

Does God Want a Roommate?

Revelation 2:1-7

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In 1978 I went on my first date with my now wife Susan. We went to see Close Encounters of the Third Kind. It was sold out, so we went next door and saw this other, awful movie. Then we went back to the Cooper and saw Close Encounters of the Third Kind.

During the first movie I had managed to get my arm around my date. I was *so* excited! I was so enamored with her that I would not move it. Even though during the second movie my arm was screaming in absolute pain, I wouldn't move it. Finally, it was utterly paralyzed . . . from my neck all the way to my fingertips . . . dead meat sitting on her shoulders.

At last I had to excuse myself,
 reach around her head,
 pick my arm up,
 set it on my lap,
 and slap it until it came to.

On our second date I worked like crazy. I prepared a picnic, I cleaned the car . . . I took her up to the horse pasture in the mountains where we kept our horse. But we couldn't catch the horse. So we picnicked on a rock under a pine tree, and we talked about death. My friend Bobby had died that week in a car accident. We talked, and talked, and talked . . . I was stricken with her.

On our *third* date I arranged a snow-shoeing trip. My mom helped me prepare a picnic for that trip as well. On the way up, at the top of Loveland Pass, we parked the car and hiked to the top of a 13,000-foot mountain in our tennis shoes in mid-winter. I remember looking at her and thinking, "Wow! What a woman!"

Of course, like Campolo would say, I was being conned. I found that my wife would rather scrub a million toilets than climb a frozen mountain in mid-winter. But, you see, it was a *beautiful* con because she didn't climb it because she loved frozen mountains; she wanted to be with *me*. She disciplined herself for me.

We snow-shoed to my Uncle Chuck's cabin in the woods, and we had a picnic in the tree house that I played in as a little boy. Having picnics in tree houses doesn't especially float my boat, but I thought that maybe it would float hers. And it *did*. It *worked*. I was in *love*.

We call it "puppy love" . . . "infatuation" . . . and we middle-aged parents warn our children about it! "Be *careful!* It's infatuation! Don't get carried away. These honeymoons don't last. One day you'll see that, when you're mature. Once you've paid a mortgage payment and lived with life's responsibilities and raised a few children and logged 10,000 hours in the office, then you'll understand that honeymoons don't last! Be careful."

On our fourth date we went to a dance. In a James Bond-like, romance-induced fog, I drove my dad's car over a median on South Broadway. I bent the frame; it was *bad*. And she still liked me!

I was feeling pretty secure in our relationship, so on the fifth date . . . we just went to a movie.

And on the sixth date we went to a movie . . .

On the seventh date we went to a movie . . .

Eighth, ninth, tenth, eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth . . . went to a movie.

It was long about then that I said, "You know, maybe we ought to date other people too."

An anonymous author wrote this:

Their wedding picture mocked them from the table

Somewhere, between the oldest child's first tooth
and the youngest daughter's graduation,
they lost each other.

Throughout the years each slowly unraveled
that tangled ball of string called self,
and as they tugged at stubborn knots,
each hid his searching from the other.

Sometimes she cried at night and begged the whispering darkness
to tell her who she was.
He lay beside her, snoring like a hibernating bear,
unaware of her winter.

Once, after they had made love,
he wanted to tell her how afraid he was of dying,
but, fearful to show his naked soul,
he spoke instead of the beauty of her breasts.

She took a course on modern art,
trying to find herself in colors splashed upon a canvas,
complaining to the other women about men
who are insensitive.

He climbed into a tomb called "The Office,"
wrapped his mind in a shroud of paper figures,
and buried himself in customers.

Slowly, the wall between them rose, cemented by
the mortar of indifference.

One day, reaching out to touch each other,
they found a barrier they could not penetrate,

and recoiling from the coldness of the stone,
each retreated from the stranger on the other side.

For when love dies, it is not in a moment of angry battle,
not when fiery bodies lose their heat.
It lies panting, exhausted
expiring at the bottom of a wall it could not scale.

No longer lovers. At best, roommates.

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

‘I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear evil men but have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not, and found them to be false; I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary.

‘But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

‘Yet this you have, you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.’”

“You’ve abandoned the love you had at first.” That must have been a very *painful* letter for Jesus to write. For He was writing to one who had spurned His love.

In my last sermon, toward the end, I shared with you how I came home and woke my wife at an unexpected hour. I said I wished I could have entered her dreams and whispered to her so she wouldn’t die in shock. “Don’t be afraid, honey. I won’t rape you. But if you desire, if you wish, my greatest longing is to make love to you. I’m your *husband!* Don’t be afraid. Awake, O sleepy one, and I will impregnate you with life.”

