absolutely.

ML: Things start happening in her body to prepare her to receive you sexually. There it is. That comes from kissing. That happens because God made it that way. And so we just know. You don't need a pastor to tell you what's sexual and what's not sexual activity. You know. Your body tells you.

Boundless: So that's why the sister and mother metaphor is still in play. So the idea is you want to express your affection in ways that you would a mother or a sister in an engagement.

ML: In a non-sexual way. That's right.

Boundless: So just as it might be appropriate for you to hold your mother's hand, you can hold the hand of your intended. However, if your intention is not to marry her then even that subtle display of affection may be considered inappropriate, may be considered defrauding behavior.

SC: And what's particularly relevant is what you as a man have expressed to that woman. This idea of defrauding as we talked about earlier is implying a commitment or an arrangement between the two of you that doesn't exist, if you as a man imply some commitment. And it need not be spoken because from a biblical perspective conduct can belie what you are saying with your mouth. And so if I am dating a woman and it's very early on in the relationship and intentions are unclear and I try and clarify things say in a casual direction and yet I am physically or sexually or even at some levels emotionally intimate with her in ways that the Bible defines a marriage relationship, then regardless what I have said to her, I am defrauding her. And that can flow both ways. I mean we typically think of men as the initiators of these sorts of relationships, but peoples of both sexes can mislead one another.

Sex and the Single Guy (Part 2)

The second half of the interview with Scott Croft and Michael Lawrence about guys and sex.

Scott Croft and Michael Lawrence

Boundless: Is getting married a mandate? Is it a Christian responsibility?

Michael Lawrence: I think what [Genesis 1 and 2](#) teach, as well as Paul's teaching in Ephesians — what he says in [1 Corinthians 7](#) notwithstanding — is that marriage is the norm. Marriage is understood to be the norm for Christian men and women. I think it's understood to be the norm for *all* men and women — marriage is not just a *Christian* institution, marriage is a *common* grace institution. Marriage is something that God created for all men and women and it continues to apply after the fall in much the same way that it applied before the fall so that the norm for us as human beings is marriage.

Boundless: And that is to say that some are called rarely to celibate service.

ML: Yes, and I would say our basis for *rare* — using that word rare there — isn't just because of our own experience. I think Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 makes it clear that he too understands that this is unusual. He says, "I wish that all men were as I am." But he recognizes that they are not, that each has been given their particular gift. So I do think it's rare.

Scott Croft: If I could just expand on one thing, having dealt with the practical side on this.... A number of guys have talked to me and to Michael, bringing 1 Corinthians 7 as a justification for what they would like to do right now as single men and want to parse deeply whether singleness is as good or right a gift as marriage. But I think whatever Paul is saying in 1 Corinthians 7 — and we can have the discussion about parsing the exegesis there — whatever Paul is saying, he is not giving the green light to 25-, 26-, 27-, 28-year-old men who are doing well in their jobs and who enjoy having more time on the weekends and the evenings to spend with their male friends or female friends — who are not interested in the commitment and work that come with marriage — he is not giving those guys the green light to pursue that course. There is at the very least, by most orthodox and reasonable interpretations of 1 Corinthians 7, a ministerial purpose for extended singleness on the part of a Christian

man. What Paul is certainly not saying there is feel free to spend all your time doing as you wish as a single guy with no thought with these sort of things.

Boundless: Maybe there would be value if there was a new letter from Paul to single men where he would give them the additional context of the life he was called to. Because when you look in Timothy, he is saying that the life that I am called to is about sacrifice and about persecution and all these other things. We need to remind these guys that you can't just grab that one passage in isolation and think that you can use it as a cover for any kind of single life.

ML: That's right.

Boundless: If we really hold up a higher standard of what celibacy is all about, I don't know many guys who would be compelled and drawn toward it unless they actually had a gift and a calling for it versus seeing it as the thing that most gives spiritual cover for the lifestyle that they have chosen.

SC: I think that's exactly right. I think a more biblical definition of purity on the part of single men would lead to a dramatic decrease in the number of single men who are "called to celibacy."

