

# Courtship and Dating



## **Introduction: Is there a better way?**

I think most Christians recognize that the way our modern culture dates is not the way a Christian should seek a spouse. Many Christians try to date in a different way from the world; yet, one of the struggles we sometimes face is the lack of guidance on dating. I was raised in small congregations. When I first faced these questions, I didn't have classes or books on dating or courtship. It was almost as if I was just had to figure it out. Is there better way than the world's way of dating or trial and error dating? Yes. Finding a spouse can be a God honoring process. The season of dating/courtship doesn't have to be a time that we look back on with shame. Our relationships before marriage can be pure and pleasing to God.

Perhaps you have had more guidance than I had, but I think that for many young people the direction given was minimal. Thankfully for me, in time, as I sought assistance, I was blessed with help through a number of books: *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* (Joshua Harris), *Boy Meets Girl* (Joshua Harris), *Passion and Purity* (Elizabeth Elliot), *Boundaries in Dating* (Henry Cloud and John Townsend), *When God Writes Your Love Story* (Eric and Leslie Ludy), *Best Friends for Life* (Michael and Judy Phillips), and *Get Real* (Glenn Colley and Chuck Webster).

My hope in writing this short e-book is not to focus on bashing anyone's ideas, but to complement and add a different perspective. The books mentioned above had good ideas and concepts, but reading a book is often like eating a fish, there are bones you have to pick out to get to the meat. I am sure that is true for this short e-book too. I hope there are not too many bones and you are blessed to read it. It was a blessing for me to write it.

Before we start, I want to define one term: Courtship. Courtship is the process of seeking marriage. In our modern times, dating can be similar to courtship. I know some who dated in purity and their intention was a godly marriage, even though they did not call it courtship. Whatever we call it, our relationships should honor God. What the world does in dating is not what we should do as Christians. So often today, dating is stealing things reserved for marriage, with none of the commitment or intention of marriage found in courtship.

## **Starting at the beginning.**

*Genesis 2:24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*

From the beginning, God intended for men and women to be married. While there are hard situations and tragedies that cause some not to marry, in general, most people will marry. In addition, for most people today, we choose whom we marry. The Bible does not give Christians the name of the person we should marry, or when we will meet or where we will meet. As singles, it is up to us to prayerfully seek a mate according to the principles of the Bible.

From the Bible, we know that the foundation we want for our marriages is Christ (Ephesians 5:22-33). When we make God the foundation of our lives, everything else falls into place according to His will. So as we consider how to conduct ourselves in relationships, we will start with why we should seek God first and make Him the foundation of our lives.

## **Seek God First.**

*Matthew 6:31-33 Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' (32) For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. (33) But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*

Are you seeking God first in your life? Forget about dating and relationships for a moment. Thousands of years from now, in heaven, you will not be concerned about marriage, or even whether you ever married! The spiritual aspects are the most important parts of life and are relevant for all of eternity. God says to seek those spiritual things first and the rest will fall into place according to His will. Do you really believe that?

*Ephesians 3:20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us*

God has things under control, He can do more than we ask or think. Whether we acknowledge it or not, we depend on God for each breath we take (Daniel

5:23). God holds our breath in His hand! We depend on God for our health, food, clothing, etc. God knows about our hopes and dreams. He knows every detail of our lives. Since God has things under control, I don't need to worry about life, but I do need to obey Him and put Him first in my life.

Since God has things under control, what has He said about our hopes for marriage? Consider these verses:

*Proverbs 18:22 He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD.*

*Proverbs 19:14 Houses and riches are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from the LORD.*

Both of these verses show us that God can help us find a mate; however, that does not mean that God will step in and make the choice for us or that we will always find a mate. Just because God has things under control, doesn't mean everything will go according to MY hopes or MY plans (Isaiah 55:8). In fact, some will never marry, for a number of reasons; in addition, God might have other plans for you in His wisdom (more on this later). Yet these verses help give us perspective and focus in our prayers; God CAN be involved in this choice, and we should want that. Our prayers should be, IF IT IS God's will, for God to help us make this choice and help us find someone who will honor and serve Him.

