

THE SINGLES SCENE

**GOD'S WONDERFUL WAY OF LIFE
COMPILATION
BOOK 4**

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INTRODUCTION

When you grow out of your teenage years into your single years you reach a fantastic stage of life. You've still got the vigour of youth plus you've grown in wisdom. This is a time of travelling, of dating and of having fun. This is a time also when you make major decisions and whatever you do you should do carefully.

From 19 to 25 most young people in the church make the following major decisions - baptism, marriage and your career for the rest of your life. They come so quickly that at the time you are not often aware of the impact they have on the rest of your life. Yet, if you've had good instruction and teaching throughout your life and if you have loving parents they will help you make the right decisions.

I'm going to be covering quite a number of areas relating to singles but there will be more of a focus on dating and relationships with the opposite sex, not just because singles spend a lot of time talking about it, but for another very important reason.

We spend considerable time studying in preparation for baptism and usually anywhere from 2 to 6 years full time study in preparation for our career for the rest of our lives but when it comes to preparing for the last of life's three major decisions, marriage, the amount of teaching given to us by society on the topic is sadly lacking when you consider the number of unhappy marriages, divorces and broken relationships in the world today. That's why there'll be a lot of focus on dating and male-female relationships.

Let's have a look now at Proverbs 30:18-19. It reads:

There are three things too wonderful for me, yes, four which I know not - the way of an eagle (how it glides so freely), the way of a serpent upon a rock (how can a snake move so fast without any legs?), the way of a ship in the midst of the sea (how it can move so freely and handle rough seas) and the way of a man with a maiden.

What you've got to read into this also is the maiden responding to the man.

You've got a young man - 22, 23. He's got his personal life under control, financially responsible, he's baptized in God's church and just had his first taste of ambition in his job. He's ready and he's got zeal and strength and here's this young, sweet innocent lady - 21, 22 years of age and they go out and have good times together and talk about their exciting hopes and plans for the future.

If we're older how do we view them? Do we say, "Oh, they're young! They'll learn. They haven't had kids yet." If we do that we really are robbing them of a glorious time.

This is a time for singles to travel. It's a time for having a little extra money to spend on what you like doing but remember what you earn and what you save for the future for a house can have great bearing on your future happiness so you have to be careful not to blow all your money.

In Ecclesiastes 11:9 we read:

Rejoice, O young man in your youth and in the ways of your heart.

If you'd like to learn ski-ing go on one of those ski package tours. Have the exhilaration of ski-ing down the slopes. Go out and enjoy yourself. Broaden your talents, your horizons and get involved in all sorts of fun activities and sports and whatever you like with the right kind of financial common sense.

"But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment." Be careful that as you're having a good time that you keep God's laws. Yes, you can get caught up in a wrong sexual relationship with a girl. A girl at work may give you the eye and you may start to be tempted to date her outside the church and possibly leave yourself as a result.

This is a volatile time also - a time to keep your wits about you and keep close to God but have a good time because God tells you to!

HOW TO GLORIFY GOD AS A SINGLE

How do we glorify or honour God as a single? In 1 Corinthians 10:31 we read,

Therefore whatever you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

As a single we're told to glorify God. That means we don't glorify the self with its carnal, hurtful desires but we glorify God - we do His will. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10:

Concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.

They were motivated by God's spirit dwelling in them to serve others. "Indeed you do so towards all the brethren who are all in Macedonia but we urge you brethren that you

increase more and more." What he's saying is let's raise the standard a bit. I don't think there's one of us who can't find some room for improvement.

By glorifying God we can fulfill our personal needs. All of us have certain needs. By actively glorifying God you are going to fulfill your needs - a sense of belonging for example, having friends and companions, your need for encouragement and support. You need bolstering from time to time. If you're actively glorifying God and not self your needs for belonging, support and encouragement will be fulfilled by that loving God you're glorifying. There are many benefits from the things we do to glorify God. Here are several points on how we can glorify God.

1) Remember why you're in the church.

In 2 Corinthians 13 we're asked to examine whether we are in the faith. Why do you come to church anyway? Fun and social activities should be part of it but it shouldn't be the most important thing. Singles can often focus on having fun, fun, fun and having a good time. That's good and proper but if that's our only reason for being in the church because there are plenty of fun activities we need to re-evaluate our priorities.

Marriage is a valid hope but it shouldn't be our central reason for being in the church. Other singles still come along just because their parents come along rather than coming because they want to, while others are just in the church for the gravy train - the niceties, the fun activities, the social life and because their friends are in the church. Check your motives. Why do you come along to church?

God has called us to be rulers and teachers (Rev. 5:10) when Christ comes back to straighten this world out. That's an incredible privilege to think that each of us in the church have the awesome opportunity to be pioneers and architects of God's wonderful world tomorrow.

We'll have the privilege to found a new age where the millions in the third world will no longer suffer, when there will be no more greed, crime and violence. We'll have the opportunity with God's power to clean up this planet and rebuild the cities into beautiful masterpieces, where beauty will be the order of the day and where everyone will live in peace and prosperity and will truly be one big, happy family.

How exciting to think that in a few short years God will give us that exciting opportunity to change this world which it yearns for so desperately and create that wonderful world tomorrow. **THAT'S WHERE IT'S AT!** Think about it you young people!

Have vision and think about that wonderful world tomorrow just a few years around the corner! **And then when we're finished with this world there's the whole universe beyond that!**

Do you want to be a part of it? Do you want to soar into the clouds and travel the stars? Do you want to feed and save those people who suffer abject poverty in Africa for good? Do you want to be a spirit-being with limitless power, wealth and energy like God?

It's all there for the taking but you can only have it through being in the church, overcoming your human nature and growing in your ability to love others and help others any way you can.

We're called to be part of that team to start it all off and now we have a job to do. As well as supporting the work of preaching that good news to mankind **we're called to help each other through our encouragement, support and friendship make it into God's kingdom!**

If you're not all that happy chances are that you're not giving much to others and that you may be a bit too self-orientated. The way we make it into God's kingdom is to help others make it too. There is more to life than just seeking to indulge yourself and just having fun for yourself. True joy comes from being involved in other's lives and help making their lives happy by giving other's the physical and emotional support and friendship they need. We do need each other.

2) Respect your fellow singles.

Respect each other's talents and praise and encourage each other (1 Peter 2:17). Don't focus on the negative. It's so easy to do that. We should honour and respect the strengths of our fellow singles (Phil. 4:8). During my time since I've been in the church I've met some absolutely wonderful people. The people I look up to most are many of my own friends who've got wonderful qualities which I love and try to copy in my own life and be a composite of.

From my time when I was a young single I can think of my friend Peter O'Kane who taught me the value of consistently reaching out and making both visitors and lonely people in the church feel welcome. I think fondly also of two of my friends, Les and Leigh, whose wonderful sense of humour inspired me to be more expressive of my own.

The bubblyness and enthusiasm for life of another friend of mine, Veronica, has also been very inspirational. Then there was my friend Chris who I admired for the way he got along so well with both little kids and the elderly ladies in the church.

Speaking of elderly ladies, I couldn't forget to mention a dear friend of mine, the late Mrs Isabel Weight, who though she suffered terribly from emphysema when I used to visit her, absolutely amazed me by how she'd be constantly be thinking about others and how they were doing. We can all think of people we know who've been inspirational to us in certain ways so think of those people (Phil. 4:8) and learn from their example.

There's much to be learnt from books and from the sermons we hear but I've learnt much more just from learning from the strengths and weaknesses of people I know. Respect those strengths in your fellow singles and learn from them and try and be a composite of them in your own life.

When you're married you've got someone right there to talk to and bounce your ideas off and open up to and who can give you feedback, help and encouragement. As

singles, you have a large number of available friends in the church to open up to so I encourage you to open up and talk to one another about the things of God and the things of life. Discuss your problems and plans and hopes with one another.

God loves to see His people talking to one another about life. We read in Malachi 3:16:

Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another and the Lord listened and heard them, so a book of remembrance was written before him for those who feared the Lord and meditate on his name.

It's encouraging to know God is listening and wanting to help us. God loves to see people getting their life together and seeking help from others to do so.

3) Don't overglamorize marriage.

It's very easy to think "as soon as I get married all my problems will be all over." The Beach Boys once had a hit song called "Wouldn't It Be Nice". One of the lines went "and then we'll be married and then we'll be happy". Marriage doesn't suddenly transform us from dull to happy people. That kind of change only comes from within us. Good marriages take work and are never completely trouble-free. We can bring all sorts of problems into marriage if we're not careful. Our old habits don't suddenly disappear overnight.

Some singles get into the frame of mind that when they are married they'll do such and such. "When I get married I'll fix nice meals and eat better." "When I get married I'll develop my talents." But why wait? Be an interesting and dynamic person now. Learn to make it happen - yourself! Don't hold out thinking that only another person in your life can make it all worthwhile!

According to ministerial surveys marriage problems are the number one problem in the church today even outweighing singles problems for those of you who think things are bad in amongst singles. That is a great cause for concern. The problems probably would be only half as bad if singles, before they got married, would actively out of love for their future spouse try and root out as many of the seeds of their bad attitudes and habits as possible whether it be a bad temper, sexual lust, laziness around the house, financial irresponsibility, a bad stubborn streak or whatever it may be.

Those type of attitudes take time to break and overcome so make the most of the time you have while you're single to grow up emotionally and spiritually and try bring as few of those spiritual liabilities into your future marriage.

Those attitudes and habits don't disappear once you get married. They may lie dormant for a while when you're head over heels in love but they are part of you until you get rid of them and will come to the surface in time. Show that kind of true love for your future spouse now. Marriage is not all romance and passion, though that's there in every good marriage. Remember too, marriage also includes the mundane things - the housework, the paying of the bills, etc.

On the flip side you've got those who look down on marriage or who are too scared or selfish to make any commitment like marriage. I'm not knocking people who have decided to stay single out of choice. There are some good valid reasons why some choose to remain single. And they should never be looked down upon because of that but there are those who have selfish or illogical reasons for staying single.

Some remain single and unattached because they are so scared of being hurt again. The old saying, "once bitten, twice shy" has a lot of validity. Love is never free from its risks. C.S. Lewis put it beautifully when he said:

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly be broken. If you don't want your heart broken then don't give it to anyone, not even to an animal.

To stop ourselves from taking risks though, also means depriving ourselves from many wonderful friendships and the emotional fulfillment they bring and loneliness can easily result. Walking the tightrope between the two can be tough.

God loves us all when most of us don't love back so God also takes risks. The trick is in making those risks calculated ones and mitigating as much of the potential hurt as possible. Some ways include preventing sexual familiarity before marriage, expecting nothing and not getting hung up about how they respond to you and having the faith to leave the timing and eventual outcome of things in God's hands.

For those who're too selfish to not let anything change their freedom and lifestyle and emulate the example of the nearest kinsman to Ruth, who didn't want to take Ruth as his bride, all I can say is you're probably missing out on one of the greatest opportunities of sharing life with a husband or wife and children of your very own. Marriage can be a great blessing depending on how you work it and a lot of people have truly wonderful marriages. If you have doubts or are sceptical or sarcastic about marriage then ask them how much of a blessing it can be. Keep your mind open and I'm sure you'll see how sharing your life with others is a magical way of life!

4) Treasure your spiritual family.

We are one family and as such we need to treat each other as close family. Help your fellow singles just out of their teenage years. If you're younger build friendships with the singles who are older than you rather than just sticking with your peers. Put yourself on a campaign of good works. Make the effort to get to know people well if you'd like to be invited over to people's places. Try to improve on anything that prevents people from saying, "Hey, let's invite so and so over."

Cliqueyness is often a problem with young people, in some areas more than others. People, including singles, have different personalities and interests and therefore we associate more easily with some people than others. That's entirely natural. You can

only get so close to some people as compared to others who you can get along with like a house on fire.

We tend to associate in smaller groups and that's natural and good. It's only a problem when they become exclusive.

A lot of people in the church do suffer from loneliness, a good number being singles, and we have to be aware of that and help out where we can.

5) Learn, learn, learn.

Learn to be able to give in conversation from your experiences, those of others, from books and the media. Learn to develop depth of conversation. A lot of people can be quite shallow when it comes to conversation and very often it seems all they can talk about is the weather. I find it particular sad when that happens with our older singles who've had a fair bit more time to accumulate experiences and learn of things to talk about. Like a good wine we all should get better with age in terms of what we can share with others.

We should have a love of reading about the world around us. Far too often television and watching movies have become a substitute for reading and learning about the world around us leading to the shallowness that has become a real problem amongst our young people today. I'm not down on tv and movies, both of which I enjoy from time to time, but when they become a substitute for reading and learning about the world around us that's when it becomes a problem.

Learn responsibility and courage. Ladies, realize men put up a lot of courage often to look you in the eyes and ask you out for a date. Guys, it does get easier. Strive to overcome that shyness with God's help. In Hebrews 10:39 we read: "We are not of those who draw back to perdition but of those who believe to the saving of the soul." No, we're not to draw back but in faith step out and take the risks in order to give and God is sure to bless you. Keep at it and develop courage to meet people and give in dating.

Learn to develop your etiquette and manners and service that you'll need for marriage. Try and get involved in the church and serving God's work, church activities, the elderly, giving encouragement and getting out there and making friends. Talk to God about it. Ask for opportunities and He'll swamp you if you so desire (Eph. 3:20-21). Seek God's character and learn to give more and more as singles as you'll be richly blessed as a result.

6) Develop a personal friendship with God.

Do you ask Him as you would ask a friend for help with the little things as well as the big things you need help with?

Keep close to God and talk to him and open up to him about everything as you would with your best friend!!!

The Book of Proverbs, which is written especially for teenagers says:

In all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct your paths (Proverbs 3:6).

You need to see the part God has played in your life. Remember or ask about the times you have received divine intervention or healing and especially answered prayer in your life. Realize that God really is our friend and he is personally interested in you.

TRUE MASCULINITY

Now let's look at the subject of what true masculinity. For our look at this subject I'd like to quote from a summary of a youth bible study given by Mark Gully:

There's a big difference between godly masculinity and the world's masculinity. There's a great ambiguity of the roles of the sexes in our society. Society is trying to blur the sex roles.

Here are some of the things the world says you have to be to be masculine - tough and brutal, a good fighter and avenging, a heavy drinker and smoker, a reckless driver who drives hard and fast, a sexual conqueror and someone who swears and tells crude humour. In short, the world's masculinity really is a gross unconcern for others.

Effeminism (1 Cor.6:9) is just as abominable in God's eyes. Men are getting softer and being dominated by women. Many men are weak and skinny and unathletic. Homosexuality and effeminism are drastically rising. A big influence comes from effeminate rock and movie stars.

There are two sides to true masculinity - there are the physical and there are the spiritual characteristics.

First, let's look at the physical characteristics. Men should be physically strong and fit. David was no weakling. He battled wild animals and a bear (1 Sam. 17:36). Now we don't have to do bold things like that or be an Arnold Schwarzenegger but should we have a reasonable amount of physical strength. Jesus himself would have been a fit, strong man working as a carpenter. We should be in shape, physically fit and in good condition.

Another part of true masculinity is courage. Everyone has fears. The truly masculine man is the one who cuts through it and does the tough things even when he's scared. He has a strong, deep conviction of what's right and he'll do what's right even against ridicule and persecution from family, friends and people at work, school or wherever.

Men should be able to endure hardship, both physical and emotional. That kind of toughness, physical and emotional, in particular, takes time to develop. Though emotionally we shouldn't be oversensitive to hurt and criticism, on the other hand we should be expressive of our feelings and occasionally not be afraid to cry when it's appropriate such as for repentance or times of great stress or great joy and emotion.

Men should be capable of enduring physical and emotional hardship in taking the lead to help and support ladies through the trials of life. We should be a strong shoulder to lean on but that doesn't mean we don't need bolstering from time to time. That's where a truly feminine woman stands out. True femininity includes bolstering, supporting and encouraging us males. In that way a truly feminine woman makes a man more masculine and brings out his masculinity.

Men should have drive and motivation to be successful and achieve and get things done in life. That should be the direction of that natural manly aggression and we shouldn't be egotistically "macho".

Education and knowledge are vital tools for a masculine young man with real goals and purpose. Both Solomon and Jesus (1 Chr. 1:7-10, Luke 2:46-47) had a desire for knowledge and understanding. Men as well shouldn't be coarse or grubby but well-groomed and smell good (Ps. 45:8, Myrrh - ancient equivalent of Menage or Brut 33).

A truly masculine man takes the lead in showing kindness and service to others including women. He is someone who keeps himself pure for his wife (1 Thess. 4:3) and who'll stand up for godly integrity (Titus 2:7). As single men we should try to be big on showing hospitality and organizing activities and group dates.

A masculine man is also thoughtful, courteous, patient, self-controlled and takes personal interest in others, gives a lot in hospitality including dating and has a wide range of talents and skills. He makes sensible decisions seeking other's input and leads well in conversation. He gives his all to help, provide, encourage and support his family seeking God's help diligently in his life to truly lead others in a godly way.

TRUE FEMININITY

A good understanding of what true femininity is can be found described in two passages of the Bible. The first one in Genesis describes the goal of true femininity while the second one in Proverbs describes an ideal example of a truly feminine woman.

Let's look at the definition of true femininity in Genesis 2:18.

And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone. **I will make a helper comparable to him.**

The goal of true femininity is to fulfill the purpose of why God created woman - to be a helper to others and, in particular, to man.

The word helper does not mean slave. It means a supporter and a encourager - someone who'll lighten his load in life and is also a companion and a friend.

In my dating experience the girls who have stood out in my eyes are the ones who do everything they can to support and help out with the date I've planned with them. They

give it their all to contribute to the conversation and make it as fun as possible which I really appreciate. They care enough to consciously make the effort to do what they can to make us guys feel good like showing genuine interest in the things that we guys are interested in and encouraging and complimenting us when appropriate.

Some girls even go so far as to show appreciation with a thank you card after which I've enjoyed. The truly feminine girls in my eyes are those who have get-up-and-go and show enthusiasm to support activities we guys try to organize. They are the ones who radiate an inner beauty (1 Pet. 3:3-4), who're willing to be friendly and approach people of all ages in the church and the shy amongst us, including some of us guys.

Sometimes we guys need encouragement and girls who are willing to approach us guys in church and spare a few minutes to see how we're doing and have a chat with us can really make our day and that's something I feel girls in the church can be a bit slack on. Girls, remember just a small thing like that can really make a big difference and the more you help and encourage and bolster the guys you meet the more they'll grow and become the masculine men you're after.

If you want masculine men then be prepared to help them anyway you can in those many little practical ways that will build their confidence and make them more masculine.

The ideal example of truly feminine woman can be found described in Proverbs 31. For their comments on this description of the ideal woman I'd like to quote from Barry St Clair and Bill Jones' book "Dating – Picking and Being a Winner". They write:

If you want to be a truly feminine woman in God's eyes then learn to be like Ruby. Ruby is a woman in the Bible. She's called Ruby because the Bible tells us "Her worth is far above rubies." You can read about Ruby in Proverbs 31:10-31. Let's look at each of her excellent qualities.

She was a terrific teammate. "The heart of her husband trusts in her and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life"(v 11,12). Ruby's husband knew he could count on her because she wanted to do him good. She was considerate, not selfish. She put him second only to God and she looked out for the needs of her family and friends.

Ruby was also a cheerful worker. "She looks for wool and flax and works with her hands in delight"(v 13). Ruby worked with delight. She was cheerful. She had a positive attitude toward her responsibilities.

Ruby's also a great cook. "She is like merchant ships. She brings her food from afar. She rises also while it is still night and gives food to her household and portions to her maidens"(v 14, 15). Ruby knew how to shop and cook. To some guys it's a real priority but after you've tasted some of those guys' meals you can't blame them sometimes.