Boundless: Is this why some of you were laughing when he said "called to celibacy right now"?

ML: Yes I think because it's a cover, it's a fig leaf.

SC: And that's the temptation in every area of life. We proof-text and use the language of Scripture to justify things that we would like to do anyway — things that may or may not have any biblical motivation and in fact may be counter-Scriptural.

ML: Right, we really don't need another letter from Paul because I think Paul is clear enough there in 1 Corinthians 7. It begins with him picking up their statement, "It's good for a man not to marry."

Boundless: Yes.

ML: And he says to them, over the course of that chapter, yes it is good not to marry when these conditions are met: when you are able to exercise self control. And that doesn't mean, "Well, I am struggling, but most of time I am doing all right." No, he means you are not failing here, you are not being controlled by your passions.

Boundless: Isn't it possible that these guys were not only defrauding women by taking advantage of them physically and emotionally but also by not marrying them?

They are, in a sense, relegating women who may be called to marriage to perpetual singleness.

ML: I'm certain that's the case. And in that sense, while I want to be careful here in talking about singleness and the curse, God is certainly able to redeem and use singleness; our Lord's example is surely the prime example of that. Nevertheless, there is surely the case that many women are having to bear the burden of this aspect of the curse of the fall. Not just because of their own sin but because of others' sin, of them being sinned against.

Boundless: We've noticed 1 Corinthians 7 being used by a lot of single women who are trying to go back and find consolation for where they are in their life. And there are a lot of Christian writers who are now encouraging them saying, "Don't be anxious. Actually singleness is better, and look at all the stuff Paul talks about. Maybe singleness is even superior, and maybe you shouldn't be thinking and praying about marriage." I think it's created a lot of confusion.

ML: To single women who find themselves single but don't particularly feel called to be single and don't particularly want to remain single: I would send them not the 1 Corinthians 7 — because I think Paul really is talking about unique gift and calling there — I would send them to [1 Peter 4](#), where I think the word *gift* is being used in a slightly different way. Peter says in 1 Peter Chapter 4 beginning [verse 8](#), "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ." I think some women may have been given a gift that we should not understand as this particular calling of celibacy, but rather simply the gift of the circumstance that they are in. And it may not be a gift that they particularly wanted, and I don't know that we should think of it as necessarily something they are going to have for the whole of their lives. But 1 Peter 4 and that sense of whatever circumstance you are in, whatever situation, whatever opportunities you have, whatever gifts you have at that particular moment — don't grumble about them, use them.

Boundless: He is saying that the circumstances themselves are the gift.

ML: I think that is a legitimate extension of 1 Peter 4.

Boundless: And that while they are exercising that gift they can still be hopeful.

ML: Yeah, absolutely.

Boundless: About marriage.

ML: Absolutely.

Boundless: OK.

Boundless: Emerson Eggerichs, who wrote the book [*Love and Respect*](#), talked about encouraging those women who find themselves single, beyond their expectation and their desires, that they are entering into the sufferings for Christ and that it's a burden to bear.

ML: Yes, and I think we should understand Christ's singleness as a burden that He bore. I think it's part of the curse that He undertook for us.

Boundless: That, and even Paul said "I can take a wife, I could be experiencing these things, but it's a sacrifice."

ML: That's right.

Boundless: You spoke of men who are not failing and being led into sexual sin as a sign that they have been given the gift of celibacy. Is that the only criteria? How would a single man know whether or not he is called to celibate service?

ML: Well, I think there are two things, and they are the two things that Paul speaks about in 1 Corinthians 7. I kind of limit myself there because this is where Paul talks about it. One is the ability to control one's passions, and I think there we want to be really clear. What Paul is talking about is a continuing, ongoing state of self-control. Not most of the time, but actually something that characterizes you, that you are characterized by by not struggling with this.

SC: To the extent that one would almost talk about it as having a peace with it, and a facility toward it. If you want to talk about celibacy as a gift, there should be some naturalness about it.