While it may be true that God's hand of providence can help us find a mate, not every opportunity for a relationship is from God! Just because an attractive person is showing interest in you, that doesn't mean that God had anything to do with it. Many attractive worldly people would be terrible courtship/marriage choices. Beauty is a poor indicator of moral character and virtue. And convenience is a poor indicator of providence. Sadly, many marriages are lightly entered into without God's help or without careful thought about God's word on the matter.

**To everything there is a season.**

*Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: (2) a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, And*

*a time to pluck what is planted; (3) a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; (4) a time to weep, And a time to laugh; a time to mourn, And a time to dance; (5) a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; (6) a time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; (7) a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; (8) a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.*

Everything has a season and that is true of relationships too. There is a time to seek relationships and marriage and a time to refrain. Waiting for that right time is not easy. I think most young people desire companionship and romance long before they are ready for the commitment and responsibility. And unfortunately, many experiment with dating, with romance, and with fulfilling lust only to discover that bitterness, sadness, and shame come from impurity and violating God's plan. Everything has a season, don't rush that season!

I can think of at least two seasons that most singles will face: (1) too young or not ready for courtship/marriage and (2) ready for courtship/marriage, but waiting. What season are you in?

Are you too young for courtship/marriage? The Bible doesn't give an exact age to pursue courtship/marriage or ways to date or engage in courtship. We have societal traditions to help provide a method for young people to marry, but those are just traditions. Other cultures have arranged marriages, but those are traditions as well. God may not have given the method, but He did give guidance. God has spoken on love, purity, kindness, divorce, anger, parenting, financial obligations, etc. There is no Biblically right method, as long as you follow the guidance given in the Bible. I think most of us today would be shocked at past times when some young women were married very young and some men didn't marry until they were older and had established incomes. In our culture today, you cannot marry before age 18 without parental consent. But that doesn't necessarily mean that someone is ready at 18 or not ready before 18.

Are you ready, but waiting? Are you sure you are ready? We get to choose when we are ready, so make sure you are ready.

1. Are you ready for children? Once you are married, children are part of the equation.
2. Do you have a way to support a family financially? 1 Timothy 5:8 commands us to support our own families, are you ready for this?
3. Do you have self-control? Finances, your speech, anger, your eyes, your passions, etc.
4. How do you treat your parents, brothers, and sisters? How you treat your family before marriage is an indicator of how you will treat your husband or wife. If you are harsh and angry now, you will be harsh and angry in the future.
5. Do you have realistic expectations of marriage? Marriage is nothing like what is portrayed in the media today. You need to learn real expectations from the Christians around you.

The list isn't exhaustive, but I hope it helps you see that we can desire something before we are prepared to have it. So, are you really ready?

### **Waiting? Time to Prepare.**

One of the ways that we know that we are ready for something is when we have made efforts to be prepared for it. For example, all of us who know how to drive know that we were not ready to take the wheel until we had spent some time learning how to drive and learning the rules of the road.

*Proverbs 24:27 Prepare your outside work, make it fit for yourself in the field; and afterward build your house.*

In other words, get your fields prepared and income source established, and then build your house. The Proverb writer's point is to be prepared! I see a parallel to relationships and marriage too - be prepared before you seek them!

Financial problems are the #1 cause for divorce<sup>4</sup>. Being a Christian does not mean there are no bills to pay each month or that life is any less expensive! Seeking a relationship before you are ready is like building your house before you planted your fields and gathered any income. God gave us advice like this so that we would not make foolish decisions! How are you going to pay your bills?

Preparation is more than financial. Do you know how to deal with your anger? Do you know how to communicate? For the guys, do you have your mind and eyes under control? Being married won't fix any of those problems; in fact, it will likely make any uncontrolled problems worse.

I have always liked this analogy: Two farmers prayed for rain, one went out and tilled his fields and prepared and planted seeds in hope that the rain would come. The other farmer just waited for rain, if it came, he would figure what to do then. Which farmer is prepared to receive what he is asking for? Which farmer acted on their faith? And which farmer is more likely to have God's hand of help? It is so easy to ask for something and then make no effort to be prepared to receive it.

Are you asking and waiting for God to send a potential mate, and then you will figure out how to communicate or how to manage a household? Or are you using this time as a single person to grow spiritually and to learn how to be a godly mate for someone? There are numerous books and studies for single Christians that focus on preparation for both courtship and marriage. Are you going to prepare for what you are asking for?