She's a business woman. "She considers a field and buys it, from her earnings she plants a vineyard"(v 16). Ruby knew how to make and manage money. If something ever happened to her husband she could provide for her family.

Ruby loves to exercise. "She girds herself with strength and makes her arms strong"(v 17). Ruby was a physical fitness enthusiast. She watched what she ate, didn't let herself go and kept her body in shape.

She is creative. "She senses that her gain is good, her lamp does not go out at night. She stretches out her hands to the distaff and her hands grasp the spindle"(v 18,19). Ruby used her time wisely by learning how to enhance the beauty of her home.

Ruby's also a fashionable dresser. "She is not afraid of the snow for her household is clothed with scarlet. She makes coverings for herself. Her clothing is fine linen and purple"(v 21,22). Ruby was fashionable but frugal. She not only knew how to buy clothes but she could make them as well.

Above all Ruby was generous and kind to those who needed it. "She extends her hand to the poor and she stretches out her hands to the needy." Ruby felt compassion for the poor and needy and she did something about it.

These beautiful qualities weren't developed overnight. They were developed over years. There is no set mold for what a truly feminine woman should be like just a common theme - that she is a helper and a supporter to others as well as seeking her own fulfillment in a balanced way. Look at what happened because Ruby took the time to develop herself. Verse 28 says "Her children rise up and bless her, her husband also, and he praises her. Many daughters have done nobly, but you excel them all."

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN 1ST AND 2ND GENERATION CHRISTIANS

In the church we have two rather distinctive groups of members which we call first and second generation christians.

By definition, first generation christians are those of us who were called out from the world into the church. Second generation christians, on the other hand, are those who were raised up in the church by parents who themselves came into the church from the world.

There are several variations to this grouping of members in the church. Some of those variations include -:

- Third and even fourth generation members
- Those whose parents came into the church when they were in their teenage years or even older and they spent little of their childhood being raised in the church. (Most of those who fall into this category, from my experience, tend to have a calling and an enthusiasm much like that of first generation christians)
- Those who were raised in the church but left around the time they were teenagers only to come back to the church much later after they saw the world for what it really was. (We have had many prodigal sons and daughters return to the church over the years)

- Those who were raised up in the church but had their own first love experience, like those of first generation christians, when they had to prove all the doctrines of the church for themselves during the apostasy of our former association.

What are some of the differences between first and second generation christians?

- First generation christians tend to have a dramatic calling and they see the teachings of the church as new, shocking and exciting. Often God has softened them up first in the leadup to their calling with certain trials and then opened their eyes to the many teachings of the Bible in a dramatic way.
- For those raised in the church there is no shock and those of us who came out of the world should understand why there's no shock. It's impossible to find it shocking when you've known it all your life and therefore it is much easier for second generation members to take the truth for granted and not value it for what it really is.
- First generation christians see the opportunity as a pearl of great price. They see a stark black and white contrast between what the world offers and the church teaches and they jump at it. If you've grown up in the church take pride in your parents for having the courage to come out of the world's ways. If we came out of the world we shouldn't brag about what things we have given up but have Paul's attitude where he counted those things as rubbish (Phil. 3:8). Second generation christians should be deeply thankful they've been brought up in the church for it is a great blessing (1 Cor. 7:14).
- First generation christians tend to see good and bad in a lot more black and white terms than those who've been brought up in the church. Since they are so used to hearing God's truth and have lived to some degree a sheltered life, the line between right and wrong can seem hazy at times for those brought up in the church.
- First generation christians have a new love. To second generation christians it's not a new love but it should, in time, be a first love. To give up work and sport on Saturdays and all the other things is easier for first generation christians because they're usually older and on a spiritual high whereas second generation christians are not on a high and are usually younger and parents need to help them through those kind of sacrifices in a positive way.
- Because they have it so good in the church with the opportunities that they have it's hard sometimes for those who have grown up in the church to have much of an urgency in wanting God's kingdom to come. It's good for those who have grown up in the church to watch and read up on how badly people have it in the third world as well as how tragic life is for so many people in our nation today so they can feel deeply and see how badly this world needs God's kingdom and have more of urgency for the kingdom. Make it your goal to be in God's kingdom and realize that the world is going to end very soon and **REAL LIFE** is soon to begin.

In Revelation 17:14 we read the following:

These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.

We know what faithful means in this passage – to be faithful to God's ways to the end or when Christ returns but what do we mean by someone being called and chosen?

Does being called mean the same thing as being chosen by God? We can find the answer to that question in Matthew 20:16 where we read:

So the last shall be first, and the first last: **for many are called, but few chosen.**

It says the many are called not the few and that only a few are chosen. So we see here that being called by God is something completely different from being chosen.

My own personal view on this is that the calling is a general invitation to all our young people in the church from God where God gives them a partial understanding of His truth. It's a partial opening up of their minds with an invitation to become a converted member. It's then up to those who are called to respond to that calling at their own pace and if they respond enough then God chooses them and gives them a much fuller understanding of His truth.

If you have been raised up in the church what things can you do to deepen your conversion and know that you're ready to be baptized?

- First of all, you need to prove the doctrines of the church and not just assume they are correct. Cultivate a love for all the areas of God's truth and not just some here and there. Have a love for all of the doctrines and prophecy as well as God's way of life. Second generation christians need to believe the doctrines and keep God's laws because they've proven them right and not just accept them because their parents believe them.
- **How can you tell whether you are merely accepting the doctrines of the church and God's way of life because your parents believe them or because you believe in them? Well, I would ask you a simple question, "Is what you believe a conviction or is it merely a preference?" A conviction is a belief or a standard of behaviour that you will hold to no matter what. A preference is merely something you prefer to do that you might change under different circumstances.**

You can ask yourself if all your family and best friends left the church would you stay and hold onto the doctrines of the church and still live by God's way of life? Many young people of my generation got baptized because it was the thing to do or because it was expected of them. When the trials of life came later on and when the church changed its teachings they gave up the truth and God's way of life simply

because it was a preference and not a conviction. How about you? Would you do the same thing under those circumstances or are you truly convicted of God's way no matter what happens?

If God's way of life and the teachings of the truth are something that you are committed to, no matter what, then you do have the repentance required for baptism no matter how you feel. Attitudes of the heart and the Holy Spirit are spiritual and not something that you can feel so don't get hung up on waiting for a dramatic calling accompanied by great feelings. Only when you receive God's spirit at baptism are you officially eligible for the first resurrection by having God's spirit in you and not just working with you.

- If you want to deepen your feelings and appreciation for God's truth then remember contrast is a big key. For those of us who were called into the church many of us know deeply what it's like to live without the hope of God's kingdom and many of us have had first-hand experience at how awful life can be not knowing or living by God's way. Our appreciation comes from the great contrast of knowing what life is like without it.

There is no need if you've grown up in the church to leave the church for a while to prove God's way is right. In Proverbs 1:20 we read that:

Wisdom calls aloud outside; she raises her voice in the open squares.

It says that wisdom cries aloud in the streets. There's enough evidence in the messed up lives of people in the world, including unconverted friends and family, to prove God's way is right and the world's way only brings pain. If you do leave the church and come back later you will still have to wear the consequences of living by the world's ways. If you speak to those who have done it you'll realize that it's just not worth it.

It's far better to learn second-hand from friends and family in the world as well as people you read about in magazines and see on TV just how bad life can be without living by God's way than to experience it first-hand. You'll spare yourself quite a lot of scars and regrets if you do. If you want to deepen your feelings and appreciation for the truth and God's way of life spend some time seeing the deep contrast of life without it through the lives of others. You'll soon see what a pearl of great price that you have in your hands to know God's truth and be invited to be in the first resurrection if you do your part.

- Another point to deepen your conversion if you are a second generation christian is to get to know people older than you, from those in their 20's and 30's right up to our senior members. In Proverbs 13:20 it says: "He that walks with wise men shall be wise." My own observation over the years is that the maturity of young people is often directly proportional to the time they spend getting to know people older than them. Those who spend virtually all their time with their peers tend to be more shallow and less mature.

I would encourage parents to regularly encourage their kids to get to know people of all ages in the church, not just their immediate peers but also those in their 20's, 30's and older and young people, if you spend time getting to know those older than you, little by little, you'll be quite surprised just how enjoyable and helpful those friendships can be.

In 2 Timothy 1:5, the Apostle Paul wrote the following to the evangelist Timothy:

When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.

We see here that Timothy was himself not a second but a third generation christian having both a mother and a grandmother in the church.

The calling for those who have grown up in the church is totally expected and not so dramatic but it can and should be just as profound. Those of us who came out of the world should appreciate the calling of second generation christians just as those brought up in the church should appreciate the calling of those of us who were called from out of the world.

FEELINGS AND EMOTIONAL MATURITY

As we move from adolescents to young men and women there's one area of pivotal importance we need to develop and that's understanding the nature of feelings and emotional maturity.

Not only should we grow up physically but we also need to grow mentally, spiritually and emotionally. No one is born with emotional maturity. Over time it must be learned and developed. Our emotions need to be understood, taught, trained and controlled by the mind.

Just what is emotional maturity? How would you define it?

Emotional maturity is where we don't just react purely on how we feel. It's where we control our reactions and only react where it's for the good of others and ourselves, not at others' expense irregardless of how we feel - whether we want to do it or not!

The Greeks put it well when they said that emotions must be ruled by reason and also, just as important, that reason must be warmed by emotion.

Emotions and feelings are impulses from within us that move us toward action. Emotions are what drive us to do the things we do. When our emotions are controlled we do what is right and if they're not we do what we feel like. Among the emotions are

such feelings or expressions as fear, anger, resentment, jealousy, hatred, grief, sorrow, surprise, desire, elation and joy.

Unfortunately a lot of us allow ourselves to act thoughtlessly on impulse. As a result we get swayed and buffeted into all sorts of troubles, tragedies and sufferings through our irrational actions.

Mr Herbert Armstrong tells this tragic example of a man he once knew in an article he wrote called "Emotional Maturity":

He was a highly educated teacher who readily assumed the responsibility of teaching youths when he himself had never learned this central truth of life. His mind was filled with knowledge about things - geology, astronomy, mathematics, literature - but he had acquired little knowledge about himself - his moods, feelings, drives, impulses and desires. As a child he had not been taught self-restraint, self-control or how to intelligently to divert his moods and desires and guide them according to wisdom.

He was married to a beautiful and intelligent wife, had a fine family and honoured position. When he allowed his feelings, impulses and moods to lead his actions instead of sound judgment and wisdom of mind, his home was broken by divorce, and in the grip of his moods and his tendency to run from his problems instead of facing and solving them, he fled in blind fear from his position and brilliant future. He wrecked not only his own happiness, but his marriage and his home, and he faced great sorrow, suffering and brought unhappiness on others.

He had allowed his emotions and moods, instead of his own mind to lead his actions. He had come to see circumstances through the eyes of his feelings and his understanding had become warped and distorted. He had grown up physically. He had developed mentally but emotionally he was still a very young child - and as a sad result, his spiritual age was no older (Good News, Apr.1986, p.2, 17).

I'm sure we know examples of people who similarly live according to their moods, feelings and self-indulgent whims. They live according whatever feels good at the time without any restraint or concern about how it affects others. We can look at the lives of those who have great wealth, who live according to every self-indulgent desire they have and their lives are an absolute mess because of it. You wonder how they could descend into such a state of debauchery when they've got so much wealth and other things going for them and that truly is a sad part of human nature.

Examples Of Emotional Maturity

Let's now have a look at some examples of emotionally immature behaviour. At the top of the list we've got excessive moodiness. People who are very moody have emotions that go up and down like a yo-yo. One moment up, the next down. They show little consistency and stability in their feelings and people have to walk on eggshells and keep their distance because they don't know whether they're going to be in a good or a bad mood.

Other examples include pouting or crying over trivial things, acting on impulse without thinking, being too easily influenced by others and being gullible, overdaydreaming, being too easily offended and touchy, accusativeness, over-competitiveness, sarcasm and cynicism. Bucking responsibility is another classic example of emotional immaturity.

Do you avoid or neglect responsibility toward others?
Do you get upset when you're not the centre of attention?
Do you demand or expect too much from other people?
Do you refuse to admit error when wrong?
Do you constantly compare yourself with others?
Are you overly fearful or shy?
Are you flippant or unable to be serious?
Are you disorganized or undependable?
Are you self-indulgent, insensitive or inconsiderate?

Herbert Armstrong writes the following about emotional maturity:

Emotional maturity does not mean emotion-less maturity. The truly emotionally mature control the emotions. They do not anesthetize them! They do express, at the right time, and in proper degree, enthusiasm, happiness, joy. They do feel deep gratitude for blessings, and also they deeply feel reverence, adoration, in the worship of god. They sincerely feel compassion toward others -- a feeling of true outgoing concern. They express sympathy and have mercy.

Emotional maturity does not crucify emotions -- it controls and guides them with right knowledge and true wisdom. Emotional maturity develops hand-in-hand with physical, mental and spiritual growth -- the four blending, finally, into the perfect spiritual character which is the true human destiny and the very purpose of life. It can bring very great and rewarding and lasting happiness.

Now, finally, let me describe [the] categories into which people generally, and thoughtlessly, fall. And then let us see a few examples of the correct use of the emotions.

First, many, especially those of lesser education, let themselves go to an emotional extreme. They are mere babes, emotionally. It never occurs to them to put any check or control on their emotions. They become highly emotional over non-consequential things, like a little child. If these people drove their automobiles as they guide -- or fail to guide -- their emotions, their cars would run wild and create disaster.

Their feelings are worn on their shirt cuffs. They are upset over trifles. Their tempers fly, uncontrolled. They flatter, they gush, they exaggerate their compliments and their praise of others. They gossip, they slander, they speak evil of others behind their backs. They continually feel jealousy, resentment, or excessive jubilation.

Some religious sects attract deliberately the overly emotional. In religious meetings their preachers work on the emotions of their congregations, encouraging uncontrolled outbursts of emotional response. They "work it up" -- they generate increasingly

energetic and noisy displays of out-of-control emotion. But Jesus Christ set no such example. Nor did any of Christ's own original apostles.

Then there are those who go to the opposite extreme. Often these are the intellectuals, and the highly educated -- though usually mis-educated. They have controlled emotions with their minds to the extent that their emotions have been stifled and put to death. They no longer feel deeply about anything. They are utterly devoid of real sincerity, any depth of gratitude, any feeling of compassion or real sympathy. Their emotions never grew up to maturity -- their emotions died in infancy...They are just listless -- indifferent. They feel no purpose in life. They have no ambition. They have no spark. They do not radiate -- they are like dead fish...They have no personality...There isn't enough life in them to generate any noticeable emotional response...

The Bible teaches us that our relationship with God must completely dominate our lives -- until it simply is our life! It teaches us to feel deeply, though always intelligently, about it.

Look at God's instruction through Joel. A tremendous worldwide time of trouble is now generating -- such as the world never experienced before. Joel prophesied the coming famine and disease epidemic. He foretells the plagues of the "Day of the Lord." He foretells the next, and nuclear, all-out world war -- the most frightful trouble ever experienced by man. Then God inspires Joel to instruct us how to escape and find protection. Does he say we should go through some routine motions, repeat by rote some prayer already written for us, which we recite without feeling or emotion? No, never! Here is what he says:

"Therefore also now, saith the Eternal, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Eternal your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness Let the priests, the ministers of the Eternal, weep ... And let them say, spare thy people, O Eternal, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them Yea, the Eternal will answer" (Joel 2:12-19).

God says we should turn to him in dead earnest -- fasting, rending our hearts -- in deepest real feeling. This is no thoughtless giving way to uncontrolled emotion. This is full mental realization of purpose -- of need -- and, with deepest intense feeling, seeking God with all our strength and might.

In correcting Israel for their manner of indifferent prayers, God says of Israel: "They never put their heart into their prayers" (Hosea 7:14 -- Moffatt translation). Look at some of the sample prayers quoted for us, as examples, in the Bible. Notice David's prayer of repentance, when he "came to himself" after his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband. It is in the 51st Psalm. Notice how David, in dead earnest, put his whole heart into this prayer -- with deep feeling of remorse and repentance:

"Have mercy upon me, O God," David cried out. "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy

ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation praise The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

Notice Daniel's prayers. He was in intense, dead earnest. His was no light, casual, routine prayer. He put his whole heart into it. Of it Daniel says: "And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: and I prayed unto the Eternal my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God ... We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day ..." And in this deeply earnest prayer Daniel continued on, beseeching God with his whole heart (dan. 9:3-19).

Can you imagine these men of God praying in this manner dry-eyed? I can't. Surely tears were streaming down their faces. These were intense prayers -- prayers of surrendered, yielded men to the great God! God has graciously granted, by astonishing miracles, many answers to my prayers. But never have I received an answer from God except when I prayed earnestly, from the heart. I have never known of a real answer coming from God of a casual routine prayer. Yet do not most people pray casually, perhaps as a matter of duty, and without feeling or emotion? Perhaps this makes plain the reason most people have never received an answer to their prayers.

Jesus gave us an example of two men praying. The one a respected Pharisee, the other a hated publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed, without emotion or feeling, in his own self-esteem and vanity: "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." The other, pounding his breast in his earnest, heartrending, deep-feeling remorse and repentance, choked with emotion, could only say, amid his tears, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" Of this latter, Jesus said, "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other" -- the self-exalting Pharisee (luke 18:9-14).

Jesus Christ is our example. Can you comprehend what extreme deep feeling Jesus experienced when he looked out over the city of Jerusalem, whose deceived, erring, wrong-doing people He loved, and cried out: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matt. 23:37) Here was emotion expressed. But it was intelligent expression of feeling -- not unthinking, unguided sensual impulse. It was filled with deep meaning!

Of course Jesus had the divine power. He could have gathered the people of Jerusalem to him by force! But, had He brought them to him by force, His whole purpose of character-building by free choice and free moral agency would have been defeated -- so He willed that they, themselves, should make their own decisions. And he was grieved through his whole being that they rejected truth and happiness and salvation and eternal life, and chose curses and suffering and death.

Should we ever feel deeply about things? About things which should be felt deeply about, we certainly should. Jesus did! Just before the Judas-led murdering mob came to lead him to trial and death, Jesus went apart from his disciples and prayed. "And being

in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44).

If we do learn to live by "every word of God" -- by God's instruction book -- we will learn to guide emotions intelligently -- but we shall not suppress them, neither let them run rampant and uncontrolled where they ought not. Jesus Christ, at age 33 1/2, was the most perfectly developed man, physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally, who ever lived. He was fully mature, these four blending harmoniously into the one perfect whole man. Let us study his life, follow his example, live as he lived. And let us begin, now, to train our children, from their very first year of life on up -- at whatever age they are -- in the art of emotional growing up! (Good News, Apr.1986, p.17-19).

There are three important things that mold our emotions:-

- 1) Conditioning. The way you were brought up and treated as a child by family and friends.
- 2) Modeling. Taking after those you look up to, like parents, or those you have close contact with.
- 3) Learning from circumstances. Where you make mistakes and you decide for yourself to change accordingly.

We are never a hopeless victim of circumstances. We always have control! These things mold us into how we are today. We always have the power to control our emotions and guide our actions. The question is "do we want to?"

No matter what cards we've been dealt with, from genetic traits and looks to the way or circumstances we were brought up with or how badly other people have treated us we still have the choice as to how to respond to those adversities or handicaps. Will we blame our circumstances or others around us for all of our problems or will we rise above it and respond to adversity in as positive way as possible and make a good life for ourselves with God's help?

If we do learn to live by "every word of God" we will learn to guide our emotions intelligently but we shall never suppress them neither let them run rampant and uncontrolled where they ought not.