Then I said, “I’m not joking about that! I’m not saying that flippantly! I really mean it, because *that* is the *Gospel.*” Then I said a few more things and ended with this: “If I remember correctly, that night I got a pretty good lovin’!” And I laughed.

This last week I found out through the grapevine that a lot of folks were offended. And I’m *glad* I found out. It helps. A sermon needs to be a dialogue or a triologue. But I want to say to you, I offend people often.

- Sometimes I offend people because I’m a callous, insensitive, self-centered bonehead misrepresenting God. (It feels good to get that off my *chest* and out in the open, so you won’t be surprised.)

- Sometimes, though, it's because I didn't explain a concept well.
- Sometime, it's because I preach the gospel.

A friend said, "Peter, people don't want to be invited into your bedroom." I didn't invite anybody into my bedroom! I just said I delight in my bride! So if you're in my bedroom, *get out!* Go read the Song of Solomon . . . that'll do you!

Another friend said, "Well, I think it was that you said, 'Got some lovin' and then laughed. It made it cheap." I certainly *do not* want to make it cheap. So I apologize. I'm sorry for miscommunicating.

But I tell you what: I *do* laugh. I *seriously* laugh.

Not in mockery, but in joy;
 Serious, gut-wrenching delight
 As serious as a wedding banquet,
 Bound in a covenant of blood—
 The blood of the Lamb

When I laughed, I was making an extremely serious point that I want you to get: One day, bride of Christ, you will awake to ecstasy, and the laughter will be that much deeper and that much stronger because you have been to the edge of hell, and you've been in bondage to the Dragon that rapes your soul.

But now you are being awakened by the Bridegroom who is the lover of souls. He does not steal your sovereignty and rape your soul; He romances your soul into the ecstasy of surrender. His goal is *ecstasy*. Joy! More serious and more powerful than all this *fallen*, God-condemned, God-damned (is the word) world! Joy.

"He endured the cross, despising the shame, for the *joy* that was set before Him." And what was that joy, Bride of Christ? *You!* "The Lord delights in you," says Isaiah. "As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you" (Isaiah 62).

How does a bridegroom take delight in his bride?

- The Psalmist wrote, "The sun declares the glory of God. It comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber." Wow! Radiant!
- John said, "The friend of the bridegroom rejoices at the bridegroom's voice."

In that day the wedding party—the wedding banquet—the marriage supper—didn't really start until the friend of the bridegroom—the best man—heard the voice of the bridegroom crying out from the bridal chamber, "We did it!" And that's when the feasting began . . .

The laughing began . . .
The party began . . .
The *life* began . . .

And they celebrated for a week.

The Great Bridegroom longs to take delight in His bride. But He *will not* take delight unless she surrenders delight, because *His* delight is *her* delight. And *her* delight is *His* delight. It's a communion of delight. And in that communion of delight, fruit—life—babies—are born. It's the way God made it.

But Satan steals,
and the Dragon rapes,
in order to give birth
to death and fear.

So last week when I heard people were offended, I felt angry. Not at all angry at those people, not at all angry at you, a little bit angry at myself for miscommunicating, but a whole lot angry at an Ancient Dragon who lies to the Bride of Christ so she will not surrender to delight. She *will not* bear life, but fear, shame, and death instead.

Several years ago I sat in the car with a very good friend who was planning to leave his wife. I was pleading with him to stay. Finally, he said, "Peter, do you know that on our wedding night she wouldn't let me touch her?" He said, "She wouldn't let me make love to her for three days, because she didn't *want* to."

You see, my friend leaving his wife . . . that was an inexcusable sin. (*All* sin is inexcusable. It can only be forgiven.) It was a horrendous sin. His wife also committed a horrendous sin. And they both listened to the Dragon.

We may be married to Christ, and Satan can't prevent that now; however, with lies he can keep us from bearing fruit. Do you know why? Roommates don't bear fruit. Lovers do.

God doesn't want roommates; He pursues a lover.

So the Dragon tempts us. He tempts us to immorality *and* morality—to shame. We eventually just become roommates, our hearts sealed off to the Great Bridegroom, so that the *seed*—the Word of God!—Jesus Himself!—would not be implanted in the fertile, open soil of our hearts. Like we read last week, "We are our own deepest hiding place, and fear and death are the surest doors against the Lover of our souls."

1. The Dragon tempts us with immorality. He tempts us to offer our hearts to idols that end up raping us to our shame. Then we associated passionate, intimate communion . . . with shame.

We watch television. The *crap* that's on television just blows my mind! And nobody flinches. Nobody is surprised.