### **Why waiting makes sense.**

For many, dating has become a teenage and even preteen practice. Although the Bible doesn't specify an age before we engage in relationships, there are many reasons why waiting makes sense. Our goal should be godly marriage. Much of modern dating today is short-term relationships - you learn to love, and then learn to forget about that person - over and over. Do you really want to be able to habitually break up? How many high school relationships lead to pain and heart-break, to compromise and impurity? Many. Countless young people look back at their high school dating with shame and regret. It is not supposed to be this way!

Modern dating teaches us to treat our relationships as disposable; not a useful skill for marriage. Modern dating hasn't worked well, and the divorce statistics show that to be true. In 1900 the divorce rate was 8.1 percent, now it is 50%<sup>1</sup>. In 1900, you would be hard pressed to go out on a date without a chaperone, and kissing was out of the question.<sup>2</sup> Our modern approach to dating has both failed to protect our purity and failed to prepare young people for marriage.

I think a large part of how we got off track is that seeking a relationship was no longer only for those ready for marriage. We switched from a culture of courtship that likely meant one or two relationships before marriage, to a culture of recreational and temporary dating relationships in which we are constantly learning to leave and forget someone we “loved”- again and again. Sounds like a culture of divorce training doesn't it? In practical terms, the average 13 to 17 year old is nowhere near ready for marriage, so why pursue dating? What is to be gained? Nothing. What is so often lost? Our purity! Go back to the list above; are you ready for a relationship?

One other aspect to waiting, waiting makes controlling and saving your passions easier. If you date long before you are prepared to marry, what will you do if you fall in love and deeply desire someone, but you can't marry? If you are ready for marriage and you seek someone, you can marry and your passions are in fact a blessing (Hebrews 13:4). But what are you going to do with passions for someone that can't be fulfilled for years? Marriage is the only way we can fulfill our passions. Our modern dating methods have a lot to do with why so many people, Christians included, lose their virginity before marriage. It is not supposed to be that way! And this is not marriage the way that God intended it!

*1 Corinthians 7:8-9 “But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; (9) but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.”*

Paul reminds us the human body isn't lazy when it comes to passion, we can burn with passion when we have found someone we are attracted to. If you are not ready for marriage, then seeking a relationship is like trying to light the fuse to dynamite with the hopes that it won't light or that the fuse is very longggg! Why not wait until you are ready for the fireworks? Don't light a match to fireworks that you cannot enjoy in a godly way.

### **Maintaining our Purity.**

What does it mean to be pure before marriage? I think most people would say the absence of something evil. Yet, in practice, people often use very different standards as to what is pure before marriage. There are things



couples do that are lustful in nature, but are not sex. For example: kissing, massage, holding, cuddling, sleeping together without sex, etc. What is God's standard?

First, the foundation: fornication is a sin:

*Ephesians 5:3 But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints;*

The Greek word used in Ephesians 5:3 for fornication is porneia. It covers all forms of illicit sexual intercourse: sex before marriage, adultery, homosexuality, etc. It is from this Greek word, porneia, we get the word pornography. God's expectation is no sex before marriage.

While it may be clear that sex before marriage is wrong, what about kissing, making-out, cuddling, or other things that people do before marriage? Has God said anything? Romans 13:12-14 helps us understand what God expects.

*Romans 13:12-14 The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. (13) Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. (14) But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.*

“...make no provision for the flesh...” Making a provision for the flesh is anything that stirs our lusts outside of marriage. Be honest, that can be a lot of things: kissing, lustful looking, nudity, immodesty, romantic holding, romantic hugging, massage, dancing, running hands through one's hair, etc. There is so much that can stir our passions. If something stirs your passions before marriage, don't do it! Our choices will make it either easier or harder to stay pure.

### **Why wait for kissing?**

The world is sometimes more honest about sin than some Christians. You might have heard someone say, “I made it to first base with a girl.” What is first base? Kissing. First base on the way to what? I suspect that most guys at least have heard the worldly baseball analogy about girls. First base is

kissing, second base is touching above the waist, third base is touching below the waist, and home is sex. Whether some Christians admit it or not, the world knows, kissing is the first step toward sex. But I think some Christians try to convince themselves otherwise, because it is something THEY WANT, a provision of the flesh THEY like.