Emotions And Romance

Let's look now at one particular emotion that's quite important to singles - romance. Or his thoughts on this subject I'd like to quote from Chap Clark and his book "Next Time I Fall In Love". He writes:

Falling in love definitely exists. However faulty and dangerous eros or infatuation may be to build a dating relationship on, you can't deny it's existence. Palms sweat and stomachs churn just at the thought of another. So what do these feelings of love mean?

First, feelings of falling in love contain only a piece of reality. Sure, these rich, aromatic feelings of love prompt us to date people. Falling in love definitely tells us that we're excited with someone. But for all the usefulness of infatuation, it will turn on you viscerally if you think those feelings are all you need for a loving relationship.

As a gauge of [true, outgoing] Agape love – a for-you love - romantic feelings simply aren't reliable, largely because they ignore the facts. Star Trek's Mr Spock, for example, led a pretty impassionate life, thanks to his Vulcan ancestry. His value to the purely human crew on the Enterprise lay in his ability to think with stark logic when other's emotions got in the way. Now Spock is no perfect model for humanity but we can learn from him. It's important for us to take a close look at what we're getting excited about and to check out how much reality there is to support our feelings...

Not only are romantic feelings an unreliable yardstick, they fluctuate like crazy. To someone in love(eros), romantic feelings are up one day and down the next. All sorts of things inside and around you sway romantic love one way or the other - the physical changes of [growing up], normal mood swings, [fatigue]...pressure from family and friends or school [and the reactions of the opposite sex]...

Romantic feelings of love are powerful and difficult to control. Ever try to drum up romantic feelings for someone? It just doesn't work...Of course, we all wish we could turn our feelings on and off like a [tap]. Who wouldn't rather perk themselves up when they're feeling down or turn off feelings for people they know are terrible for them...? We just have to control our feelings and let them run their course while we try not to rely on them too heavily.

If you do give romantic feelings complete free rein, on other hand, you'll have a terrible time trying to control them later. If you let them, romantic feelings will overpower your common sense and even your willpower. You may have decided that you absolutely don't want to become involved with someone who's into drugs or drinking [or who's spiritually uncommitted]...but if you let yourself fall in love with someone like that [you can very easily] compromise on your decision...

No one can deny that romantic feelings add spice to life. Though it was Spock's cold logic that saved the Enterprise who knows how many times, I'm glad I'm not a Vulcan - I want to feel life. For all their shortcomings, romantic feelings are amongst the most exciting, fun and stimulating of all the emotions. Rolled up in romance is a potent mix of fear and joy and anticipation and excitement and adventure. I wouldn't trade those exciting feelings of romance for anything...

As exciting as they are, how can we trust our feelings if they're so unreliable, or keep them in check if they're so uncontrollable?

First of all, know them for what they are. Welcome romantic feelings as part of the dating adventure - but don't read into them any more than they deserve. Feelings come and go. Never forget that. They come and go - all of them! Just because you're wild about someone, don't jump to the conclusion that you've found true love. Romantic feelings don't necessarily indicate a desire to be committed, they just give us the incentive to keep on getting to know each other.

Don't trust them too much either. Because romantic feelings and emotions fluctuate like so much, it can be a mistake to make far-reaching decisions based solely on our

feelings. Sure, emotions are important in love relationships - but so are commitment, friendship, honesty, loyalty and forethought...

Enjoy the power and spice of romance. So far we've talked about the dangers of relying on feelings. It's just as damaging to a relationship to ignore or suppress feelings. They need to be expressed...Don't think that feelings are bad. They're neither good or bad, but neutral. They're important because they illuminate what we're thinking deep inside us. So acknowledge what's inside you. Share your feelings honestly, carefully and often with someone you trust. Hiding or running from feelings never works; they'll inevitably chase us down and bite us. Express them [carefully at the right time] and enjoy the adventure they bring to life.

Don't let the beauty and simplicity of falling in love destroy you and your special friends. Make sure your mind, your heart and your commitment are a dating relationship's foundation so that when those overpowering romantic feelings surge, they can be welcomed as friends that actually improve your dating instead of enemies that are out to destroy you and your friendships.

In [summary] about romantic feelings -:

- they contain only a piece of reality
- they constantly fluctuate
- they're difficult to control
- they add spice to life...
- know them for what they are [temporary and constantly going up and down].
- don't trust them too much [and don't let them blind you to the real facts and]
- enjoy them! (p.49-52).

David Seamands in his book "Putting Away Childish Things" makes these comments about falling in love:

Falling in love on its own is a childish basis for a christian marriage. You would think love was a mysterious force from outer space that unexpectedly seized two people and overpowered them, a force beyond rational control. However, if love comes that way, it can leave that way, just as mysteriously as it arrived. Several years ago a television heroine and her TV bridegroom spoke their marriage vows, claiming that they would cherish and care for each other "so long as we both shall love". They changed just one letter and espoused a totally different philosophy of marriage than that which promises to love "as we both shall live".

Mature christian marriages combines the three Greek loves - eros (desire, sexual attraction), philia (genuine friendship, unity of interests and purpose) and agape (deeply committed devotion and care no matter what happens). Married love is a very precious and precarious balance of all three. Romantic or eros love is a wonderful, and might I add, vital help in getting a marriage started. It is like the rocket that puts the space capsule into orbit and then drops away. It takes other forms of power to continue that capsule in its successful flight towards its goal. It takes putting away childishly imbalanced concepts of love to have a successful marriage.

"I understood as a child," said Paul, "when I was a child." Yes, but marriage is an adult business. Rather than "falling in love" it might be more accurate from a christian standpoint to speak of "climbing up into love".

The Cyclic Nature Of Feelings

If you deeply understand only one point here about feelings then I hope you understand that feelings - all feelings come and go and have the same up and down nature like waves.

How much those highs and lows go differs from person to person. If we draw a line across the centre of a wave or sine curve, symbolizing the emotional centre(neither high nor low), the distance from the centre to a peak for a particular person is usually about the same as the distance from the centre to the valley.

Some people are very steady and while they don't get very excited about things neither do they get very depressed either. On the other hand, people who get very excited generally have lows of the same intensity. Teenagers will tend to experience greater highs and lows with the hormones that start pumping at the time of adolescence.

Feelings of romance, happiness, sadness, excitement and boredom continually go back and forth in our lives. With that in mind there's no need to panic when negative feelings creep into our lives. There's also no reason to feel that God or other people love you any less just because you are at the low point of that regular cycle. Remember that your feelings will usually pick up not long after.

Just because you're feeling bored or your conversation feels dull, if you do the things that are right your feelings of excitement and passion will return again in due course. Some people rush into marriage on the crest of a wave while their feelings are passionate before the first trough comes along without examining whether they have the other things which are necessary for a stable marriage. Just because you're feeling passionate for someone now doesn't mean those feelings are going to last forever.

Your feelings of passion may be strong now for someone but when the trials of life hit those trials may show how weak your commitment for that special someone might really be if you're too wrapped up in your own interests or you're stubborn or inflexible or you don't have much of a deep concern for your loved one.

Feelings or the intensity of your physical attraction for someone wax and wane like the phases of the moon and are never constant. Usually what I find is that if a girl has good looks but they are selfish and/or shallow, I find them less physically attractive over time but if they are good looking and they are kind and have a good deal of spiritual and intellectual depth I find them more physically attractive as time goes by.

Personally I'm a little bit of a cynic of young love. True love must be tough. It involves cutting against the grain of human nature. It involves denying your own selfish needs and wants if they're going to hurt your loved one. It involves self-sacrifice when needed and doing menial things when you don't feel like it. It's more than just the passion and

romance pictured in movies and in our love songs. True emotional maturity means putting others before ourselves and doing what is right when we don't feel like it!

When I feel down a bit or I feel bored or my creative juices for conversation are running low and my conversation gets a bit boring I never panic. All I do is give it a bit of time and sure enough if I'm trying my best to do God's will my feelings and creativity picks up again.

Our feelings can never be fully relied upon to discern right from wrong. Remember just because we feel or don't feel guilt doesn't mean something's right or wrong.

Is your life at the moment like a roller coaster ride with big highs of joy quickly followed by terrible lows? Do your feelings easily go up and down sharply depending on how people treat you or like you? Are you a manpleaser instead of a God-pleaser? People who are like that often have low self-esteem and are insecure!

This is how James describes people like that in his epistle:

Let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord. He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways (Jam.1:6-8).

How strong is your faith that God is in control of things and that He'll work things out for the very best in the end for you?

Being Secure

To be secure you need an anchor or a foundation. How strong is your foundation? Have you ever thoroughly proved this is the true church? How deep is your conviction that God exists and this is the true church? The strong trials of life will always come to test how strong your faith and conviction really is.

You need to send your roots deep into the church - prove it and get involved in serving and building friendships in the church! If you don't you may find yourself stumble like in the parable of the sower:

...yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a little while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles (Matt. 13:21).

Most of us have been on the rollercoaster of romance at some time in your life where your feelings would go up and down dramatically based on the way a special girl or guy you liked treated you or how much or how little attention they gave.

The reason the lows often hit us bad is because we have this tendency to walk by sight and not by faith (2 Cor. 5:7). We look for things that are tangible and physical rather than implicitly trusting in God even though there may not be any physical signs.

We, in romance, for example, depend too much on one particular person fulfilling our needs instead of trusting in God and believing He'll provide you with that special someone. It's so important to be secure and have a deep conviction that God will provide us with all our needs and that He loves us so much that He works things out always for the best in the end.

When we're insecure we lack faith and we worry. John Haggai in his book "How to Win Over Worry" makes the following comments about worry:

Worry is a sin. It is always a sin for two reasons. Worry is distrust in the truthfulness of God and worry is detrimental to the temple of God [our bodies]...When you worry you accuse God of falsehood! (p.29)

God says: "I will work out everything for the best in the end." Worry says: "You're lying God".

God says: "Cast all your cares on me for I do care very much for you (put your own name in here)." Worry says: "You're lying God".

God says: "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Worry says: "You're lying God."

God says: "Don't worry about anything. I will provide you with all your needs. I will give you your hearts desires also if you will seek me. Look at all the birds. They don't sow or reap yet I provide for them. Look at all the lilies of the field. They don't toil or spin yet I array them in magnificence.

"How much more do I love you and want to give you good things with all my heart? Why do you lack faith? You, (insert your name), are so precious to me and I want to give you your heart's desires if you seek and love me. So don't worry."

The reason we struggle with faith is because of two things —:

- 1) We underestimate the power of God and
- 2) We underestimate the love of God.

Let's look at number one and consider how it applies to matters of the heart. Let's take a common reason why many fear and worry about whether they will win a certain someone's heart - they feel they may not be good-looking enough. How do we underestimate the power of God in these matters? Now, if you've done your part by seeking His righteousness, preparing yourself, including doing the best you can and no more with your looks, God may not make someone like you but He can pull some marvellous strings for you.

He knows exactly what you want and like in someone and He knows exactly what everyone else wants and finds attractive in the opposite sex being able to see into the hearts of all people. When the timing is right He can pull the strings needed to bring someone into your life and IF God is bringing someone into your life at a given time then you can rest assured that He wouldn't bother unless that person finds you attractive. There may be tests along the way and the first or second one may not be the one but you can rest assured God will provide in that way when the timing is right.

Now how do we underestimate the love of God? Because God is invisible He can seem unreal to us and if other people don't care to reach out to us the way we would like them to we can easily think of God that way too but God's love is infinite. It is so much greater than any love that we might show on a human level.

When you fall for someone special how deeply do you feel for that person? God cares much more for us than we do when we fall for someone. When we fall in love for someone we are eager to shower the object of our desire with attention and good things and go over and above. God is like that toward us. Not always, of course, as there are times He uses hard times to build His character in us but there are certainly times when God shows that eagerness in our lives to bless us.

Ever ask God for something in prayer and when He did answer your prayer He gave you more than you bargained for? He gave you over and above - just like He said in Luke 6:38 - pressed down, shaken together and RUNNING OVER. It's been said many times before but it is true that you can't outgive God!

If He answers those smaller prayers and gives you more than you bargained for then won't He also bless you in time with that special someone in life. If God was deeply interested in those smaller matters in your life how much more is He concerned is He with one of the most important matters of your life - who you will spend the rest of your life with? When Satan tempts you to worry in life remember one very important thing - **NEVER UNDERESTIMATE HOW MUCH GOD LOVES YOU!**

The more you deep down believe that God will always provide for you no matter what trials you go through the less your emotions will go up and down like a yo-yo and you'll be a lot more contented on the inside. Do you depend on and put your faith in men and physical signs or do you trust implicitly in God and His promises?

There are many tell-tale signs of people who are insecure. Trusting in God to provide for you also includes your emotional needs - everyone has a need to be loved and a need to belong. We all, not just want but crave, praise and attention from others. We all want to feel important to and loved by others.

When those needs aren't being met and we don't trust God to provide them often we go seeking them the wrong way. People who are proud or are vain surprisingly have low self-esteem. They boast and fish for praise. People who depend on the approval of others to feel good about themselves will be disappointed and what is more, their need for approval can ruin relationships by overloading them.

When someone is uncertain of himself and doesn't feel good or O.K. about himself on his own, always needing approval and support from others and being unduly depressed by their criticism, it means that he has no valid belief of value from within himself. If he is disapproved of, he feels crushed. If he is not noticed, he ceases to exist and if he is praised he is in the seventh heaven of elation. He has little sense of his personal value, though he may give the appearance of being exceedingly egotistical since he is always "fishing" for praise from others. His centre of gravity is not in himself but outside in others.

The lesson is obvious - you can't depend on others for your sense of self-worth. It must come from within you and from God. Here are some other signs of people who are insecure.

Do you try to dominate conversation all the time?

Can you handle it and not feel bad when you're not the centre of attention?

Are you willing to play second fiddle when it comes to who talks the most in conversation or who leads the way?

Do you enjoy correcting factual errors in other people's conversation?

Do you use humour to put your friends down?

Do you feel bad or jealous if other people go well in something and you don't?

Do you have to know more about a topic than others to feel comfortable discussing it?

The best friendships do not require that anyone keeps the upper hand. Rather, there is a mutuality in which either partner is free to be weak at times without fearing that the other will get "one up".

The best way to be secure, feel loved and enjoy ourselves is not to go seeking it by dominating conversation and not letting anyone else speak, fishing for praise, doing attention-grabbing things or just seeking to have fun for yourself all the time.

It's best described in the immortal words of Christ Himself: "Give and it will be given unto you" (Luke 6:38). Christ here is not just talking about physical needs. He's also talking about emotional needs. Forget about worrying about how down or unloved you feel. Focus on other people and how to fill their physical and emotional needs. Your mind can only usually focus on one thing at a time. If you focus on other people you aren't usually focusing on your own needs and worries. And in time God will make sure, through others, your emotional needs will be looked after.

One of the best ways to learn to give is by analyzing your own needs. We all desire recognition, love, attention, affection, a sense of belonging, encouragement, companionship, understanding and patience. Seeing what satisfies and makes you feel good can teach you many things about how to give to others.

When you give to others seeing others feel happy and encouraged makes you feel good and not only that, when you give to others they feel more inclined to give back to you and seek your attention and company. If you're taking all the time people aren't going to be interested in you. Sometimes the cycle takes a while to be completed but don't worry because in time if you are faithful to giving and living God's way He'll reward

you for it and make sure, in time, your emotional needs will be filled. God will provide for your emotional needs without having to try and do carnal or dumb things to get attention and get others to give you your needs.

Trust God, not just academically but deep down in your heart, and be someone who takes the initiative to give to others and in time you will be content and secure.

DATING

Now we move onto the subject of dating. To introduce this subject I'd like to quote from a summary of a singles Bible study that was given on this subject by Gary Antion:

Why should you date? Simple! Because half of the world is the opposite sex! If you're afraid of the opposite sex, if you don't know how the opposite sex reacts, if you don't know what their goals and ambitions are, if you don't understand the way of a woman or the way of a man then how do you expect to deal with the opposite sex in the church today and how do you expect to deal with them in the World Tomorrow.

How do you feel around young ladies or young men or older ladies or older men? Do you feel comfortable or uncomfortable? Are you able to converse or do you feel on edge or uneasy? Are you socially awkward or socially adept? These skills we learn through dating - interaction with the opposite sex.

How well do you fellowship within the local church? Do you avoid the real pretty ones because there's a certain mystique about them? Do you stay away from those who on the surface don't look very pretty? If you are you're making some pretty big mistakes. Some very pretty ladies I have known have become rather ugly when I got to know them and some rather average ladies have become very pretty when I go to know them. If you go for the looks alone on the outside you're making some big mistakes. To marry a woman just for her beauty is like buying a house just for its paint. "Boy, I sure like the paint on this house. I think I'll buy it. I know the termites are eating it up and the roof's about to fall down but I sure love that paint."

Dating is a form of giving - giving someone of a good time. Everybody you know has an effect on your life because you learn things you like and things you don't like. We're all different with different tastes and it's important to note some of these qualities as you date. I'd like to now quote from a book called "Are You Fit To Be Tied?" which is put out by the Catholics:

"Today dating often begins in the teens with no serious thought for the future. Let's face it. You date because it's fun, a great way to spend Saturday night despite an occasional miserable evening but dating also serves some very important purposes. Through dating you discover what the opposite sex is like. You learn to talk and share and understand what girls and guys are all about. You explore the subtle and not so subtle differences between feminine and masculine personalities.

"You discover much about yourself, your feelings, your needs, your emotions and your capacity for love. You learn manners and social skills and the art of relating closely to another person." Some people can't. They pull up the drawbridge before the person can come across.

"You come to meet and appreciate many different types of persons. Through a wide variety of dates and relationships you learn what traits matter to you most and what do not. At 15 good looks and easy conversation might matter the most. By age 18 kindness, friendliness and reliability might count. By 20 ambition, good character and love of family might be the attributes you seek in a partner. Through a number of close friendships and emotional bonds you deepen and mature readying yourself for marriage and the fidelity and commitment it demands.

"Let's presume you date with a wide variety of people. In the process you meet Betty who teaches you how to water ski, Susie who introduces you to the joys of classical music, Francis who you can joke and laugh with and see humour in everyday things, Jan who's interest and warmth and encourages you to share your hopes or as a young woman you date George who's passion for politics kindles your own interest, Bill who really cares for your work with retarded kids, Brad who's good looks and sunny smile really turn you on and Doug who takes you to the neatest places for dinner and brings you a single rose.

"In other words with broad dating experience you grow as a person. Your interest and knowledge of yourself and others is enlarged. If you've dated only a few persons or if you've gone with only one guy or girl through life or teens you haven't given yourself the best possible chance to know what you really want in a husband or wife."

Why Do You Date?

We've briefly talked about the reasons to date but why do you date? Are you a selfish or a selfless dater? Are you a giver or a getter when it comes to dating? Let's look at some selfish reasons to date.

Barry St Clair and Bill Jones in their book "Dating - Picking and Being a Winner" make these comments:

Do you date:

- To satisfy your ego?
- To look good in other people's eyes?
- To satisfy your physical desires?
- To be popular?
- To get someone else jealous?
- To please my friends?
- To be like everyone else?
- To get a marriage partner?

Most styles of dating don't work because they are based at least partly on selfishness. God's style of dating emphasizes a whole different set of motives for dating in which you:

- Date to become a better person. When you build relationships with others through dating you mature, you grow spiritually, mentally, emotionally and socially.

- **Date to become a better friend.** In your dating you want to consider your date's needs first. The more you serve him or her, the more you grow in your ability to give friendship. You also learn to communicate better and develop in your ability to give in interesting conversation. It also helps you get to know other people and work through any trouble spots.

- **Date to become a better partner.** Spending time with your date helps you understand the numerous ways a guy or girl is different from you. You learn to communicate openly and honestly. You learn to relax and enjoy being around others. Every experience helps prepare you for your future marriage partner.