ML: In the same way I think almost everybody experiences this with particular sins. Some people just don't struggle with some sins. God has so gifted them and maybe even in a particular way sanctified them. Maybe it's anger or maybe it's greed. It's not where they struggle. They struggle elsewhere. Well, I think someone who is called to celibacy, that's the way they talk about sex, "This is just not where I struggle. My struggle is somewhere else." I think that's really the force of what Paul's getting at

there in 1 Corinthians 7. I think the other piece is that Paul certainly understands that celibacy is given for a reason, and that reason is to be able to devote oneself to ministry in a focused way because marriage itself is ministry. It's to devote oneself to the task of spreading the gospel in a way that the responsibilities of marriage and family would limit you.

Boundless: There are some who have argued that the New Testament brought about a new context for singleness. Much of the New Testament is focused on people who are single, like Jesus and Paul. So from the Old Testament to the New Testament you move from a Bible that talks so much about families, marriage and kids, and all of a sudden you are talking so much about what's being done in singleness. And then some people look at 1 Corinthians 7 where Paul says if you are not married don't get married because of the present. There are interpretations that say we are still in those present times and there are others that say no, he was talking about a set period of time. And I guess I'm just curious, is there a difference in a New Testament perspective of the world of singleness or was there some disproportionality in the fact that New Testament is written by so many singles that makes us see it in a wrong context there?

SC: I would still want to talk about singleness as an exception and I think there are some very powerful arguments based on silence in the Bible that marriage and family is a natural part of maturity and a natural part of becoming a man or woman. In [Matthew 24](#), Jesus, in talking about normal life, says people eat, drink, men marry, women are given in marriage. Here He is talking about the norm to make a point about something else. That is a strong argument from silence that this is the way things are. Paul, in a number of different books, either unspoken or subtly refers to points or premises that marriage is the norm.

ML: I think that is exactly right. Marriage continues to be the norm in a Christian worldview. And not just marriage, but family ... and that's another discussion.

Boundless: It's good though.

ML: Should we even be conceiving of voluntary childlessness within marriage? No, I don't think so. The norm is marriage and children in the Christian worldview. That said, it is certainly the case that singleness and the corollary barrenness, childlessness are redeemed in the Christian worldview. Why is that? It is not just the example of Jesus and Paul. It is because fundamentally the place of the natural

nuclear physical family changes from the Old Testament to the New Testament. In the Old Testament, the nuclear family, the biological family is the channel of God's redemptive grace. It is the stream along which God's covenant of redemption is flowing, beginning with Abraham and falling through this large extended family. In the New Covenant, while the family is not in any way denigrated, it turns out that that biological family was all along pointing to something else. And that is a spiritual family of God, into which you still have to be born, but now not because of a husband's will but as John's prologue puts in John Chapter 1 "Because of the supernatural work of God." So it is possible to be a single person in the kingdom of God and to be fruitful, which is the opposite of barren, right? To be fruitful, to be a member of a family. So barrenness and singleness were very visual pictures of what it meant to be cursed in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, in this revelation of the redeeming grace of God, even singleness, even barrenness find ways of being redeemed and a means of being now used to be fruitful —

Boundless: In the right circumstances —

ML: In the right circumstances. In the right circumstances. So marriage and family is the norm in the Christian worldview. But God's grace is enormous, right? So enormous that these two primary pictures of the curse that we see in the Old Testament — even they are redeemed and put to fruitful, spiritually useful purposes in the New Covenant context.

Copyright © 2006 Focus on the Family. All rights reserved. International copyright secured.

About the author

Scott Croft has served as the Chairman of the elders at Capitol Hill Baptist Church, where he wrote and teaches the Courtship & Dating CORE Seminar. Scott and his wife live in the Washington, D.C. area, where he is also a practicing attorney.

Michael Lawrence has served as associate pastor at Capitol Hill Baptist Church since 2002, after having earned his Ph.D. at Cambridge University and M.Div. at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Michael and his wife have four children.