Consider these facts about romantic kissing:

- When kissing, dopamine, endorphins, and phenylethylamine are all released into your blood stream giving you a feeling of pleasure and euphoria and happiness.<sup>3</sup> These hormones make us want more.
- Our adrenal glands produce norepinephrine and epinephrine preparing your for organs for sex.<sup>3</sup> Your whole body is shot with a chemical stew in preparation for sex. Kissing is one of the keys that turns on the sex drive. (Our eyes are another key).

Clearly not all kissing is romantic in nature or stirs passions. There is kissing between family members and some cultural kissing on the cheek or hand as a greeting. Yet, if we are honest about it, a whole lot of kissing by unmarried couples is a provision for the flesh; it is arousal, and enjoying aspects of marriage, before marriage!

I know that some will say that they are the exception, that kissing doesn't affect them, it doesn't stir their desire. But even if that were so, how do they know that the other person wasn't being affected? As a side note, I have had people tell me they could look at porn and enjoy it and that it "didn't affect them". Another told me they were not looking lustfully; they claimed it was like looking at a cool car or beautiful shape. We can fool ourselves into justifying any sin we WANT to do. Whether we admit it or recognize it, we are affected by romantic kissing.

If you save kissing for marriage, there will be no regrets, and you cannot fall into fornication if you hold true to that standard. In our modern society, where so many Christians stumble into fornication, saving kissing for marriage can be the difference between giving yourself completely to your spouse on your wedding day or the reality of a lifetime of regret that you did not.

One additional benefit, the devil cannot tempt you as strongly in areas that you have never experienced. Satan can always tempt us by curiosity, but he can tempt us even more strongly by our experiences/memories and details of sins we have indulged in. Our purity helps protect us from sin. The less experience you have in lustful things, the less ammo the devil has to tempt you with. If you don't know what it is like, the Devil simply can't tempt you in the same way.

### **A side note for guys.**

Kissing is not the only thing that fills our bodies with a chemical stew of hormones, our eyes do the same. Looking at pornography can become a chemical addiction in your brain to images and the stimuli we get from the nudity. The reason we like to look at women's bodies is that when we do, our body is doing a lot of things behind the scene. While it can be sometimes be subtle, our bodies are being affected, and we can become addicted to that chemical stimulation. In a marriage, being "addicted" to looking at your wife's body is a good thing and a blessing from God (Proverbs 5:19). Outside of marriage, lustful eyes will only hurt you. If you are looking at pornography, you must stop! Pornography destroys marriages, and a pornography addiction before marriage will likely only get worse after marriage. A wife can never compete with false and imaginary images. If you are looking at porn, you are not ready for marriage! (If you are addicted, you need help, get help! James 5:16) For further reading, check out "*Every Young Man's Battle*" by Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker and "*Who Moved the Goal Post*" by Bob Gresh.

### **A side note for girls.**

You may be wired differently from guys, and not as visually oriented to lust, but you still need to watch what you look at. Girls looking at nude or partially nude men are just as wrong as men looking at women that way. It is sad to see so many Christian young women post on Facebook or Pinterest photos of men half-dressed or no shirts and commenting on how "hot they are". They are looking lustfully at men. If guys posted girls half-dressed in suggestive poses and commented about how "hot" they are, most Christians would object. Yet young women need to be held to the same standard. They are by God! Don't look lustfully, that is a provision of the flesh for both males and females.

## **Waiting is an important part of the plan.**

Be thankful that we don't get what we want the instant we pray for it. Be very thankful! Many times what we thought we wanted, or whom we thought we wanted, turns out to be not what we wanted at all. So much of life becomes clear with a little time. Our thoughts, goals, and hopes change with time and spiritual growth. I suspect most young people are at times very shallow in their desires, I know I was. "She is pretty; I want her!" As you grow spiritually, it becomes "She is virtuous and godly; I desire her," or "He is honorable and godly; I desire him." Be thankful that your prayers are not always answered with 'Yes', because many times 'No' is spiritually best.

Going back to the analogy of the farmer praying for rain. Sometimes the rain comes later than hoped for; in fact, in the Bible, we see people waiting a long time for marriage: Joseph was 30 years old, Isaac was 40. Joseph was falsely imprisoned and before that sold into slavery. Isaac was living in a pagan land where there were likely no faithful young women. They had to trust in God and they had to wait, a long time, but waiting was for the best. Isaac likely could have found a pagan girl quickly (he could have taken a short cut) and then lived the rest of his life regretting it. By trusting and waiting, he was blessed. What about you, do you trust in God enough to wait?