Ephesians 4:2 says to be humble, gentle, patient, forbearing and loving toward one another. This cannot happen if you focus on yourself. But when you concentrate on these attitudes you will be able to put the needs of others ahead of your own and this greatly benefits your dating.

- **Humility.** When you are humble you consider the other person as more important than yourself. When you have this attitude you want to meet any need your date has. You will find yourself thinking of your date's needs before your own. Humility doesn't mean that you think you're a slug but it does mean you mean you think of your date as very valuable.

- **Gentleness.** When you are gentle, you carefully avoid hurting your date's feelings. Instead, you sensitively build up that person with kind words avoiding harsh words.

- **Patience.** No two people are exactly alike in needs, desires and attitudes. If you concentrate on your own wants in a relationship, you will become irritated with the other person. A patient person, however recognizes the differences in others and allows them room to grow at their own pace.

- **Forbearance.** Putting others ahead of yourself is not always easy. As you learn to serve, even your date may date may mistreat you, intentionally or by accident. Forbearance is enduring any suffering the other may cause though it doesn't mean you become a doormat.

- **Love.** This isn't the emotion-filled, possessive shallow love that is found in other styles of dating. When you love others you want them to have God's best for them.

How To Date

I'd like to quote again from the aforementioned singles Bible study on dating. Gary Antion makes these comments on how to and what to do on a date:

Do you know why guys say "What are you doing tonight" or "Saturday night?" Because if you're doing something else they don't want to ask you because they know they'll be rejected. Guys, do you know what we're doing when we do that? We're taking away asking them. So if you ask her and she's already got a date that means two people have asked her on that same night. Think of how terrific she'll feel but if you say:

"What are you doing Saturday night?"

"I've got a date."

"Oh, I was just wondering what you were doing Saturday night."

But if you say, "I've got tickets to a wonderful concert and I was wondering would you be my date for Saturday night. I'd love to take you" you give the girl a chance to feel special.

We have to be careful to think about the other person. One's thinking about self, the other's thinking about the other person and how great they'll feel. Some guys at college when they need a date they call over and say:

"Jane, would you be my date for this evening."

"No, I can't go."

"Anybody else there in the dorm?"

It really makes Jane feel special, doesn't it? No, that's not the way to make someone feel special.

O.K., now, what can you do for a date? I have a whole section of ideas for dates from a book entitled "Waiting To Choose The Right Mate". Here's just a few:

"You can go to amusement parks, parks in general, movies, television, dancing, parties, visiting friends and family, picnics, attending sports events such as football, soccer, baseball, hockey, cricket, basketball, tennis, etc. You can go to community activities, visit a courtroom, do some volunteer work, visit someone in hospital.

"You can share hobbies together - stamps, photography, painting, arts and crafts. You can go dining. You could try new cuisines like American, Armenian, Brazilian, Chinese, Continental, English, European, French, German, Greek, Japanese, Italian, Jewish, Mexican, Middle Eastern, Oriental, Polynesian" and so on.

"What about participating in various sports like ski-ing, backpacking, bicycling, hiking, fishing, horseriding, skating, squash, rock-climbing, boating, golf, tennis, swimming, jogging, camping out" and so on.

"There's cultural events, theatres, musicals, ballets, dogshows, museums, planetariums and so on, educational opportunities like lectures on travel, art, gardening, music, singing and so on."

There's plenty of things to do if you're creative and put your mind to it. **Remember experiences are twice the fun when shared with someone else.**

Here are some other points to consider when it comes to dating-:

1) Plan your dates in advance. There's a time and place for spontaneous dates which can be great but in general do your homework and pick a date and who it'll be with, where it'll be and how you'll meet for it.

2) Ask your date out preferably a week in advance. This gives your date a chance to prepare and time to savour the up coming date. If you're nervous beforehand pray

for God to calm you. Everyone's afraid of making a mistake like, "Hello, Barbara. This is Movies. How would you like to go to the John with me?" I've asked dozens of girls out on dates and I still get nervous before asking them but it does get easier with time.

3) If you're planning on a dutch date then mention that when you ask a girl out. Don't keep them in the dark until it comes time for the bill.

4) Maximize conversation. One of the main reasons for dating is to build friendships. Try to structure plenty of time for talking.

5) Go out of your way to give as much fun as possible. The more the girl enjoys the time, the longer she will remember it.

6) Add variety to your dates. Don't get in a rut by just say going to dinner and the movies. Try different times of the day like the morning or afternoon and different types of activities.

Girls Asking Guys Out

Should a girl ever ask a guy out for a date? Good question. If you ask around most guys, though not all, would like to be invited out on a date by a girl on the occasional basis. Here are a few examples of times I feel it would be nice for a girl to ask a guy out:-

- When a guy has been a real good friend and has taken a girl out on a date a few times it would be nice to show appreciation for his efforts if a girl returns the favour and asks him out.

- If a guy is particularly shy there's nothing wrong with a girl asking him out in order to help boost his confidence by giving him a fun time and help make him feel more comfortable. This can work just as well inviting him along on a group date with other girl friends.

- If a girl can provide a guy with the opportunity to enjoy an attraction that is unique that a guy can't provide I see no reason why a girl can't ask a guy and make a date of it.

The guys should take the initiative and organize the dating in an area and lead the way to make sure the girls are looked after but there's no reason why a girl can't ask a guy out now and then on the occasional basis.

There should be creativity in the dating in an area and not just non-interactive video nights and having dinner and going to a movie all the time. Be creative and make the most of your dating opportunities in those precious wonderful short years you do have to date as singles.

What's The Best Game Plan From Starting To Date To Marriage?

Let's now talk about having a game plan of how to progress from starting to date to marriage. I'm sure you've all wondered about such questions as when should

teenagers start one-on-one dating? When should you start going steady? How long should a steady couple take minimum before they get engaged to get to know each other? And what is the youngest age that people should get married? All are very important questions and need to be answered.

The following are guidelines **only**. They are not hard and fast rules but the more you deviate from them, the more your chances of success and happiness will be reduced.

The game plan is:-

1) Don't start one-on-one dating until your mid to late teens. When you've developed a good understanding of both the benefits and dangers of dating is a good rule of thumb as to when it's O.K. to start dating. Generally it should be a parent's decision.

2) Mix your one-on-one dating with group dating and date widely. Through meeting a wide variety of people you find out what qualities you like in someone of the opposite sex. Also dating widely allows you to get to know as many potentials out there as possible so you can pick the best person.

3) Have at least a couple of years dating widely with good number of people and wait until at least 19 or 20 before you start going steady with someone.

4) MOST IMPORTANTLY choose someone who has good character and who deeply loves God's way and truth and be that way yourself - generous, helpful and trying your best to please God and others.

5) Get to know each other as well as you can and spend at least 6 months getting to know each other while you're going steady until you get engaged.

6) Hold off prolonged kissing, necking, petting and sexual intercourse until marriage.

7) Don't marry until you are out of your teenage years.

The most common analogy used in the church to describe the game plan is the diamond analogy where you start off steadily building up a wide base of friends through your late teens and early twenties and after you've dated widely you steadily narrow down to the guys or girls who have the qualities you like most until you meet that one special someone in life.

As a general guideline I doubt if it's wise for a girl to date one-on-one before 16 or a boy before 17. Usually parents should make that decision if you are old enough. Before that young people of similar ages can have loads of fun going out in mixed groups. Many don't want to pair off at this stage and that's good. No need to rush into dating. Enjoy being young.

Studies show that the younger you start to date, the more likely you are to get serious and go steady. Those who go steady younger are, in turn, more likely to get involved

more deeply in sex. They also are more likely to marry young. They even feel they "have to" get married. Half of all teenage women who stand at the altar for marriage are already pregnant. And forced marriages, as well as young marriages, are far more likely to fail.

High school age is a time to go out with lots of people - in groups and later one-on-one. This helps you sort out the things you like and don't like in those of the opposite sex. You learn from experience. You learn what to look for and what to avoid. It's the wise way to go.

Enjoy the variety of dating lots of others while you've got it. The single years for most people are a relatively short time in their lives, usually between 3 to 7 years from when you begin dating, compared to 20 to 50 years of married life. Enjoy the variety while you've got it. For one thing, if you hone in on one person too soon, how can you be sure you've made the right choice? As your relationship goes on you may well wonder: "Is this really the one for me?" A good question. And how can you be sure if you haven't dated a good many others. You probably can't.

For my mind 20 is the youngest age anyone should marry. Marrying younger is certainly not a sin but you greatly reduce your chances of success and happiness. Financially you can set yourself back for years and emotionally you can be more easily swayed into picking the wrong person for you. Even 20 is not the best age. Around the mid 20's is probably the best age to get married. Until the breadwinner is financially and stable careerwise I would definitely hold off on getting married. Once you're both emotionally and financially stable then go for it.

Let's look now at each of the stages to serious dating. For their comments I quote again from Barry St Clair and Bill Jones' book "Dating: Picking and Being a Winner". They write:

1) Group dating.

A couple starts out dating usually by spending time along with others in a group. They may go out as a whole group of friends and may or may not be paired off. But soon they discover each other and enjoy being together.

Dating in groups has several pluses. You build relationships with many people, not just one. Second, if you have trouble making conversation with a date, group dating takes the pressure off. You can listen while others in the group talk. Third, dating in groups keeps you out of situations where you might be tempted to give in to physical temptation...

[The one main drawback of group dating along with its pluses is that there is a universal tendency for the triviality of conversation to be directly proportional to the number of people in a group. Often conversation can get very trivial in a group and there's not as much chance to get to know people that much on a more personal level. That's why I feel there should be a good balance between both group dating and one-on-one dating – RW.]

2) Couple dating.

This is what most people think of when you mention dating: a guy and a girl going out alone. It may be a one-time date or they may date now and then. However neither one is committed only to the other. If they date fairly often, they date other people as well. This is the healthiest stage of dating because a person builds friendships with many people. It's healthy also because normally there is no pressure from another person physically or emotionally. The person benefits by learning how to build good friendships with the opposite sex, yet avoids the problem of relationships advancing too fast.

3) Consistent dating.

After a couple has gotten to know each other and there's mutual attraction between the two they begin to date regularly...

[They know they like each other in the romantic sense but as yet no commitment has been made to date each other only - RW]

4) Commitment dating.

This is where two people have made a verbal commitment to date each other only. Be very careful of assuming your steady should date only you if you haven't made a verbal commitment as this will save many problems. Generally commitment dating should only occur close to an engagement.

Going Steady

I don't believe it's wise at all to go steady and pair off with someone until at least 19 or 20. That way you give yourself time to date widely and time to start preparing for the responsibilities of adulthood both emotionally and financially.

What so often happens is two teenagers get involved and go steady around 16, 17 or 18 while they're still in high school. Soon enough they get involved in pre-marital sex and she falls pregnant.

One of two things usually happens - he dumps her to support the baby on her own or they have a forced marriage. They're both at school or college or doing unskilled work. They can barely support each other, let alone a newborn child. Their opportunities for studying a career become severely limited. Often they've married someone who's selfish and they're not compatible with. Over half of teenage marriages like this end up in divorce within 5 years, a figure which sadly is almost reflected in the church.

The idea of steadily dating one person to the exclusion of others when you are too young to seriously consider marriage is not good for several reasons. Humans naturally seem to want to possess things or even people! - exclusively. But in friendships with the opposite sex, this approach limits social development. It hinders meeting and getting to know a wide range of people since it tends to announce that you are special friends with only one guy or girl and hence off limits to others. It actually is a selfish point of view when done so young.

Going steady, in the worldly sense, is to some degree lazy. Boys are spared the bother and embarrassment of asking new girls for dates. Girls feel a sense of security, knowing they will be assured of regular dates. Familiarity is another matter to be considered. The familiarity created by steady dating makes it easier for the boy to make ever-bolder romantic advances on subsequent dates - while it becomes more difficult for the girl to say no and vice-versa with girls who try to get too physical.

Stated plainly, dating only one person multiplies the pressure to have sex. After scores or hundreds of hours alone with one another it is difficult to maintain godly moral standards.

Teens should be friends with everybody and not go with any one person exclusively until they are old enough to have dated many different people and have come to the stage when they can seriously consider marriage.

Dating in the world is quite different to how it generally is in the church. In the world people generally try and make a romantic connection on the first or second date rather than getting to know that person first before deciding whether the person is a compatible to them.

If a guy asks a girl out on a second or third date and the girl it's generally accepted by each other that they are boyfriend and girlfriend. Dating someone is used as a term to say that two people are an item. It's an unspoken thing that they are an item if they go out on more than one date. A friend of mine, who used to attend church, had one such misunderstanding when she unwisely accepted a second date from a guy outside the church.

Because people go steady so quickly, two or three dates into getting to know each other, they find themselves breaking up with people over and over again because it doesn't take long after to realize that the other person is too selfish or they aren't compatible with each other. People in the world spend very little time finding out whether the other person is right for them before they start going steady and end up breaking up with lots of people over and over again or stay with someone who is just no good for them.

If you want to find the right person that God has in mind for you and you want to protect yourself from the breaking up cycle get to know people well before you start going steady with them, even if there is mutual attraction between the two of you. Try to keep things at the friendship level first until you realize there's quite a strong chance that the other person may be the right one for you.

Two advantages single dating have over group dating are single dates have the beauty of being easier to plan than group dates since you're only asking one person out plus often you can make someone feel special in a particular way by asking them out for a date that you can't quite do asking them out on a group date.

Some girls I've known who've gone steady have asked why no other guys ever ask them out anymore. Sometimes the answer is pretty obvious. They make it so obvious either intentionally or not that they're going steady with the amount of time they spend

with their steady in public. Guys will quite naturally be apprehensive to ask a girl out if they notice a girl appears to be going steady.

If you want to give each other the freedom to date others on the occasional basis it's probably a good idea to keep your time in public (meaning around your friends in the church) with your girlfriend or boyfriend minimal or done in a low key way that it doesn't put off others asking you or your steady out. It can also be a good test to see how possessive you are of your steady and give you the opportunity to work on it and build more trust into your relationship.

Just a couple more points on dating widely. Dating widely doesn't mean dating one steady after another like in the world and I am strongly against people going steady when there is no chance of marriage between them. That only just selfishly limits the other's social opportunities through dating others plus it's using someone who genuinely hopes for a permanent relationship with you which can do a lot of emotional damage.

At the right time when you have dated widely already, having a steady girlfriend or boyfriend is a wonderful and magical experience which should, in most cases, lead to the blessing of marriage when the time is right.

In his book "The Missing Dimension in Sex" Herbert Armstrong makes the following comments about God selecting the right person for you:

It is GOD who joins together in marriage a husband and a wife. Therefore it ought to be -- in your own interest -- GOD who selects for you the husband or wife you are going to marry! And God will do this, if you ask Him, and then refrain from getting in a hurry and taking it into your own hands! This may require self-restraint and patience, yes, and also faith. But if you rely on God, He will not fail you. And if He selects your lifelong mate, you'll have the right one!

How does God do this and how do we know if God is selecting a certain someone for us? First of all, we must ask Him in prayer to select that person and guide us in our actions. We have to be careful not to take things out of God's hands and insist we have found the right someone when there are things that others see (and we should also) that the person is not right for us.

Seek a multitude of counsel from friends and family as God can communicate much wisdom and a different perspective on things through others to you.

Look out for circumstances that are providential and not just co-incidental in nature. Look for God's hand in circumstances. Look to God to handpick that certain someone for you and bring you together with that person He will not fail you if you do your part.

Picking A Winner

How do we go about picking the right person to marry in life? How do we know whether we have picked someone who is good for us and who we will live happily ever after with? Barry St Clair and Bill Jones in their book "Dating – Picking and Being a Winner" make these comments on how to pick a winner:

Everyone has a mental picture of Mr or Miss Right. Maybe you have a poster of him or her on your wall. You probably know exactly what you want your perfect date to look and act like. So when a prospect comes along you immediately measure him or her against your mental picture. Ways of evaluating the perfect date often fall into 3 general categories - the big three - looks, personality and popularity. Every person is unique when it comes to their tastes so there are as many different possibilities within each of these categories as there are people.

I'd like to give you a good you a good example of how you can pick a loser when you thought you've picked a winner. Bill tells this story of how he almost picked someone who seemed a winner at first:

"She was perfect: a California girl, 5 and 1/2 feet tall, medium build with blonde hair, fair complexion and blue eyes. She was the life of the party, but still a straight. Bill's dream had come true or so he thought.

"After getting up my nerve, I asked her out. She said 'yes' and everything went perfectly. We had a great time. I continued to ask her out but after the first couple of dates I noticed something - she was selfish. She cared about herself much more than me and it was obvious. But I continued to date her, because I thought I would be crazy to let go of someone who fit my picture of the perfect date. Besides, I might not find another perfect girl. So I hung on, hoping she would change.

"One night, after driving to her house she started coming on to me physically. I didn't know what to do. The year before I'd decided to become a christian and one of the main ways God had been changing me was in my attitudes and conduct in dating relationships. I had committed myself to date according to God's plan and I knew messing around would not honour Jesus Christ.

"All I could think was, 'How can I get out of here?' I looked nervously at my watch and told my date that I had to get home. I walked her to her door and never asked her out again.

"What went wrong?' I asked myself and God. How could she be such a loser as a date? Will I ever find another perfect girl and if I do, how can I keep the same thing from happening again?"

UNFORTUNATELY THE BIG THREE (LOOKS, PERSONALITY AND POPULARITY) COVER ONLY THE SUPERFICIAL QUALITIES OF PEOPLE AND COMPLETELY MISS THE MOST IMPORTANT CATEGORY OF ALL - CHARACTER.

Character is everything a person is on the inside - especially their attitudes and maturity. It is often a result of the person's spiritual life and convictions. And that's what really counts!

Take Bill's dream date, for example. Outside she had everything he thought was important, but inside, she was selfish and impure. All her positive outer qualities could not cover up those negative inner ones. As a result, their relationship did not last.

This is true in every relationship. On the outside, a person can be the best you have ever seen, but if he or she does not have positive character qualities the relationship will be a real loser.

If you ignore the person's character, you'll bomb out every time because the outside will not last. Beauty lies only at the surface of a person's body and fades with age but character lives deep within a person and generally continues to get better and better with age. The qualities you appreciate in another person today will probably be even stronger and better twenty years from now and even better forty years after that if you go for character.

Many young people think dating a person with all the outer qualities they desire is worth the price of putting up with the negative character qualities. They continue to date and get drawn into a relationship. Because they're comfortable with the other person, they get married and put up with each other for two or three years.

One day, they look at their spouse and realize that the looks don't matter anymore. Neither does popularity. And even a great personality doesn't make up for the lack of character. Shocked, they finally admit that they don't like this person. They see the person for what he or she is really like. With all the pretty wrapping aside, all that's left is the ugly inside.

Galatians 5:19-21 lists the negative qualities which are called the works of the flesh. The flesh is that sinful part of everyone that says "Do your own thing." The attitude of the flesh is I'll do what I want to do, when I want to, with who I want to, as long as I want to. And I'm not going to listen to anyone tell me otherwise!" Everyone has a measure of good and bad. There must be enough good habits and a certain minimum of the bad along with a commitment to root out those bad habits for a relationship to work.

Here are a few questions based on what Galatians 5 says about the works of the flesh that you can measure your potential girlfriend or boyfriend with and also measure yourself with.

Has your date been involved in sexual immorality?

Does your date refer to sex a lot or make plans so you can mess around physically?

Does your date love anything more than God - people, popularity, power, pleasures, prestige or possessions?

Does your date hate anyone or have pet hates against people?

Does your date discourage you from having other friends?

Does your date have to have the last word all the time?

Does your date argue a lot?

Does your date instigate fights with others?

Does your date lust for things that belong to others?

Does your date drink too much, drive recklessly or does shameful things at parties?