We talk about this stuff with our friends . . . we joke . . . and we laugh . . . we can have conversations about it right out here in the parking lot, but the preacher mentions it in a sermon, and people are *offended?! What is that?* The sanctuary is the one place we *shouldn't* be offended.

Paul wrote this to the Ephesians about thirty years before John: “For this reason a man will leave his father and his mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”

Maybe the Ancient Dragon is lying to us about *far more* than just *sex!* He is lying to us about Jesus . . . and us. He lies through immorality (and we'll talk about that much more in Thyatira).

2. The Dragon also lies to us through morality—sin and law. Immorality is the door to morality—the law.

So Satan whispers something like this: “Since your heart was raped, never surrender it again. Guard your naked heart. Guard it . . . with morality . . . with law . . . keep it prim and proper. Everything in the proper place! Maintain control over the sovereign, little kingdom of your heart. And this *is* what Jesus is for. To guard the border of your heart so that everything inside would be locked away safe and secure.”

In one of his stories, C. S. Lewis speaks to a cold bride through one of his characters, and this is what he says:

But your trouble has been what old poets called *Daungler*. We call it Pride. You are offended by the masculine itself . . . the gold lion, the bearded bull—which breaks through hedges and scatters the little kingdom of your primness The male you could have escaped, for it exists only on the biological level. But the masculine none of us can escape. What is above and beyond all things is so masculine that we are all feminine in relation to it. . . .

We are the Bride of Christ. And why are you, Bride of Christ, betrothed to Jesus the Christ? Why? Are you betrothed to Jesus so He will keep order, discipline, and morality in your kingdom? So He will guard the border of your prim and proper little kingdom, keeping everything inside safe and secure?

Are you betrothed to Him for security?—Eternal fire insurance? “What a great provider!” Did you marry for *security*? Oh, the Lord is sad when people do that. Jesus may want to come and scatter the kingdom of your primness and draw you into a wild, passionate romance where you lose everything and gain Him.

He did not hang on a cross and bear the pain of Hell so you would be regular in your devotions, go on one missions project a year, and be a faithful tither. He suffered, died, and bore Hell in order to win your heart.

That you would surrender
Your sovereignty to His sovereignty;
That you would surrender
To ecstasy.

But Satan has made you fear the deepest longing of your soul so you would spurn the Lord's advances and turn Him into a roommate—a border guard.

Jesus writes to the Ephesians, “Ephesus, I see your works. I see your faithful endurance. I see your orthodoxy . . . it is perfect. And you hate the work of the Nicolaitans. I hate their works too.”

The Nicolaitans were probably a group that taught that sexual licentiousness or sexual immorality was just fine. Jesus is saying, “Thank you, Ephesus. Thank you for hating immorality. Thank you for hating passion out of bounds. But, my dear, you have come to hate passion *in* bounds! You cook, you clean, you take care of the children, and I'm absolutely convinced you'd never give your passion to another. But what's the *point*? You never give it to *Me*.”

And you have abandoned the love you had at first.

We can philosophize and theologize about what “love” means . . . Agape, Storge, Phileo, Eros . . . but *you* know what Jesus means.

[Singing]

“You've lost that lovin' feelin' . . . oh that lovin' feelin' . . . You've lost that lovin' feelin' 'cause it's gone . . . gone . . . gone . . . wohhhh . . . (bum bum . . . bum bum . . . bum bum . . . bum)

Baby, baby . . . I get down on my knees for you (bum bum . . . bum bum . . . bum bum . . . bum) if you would only love me . . . like you used to dooooo. Baby, baby, so bring it on back . . .”

“You've lost that loving feeling,” He says! And we say, “Lost the loving *feeling*?! I can't control my feelings!” *Wrong*. If you're a Christian, that is basically psycho-bull-ony. How do I know that? Because the Living Lord says, “Repent. Remember. And do those things you did at first, Ephesus.”

People have said, “Well, Peter, you know, you and Susan seem to have a pretty passionate relationship,” as if that just kind of *happens*. It *is* a gift, but let me tell you: we've had to *fight* for it beginning twenty-four years ago, after our thirteenth date, when I remember praying, “Oh, God, I think the problem is with me. Every time I win a girl's heart I get tired of her—lose passion for her. God, I don't think I understand love. Help me.”

We've had to discipline ourselves for passion.

1. While we were dating, abstaining in hope of greater passion when we were married.
2. Once married, we really had to discipline ourselves even *more* for passion. Four little children . . . a wife that gets no sleep . . . a job that can consume every waking moment . . . a culture that constantly invites me to be unfaithful . . . the middle-age spread on my gut and on my wife's whatever . . . and most of all, the frightened, little, insecure, painful hearts that we bring into this covenant ratified by God.