We see in Abraham and Sarah an example of what happens when you don't trust in God's timing. Abraham and Sarah waited for many years for a child, the child hadn't come, even though God had promised them a child. In Genesis 16, Abraham (at 86 years old) and Sarah (at 76) are long past childbearing age, and yet God promised descendants as numerous as the stars in sky:

*Genesis 15:5 (NKJV) Then He brought him outside and said, "look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." and He said to him, "so shall your descendants be."*

But God's promise didn't happen instantly, and Sarah, in a moment of doubt, didn't trust in God. She sees a solution: her maidservant, Hagar, could become Abraham's concubine and give them a child. This is not what God said, but it was convenient and fast and solved the problem, right? Wrong. God didn't forget, He had other plans. And God didn't need their help; in

reality, their help was no help at all! The child born to Hagar becomes a nation that will kill and harass many of Abraham's descendants in the future. And the marriage to the concubine Hagar will be a disaster and cause all sorts of turmoil in Abraham and Sarah's marriage!

All of us will have Hagar moments in life. Times in our life when it looks like God forgot, and we will be tempted to cut corners or compromise to solve the matters on our own. I think for many of us, waiting for the right time for dating/courtship is a Hagar moment. We want it now! Another Hagar moment is when we are ready, but the right one hasn't shown up yet! Waiting is hard!

Although it is sad to consider, some will never marry, for a whole host of reasons. Serious health problems might mean that someone could not marry. Tragedies also happen. Sometimes young people must stay at home and take care of family members. Biblical examples are numerous too. Jeremiah was told not to marry by God (Jeremiah 16:2). Tamar was raped by her half-brother Amnon and it appears she never married (2 Samuel 13:1-20). Others chose not to marry to serve God; it appears John the Baptist never married, as well as Paul and Timothy, so that they could be fully dedicated to preaching.

God is fully aware that you are single. He has every hair on your head numbered (Luke 12:7). Trust in God. If you are not yet ready for relationships and marriage, then trust in God, wait, and use this time to grow and learn about courtship and marriage. If you are ready for courtship and marriage, then trust that either one of these are true: (1) that in due time God can provide you a godly mate; or (2) you can be useful to God and glorify Him as a single person. Trust in God.

*1 Peter 5:6-7 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, (7) casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.*

God knows all about us. He cares about us! He knows about our hopes and cares, and wants to trust in Him. Trust in Him with your hopes for relationships and marriage.

## **True Love.**

It is not always easy to remember the distinction between love and lust. What does it mean to love someone? One of the advantages of the Greek language is that there are four different words for love that give deeper meaning than the one word we have in the English language.

1. Agape: Used to express the love of God. This is selfless love; it gives and expects nothing in return.
2. Philia: Love between friends.
3. Storge: Love between members of a family.
4. Eros: Romantic love, lust, passion.

In order for a godly marriage to flourish, it must be built upon selfless love, agape love. Romantic love/lust doesn't sustain the relationship when children, age, and health problems come.

*1 Corinthians 13:4-8 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; (5) does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; (6) does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; (7) bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (8) Love never fails..."*

1 Corinthians 13 is talking about agape love. Agape love, selfless love, is all about someone other than self. Both men and woman will be very unattractive at times. Selfless love puts the needs of the other person ahead of our own needs, wants, and desires. Selfless love is what keeps a marriage together through any trial.

One of the greatest lessons in selfless love in my life was to see my mother take care of my paralyzed father. When my dad was in his late 40's he had an aneurysm which caused paralysis on the left of his body and left him wheelchair bound, partially blind, and very weak. My dad, who was athletic and strong, a man who could do anything, was reduced to a man who often needed help just to use the bathroom. Not a lot of romance or passion in my parent's relationship, but there was love - selfless love, the love that lasts through any trial or problem, and the same love that God has toward us. If you want a godly marriage, you need to learn selfless love.

## **Fake Love.**

*Romans 12:9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.*

Love with hypocrisy is a selfish love. We learn selfish love as children very early. We learn how to manipulate people to get what we want. We learn to treat someone nice before we ask them for a favor or maybe complement them on something, then ask them for a favor. We can get into a habit of fake love.