The Bible cautions you to avoid dating people who have negative qualities like these. There are several reasons. First, these are all signs of self-centredness and God knows a self-centred person will not meet your needs. Remember God is committed to giving

you the best. Second, it might damage your reputation as a christian. People would think things of you that aren't true. Third, it could hinder your relationship with God. You might be tempted to compromise. Because you want to please your date, you could give in and do something that would dishonour Christ and hurt your fellowship with God.

Let's now ask a few questions about how much of the fruits of God's spirit is in the life of your potential girlfriend or boyfriend.

Is your date considerate of others?

Does he or she seek to actively please others or just themself? Will they put your needs ahead of their own if they have to?

Is your date a happy person most of the time and have they got a positive, active interest in the lives of others and what the church teaches?

Is your date flexible and willing to compromise to solve problems?

Would your date wait to go out, go steady or get married if your parents thought you should wait?

Does your date reach out to others?

Does your date strive to do the right thing by god?

Does your date fulfill his responsibilities? Does your date seek to understand you?

Is your date in control of all of his appetites for sex, food or alcohol?

God wants these qualities to be active not only in you, but also in the person you like. Only if they have those qualities can they truly make you happy. More important than rating a person's looks, personality or popularity you must determine what he or she is like on the inside.

Remember these qualities are called fruit. The older it gets, the more it matures. Therefore you can't expect a person to be perfect in each of these areas. However, because of the possibility of spending the rest of your life with this person, you need to make sure that your date is controlled by the spirit, not controlled by the flesh. This is vitally important in picking a winner.

So what are the most important things to look for in a marriage partner? In my personal order of importance they are:

1) Character. Character certainly is the most important thing to look for in a potential marriage partner. How generous and unselfish are they? How kind and generous is he or she to you and to others? How committed are they to God and to the church?

The Bible tells us that out of the abundance of the heart does the mouth speak. How much do they talk about and are interested in God's truth and way of life? **Does their calling mean the world to them?**

2) Communication. How freely do you talk with the guy or girl you hope to marry? Is there a full fluency of conversation between you from small talk to spiritual topics and deep and meaningful conversation? Do you's talk as freely to each other as you would with your best friend? Conversation is the lifeblood of relationships so develop the ability to have free-flowing conversation with each other.

If there was no physical attraction between you's would you still be close friends with each other because of how freely and how much you enjoy talking to each other?

You have to be the best of friends if you hope to be married and free flowing conversation is essential to that.

3) Common interests. How much do you have in common between you? Do you both share a good sense of humour? Do you like to do the same sorts of activities when you get together? Do you share similar interests and hobbies? If two people have full fluency in their conversation it's usually due to the fact that they have a great deal in common including the calling and what they believe in.

4) Good looks. Quite obviously if you want to spend the rest of your life with someone you will want to find your partner very attractive. Good looks are still important. As author David Seamands puts it, "I can't think of anything worse than being married for a lifetime to someone who didn't ring my chimes!"

Being A Winner

We've looked at how to pick the right person to marry but that is only half of the equation. We also have to be right kind of person ourselves. For his comments I'd like to quote again from the previously mentioned singles Bible study by Gary Antion. He makes the following comments:

How datable are you? A good look at you will help you know how you rate with others. Answer these questions carefully. You'll see yourself much as others see you. Make a note how your rating can improve.

How do I act? Am I friendly? Do I have a friendly smile? If your lips turn down you've got to smile more. Do I listen with interest when someone talks to me or am I only interested when I talk to them? Am I thoughtful about others - their desires and needs? When you see someone choking do you let them choke to death or offer them a glass of water? Do I have the christian quality of liking and being interested in **all** people?

What do you talk about? Do I have a hobby I can share in conversation? Do I read enough magazines, newspapers and books so I can talk about the world around me? Can I talk about the Bible and its exciting message and way of life? Do you have a good balance? Do you thumb through the sports section or the fashion or movie sections of the paper?

Are you conversant in many areas? Can you talk about a broad range of subjects or are you narrow? Get off something and you're silent, don't know what to do. What do I know about cars? Can I recognize makes and models?

What can I do? Can I swim, skate, play tennis? Do you know about interesting places in the community? Are you developing your talents? Can you appreciate and enjoy simple everyday fun?

[I remember taking a girl out to Expo '88 in Brisbane a few years ago. I wanted to go on the huge rollercoaster and I had a real hard time convincing the girl to come on with me. Finally I managed to convince her and we had a great time. After that ride I had my fill and despite showing great reluctance to go on the first time she tried to convince me into going on it again. **It's amazing how your perspective can change just by giving things a go! - RW**]

How do I look? Am I careful to be well-groomed? Do I use deodorant, soap, a comb and toothbrush often enough? Do you take care of yourself? Mr Armstrong had a certain sense of pride in himself. One example he mentions is where he would wake up before his wife did and comb his hair because he didn't want his wife to see him with his hair all messed up. Are you neat and careful to look good in the clothes you have? Is your appearance appropriate for a christian? Am I careful to dress suitably for the occasion?

Are you gracious as a person? Are you growing in knowledge you can share with others? If you do all of these things you're becoming more of a quality person and therefore a better date.

How are you emotionally? Do you go to pieces regularly? Are you up and down often? Strive to be settled and emotionally stable.

Men need to be preparing themselves financially. We used to have guys with lots of wishbone and not enough backbone. "I want to be married" and the hormones are flowing but they weren't preparing themselves financially. If you can just barely support yourself how are you going to support a wife and kids?

Are you saving several thousand so if you do get married you can put a deposit down on a good house and have a few things to put in it so you can start a marriage off on a good foot? Are you working towards having a good income so you can provide for a wife? Are you developing your skills and seeking further education to have a good job?

Women while they're waiting can be working and saving and building their hopechest. Wouldn't it be nice if you got married and your wife says, "Well, I've got about \$4000 in my bank account, furniture and sheets and towels and a really nice set of china and silverware that I've added over the years."

Also be physically in good health, looking after yourself and doing something to keep fit. If you're a bit overweight are you making an effort to control your weight for your health and appearance sake?

You can also prepare educationally. Do you study about life and marriage and the reactions of the opposite sex? Knowledge is important. Peter said, "Dwell with them according to knowledge"(1 Peter 3:7).

From a survey of many students these are some of the most important qualities people are looking for in a mate - to have a good sense of humour, be interesting and caring, to be adaptable and empathetic, to be able to give and receive love, emotional stability, similar family background and interests, someone who's a good conversationalist and finally someone who has the quality of godliness.

In summary, marriage is not so much in finding the right person but being the right person that counts.

If you want a queen you need to be a king and vice versa. Marriage can only be a give and take commitment - you must be willing to give exactly what you want to receive.

The golden rule here is - whatever qualities you desire in a mate, develop first in yourself.

LOVE

What is the difference between love and the feelings of love we call infatuation? To answer that question I'd like to quote from an article written by Ron Kelly entitled "Love, Marriage and Sex" from a WCG brochure of the same name. He writes:

Love - real love is not even possible without a degree of maturity. Mature love that prepares a couple for a lifetime of marriage and commitment begins slowly and grows. Love never stands still. Of course love has to start somewhere. Romantic love begins with an attraction to a member of the opposite sex. There will be a beginning feeling of infatuation. But love that leads to marriage must grow beyond that and must not be based on attraction alone.

In the English language there is the one word love. Because of that there are different meanings to the words in the Bible that are translated into English as love. In the Greek language, the language of the New Testament, three different words translate into the English word love. By understanding them, one can better grasp what kind of love to strive for in marriage.

The first word is "eros". It forms the root of our English word erotic. Author H.Norman Wright defines eros in "Pillars of Marriage" as love that seeks sensual expression. It is desire. It is romantic sexual love. It is inspired by the biological structure of human nature placed in mankind.

Of itself, eros is not wrong. But it's a kind of love that should never act alone. Unfortunately it is the only love many people ever experience. But romantic, sensual love is only part of the God-given concept of total love.

The second kind of love comes from the Greek word "philia". Again you may recognize the meaning - for example, the name of the city of Philadelphia means the city of brotherly love. Philia is friendship, companionship, the physical as well as emotional sharing of time and interests. It shows a desire to co-operate.

Mr Wright suggests the difference between eros and philia is that eros is a face-to-face relationship while philia is a shoulder-to-shoulder relationship. When applied to marriage it depicts a husband and wife working together...

A friend is someone whose company you prefer. Someone you want to be with. Every good marriage has philia love - husbands and wives who want to be with each other. But these two words do not tell the whole story of love. There is yet another Greek word that explains the deep and spiritual meaning of love. The word is "agape".

Eros produces romance - makes your mate your lover. Philia makes your mate your friend. But agape goes far beyond. Agape is a love of total commitment...Agape is total giving love. [It is where there is no self-interest. We put another's needs ahead of ours even if we don't feel like it or it's inconvenient - RW]...

Agape is not a natural love. We were not born with it. It is not the self-centred love of adolescence. Eros is essentially in mankind by creation. Philia comes naturally - we all want friends. But agape is acquired by maturity...

It is natural to love the self. It is not so natural to love someone else that much. That's why God says that we ought to grow in love toward others equal to the love we have for ourselves. No one can expect more. But so few ever come close. Most are simply so selfish they do not achieve the real depth of love.

Too many marriages are based on only kind of love - eros. That love usually will not hold up under pressure. And sadly, too many marriages don't even have philia love. Some husbands and wives aren't even good friends. Agape love is commitment-love. You commit yourself to seeking the best for someone else no matter what(p.4-5).

Diane Elbe in "The Campus Life Guide to Dating" makes the following comments about agape:

[Agape is] choice-love because it is based on actions, not feelings. You choose to be patient when your girlfriend is late and you miss the movie. When your boyfriend gets a better grade than you on his test you choose to rejoice with him. You choose not to seek your own pleasure when your hormones are screaming for you to keep going. You choose to forgive when your lover hurts your feelings - or even break up with you (p.109).

Love is not a feeling. Real love may bring out strong feelings but real love is not a feeling. Love is a decision "for better or for worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health" you will care for that person and put that person's needs ahead of your own.

Having strong, sexual desires for another person does not mean you love someone. Consider this: you may have sexual desires for a person you may not have met. Watching that person walk down the street or seeing that person's picture in a magazine can easily arouse you sexually. How could that possibly be love?

Let's look at three different loves in our own language. Barry St Clair and Bill Jones call them "if", "because" and "no matter what" love. They make the following comments about these three types of love in their book "Love – Making It Last":

"If" Love

I love you if...

you impress my friends
you act cool
you spend money on me
you meet my needs
you get good grades
you are popular
you satisfy my desires
you go to bed with me

Many relationships are based on this kind of love. It has strings attached: "as long as you meet my conditions I'll love you"...

"If" love is selfish. It never lasts. It ends when one partner fails to live up to the other person's conditions [and doesn't deserve to be called love].

"Because" Love

I love you because...

you are beautiful
you're handsome...
you're a cheerleader
you have a car...

You're probably saying, "This kind of love sounds pretty good to me. I want someone who has lovable qualities. What's the problem?" The problem is competition. What happens when someone comes along with more lovable qualities?...

Many people date and marry with "because" love. It eventually wipes out a relationship. There is the constant threat that the other person might find out something that they don't like and leave. This forces people to wear masks making sure the other person can only see the "good side". A deep fear hovers over a relationship like that.

"No Matter What" Love

I love you no matter what...

you do (I love you even when you trip and throw food all over the cafeteria).
you don't do (I love you even when you don't remember my birthday).
you act like (I love you even when you eat with your fingers at my parents' house).
you look like (I love you even without make-up or you're unshaven).
you weaknesses are (I love you even when you eat chocolate and get zits).
your faults are (I love you even when you throw a temper tantrum).

You probably haven't seen this kind of love in many dating relationships (or even marriages for that matter), but this is where you begin to understand real love. With "no matter what" love you can freely love and be loved. This is the kind of love that is neither earned nor deserved. In this love you know that the other person loves you in spite of what you are like. Only with this kind of love can you build a solid foundation for dating and marriage. It is the "no matter what" love that is the real thing! That is perfect love!(p.27-29).

You've probably all heard of infatuation. What is infatuation? Youth evangelist Barry Woods defines it as a state of highly charged emotion that can cause you to ignore reason and shower extravagant attention on the object of your desire that can ultimately leave you looking foolish. Infatuation is the emotional impulse of love untested by time or circumstance.

Barry St Clair and Bill Jones make following the comments contrasting love and infatuation:

Since infatuation can lead to true love it can be hard to distinguish between the two. Let's contrast them so you can see the difference...

INFATUATION

REAL LOVE

Fall into it suddenly	Grows with time
Deepens little with time	Always deepening
Wants sex now	Willing to wait for sex
Up and down emotionally	Consistent
In love with love	In love with a person
Fickle	Faithful
Can't eat or sleep	Has proper perspective
Hostile break-up at the slightest irritation	Does not panic when problems arise
Emphasizes beauty	Emphasizes character
Gets	Gives
Based on my feelings	Based on other's needs
Self-centred	Self-controlled
Shows emotion	Shows devotion
Physical	Spiritual
Expects to find happiness	Expects to work at happiness
Asks "How am I doing?"	Asks "How are you doing?"
Focuses on the performance of the other person	Provides unconditional acceptance of the other person

May feel this way toward more than one person	Feels this way toward one person only
Possessive	Allows the other person to relate to others
May be based on few contacts (only person you've dated)	Based on many contacts (dated many others)
Has an idealized image of the other person	Has a realistic view of the other person's strengths and weaknesses
Avoids problems	Works through problems (p.18-19)

Infatuation presents you with choices. How do you handle those choices when you fall for someone? You can use those feelings to work for you or against you.

One example of where it's worked in my favour was when I was keen on a particular girl who had a strong musical interest and though I had toyed with the idea for some time it gave me the final gentle shove I needed to take up learning the saxophone so I could have a common musical interest in case something worked out.

I based my decision on whether I could realistically afford it, not because I impulsively wanted to do it and I asked the question if it was going to be a benefit or a hindrance to me if things didn't work out. Well, things didn't work out but those feelings for her helped me to develop a new talent for which I am grateful for.

Those feelings from being fond of someone produce an aromatic high which should stimulate our self-confidence especially if the feelings are mutual. They should give us the extra confidence to approach people easier and be able to serve them more.

On the other hand a lot of people let those feelings work against them. Couples should spend a lot of time with each other but certainly not at the exclusion of others as happens a lot when people do get together. Other people base their whole life's plans around a particular person and leave themselves high and dry when things don't work out. Other people do crazy and impulsive things which they later regret while others become so pre-occupied with their object of desire they neglect friends, family, schoolwork, their college studies, saving for the important things of life and other important things.

Remember the choices are in your hands. You can let those feelings work for you or against you depending on how you work them. Are they going to help or hurt others? Are they going to be a help or a hindrance if things don't work out? I hope you can make wise choices the next time those aromatic feelings next come into your life.

The Chemistry Of Love

We've talked about love and the feelings of infatuation or romance and their differences. To get a more fuller understanding of love and romance I would like to quote from an article called "The Right Chemistry" which gives a fascinating insight into the God-given chemicals that race around in our body when we fall in love:-

Lovers often claim they are being swept away. They're not mistaken; they are literally flooded by chemicals research suggests. A meeting of eyes, a touch of hands or a whiff of scent sets off a flood that starts in the brain and races along the nerves and through the blood. The results are familiar: flushed skin, sweaty palms, heavy breathing. If love looks suspiciously like stress, the reason is simple: the chemical pathways are identical.

Above all, there is the sheer euphoria of falling in love - a not-so-surprising reaction considering that many of the substances swamping the newly smitten are chemical cousins of amphetamines. They include dopamine, norepinephrine and especially phenylethylamine (pea). Cole Porter knew what he was talking about when he wrote "I get a kick out of you".

"Love is a natural high," observes Anthony Walsh, author of "The Science of Love: Understanding Love and its Effects on Mind and Body". "Pea gives you a silly smile that you flash at strangers. When we meet someone who is attractive to us, the whistle blows at the pea factory."

But phenylethylamine highs don't last forever, a fact that lends support to arguments that passionate love is short-lived. As with any amphetamine, the body builds up a natural tolerance to pea; thus it takes more and more of the substance to produce love's special kick. After two to three years, the body simply can't crank up the needed amount of pea. And chewing on chocolate doesn't help, despite the popular belief. The candy is high in pea, but it fails to boost the body's supply."

Fizzling chemicals spell the end of the delirious passion. For many that marks the end of the liaison as well. It is particularly true for those whom Dr. Michael Liebowitz of the New York State Psychiatric Institute terms "attraction junkies". They crave the intoxication of falling in love so much that they move frantically from affair to affair just as soon as the first rush of infatuation fades.

Still, many romances clearly endure beyond the first years. What accounts for that? Another set of chemicals, of course. The continued presence of a partner gradually steps up the production in the brain of endorphins. Unlike the fizzy amphetamines, these are soothing substances. Natural pain-killers, they give lovers a sense of security, peace and calm. "That is one reason why it feels so horrible when we're abandoned or a lover dies," notes Fisher. "We don't have our daily hit of narcotics."

Researchers see a contrast between the heated infatuation induced by pea, along with the other amphetamine-like chemicals, and the more intimate attachment fostered and prolonged by endorphins. "Early love is when you love the way the other person makes you feel," explains psychiatrist Mark Goulston of the University of California, Los Angeles. "Mature love is when you love the person as he or she is." It is the difference between passionate and compassionate love," observes Walsh, a psychobiologist at Boise State University in Idaho. "It's Bon Jovi vs. Beethoven."

Oxytocin is another chemical that has been recently implicated in love. Produced by the brain, it sensitizes nerves and stimulates muscle contraction. In women it helps uterine contractions during childbirth as well as production of breast milk and seems to inspire mothers to nuzzle their infants and similar cuddling between adult women and men. The versatile chemical may also enhance orgasms. In one study of men, oxytocin increased three to five times its normal level during climax, and it may soar even higher in women...

Chemicals may help explain (at least to scientists) the feelings of passion and compassion, but why do people tend to fall in love with one partner rather than a myriad of others? Once again it's a function of...Biology. "Men are looking for maximal fertility in a mate," says Loyola Marymount's Mills. "That is in part why females in the prime childbearing ages of 17 to 28 are so desirable."

Men can size up youth and vitality in a glance and studies indeed show that men fall in love quite rapidly. Women tumble more slowly to a large degree because their requirements are more complex; they need more time to check the guy out. "Age is not vital," notes Mills, "but the ability to provide security, father children, share resources and hold a high status in society are all key factors."

Still that does not explain why the way Mary walks and laughs make Bill dizzy with desire while Marcia's gait and giggle leave him cold. "Nature has wired us for one special person," suggests Walsh romantically. He rejects the idea that a woman or a man can be in love with two people at a time. Each person carries in his or her mind a unique subliminal guide to the ideal partner, a "love map" to borrow a term coined by sexologist John Money of John Hopkins University.

Drawn from the people and experiences of childhood, the map is a record of whatever we found enticing and enticing - or disturbing and disgusting. Small feet, curly hair, the way our mothers patted our head or how our fathers told a joke, a fireman's uniform, a doctor's stethoscope. All the information gathered while growing up is imprinted in the brain's circuitry by adolescence. Partners never meet each and every requirement but a sufficient number of matches can light up the wires and signal, "It's love". Not every partner will be like the last one, since lovers may have different combinations of the characteristics favoured by the map.

O.K. That's the scientific point of view. Satisfied? Probably not. To most people - with or without Ph.D's - love will always be more than the sum of its natural parts. It's a commingling of body and soul, reality and imagination, poetry and phenylethylamine. In our deepest hearts, most of us harbour the hope that love will never fully yield up its secrets" (Time, Feb.15, 1993, p.50-51).