It's been a fight for passion. And it has cost me energy, and mostly pride. I had to get down on my knees and beg.

Can you imagine how Jesus—the Word that was with God and was God—felt writing to His bride in Ephesus? I think *I* can . . .

Several years ago, nursing our last child, my wife didn't have much energy for me. And I was desperate for her affections. I mean *any* affection . . . a hug . . . a kiss . . . a smile . . . She would say, "Well, I just grew up in a family that didn't express itself that much. I cook, I clean, I take care of the children . . . *that's* how I say I love you."

But I knew the truth. She was growing tired of the fight—fighting for passion. And it *was* a fight for her, because, unlike Jesus, I can be very critical and self-centered and demanding in the wrong kind of way . . . not easy to love.

I would stay awake all night sometimes, angry and frustrated, not knowing what to do with my feelings. During those times sexual immorality was especially tempting. Movies and the Entertainment Channel Network (or whatever it's called) . . . *tempting!* I could demand sexuality, but I couldn't demand delight.

And her delight
is my delight,
a communion of delight.

To tell her how I felt was utterly humiliating. "Susan, even though you don't long for me, I still long for you. I sit awake all night; I watch you while you're sleeping, just wishing, hoping, and praying that you would wake up and receive my love."

I have to tell you that during that time there were nights I remember thinking to myself, "Peter, just give up. Just give up. Give up on being lovers, and just settle on being roommates." That was a temptation, and it came from Hell.

By the grace of God, one night late I wrote my wife a letter. I told her how I felt—how I ached for her, and I bared my soul.

God has written his sleeping bride a letter.
The name of the letter is "Jesus"—the Word of God.

And look at Him: beaten, bloody, humiliated, exposed . . . the heart of the Living God hanging on an old Roman cross for the love of you—His bride. Oh, when you see Him, He is easy to love.

Me?—I’m hard to love. But I did write to Susan and said, “This is my heart. Remember how you were when we were first married? Don’t give me that ‘I grew up in this kind of home . . .’! I *remember* the things you did when we were first married! Can’t you do *those* things?”

Now I need to tell you, because I know you’re worried: My wife edits all my sermons. My sermons are always *our* sermons; they come out of *our* life together. And it was my wife who reminded me of that letter. She reminded me of that letter because *that letter* gave her hope. It was a new beginning for us.

“Ephesus, Ephesus . . . Oh, Ephesus, remember what we had? Repent! And do those things that you did at first.”

And we say, “What *were* those things that they did at first in Ephesus?” Because if we *knew* what those things *were* we could *do them!* We could get them down, we could get everything in order, our little kingdom would be prim and proper, and everything would be okay, right?” Wrong!

What would we do? We would establish a new denomination: First Church of the Things They Did First in Ephesus. And in a few weeks we would be as dead as ever.

We don’t know what they did at first! We’re not invited into their *bedroom*. Why? Because we are invited into *our* bedroom. Jesus has a unique relationship with every one of us. *And* He has a unique relationship with each church. He’s singing a new song at Lookout Mountain Community Church that’s not like a song anywhere else! Unique.

We don’t know exactly what they did, but whatever it was, they did it for that first love and out of that first love. God doesn’t want us to be simply stuck in first love. He’s always maturing us into the deeper things of love . . . “Come on, come on, come on . . . a little deeper, a little deeper . . .” But that doesn’t mean He wants us to *lose* that first love.

When you are seventy-five your passion for your spouse should be stronger than ever. It may not be sexual, but it should be more *intimate* than sexual. God’s goal is that you’ll be far more than roommates.

Jesus says to Ephesus, “Remember, repent, and do the things you did at first.” And the question is, what is Jesus saying to *you*?

- “Remember those hikes we used to take? And *you* probably didn’t even think of them as devotional, but remember those hikes? You thought of *me* the whole time! Would you go hiking again?”

- “Remember how you used to stay up late and *devour* my Word? You *memorized* it. Could you do that again?”
- “Remember how you gave? Do that again.”
- “Remember how you sang songs to me. Would you sing me a song?”
- “Peter, remember how you used to see me in your kids every time you looked at them? You’ve forgotten to *look*. Take another look . . . I’m still there.”

In a few weeks He may call you to something else. Did you notice that it was when Susan and I did exactly what we did on our first date, over and over and over again, that we got tired of each other? If we went snow-shoeing and ate picnics in tree houses for thirty years we would *still* get tired of each other!

The point is, *work* at your relationship. Do the things that nurture your affections . . . your *first love*. That’s what Christian disciplines are about. Discipline yourself for affection.