Love with hypocrisy in relationships is when you put your desires and passions ahead of what is proper or what is best for the other person. Love with hypocrisy is when you want to satisfy your lusts at the expense of stealing someone's purity. Agape love looks out for what is best for the other person and for God, not what is best for to fulfill the passions of the moment.

Do you know how to selflessly love someone? To be honest, I think most young people don't have much experience in practicing selfless love. But the good news is that we can learn! In practical terms, we can learn by being nice even if you have nothing to gain. It will mean caring about people, who many times, you might never see again. It will mean doing nice things for retired people, little kids, and strangers. It will mean going to church events even if there are no attractive singles there. It will mean being nice to people you don't think are attractive. This is sincere love.

The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) is a good example of selfless love, doing what is right because it is right, not because you have something to gain. The Samaritan went out of his way, spent his time and his money on someone he most likely would never meet again. He spent what was equivalent today to several hundred dollars on a stranger in need! Selfless love often doesn't have an instant reward. In fact, selfless love is often inconvenient. But without selfless love you will be exactly what 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 talks about, you are "nothing" and you "profit nothing". The irony of selfish love is that one will never be satisfied by selfishness. It is by giving and being generous and selfless that we find the blessings and joy of true love.

## **Loneliness.**

Loneliness can be one of the hardest aspects of being single. The weight of a loveless or lonely life can be a crushing load. Yet loneliness is a self-inflicted state. We choose to feel lonely based on our conditions. If we have a different attitude or different perspective, in the same conditions, we can be content. The word of God helps us keep perspective. Let us start with our first relationship, our parents:

*Psalms 27:10-14 When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take care of me.*

When everyone else is gone, even our parents, God is still there. As singles, we can make an idol out of our hope for marriage. Any marriage is a limited human relationship that will end someday, just like your parents will be gone someday. No matter how good and strong my relationships are, they are all temporary and are not meant to replace God. But I think sometimes, we get this backwards. We trust our human relationships more than God. We need to make sure that we don't elevate our relationships or hope for a relationship to idols. This isn't easy. Many people have rejected the Lord because they lost a spouse, a son, or daughter. It appears that one of Darwin's reasons for pursuing the theory of evolution was that he lost his 10-year-old daughter Annie<sup>5</sup>. God is warning us in advance, human relationships are momentary; our focus should be on the eternal. God and your faith are the true constants in your life.

## **Finding meaning in the right things helps with loneliness.**

Loneliness can be very inward focused: "No one loves me," "No one cares about me", "I'm all alone". Instead of thinking "How can I help others", "There are others who need my encouragement, how can I be their friend?" "What can I do for the Lord?" Do you see the pattern? If my focus and thoughts revolve around me and only my concerns, and what I am missing out on, what I don't have, I will likely find my life without peace, lonely, and without meaning. What is the focus of your life? Service to God? Or self? One of the cures for loneliness is finding purpose and meaning in service to God and helping others.



I remember a few years after my grandmother passed away, talking to my grandfather, who was not a Christian. My grandfather was in his late 80's at the time, he had a good career, had a good retirement (starting at age 55), and good health into old age. We talked about his daily routine and he mentioned, with sadness, all the restaurants and places he would visit to see his retired buddies, but most of them were dead now, and only he was left.

He had no hope and he was lonely. If your hope is on this earth, this life can be very lonely and empty. The tragedy is that he died without Christ and now he is truly lonely and he knows that Christianity was the answer. Only God can fill that void in our hearts. Human relationships, marriage, and friendships are blessings, but they were not meant to replace God.

Loneliness is a choice. What will your choice be? To focus on what you don't have and can't do? Or focus on what you have and how you can help others and serve God?

### **Finding The One.**

How can we tell when we found the right one? I wish I knew a better answer than this: we choose 'the One'. Choose wisely! THAT is the right one.

We cannot presume that God will intervene and force us to make a good choice. We regularly see Christians make poor choices in dating and marriage. When I think about poor marriage choices, I think about Solomon, whose marriages to unbelievers brought about his spiritual downfall, his family to shambles, and undermined the society he was leading. We can make either good choices or poor choices in dating/courtship and marriage.

There is no checklist in the Bible for evaluating a spouse, but there are many verses that give us guidance on the type of person we should be seeking. A while back, I wrote this list to help me as I pondered what I hoped for in a wife:

Does she want to be a stay at home wife?