Handling Physical Attraction In Relationships

The biggest problem by far I feel that stops the free-flowing nature of building friendships with those of the opposite sex that should be there is that we don't know how to handle the question of physical attraction when it arises.

One thing we should keep in mind is that just because someone finds you attractive doesn't mean that they're interested in you. For example I might find half of the single

girls in the church attractive physically but not too many have the mental depth and emotional maturity I'm looking for in a lady.

One friend of mine who used to have a real problem saying no to a girl went steady with a few of them who he knew didn't have the character and qualities he needed in a wife. We need to wholeheartedly see that there is more to someone of the opposite sex than just good looks which you realise a lot more fully with age.

Now how should we handle this question of physical attraction. Personally I think the old phrase "I don't want to lead him on" to justify a girl avoiding a guy has little moral validity at all. The only exception is if a guy can't take a verbal no for an answer which does happen from time to time if the question of whether she likes him or not is addressed.

Most guys I've spoken to would much prefer a girl continue to be friendly to him any day than to have her avoid him or have nothing to do with him if she's turned him down or even has suspicions he might be interested in her.

Why? Well, the answer is simple. If a guy is knocked back by a girl as a potential lover that's one thing but to add salt into the wound by avoiding him and not being willing to spend the time they used to spend just as friends is another.

The first case a guy is only being knocked back as a potential lover. The second case though, is a double blow to a guy's self-esteem because he's not only being knocked back as a potential lover but as a friend as well. That goes both ways as guys avoid girls in situations like this also. That's something I wish all singles, both guys and girls, would understand. It would help prevent many problems that often arise between guys and girls.

Avoiding someone at any stage only makes matters worse or puts off a issue that's needs to be addressed plus it causes an unhealthy, frosty atmosphere to develop between people in a singles area. Just continue being relaxed and friendly to everyone including anyone who you may be suspicious of liking you. If you have suspicions and there is a bit of evidence of them liking you then don't put off asking them the question of whether they like you or not. Communication is the key. Regardless of their answer, continue being friendly to them as much as you're able to.

You do have a part responsibility if you have broken their heart of helping heal it for them. I've seen way too many hearts being broken without the person who's broken it ever having the courtesy to help heal their heart. Keep in touch with and make sure everything is OK. You're not doing anything to convince them you've change your mind. If you've been firm with your answer and they think you're changing your mind it's not your problem but still keep on being friendly as you're able.

You may need a bit of time apart if he feels that he needs it to help get over the pain but let him be the judge of that unless you're sure he can't take no for an answer. The awkwardness you might feel around him is usually minor compared to the pain he might be going through so have the courtesy not to add to it by avoiding him against his will. The same holds true if a guy has knocked back and broken a girl's heart.

Communication is the key. If you have your suspicions talk to them about it, say what you know you should, don't avoid them if you can help it and stay in touch and be a friend.

I find it amazing how girls, and this holds true for guys as well, tend to avoid discussing the issue, ignore the guy and sweep the issue under the carpet. They may as well get it quickly over and done with, especially as the awkwardness they're going through is only minor compared to the pain a guy can go through in such situations and vice versa.

Just to finish up with on this point if you like someone it's the right thing to do to let that person know once you've built up a solid foundation of friendship with them, either verbally or non-verbally, in person, over the phone or by letter. Some people are very quick at letting others know their feelings about them and I admire their courage and confidence in being able to do that but regardless of how quick or slow you are at letting a certain someone know you like them don't take forever in letting them know. You never know - you might get lucky!

Loving Toughness For Singles

Before I quote some excellent material from Dr James Dobson on some principles of loving toughness for singles I'd just like to offer a few thoughts on how fast to approach the opposite sex. Everyone is different with different tastes and depending on our different circumstances through life not all of us are ready or interested in a relationship with a girl or guy at the same time. Different approaches work for different people. As they say, horses for courses.

From my observation in well over half of the romances I've seen blossom the attraction and relationship have begun fairly quickly while a minority of others have taken time to blossom with one party having to woo the other over a period of time from many months to many years.

When the relationship has taken time to blossom I've noticed a pattern that relates to the pace of how one party has tried to win the other's heart. One night walking home from my train station while I was thinking about it I stumbled upon an analogy that has a few similarities.

As is my habit, if I see a cat I like to befriend it. If I were to charge straight over to it, it will take off every time. The same happens with women. If you go in too fast they will take off every time. Some guys, though, are too dumb to figure that out. The best way that I've found to catch a cat is firstly to approach slowly and then crouch down a few feet away and call the cat over. In the majority of cases the cat will come to me and allow me to pat it and pick it up. I wish I had those odds in building close friendships with women.

A certain percentage no matter how gently you approach will run. The same goes for women who become quite frightened because of past experiences. Slowly approaching shows you're making the effort to be friendly. When you crouch down and stay put you're showing the cat that you're not going to pressure it so it can trust you. Similarly

you have to build that sort of trust with women. If they are receptive to the love and affection you're willing to give them they will come to you if you've built that trust and platform of friendship first and then made your intentions known.

A girl that I once knew made a very valid comment that has stuck in my mind about how to win the heart of a lady. She said that you have to know when to chase a woman and when not to chase a woman.

There is a time when a girl wants the attention and interest from a guy and other times when a girl is not ready for it depending upon circumstances in her life. The key to knowing when is to pay attention to the feedback a girl is giving which hopefully will indicate when a girl wants the attention of being romantically pursued and when a girl needs space in the friendship you have with her.

There is another piece of advice a close friend of mine once gave me that I've found quite helpful despite the difficulty of putting it into practice. He said, "You have to plant seeds. Don't try and plant a forest!" In our eagerness to shower the object of our desire with attention and other good things we can certainly overdo it. That can be disastrous if the object of our desire is not ready for the attention and good things we desire to shower upon them. Build it slowly and don't plant more seeds of romance than the person you like can handle. Be patient. Good things come to those who wait!

Now I'd like to quote a few pages from Dr. Dobson's book "Love Must Be Tough" in his chapter dealing with loving toughness for singles which I'm sure you'll find every bit as fascinating as I did.

It is of highest priority to maintain a distinct element of dignity and self-respect in all romantic encounters. I have observed that many relationships suffer from failure to recognize a universal characteristic of human nature.

We value that which we are fortunate to get, we discredit that with which we are stuck!

We lust for the very thing which is beyond our grasp; we disdain the very same item when it becomes a permanent possession.

No toy is ever as much fun to play with as it appeared to a wide-eyed child in a store. Seldom does an automobile provide the satisfaction anticipated by the man who dreamed of its ownership. This principle is even more dramatically accurate in romantic affairs, particularly with reference to men.

Let's look at the extreme case of a Don Juan, the perpetual lover who buzzes from one feminine flower to another. His heart throbs and pants after the elusive princess who drops her glass slipper as she flees. Every ounce of energy is focused on her capture. However, the intensity of his desire is dependent on her unavailability. The moment his passionate dreams materialize, he begins to ask himself, "Is this what I really want?" Farther down the line as the relationship progresses toward the routine circumstances of everyday life, he is attracted by new princesses and begins to wonder how he can escape the older model.

Now, I would not imply that all men, or even the majority of them, are as exploitative and impermanent as the gadabout I described. But to a lesser degree, most men and women are impelled by the same urges. How many times have I seen a bored, tired relationship become a torrent of desire and longing the moment one partner rejects the other and walks out. After years of apathy, the "dumpee" suddenly burns with romantic desire and desperate hope.

This principle hits even closer to home for me at this moment. Right now as I'm writing these words, I am sitting in the waiting room of a hospital while my wife is undergoing major abdominal surgery. I am writing to ease my tension and anxiety. While I have always been close to Shirley, my appreciation and tender love for her are maximal this morning. Less than five minutes ago, a surgeon emerged from the operating room with a grim face, informing the man near me that his wife is consumed with cancer. He spoke in unguarded terms of the unfavourable pathological report and the malignant infestation. I will be speaking to Shirley's surgeon within the hour and my vulnerability is keenly felt. While my love for my wife has never flagged through our 14 years together, it has rarely been as intense as in this moment of threat.

You see, not only are our emotions affected by the challenge of pursuit, but also by the possibility of irrevocable loss. (The surgeon arrived as I was writing the sentence above, saying my wife came through the operation with no complications, and the pathologist recognized no abnormal tissue. I am indeed a grateful man! My deepest sympathy is with the less fortunate family whose tragedy I witnessed today.)

A better example of fickle emotions is illustrated by my early relationship with Shirley. When we first met, she was a lowly sophomore in college and I was a lofty senior. I viewed myself as a big man on campus, and my relationship with this young co-ed mattered little to me. She in turn, had been successful with boys, and was greatly challenged by the independence I demonstrated. She wanted to win me primarily because she wasn't sure she could, but her enthusiasm inhibited my own interest in return.

After graduation, we had one of those conversations well known to lovers the world over, when I said I wanted her to date other fellows while I was in the army because I didn't plan to get married soon. I'll never forget her reaction. I expected Shirley to cry and hold on to me. Instead, she said, "I've been thinking the same thoughts, and I would like to date other guys. Why don't we go our separate ways for now?" Her answer rocked me. For the first time in our relationship, she was moving away from me. What I didn't know was that Shirley stoically closed her front door and then cried all night.

I went away to the army and returned to the University of Southern California for my graduate training. By this time Shirley was an exalted senior and I was a collegiate has-been. She was homecoming queen, senior class president, a member of who's who in American colleges and universities, and one of the most popular girls in her class. And as might be expected, she suddenly looked very attractive to me.

I began to call several times a day, complain about who she was spending time with, and try to find ways to please my dream girl. However the moment Shirley saw my enthusiasm, her affection began to die. Gone was the challenge which had attracted her two years before. Instead, I had become another fellow pounding on her door and asking for favours.

One day after a particularly uninspiring date, I sat down at a desk and spent two solid hours thinking about what was happening. And during the course of the introspection, I realised the mistake I was making. A light flashed in my head and I grabbed a pen and wrote ten changes I was going to make in our relationship. First I was determined to demonstrate self-respect and dignity, even if I lost the one I now loved so deeply. Second, I decided to convey this attitude every time I got the chance: "I am going somewhere in life, and I'm anxious to get there. I love you and hope you choose to go with me. If you do, I'll give myself to you and try to make you happy. However, if you choose not to make the journey with me, then I can't force my will on you. The decision is yours and I'll accept it".

There were other elements to my new manner, but they all centred on self-confidence and independence. The first night that I applied the new formula was one of the most thrilling experiences of my life. The girl who is now my wife saw me slip away on that evening, and she reacted with alarm. We were riding in silence in my car and Shirley asked me to pull over to the curb and stop. When I did she put her arms around my neck and said, "I'm afraid I'm losing you and I don't know why. Do you still love me?" I noticed by the reflected light of the moon that she had tears in her eyes. She obviously didn't hear my thumping heart as I made a little speech about my solitary journey in life.

You see, I had re-established the challenge for Shirley, and she responded beautifully. The psychological force which produced our see-saw relationship is an important one, since it is almost universal in human nature. Forgive the redundancy, but I must restate the principle: we crave that which we can't attain but disrespect that which we can't escape. This axiom is particularly relevant in romantic matters and probably influenced your love life too.

Given that background, let me get specific with those of you who are single but wish not to be. (No insult is intended to those who are single by design and wish to remain unmarried. That is a legitimate choice which should be respected by friends and family, alike.)

Listed below are 16 suggestions that will help you conform to the principles of loving toughness in matters of the heart.

1) Don't let the relationship move too fast in its infancy. The phrase "too hot not to cool down" has validity. Take it one step at a time.

2) Don't discuss your personal inadequacies and flaws in great detail when the relationship is new. No matter how warm and accepting your friend may be, any great revelation of low-esteem or embarrassing weaknesses can be fatal when interpersonal "valleys" occur. And they will occur.

3) Remember that respect precedes love. Build it stone upon stone.

4) Don't call too often on the phone or give the other person an opportunity to get tired of you.

5) Don't be too quick to reveal your desire to get married or that you've just found Mr. Wonderful or Miss Marvellous. If your partner has not arrived at the same conclusion, you'll throw him or her in a panic.

6) Most important. Relationships are constantly being tested by cautious lovers who like to nibble at the bait before swallowing the hook. This testing procedure takes many forms but it usually involves pulling backward from the other person to see what will happen. Perhaps a foolish fight is initiated. Maybe 2 weeks will pass without a phone call. Or sometimes flirtation occurs with a rival. In each instance, the question being asked is, "How important am I to you and what would you do if you lost me?" An even more basic issue lies below that one. It wants to know, "How free am I to leave if I want to?" It is incredibly important to appear poised, secure and equally independent. Do not grasp the other and beg for mercy. Some people remain single throughout life because they cannot resist the temptation to grovel when the test occurs.

7) Extending the same concept, keep in mind that virtually every dating relationship that continues for a year or more and seems to be moving toward marriage will be given the ultimate test. A breakup will occur, motivated by one of the lovers. The rejected individual should know that their future together depends on the skill which he or she handles that crisis. If the hurting individual can remain calm, as Shirley did with me, the next two steps may be reconciliation and marriage. It often happens that way. If not, then no amount of pleading will change anything.

8) Do not expect anyone to meet all your emotional needs. Maintain interests and activities outside that romantic relationship, even after marriage.

9) Guard against selfishness in your love affair. Neither the man nor the woman should do all the giving. I once broke up with a girl because she let me take her to nice places, bring her flowers, buy her lunch, etc. I wanted to do these things, but expected her to reciprocate in some way. She didn't.

10) Beware of blindness to obvious warnings that tell you that your potential husband or wife is basically disloyal, hateful, spiritually uncommitted, hooked on drugs or alcohol, given to selfishness, etc. Believe me, a bad marriage is far worse than the most lonely instance of singleness.

11) Don't marry the person you think you can live with; marry only the person you can't live without.

12) Be careful to defend the line of respect, even during a dating relationship. A man should open doors for a woman on a formal evening; a woman should speak respectfully of her escort when in public, etc. If you don't preserve this delicate line when the foundations of marriage are being laid, it will be virtually impossible to construct them later.

13) Do not equate human worth with flawless beauty or handsomeness! If you require physical perfection in your mate, he or she may make the same demands of you. Don't let love escape you because of false values of your culture. In the same vein, be careful not to compare yourself with others which is the root of all inferiority.

14) If genuine love has escaped you thus far, don't begin believing "No one would ever want me". That is a deadly trap that can destroy you emotionally! Millions of people are looking for someone to love. The problem is finding one another!

15) Regardless of how brilliant the love affair has been take time to check your assumptions with your partner before committing yourself to marriage. It is

surprising how often men and women plunge toward matrimony without ever becoming aware of major differences in expectation between them.

For example:

- A. Do you want to have children? How soon? How many?
- B. Where will you live?
- C. Will the wife work? How soon? How about after children are born?
- D. Who will lead in the relationship? What does that really mean?
- E. How will you relate to your in-laws?
- F. How will money be spent?
- G. Where will you attend church?

These and dozens of other assumptions should be discussed item by item, perhaps with the help of a premarital counsellor. Many future struggles can be avoided by coming to terms with potential areas of disagreement. If the differences are great enough, it is possible that the marriage should never occur.

16) Finally, sexual familiarity can be deadly to a relationship. In addition to the many moral, spiritual and physical reasons for remaining virgins until marriage, there are numerous psychological and interpersonal advantages to the exercise of self-control and discipline. Though it's an old-fashioned notion, perhaps, it is still true that men do not respect "easy" women and often become bored with those who have held nothing in reserve. Likewise, women often disrespect men who have only one thing on their minds. Both sexes need to remember how to use a very ancient word. It's pronounced no!"

Breaking Up

In some romantic relationships one or both parties may come to the realization that the relationship is not strong enough to stand the test of time and lead eventually to a happy marriage. Breaking up is the result. For their comments on this subject I'd like to quote from Barry St Clair and Bill Jones' book "Dating – Picking and Being a Winner". They write the following:

Problems occur in every relationship. When you're single, depending on how serious the problems are, will determine whether or not a break-up is necessary.

Minor problems. You can take care of them while still going together. You can solve these problems by merely refocusing your primary commitment onto Christ.

Major problems. Often the best way to handle these problems is to back off the commitment to date only each other. This gives you a chance to think and evaluate without your steady always around. You may or may not continue to date during this time. If you do continue to date, you don't date as often as before. You may decide to date others as well.

Incompatible or messed-up relationship. You know that you are too different or can't get along well enough to be happily married down the track or that the only way to secure undivided devotion to God is to break up. Such can be the case if you have gotten involved physically. Because your thoughts, emotions, habits and actions have gotten so out of control, the only hope of dealing with the impurity is to break up

completely. Too many times young people are involved in commitment dating before they are ready. If you believe it is right to go steady and your parents consent then aim to make the relationship the very best - a growing friendship as you both focus on God and His way of life.

The typical breakup goes something like this:

The pizzazz is gone. One day you wake up, turn over and look at the picture of your sweetheart. In the past, looking at that picture gave you a charge, but there is no charge, no excitement, no pizzazz. You wonder why you are so madly in love. You begin a full scale investigation of your sweetheart, checking out every action and word. You notice the zit above his lip, the wart on his nose, and you conclude that your sweetheart isn't as great as you thought.

The grass is greener on the other side. Since you decided that your sweetheart isn't that great anymore, you begin looking around. You notice some others you hadn't paid attention to before and develop an attraction fast.

Bitterness. You decide you don't want to go together anymore, so you lower the boom. He or she feels badly hurt, like you led them on and let them down. These feelings turn into bitterness and she resents you for breaking up. She feels so hurt she won't forgive and after she dumps her coke on your head, you can't forgive her either. Bitterness leads to all of the other problems.

Wrath and anger. She gets angry because you have hurt her. She lets you know about every fault you have. Soon you tune each other out and you no longer communicate. The next day she hands back your picture poked full of holes(from the darts).

Breaking up is never easy, but it doesn't have to be a bloodbath. Be kind and tender-hearted. Every aspect of your dating relationship should be based on Ephesians 4:31-32, especially when breaking up. The bottom line is getting your mind off your own feelings and being concerned for the other person.

Don't break up until you have settled down. If you are angry wait until that has subsided. Realize the potential hurt that breaking up can cause the other person. It can make him or her feel rejected or not good enough no matter how gentle you are. Think through how the other person may respond. Then do all you can to avoid adding to the pain.

Don't break up for the wrong reasons. For example, your sweetheart may hurt you and you may want to break up to get even. Or you have problems getting along. In these cases you need to work on your differences and not try to get even or run away.

Ask God's guidance. Ask God to give you wisdom and guidance in the best way to go about breaking up. He will help you not only with the right words but also with the right attitudes. Pray for the other, asking God to prepare that person's heart for the announcement.

Get some advice. Ask an older, more mature christian if you are headed in the right direction. Be open to suggestions. Often this person will see things you don't see since they are not emotionally involved, especially if they are of the opposite sex as you.

Talk in person. Show the respect you have for your steady by breaking up face-to-face. If at all possible don't break up over the phone or by letter. You should carefully think through your words before breaking up and then when you see them be tender but most importantly straightforward and honest.

If you break up because the person is not in the church or doesn't have the spiritual qualities you need in a guy or a girl then let them know that. Stress the fact that your relationship with God is the most important thing in your life and explain that continuing to date would not encourage that. Steer clear of a holier than thou attitude but be honest.

If you are breaking up because of physical compromise, ask for forgiveness first. Then explain that you need to break up while you grow stronger in that area. And that continuing to go together would be too risky until the problem was dealt with. If you are breaking up because you realize "the other person is not the one" be honest - but again be kind and tenderhearted. First let them know the qualities about them you admire and appreciate. This helps soften the blow.

Accept your responsibility for the breakup. When you talk, own up to any of the things you have done that kept the relationship from working out. Tell them that you are interested not only in your own benefit but also in their's. Breaking up is not a time to air grievances. Work those out ahead of time.