When Susan and I turn into cold fish, I *know* there are things I need to *do*, whether I *feel* like it or not. I need to discipline myself to call a baby sitter . . . arrange a dinner . . . buy some flowers . . . stop criticizing her . . . do some dishes . . . make a date. Those things are disciplines.

You say, “How do I get strength for those disciplines? Aren’t they just *new laws* and *dead works*?” No! Not if you discipline yourself in *hope* of that first love.

We all have different struggles, and this may be a silly example . . . I don’t want you to get the wrong idea, but the example works for me:

I am genetically engineered by God to weigh a lot. I think I have a base metabolic rate of two. At times I gain weight; at times I lose weight. When I lose weight, people come up to me and say, “You look so great!” And I know there are other times when they are thinking, “Oh, you’re *fat*.”

When people ask me, “How did you *do* that?” I always answer honestly: “I planned a romantic, tropical vacation with my wife.” They always look at me confused, but I am serious. You see, I’ve tried just about every diet in the world . . . Atkins’ Diet, the Slim Fast program, the Zone diet, the Body for Life thing . . . I have found the secret to losing weight. This is it:

BE HUNGRY A LOT!

That’s a discipline! How do you find the strength to be hungry a lot? Plan a romantic, tropical vacation. I know we can’t *all* do that, but I *can*. I can from time to time plan a romantic, tropical vacation, and here’s what happens. I see the pizza, I look at the pizza . . . I *love* pizza . . . but then I think of a beach, my wife, and things I won’t tell you, and I put the pizza down.

It's to *her* credit. But please hear this: I don't date my wife in order to lose weight. She is *not* a weight loss program.

And I should not love Jesus in *order* to have a disciplined life. He's not a program for getting your life in order!

I discipline my life
in the hope of intimacy with Jesus;
I lose weight in the hope of community—
communion with my wife.

But, you see, if the reservations are cancelled, and I lose hope . . . watch out, Pizza Hut. Here I come!

Do you see the strategy of Satan? He whispers, "Honey, the reservations are cancelled. Not only that, but that deepest, most hungry longing of your soul for intimate, passionate communion is *evil*." So you discipline it into oblivion.

That's not the voice of Jesus. He whispers, "You know that deepest longing of your soul for intimate, passionate communion? Honey, I *made* it because I made *you* for *me*. Ecstasy. Do you believe that? Reservation confirmed. Now *stay hungry* for me."

- The call of singleness is not a call to passionless-ness. It's a call to greater passion focused on Jesus. "Would you stay hungry for me?" If you are called to singleness, I believe that one morning Jesus will wake you up to such a loving that all eternity you will say, "Thank You, Jesus. I praise You that You saved me just for *You*."
- If you're called to marriage, I believe Jesus will one day wake you up to such a loving that you'll say, "Jesus, thank You that in marriage You prepared me for this. Thank you."

But Satan whispers,
"Discipline yourself in shame."

Jesus whispers,
"My beloved, discipline yourself in *hope*."

Do you know what "Ephesus" means? It means "desired one." "Ephesus, my desired one, do the things you did at first. To him who overcomes I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise [that means "pleasure garden"] of God." Would you dream of that day? Believe in that day? You *will* overcome.

I John 5:4: "This is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith." "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for." It is not a hope that will disappoint us.

Revelation 19:

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure”—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.”

Believe that!

That Jesus *saves* you,
That He *washes* you,
That He *cleanses* you,
That He *cleans* you with His very own blood,
That He *gives* you a white, wedding gown.

So put it on in faith and hope, and He will bear life in you. He doesn't need a roommate; He longs for a lover, the communion of delight.

“And on the night Jesus was betrayed, He took bread and broke it, saying, ‘This is my body—my body—given for you. Do this in remembrance of me’ [hope of me, faith in me.] In the same way after supper He took the cup and said, ‘This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins. I will not drink again of this cup until I drink it with you in my Father’s kingdom.’”

So drink in hope in Jesus.

“Lord Jesus, we thank You that You have given Yourself to us. God, forgive us for not opening ourselves to You. It's because we have believed lies that You are

not good. Lord Jesus, You are good. You are ecstasy. And we were made for You. Thank You.”

If you hold the bread and wine and say to yourself, “Jesus, I don't feel it,” understand that our Lord is so humble that He gets down on His knees and says, “I know, sweetheart. You've been listening to the Dragon. Just take it in faith. I'll take care of the rest.” He'll teach you to love. Trust Him.

Jesus romanced you all the way to that cross outside Jerusalem and even from the depths of hell. So, in the name of Jesus, do a little romancing yourself this week. Amen.