Is she ready for marriage?

Is she virtuous?

Does she have a temper?

Is she kind?

Is she interested and active in spiritual things?

Is she modest?  
Does she want children?  
Does she want courtship?  
Would she wait until marriage for the first kiss?  
What does she think about abortion?  
(One can replace the SHE with HE and make a similar list.)

Those questions are not perfect, but an attempt to help me understand what I should be seeking. Lists like this help because they are spiritual standards and they challenge us to think about what really matters versus what was in our hearts. We can have very superficial standards based on beauty, lust, money, and social standing. I suspect many of us have in our minds dismissed someone on superficial reasons, only to look back at that opportunity, and see spiritual beauty and faith that we overlooked. We blew it! We can miss opportunities. In our prayers, we ask for God's help, but sometimes what we are looking for is not what we should be looking for.

Earlier we established that God can providentially provide a spouse for someone. Some examples: Isaac and Rebecca, Boaz and Ruth, Adam and Eve are providential couples. Does that mean that God will always work that way? Poof, there's your spouse! Not necessarily. I think for many of us God gives us a number of choices to choose from, some are better and some are worse. And in fact, that was even true of Isaac and Rebecca, Isaac had the freewill to make a bad choice, he could have married a pagan girl, instead he waited for a better choice and God blessed him. And Rebekah had a choice too, she was asked if she was willing to leave her family and all that she knew to marry Isaac, she acted on faith (Genesis 24:58). That is true of Ruth too; she had the freewill to make a bad choice, to choose beauty instead of virtue. Boaz was an older man, from a worldly point of view, not the best choice (Ruth 3:10). Ruth choose to wait and honor God, and was blessed.

The choice of who to court is something most of us struggle with. We might have of a number of people whom we could potentially court, but for various reasons, we feel they are not the best spiritual choice. In some cases, people are just not good matches, but are still faithful Christians. Some personalities just can't seem to relate well. I think sometimes we have personal preferences too: education, personality, cultural differences, age, height, and race. On occasion, these preferences are superficial and perhaps should be

forgotten, sometimes they are an important preference.

As mentioned before, there is no biblically right way to do this as long as you are pure. I think you can quickly get to know someone well in the things that matter. I say this because most people in past ages didn't have the same choices, yet somehow made marriage successful and had godly children. In many cases, the father or family would ask good questions of young men and their families, and would help lead a woman to man they approved of. The families didn't always make a good choice, I am sure that some families chose lemons, but that is also true our modern dating today too.

We should ask good questions today too (similar to my list above): Is the person is a faithful Christian, kind, merciful, slow to anger, honest, works hard, has an honorable job, is prepared for courtship, is someone who you consider a friend, and someone you are attracted to? They might be a good match. Careful planning and preparation can't guarantee 100% success in anything, but in general, that is how any effort is going to be most successful. Why not seek what will help you succeed?

While seeking a good choice is wise, it is important that we don't demand perfection. We are all works in progress. As we grow in Christ, we change and improve. Someone who was once immature and not ready, can in time be a good choice. We should not hold unrealistic standards of perfection for seeking a spouse. Each of us has areas of our life that we need to improve and areas of growth as well as areas of maturity and strength. The lists I made above were to help me have godly standards in seeking a wife. Make your own list, and then prayerfully consider what you are seeking.

### **As we close.**

The journey we are on is more than just seeking marriage, it is eternity with Christ! We hope that marriage is part of that journey, but in the end it is heaven, not marriage, we are after! Along the way most get married and that journey to marriage can be a blessing or a disaster. It's your choice. And even if you never marry, the journey of preparation for marriage can be a blessing in itself.

My prayer for the readers of this short e-book is that you are able to have a godly courtship and find a godly spouse. I hope as you read this that at least

you gained encouragement and thoughts that will help you in your Christian walk. I want to leave you with one last verse of encouragement:

*Psalms 33:13-15 The LORD looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men. (14) From the place of His dwelling He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth; (15)He fashions their hearts individually; He considers all their works.*

God created you, He fashioned your heart individually in His love, He knows your concerns, your doubts, your hopes, and He is fully aware of your life. Trust in God and use your life to accomplish as much as you can for the Lord in this short time here on earth.

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