Don't get talked out of it. Once you've expressed yourself about breaking up, often the other person will try to talk you out of it. Watch out for these tactics to postpone the breakup:

- making you feel guilty
- intimidating you through anger.
- playing on your mercy by crying
or promising to be different
- being romantic with the hope of igniting the fires once again.

Whatever the tactic, if you believe you are supposed to break up then stick to your guns. Trust God to take care of the other person's needs. Follow through on what you believe God has led you to do. Don't put it off. When you know breaking up is the right thing to do, do it! Don't hang on out of obligation or in hope that he or she may change. The longer you wait, the harder it gets. The quicker you do it, the sooner you can learn what Christ has for you next.

If your steady has broken up with you the natural tendency is to think you have been replaced by someone better when they go out with someone else. Replaced, yes, but don't think this person is better than you. Just different. God made you a very special person. Because your steady starts to date someone different doesn't make you a loser. Your dating status is all that has changed, not your specialness.

Perhaps painful is not the word for it. Breaking up is emotionally tearing. You probably feel some or all of the following - confusion, loneliness, low self-esteem (you feel rejected. You feel that if your steady doesn't want you, then nobody else will either. You feel unimportant and worthless.), depression and fear. You decide "I won't get burned again!" So you tell yourself you will never date again. That's because you are reluctant to get yourself back in the same situation. If you got hurt once, why get hurt again? You

may even like someone but the fear of getting hurt again keeps you from asking that person out.

If your steady has broken off with you remember that through what they have given as reasons God may be showing you things in your personality that need to be changed. Or He may use the breakup to identify ways you can better relate to the opposite sex in the future.

Hold no grudges. Ephesians 4:32 says you should forgive them as God has forgiven you. After your steady has finished explaining why you need to breakup thank them for their honesty, express appreciation for the special time you had together and let them know how grateful you are for your friendship and assure them of your continued friendship.

Change your focus. For several months(or years) you have focused on your steady. Thinking and talking about him or her will trigger strong emotions. At that point, focus your attention elsewhere. The easy way out is to focus on another person right away. Avoid that. Instead, put your focus on God. See this as an opportunity to grow closer to Him. Ask Him to fill the void. Be honest with Him and let Him deal with all those hurts. Ask Him to meet the needs your steady once met. This is the only way to fully recover.

Stay busy. This will help keep your mind off your old sweetheart. Spend time helping others and time with your old friends, especially if you have let those old friendships slip since going steady.

Make needed changes. If you learned something about yourself that contributed to the breakup begin to work on that.

Talk to a friend. If you continue having a hard time getting over the breakup, talk to your parents or to an older, mature christian.

Avoid another close relationship. Often to fill what's missing you look for another close relationship - quickly. That's not wise. Going from one relationship to another doesn't give you time to get your life under control. You need to be content without a relationship before you are ready for a new one. You need time for your emotions to heal. Failure to do this makes you a prime candidate for getting involved on the rebound and getting hurt again.

Continue your friendship. Don't see too much of your old steady at first. Sometimes just the sight of him or the mention of his name causes you to lose control. But as quickly as you can, continue the relationship as friends. If you can't trust your motives, wait until you can. To wait a little longer and develop a true friendship far surpasses subtly trying to get him back.

Keeping The Other Person Interested

If you are in a romantic relationship how do you build that relationship and keep the other person interested in you. For their comments I'd like to quote again from Barry St Clair and Bill Jones' book "Dating – Picking and Being a Winner". They make the following comments:

Some people have a great ability to attract the opposite sex but are seemingly hopeless when it comes to keeping the other person interested. So how do you keep a girl or guy interested in you? Well the mystery of great relationships can be solved by putting the other person's needs ahead of your own. In Philippians 2:3,4 you can find the clues to solving that mystery: "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself. Do not merely look out for your own personal interest but also for the interests of others."

Clue 1: Selfishness stinks

Selfishness is about as attractive as bad breath. It stinks! Selfishness means looking out for only your own interests and not the interests of others. This attitude says, "On my dates, I want to do what I want, when I want to do it, where I want to do it and it doesn't matter what my date wants." No one wants to be around a selfish person. Philippians 2:3 says, "Do nothing from selfishness." The first clue in relating is to avoid selfishness at all costs.

Clue 2: Conceit cuts

The rest of Philippians 2:3 tells us, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit." A conceited person is stuck on his looks, abilities or position. On a date all he wants to do is talk about himself. A conceited person not only thinks he is the greatest, but he looks down on other people, even his date. When his friends sense his attitude of conceit, they avoid him. They don't like to be around him. They develop a bad attitude toward him and try to cut him down to size. The second clue causes the conceited person to be lonely and isolated. Avoid conceit.

Clue 3: Humility helps

Humility regarding others as more important than yourself - the opposite of conceit. Humility comes out most in the way you treat your date. When you consider your date as more important than yourself, you want to treat them well. You do things that show him or her how important they are. Often you do things that require time and effort because you know they are worth it. Humility makes your date feel special. So, if you want a relationship to continue, remember to act with humility.

Clue 4: Service satisfies

Philippians 2:4 says you should look out for the interests of others, not just "number 1." Selfishness looks out for your interests, but service helps you to put the interests of others before your own. Serving expresses itself in the choices you make. When you serve, you will choose those things your date likes, not necessarily what you like - whether it is where to go, what to do or when to leave. Discovering these four clues will continue to attract your date more than anything else. Once he or she gets to know you, that person will continue to want to get to know you more. You may be cute, fun or have lots of money but if your date feels like you don't care about him or her, then they won't stick around long.

Tips for guys

- **Be courteous and a gentleman on dates.** Some ways to express that courtesy include asking her in advance when asking her out, picking her up on time, picking her up at her door as opposed to blowing your horn to signal your arrival, building rapport

with her parents when you meet them, opening doors for them and pulling out her chair.

- **Never talk about your past relationships with other girls unless she asks.** Nor should you compare your date with former girlfriends.

- **Compliment her good qualities regularly.** For example compliment her sensitivity if she detects that a person is hurting emotionally.

- **Send her a card and flower.** Offer no other reason than her specialness. Tell her you were thinking about her and wanted to brighten up her day.

- **Do not allow her to place her security in her relationship with you.** Encourage her to keep her focus on God by encouraging her to serve others and be involved in the church.

- **Guard against talking about marriage.** If you have dated for a while this can cause some girl's emotions to go berserk. Just the remote mention of marriage can build expectations. So avoid the topic. Do not talk about marriage until you can almost put a ring on her finger.

- **Maintain your priorities.** Do not devote all your attention to your girlfriend. Keep your time for God, your studies, your family and friends in proper perspective. Your girlfriend will respect your lifestyle. And she will not feel smothered by you. Be yourself.

- **Don't pretend to be someone you're not.** Sooner or later the real you will come out. If you haven't been yourself, then she will be in for a shock. Besides, now - not later - is the best time to find out if she likes you for who you really are.

Tips for girls

- **One of the best feelings for a guy is to know a girl admires and looks up to him granted he is receptive to it.** Some guys have egos that are out of control. Ego pumping flatters guys. It focuses on his physical appearance. Admiration builds up his inner qualities. Because people usually notice the physical, most guys concentrate on that. But if you notice his inner qualities, then he will begin to concentrate on those. As your boyfriend date responds to life in a God-like way, he needs to know how much you admire him for it.

- **Don't just thank him at the end of the date. Thank him during the date. Afterward, write him a thank-you card for his efforts.** Do this only if you're sincere and want to encourage him to ask you out again. This causes the guy to feel that he pleases you. He knows you are grateful for what he did to make sure you had a good time. He will notice this difference between you and others. Some girls forget to say "thank you" taking a special friend for granted. She expects him to take her out and treat her to a good time but she forgets that the guy worked a part-time job all week just to have the money to go out. Each date you might want to pick one or two of the following ways to say thank you: "I'm enjoying the time with you. You are fun." "I appreciate the way you make me feel special." "I wanted to thank you again for the date this weekend. It was great."

- **Guys scare easily.** If they sense a "noose" tightening, they often run. Therefore it is important to put your security in your relationship with God rather than in relationship with a guy. Trust God to take care of your needs and not focus on the relationship to meet those needs. To keep your security in God, check yourself frequently on these:

+ Spend time alone with God daily. Talk your problems through with Him and talk about other things than your dating relationships.

+ Ask an older christian woman to guide you. Guidance will help you keep proper perspective.

+ Look for warning signs - such as jealousy, possessiveness and insecurity.

+ Be careful about your emotions. Continually ask God to keep them from taking over.

+ Guard against expectations. When you start expecting him to call, come over or ask you out, then you have set yourself up for disappointment.

When we strive to put other's needs ahead of our own in our relationships and treat others with genuine kindness we will reap the rewards God intended for us in our relationships and dating will be a great source of joy and not burden.

SEX

The teenage and single years are a time when one's hormones and sexual desires start to kick in and we really start to notice the opposite sex. The temptations to misuse those sexual desires in a wrong way are all around us. The world totally misunderstands God's purpose for the gift of sex.

Sex can bring powerful blessings or powerful curses depending on how we use it. It is imperative we understand why God designed sex and the boundaries He has placed on its use so we can receive its blessings and not the penalties. I'd like to now quote from Barry St Clair and Bill Jones' book "Sex – Desiring the Best" for their comments on why God designed sex:

God designed sex to be exciting and awesome, beautiful and intimate...Maybe you think God is not excited about it. Maybe you even think he's down about it. No way! God is excited about sex and the Bible is never down on the use of sex - only the misuse of sex, especially outside a loving, marriage commitment between a husband and a wife.

No matter where you look - billboards, magazines, movies, TV, videos - you see sex. You don't see fantastic sex though. What you see is sick sex - sex outside of God's plan. Sick sex expresses itself in two opposite ways.

[The first one is] "sex is evil". Sex is bad. Sex is wrong but it's necessary to have children. Whatever you do, don't enjoy it.

[The other is] "sex - anytime, anyplace with anybody." Sex is like eating a hamburger and drinking a coke - no big deal. So "do it" anytime you want. Give free expression to your sexual drives. Enjoy it with anybody - whoever turns you on at the time...

[God] created men and women - male and female - in His image. And what is the first thing he told them to do? Have sex! Isn't that what He says? "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth"(Gen 1:28). God designed only one way to multiply and that's to have kids. And He designed only one way to have kids and that's to have sexual intercourse. "God saw all that he had made and it was very good." Sex came directly from God's heart...Sex is never bad in itself but it can be used wrongly...

[Sex if used properly within a loving marriage only can produce the most powerful blessings but if used wrongly out of marriage can produce the most powerful curses. God gave us our sexual drives. Though troublesome at times, it is our responsibility to control our desires and use sex wisely only in marriage.]

A lovely young lady wrote the following about her bridegroom in the Song of Solomon:

"My lover is radiant and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand. His head is purest gold, his hair is wavy and black as a raven. His eyes are like doves by the water streams, washed in milk, mounted like jewels." He is tanned and handsome.

"His cheeks are like beds of spice yielding perfume." He uses great smelling after shave.

"His lips are like lilies dripping with myrrh." His breath smells great.

"His arms are rods of gold set with chrysolite. His body is like polished ivory decorated with sapphires. His legs are pillars of marble set on bases of pure gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as its cedars"(S. of Sol. 5:10-15). He has a gorgeous body!

Now read what this handsome hunk has to say about his bride in the same book(S. of Sol. 7:1-9).

"How beautiful your sandaled feet, O prince's daughter! Your graceful legs are like jewels, the work of craftsman's hands." Great legs!

"Your navel is a rounded goblet that never lacks blended wine. Your waist is a mound of wheat encircled by lilies." What a body!

"Your breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle." Wow!

"Your neck is like an ivory tower. Your eyes are the pools of Heshbon by the gate of Bath Rabbim." (He's checking out every part.)

"Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon looking toward Damascus." (Oops! He got a bit carried away.)

"Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel. Your hair is like royal tapestry; the king is held captive by its tresses." A terrific face!

"How beautiful you are and how pleasing, O love with delights!" A knock-out 10 plus.

"Your stature is like that of the palm and your breasts like clusters of fruit." A perfect figure.

"I said I will climb the palm tree, I will take hold of its fruit. May your breasts be like the clusters of the vine, the fragrance of your breath like apples and your mouth like the best wine." (And he's enjoying it all!)

That's not a porn magazine. If you've never been interested in the Bible I'm sure you're interested now...

[Now why do we have sex? Well, let's have a look at God's] reasons for sex.

- To have babies. That's how we all got here. It's a fact that if your parents didn't have sex you wouldn't be here. So it's not a bad reason at all.

- To express pleasure. Sex is fun! No argument about that.

- To express love. Sex can be the most intimate way to say, "I love you." All of us want to express love.

All of these are good reasons to have sex. But God has something better in mind...

[In Matthew 19:4-6 Christ said:] "Haven't you read...That at the beginning God made them male and female, and said, For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh? So they are no longer two but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate"...

God designed sex to unite two people in marriage. Although people can have sex to have babies, to feel pleasure and to show love, God's higher plan is for total dynamic oneness. And that can happen only in marriage...The Bible teaches that sex is more than merely a physical act. When two people have sex they become one flesh. Both give themselves to each other. They become one person. How?

Sex joins personalities. When you have sexual intercourse with another person, you join your personality with the other person's personality...When the Bible says, "a man shall leave...and cleave"(Matt. 19:5), it means to glue, to cement. A man and woman in sexual intercourse join personalities. If you have sex and then break up with that person, you have left a part of your personality behind and torn away some of the other personality as well. Both of you are hurt and incomplete.

It takes more than sex to experience the total dynamic oneness of marriage. "One flesh" means that two people establish a relationship and companionship on every level - spiritual, mental and emotional. Then, and only then does the physical take on deep significance (p.18-23).

So Why Wait For Sex?

The pressure to have sex before marriage in this world is enormous for young people. For young people to be able to stand firm to the commitment to keep sex for marriage they need mental ammunition to cast down every pre-marital sex argument and bring "every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). To give us the

reasons why we should wait until marriage to have sex I quote again from "Sex – Desiring the Best":

[If two people really care for each other why is it wrong to make love if they're not married? That's a very good question. First of all, let's ask another question.] Do you care if your husband or wife has had sex before you get married? Sure you do! If you have waited, you want to marry someone who has waited also.

So you intend to wait and marry someone who has waited. You might explain it like this: "I think marriage is the right place for sex and I want my partner and I to wait." But that's not easy when your hormones start hopping, the juices start pumping and the desire to be close to someone of the opposite sex becomes almost unbearable. The plan to wait gets lost in the heat of the moment. You begin to think, "What's the big deal? Let's do it now."

So what is the big deal about being a virgin? All of the input around you - friends, TV, music, etc. - tells you that sexual intercourse is only a normal bodily function and that losing your virginity is a test of how mature you are. That's a lie! The truth is that the more inexperienced and innocent you are when you marry, the greater your sexual satisfaction with your husband or wife will be.

That's what the Bible means in 1 Thessalonians 4:4 when it says that "each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and in honour." "Holy" means set apart for God's purpose and honour means you are very special. You can say your virginity is the sign that you are special and set apart and very special in God's eyes. As you wait to enter marriage your virginity will result in several important benefits.

The white gown is not a farce. As a bride you can walk down the aisle and as a groom you can wait to receive her, knowing that you are pure before God and before each other.

Pregnancy is no problem. When two people refrain from sexual intercourse before marriage, obviously pregnancy is not an issue. Birth control is not 100 percent effective. Birth control supposedly lets you have sex without the danger of pregnancy. Many say the big solution to the teen pregnancy problems is safer sex. Society says "be careful - use birth control." But with so many teenage girls getting pregnant each year, somebody obviously hasn't explained too well how birth control work...

The only 100% guaranteed birth control method for the person who is not married, bar a vasectomy or castration, is virginity. That means abstaining from sexual intercourse. The issue is not birth control, but virginity.

Unless you've lived through an unplanned pregnancy with someone, it's difficult to understand the devastation. The girl is heartsick and the guy is confused, scared and angry. Both are hurt and disappointed as well as their parents. Most important than all of that, a third innocent victim - the baby - has to live or die with the consequences of their passion. When you wait you avoid all of that hurt.

[Unless you are married and in the position of being able to provide for a new human being it's not worth the risk of bringing an unwanted baby into the world and that means also in the engagement period prior to marriage because a great many

engagements do split up. When you run that risk you chance bringing a little life into the world with all of its needs for love and discipline and the stability of a home with both parents but in most cases you have no way to take care of him or her and meet its many needs.]

Trust in each other when you wait is complete. Sex before marriage creates tremendous insecurity on the part of the girl and the lack of respect for the girl on the part of the guy. Those feelings cast doubt on the relationship and its future. If the couple does get married, the question will eventually arise: if he(or she) had sex before marriage, will he(or she) do it after marriage, too? All of that adds up to destroyed trust. When you wait you can fully trust one another.

Sexual diseases are not a worry. Sexually transmitted diseases are rampant. New types and strains are being discovered all the time. Most don't respond to medication. They are miserable at best. They bring death at worst. That is a high price to pay for a few minutes of pleasure. The way to insure against disease is to wait...

You have probably watched couples like this(or maybe you've been one) who one week say,

"I love him. I am so happy."

"He's the greatest. We're in love."

Two weeks later they're saying,

"You creep! I hate you."

"I never want to see you again."

"You want your jacket back? O.K. Here it is - with the sleeves cut off!"

"You want your picture? Here it is, torn into a thousand pieces!"

What is happening here? Obviously these two don't know how to have a healthy relationship. In 1 Thessalonians 4:6 Paul explains that a relationship built on sex outside of marriage is not healthy because "No one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him." When a relationship gets too physical one person or both in the relationship is taking advantage of the other. You try to start over but every time the physical gets too heavy. It hurts both you and the other person.

Why does it happen over and over again? Because you are taking advantage of each other. You don't know how to build a healthy relationship. You can't beat the break-up habit because you've put too much emphasis on sex. You have lost sight of what God is trying to do in your life and in the life of the other person...

When sex controls you, your relationship with God goes into neutral. He seems to be a million miles away. You feel like your prayers don't reach the ceiling. You even begin to doubt if God exists...

When you have sex outside of marriage, you want to be intimate and close. You want sex to bind you together. Instead, it tears you apart. What started out as a tender expression now produces tension. Your relationship suffers in several areas:

- Breakdown in communication. Now instead of long talks, you are looking for ways to be alone to make love. Without talking, your relationship is crippled. More sex only puts a band-aid on a broken bone that will never correctly heal.

- **Shallow relationship.** Sex is the easiest and most direct route to intimacy but it is not the best. Sharing bodies without sharing hearts and minds is a shallow, hollow experience. The glue of sex is not strong enough to hold the relationship together. The qualities that make a relationship hold together - trust, honesty, openness, deep friendship and spiritual depth - take time and effort to develop. A heavy duty emphasis on sex causes the relationship to come unglued.

- **Guilt.** Sex before marriage causes you to feel guilty. Why? Because you are. This guilt prevents you from building the relationship.

- **Insecurity and loss of respect.** In real love there is no one else. But premarital sex knocks the props out from under the security the girl needs and the respect a guy needs.

"If he made love to me I wonder if there are others."

"All he ever wants is sex"

"I just don't respect her anymore"

- **Comparison to others.** If you have sex before marriage, when you get married you will flash back. You will think, "That guy kisses better than my husband." "She makes love better than my wife." Or if your sexual experiences are bad before marriage, all the fear and anger of the past will cause you to freeze emotionally. As a result, you are not completely free to love your marriage partner...

How will having sex now affect your future marriage and mate? Research by sociologist and author Ray Short shows that:

- Men prefer to marry women who have not had sex with someone else.
- If you've had pre-marital sex the marriage will more likely end in divorce.
- Extramarital affairs will more likely occur.
- Women who have had pre-marital sex are twice as likely to have extramarital affairs than those who haven't.
- Premarital sex may cause you to marry a person not right for you - sex can blind you...

When you have sex, a part of your personality stays with that other person forever. Like an apple sliced with a knife and handed out to several different people, every time you have sex with a different person, your personality is divided and handed out. You can never recover it.

Because sex is so powerful, it creates strong emotional bonds between partners. These bonds can make you feel that the relationship is deeper than it really is - thinking you know your partner and your partner knows you better than you actually do. You become emotionally "sliced":

- You have unfulfilled needs that cause you to get frustrated and bitter.
- You hang on to the relationship, not out of love, but out of fear and insecurity.
- You wanted intimacy and love but are disappointed that all you got was sex (p.54-61).

De-Facto Relationships

De-facto relationships are becoming more and more common where people live together without getting married. What does the Bible say about the subject of romantic/sexual couples living together while they are unmarried?

To begin with I'd like to quote from a summary of a World Tomorrow telecast on the subject of "Love, Marriage and Sex" that was given by David Albert. He made the following comments:

There are millions of de-facto relationships where a man and a woman live together outside of marriage. These are the ones who say that a piece of paper doesn't make love real. They don't see the need for marriage. To them it seems like only a legal complication and a potentially expensive problem should they later choose to divorce. They'd like to move on and move out as easily as they moved in. The problem here is the absence of solid, long-term commitment and with that the lack of deep trust.

These couples want to keep their options open. That may work in the good times but what happens when the going gets rough. Then they give up on the relationship and once again that leaves people who have been happy together, intimate for many months or years who then are suddenly plunged into loneliness and the difficult prospect of starting all over again with someone else.

And we're only talking about the adult partners in these relationships. What if there were children born in these temporary, easily concluded arrangements? Where do they come out when mummy and daddy suddenly moves out of their lives or re-appears with a new partner? How do sex and love without long-term commitment work for the next generation - the offspring of these temporary loving and sexual relationships? As we know children only compound the tragedy.

In the United States alone the number of children born to unmarried mothers was 770 000 in 1984 according to the Department of Health and Human Services. And the number of abortions in the U.S. is 1.5 million per year. That's one every 20 seconds and that accounts for more deaths in one year than in all of America's wars combined!

More than one-fifth of American babies are born to unwed mothers. That's one in five who'll be fatherless and who will in most cases live at or below the poverty level! If the consequences for adults in today's casual living together arrangements are bad, and they are, the consequences for children are even worse.

To continue our look at the subject of de-facto relationships I'd like to now quote from an article entitled "The Divorce Revolution Spawns the Co-habitation Generation". Cecil Maranville makes the following comments:

Unmarried cohabitation, or living together, is the status of couples who are not married to each other, but are sexual partners sharing a household. God reveals that sexual relations outside of marriage are harmful and damaging: "*Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body*" (1 Corinthians 6:18, emphasis added throughout).

Why? What does God know that people lately have been discovering the hard way? Far from insignificant, the trend toward living together is nothing short of revolutionary. In the United States about 11 percent of couples lived together before marriage between 1965 and 1974; 44 percent cohabited before marriage between 1980 and 1990; more than 50 percent of couples marrying today lived together before marriage. Almost 60 percent of American high-school seniors agreed or mostly agreed with the survey statement that cohabiting is usually a good way to prepare for marriage.

In 1970 the number of people living together without marriage was 523,000. Today the number exceeds four million. According to figures from the U.S. Census Bureau, the rate of people cohabiting has increased by some 700 percent since 1970 and number of couples with children in the home increased almost 550 percent from 1970 to 1994. Marriage statistics are equally shocking. The U.S. marriage rate has dropped 43 percent over the past four decades to its lowest point ever.

Why has the rate of marriages dropped? What has caused this revolution? In large part, it's a result of the divorce revolution, aided by a general loosening of attitudes toward morality. Having witnessed and experienced firsthand the negative results of divorce, today's youth want to avoid them.

According to a Rutgers University study, "For today's young adults, the first generation to come of age during the divorce revolution, living together seems like a good way to achieve some of the benefits of marriage and avoid the risk of divorce...According to surveys, *most young people* say it is a good idea to live with a person before marrying" (David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, "Should We Live Together? What Young Adults Need to Know About Cohabitation Before Marriage: A Comprehensive Review of Recent Research," The National Marriage Project: The Next Generation Series).

They believe that cohabiting couples who eventually marry will have stronger marriages for their having lived together first. Cohabitation, they reason, enables them to get to know each other much better than people who enter into marriage without first living together. Then, if things don't work out, the relationship can be broken without the hassle of either legal procedures or religious permission. They assume many divorces will be avoided by starting relationships with a trial period of living together. Cohabiting, they believe, will provide opportunity for the unmarried man or woman to experiment enough that he or she will find the ideal match before eventually entering into marriage.

That's not to say that all young adults have the same reasons for cohabiting. Some live together with no intention of marrying. Others live together briefly before marrying each other. Still others see cohabiting with various partners as preparation for marriage with someone--eventually...

In spite of such a vast increase in numbers of couples cohabiting without benefit of marriage, and in spite of the many reasons offered for their behavior, evidence is sorely lacking that cohabitation makes any positive contribution to marriage whatsoever.

In fact, the evidence runs strongly to the contrary, that cohabitation is detrimental. Researchers have found that living together before marriage increases the risk of divorce after marriage. "Research conducted at Yale and Columbia University and published in *American Sociological Review* found, 'the overall association between

premarital cohabitation and subsequent marital stability is striking. The dissolution [divorce] rates of women who cohabit premaritally with their future spouse are, on average, nearly 80 percent higher than the rates of those who do not' " (Neil Bennett, "Commitment and the Modern Union: Assessing the Link Between Premarital Cohabitation and Subsequent Marital Stability," *American Sociological Review* 53, p. 127-138).

David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead of the Rutgers University study concluded that "virtually all research on the topic has determined that the chances of divorce ending a marriage preceded by cohabitation are significantly greater than for a marriage not preceded by cohabitation. A 1992 study of 3,300 cases, for example, based on the 1987 National Survey of Families and Households, found that in their marriages prior [cohabitants] 'are estimated to have a hazard of dissolution [divorce] that is about 46 percent higher than for [noncohabitants].' "

Other researchers have come to similar conclusions, that those who live together before marriage are 50 to 100 percent more likely to divorce than those who wait until marriage.

Researchers have also found that living together outside of marriage increases the risk of domestic violence for women and the risk of physical and sexual abuse for children. "One study in Great Britain...found that, compared to children living with married biological parents, children living with cohabiting but unmarried biological parents are 20 times more likely to be subject to child abuse, and those living with a mother and a cohabiting boyfriend who is not the father face an increased risk of 33 times" (Popenoe and Whitehead).

A similar pattern was found in another American study. The Family Violence Research Program at the University of New Hampshire found that 'cohabitants "are much more violent than marrieds." More specifically, the rate of violence among cohabiting couples was *twice as high* as for marrieds and the rate for "severe" violence was found to be nearly *five times* greater (Kersti Yllo and Murray Straus, "Interpersonal Violence Among Married and Cohabiting Couples," *Family Relations* 30, pp. 339-347, emphasis added).

People who live together are much more likely to enter unsuccessful cohabiting relationships again. They become serial cohabitants. Leaving one relationship apparently makes it easier to leave another--rather than providing the stability many say they seek.

Fully three quarters the number of children born to cohabiting parents will see their parents split up before they reach age 16, whereas only about a third of the children born to married parents face a similar trauma.

Chances that cohabiting mothers will marry their children's fathers are declining. The most recent statistics show that it will happen in only 44 percent of cases. Economic relationships of cohabitants are often tenuous. Depression in cohabiting couples runs more than three times the rate among married couples. Overall, unmarried couples have lower levels of happiness and well-being than married couples.

So, rather than providing the benefits of marriage without the problems, cohabitation delivers the opposite: the difficulties of poor marriage relationships without many of the benefits of good ones.

In the United States of 30 years ago, people who lived together unmarried were said to be "living in sin," but American society is rapidly distancing itself from that religious perspective. Many young people associate getting married before living together with values of a past, out-of-date generation--values that are not for the current generation. They prefer not to worry about having to discuss their relationship with a clergyman either at the beginning or dissolution of their union.

"Underlying all of these trends is the broad cultural shift from a more religious society where marriage was considered the bedrock of civilization and people were imbued with a strong sense of social conformity and tradition, to a more secular society focused on individual autonomy and self-invention. This cultural rejection of traditional institutional and moral authority, evident in all of the advanced, Western societies, often has had 'freedom of choice' as its theme and the acceptance of 'alternative lifestyles' as its message" (Popenoe and Whitehead).

Men have long misappropriated religion as authority to suppress and abuse women. Seizing advantage from reactions to those wrongs, the feminist movement has influenced religious thought and practices to be more accepting of cohabitation. The feminist angle is that living together is a more positive arrangement for women. (As noted above, research shows that just the opposite is true: The incidence of abuse increases)...

Cohabiting is often done supposedly to avoid the very problems it brings. "Unlike divorce or unwed childbearing, the trend toward cohabitation has inspired virtually no public comment or criticism," says the Popenoe-Whitehead report. That in itself is a sad commentary on our civilization.

But *The Good News* isn't afraid to comment: Living together unmarried isn't a way to right the wrongs of the divorce revolution, but another wrong in itself. It is sin--sin that has been dressed up in acceptable-sounding words, perhaps, but sin. When people sin, they pay a price, their children pay a price, and their entire nation pays a price--a terrible price.

Christ's words resound with wisdom and warning: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery [*porneia*, meaning immorality, including fornication and unmarried cohabitation].' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28). Knowing the damage that sexual sins inflict on mankind, Jesus commands to avoid it at all costs.

Whether a man and woman should live together unmarried must not be decided by economics, convenience, societal trends or personal preferences--not by human opinion in any form. Marriage is a divine institution, ordained of God. He alone makes the rules. He knows what works and what doesn't. Research increasingly confirms that rejecting His way brings only sorrow and heartache, as many are learning the hard way..

God meant marriage for learning to love with loyalty and tenderness. It involves commitment, self-sacrifice and a willingness to share. At its deepest level, marriage pictures the loving relationship between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:22-32). It pictures faithfulness, commitment and permanence. Living together detracts from this biblical legacy (Good News, Jan-Feb.2000, p.20-23).

How Far Is Too Far?

"Is there anything wrong with kissing before marriage?"

"If you can't go all the way before marriage, how far can you go?"

"Is there such a thing as responsible petting?"

These questions have been put to ministers from time to time by couples preparing for marriage. How would you answer them?

Two broad opinions are voiced by the world. One is summed up in two words, "Don't touch". If you follow this prohibitionist approach you will not hold hands, embrace or indulge in any form of physical expression of love until you are married. Joyce Huggett makes the following comments about this approach:

Is this the healthiest preparation for marriage? I personally do not believe it is. Is it reasonable to encourage people to demonstrate affection to a cat, a dog or a pet rabbit and to refuse that person permission to touch the person they love? This unhealthy view of touch generates anxiety, fear and embarrassment. Too many people go into marriage afraid of touch, even frightened of sex (Growing Into Love, p.80).

The other extreme opinion is "Do anything". Any kind of sexual expression is permissible as long as the motive is genuine love. After all, kissing, fondling another's genitals and sexual intercourse are external acts - "doing what comes naturally." Why then curtail these demonstrations of affection?

God wants us to enjoy our life and sexuality but as we've seen so far, not all things that feel "so good" at the time are good for us. Often many things have kickbacks like fornication or pre-marital sex. But if you can't have sex before marriage how far can you go? Joyce Huggett makes the following comments:

Is there a middle course? I believe there is. It is the use of responsible touch. Touch is a language which can be learned...[It should be learned because] when two people marry they promise to give their bodies to one another for a lifetime of sexual fulfillment. They therefore owe it to one another to venture into marriage unafraid of touch. But touch is not a language that can be learned overnight, not even on the wedding night.

But I do not want to suggest that learning the language of touch is without risk. It is as dangerous as lighting a match on a parched land in summer. Awakened sexual desire is a hungry flame. It can sweep through the hidden recesses of our being, consuming the whole of us. This greedy flame must be guarded (Growing Into Love, p.81-82).

Before we offer her six guidelines to responsible touch I'd like to quote again from Barry St Clair and Bill Jones' book "Sex – Desiring the Best" for their comments on how far is too far:

Suppose you are driving your car on a dangerous road. The shoulder of the road is narrow and the drop-off very steep - about 200 feet straight down. If you are just seeking a thrill, you will drive as close to the edge of the road as possible to see how close you can get without going over. You say, "Boy, this is fun. I love my car and it sure does feel good driving it right at the edge. What a view! I can see all the way to the bottom. It's exciting to live dangerously." But it never occurs to you what will happen if you slip up and drive one inch closer to the edge. Whoosh! You're history! Dead meat! Now we have to dig you up out of the wreck. Not too smart, right?

But that's the approach many people take with their sex life. How close to the edge can I go without ruining my life and the life of the person I'm dating? How much fun can I have before I get caught? That's suicide! You're asking for it!

Now if you are intelligent you will drive along that dangerous highway hugging the centre line staying as far from the edge as you possibly can. You say, "I really do love my car and I care for myself so I want to protect them both." Hopefully by now you have decided to take the part of the road that will protect you, your date, your future and the future of your date...

Sex is like a fire. That same fire that warms a house can burn it down...A fire in the fireplace gives warmth and comfort. A fire outside the limits of the fireplace destroys. The proper place for sex to burn is in the fireplace of the marriage relationship where it brings warmth to the relationship. Outside of the marriage relationship sex destroys...

[Before we answer the question how far is too far] let's define some terms -:

Necking - kissing each other around the neck up.
Petting - touching each other from the neck down.

Petting has many different expressions:

- Hugging so that your hands caress your partner's back and sides.
- Touching breasts and groin through or under clothing
- Lying down together or on top of each other.
- Touching sexual organs in order to reach orgasm.

The above actions feel good, express intimacy and don't end in pregnancy. However is it just intercourse that leads you through the guardrails and over the edge to crash and burn at the bottom of the cliff? Should a couple get involved in those actions which are preliminaries to intercourse if they stop before sexual intercourse? No way!

Petting is designed by God to end in intercourse. So, when you put yourself in a position to arouse the "passionate lust" you have gone too far. Returning to the fire analogy: touches light the fire, caresses fuel the flames and heated passion grows into a mighty blaze. Once you start petting, your motor gets revved up and it doesn't want turn off. In fact what you want to do is "put the pedal to the metal" and go all the way. So stop [before petting]!

But you say, "We're going to pet, but no more." That sounds good, but once your body gets going, you lose the ability to make rational decisions. All those things you have said about waiting go out the window. Your emotions and physical desires take over. Then you're headed for big trouble...

Imagine a car going along at 55 miles per hour and then throwing the gear into park. You'd kill the car. It can't stop that fast. It's even worse trying to throw it into reverse. It wants to keep going and so do your sexual desires once they're running.

[From watching couples who were into petting] their relationships have one of two endings (and sometimes both):

They go all the way
They break up angry, frustrated and deeply hurt...

Remember, the person you date today may well be somebody else's mate tomorrow. Do you want to marry a person who has been involved sexually with someone else? Preferably not, right? Most other people don't either! So you need to keep your hands off in order not to hurt another person's future relationships. If you really care for (and love) someone you are dating, you will never take advantage of that person by going beyond his [or] her limits (p.71-75).

Joyce Huggett offers these points regarding how far to go in expressing love physically prior to marriage -:

1) Concentrate on the touch which is an end in itself eg. hugs, a goodnight kiss, a light facial or hair caress rather than the touch which is the love-play designed to end in intercourse.

[2] Be careful how you dress for each other. If your partner's clothes make it hard for you to say no, you owe it to your relationship to say so. Men, in particular, are easily aroused by provocative dress: flimsy, see-through blouses, skin-tight t-shirts, low-cut necklines which leave little to the imagination.]

[3] Avoid provocative states of undress, lying together and stimulation of erogenous zones.

[4] Learn to defuse the tension by talking to one another about your individual responses to all kinds of sexual stimuli.

[5] Avoid being alone together too much and reduce the opportunities for prolonged petting.

[6] Beware of allowing physical contact to replace other means of communication.

Sexual intimacy is fascinating. It's joys are worth waiting for...Leave the delights of genitalia, the fondling of breasts, extreme sexual excitation, necking and petting until you are married [Growing Into Love, p.88].

Prolonged kissing will, in most cases, ignite the sexual desires within. Some will ask the question "What about a quick romantic kiss?" One lady gave this advice on this subject:

"I know it is hard to resist kissing someone, especially if they mean a lot to you, or are very attractive. But you have to remember, if God hasn't picked this person for you, your lips are on another person's mate. If you were married already and someone kissed your wife/husband, you'd be pretty mad! So think 'fourth dimensionally,' as Doc Brown would say, and know that this other person is not your mate [at least not yet if you are going steady or engaged]."

Author and speaker, Craig Groeschel, in a Life Church sermon on Sex and Dating said when he met his wife they vowed to not to have sex before marriage having made mistakes in previous relationships.

Craig said everything was easy up to the point they crossed the line and had their first kiss and then it got awfully hard after that because the desire for more had kicked in after crossing that line. They kept their vow but recognised the pressure to stay pure got a whole lot harder after that first kiss.

Concentrate on building love and friendship into your relationship through dating.

Dating gives you time to get to know yourself and the other person by seeing how you react under different circumstances. How well do you work together as a team? Are you each other's best friend?

That euphoria or honeymoon that comes with a beginning sexual relationship is no long-term proof of real, true love. Too many couples today mistake sensuous feelings and emotions for love. Then, when the feeling is gone, they believe their love is finished and the relationship is over. That's why a time for dating and courtship before marriage without sexual involvement is so important(Good News, article – The Singles Scene, Aug. 1987, p.12)

Proverbs 4:23 says,"Above all else, guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life." Be careful about telling a person too quickly that you love him or her or kissing every girl or guy you like. Keep your emotions under control. Then when you kiss that special one or say, "I love you", both of you will know that you mean it(Love – Making It Last, p.20-21) .

What's Wrong With Sexual Lust?

Sex is powerful. When misused or abused, sex can seriously wound you. Like playing around with a loaded pistol, there's potential for destroying yourself. Let's look at the basic attitude behind most sexual problems - lust. Barry St Clair and Bill Jones make these comments about lust:

When you think about the opposite sex, can you tell whether it's love or lust? Do you really care for the other person or do you that person to satisfy your sexual desires? Love always waits to give. Lust never waits to get.

Jesus explained lust clearly in Matthew 5:27-28: "You have heard that it was said, do not commit adultery. But I say unto you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

That is a strong statement. Obviously Jesus didn't take lust lightly. The word he uses in Greek is "epithumia". "Epi" means over and "thumos" means passion. Lust means "overpassion" ...Lust is a burning desire for the opposite sex.

God has blessed you with your sexual desires. He has special plans for you to use those desires within marriage. That is normal. So when you look at person and say, "Now there's an attractive person", that's cool. But sexual desires that come from lust are not from God. When you start to think, "I wonder what he (or she) looks like undressed" and your thoughts start imagining anything from messing around to sexual intercourse with someone of the opposite sex you're into lust and that's wrong...

Proverbs 6:25-27 explains how lust is like a fire: "Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes. Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned?" Picture your eyes catching fire, then spreading to your mind, then consuming your body. Fire begins with your eyes. That is why Jesus said that all a person has to do is "look ... lustfully and he has already committed adultery with her in his heart"...

Your eyes are bombarded with lust material all of the time. One youth leader expressed it this way..."We live in a sex-saturated society that constantly bombards all of us with erotic stimuli. Suggestive poses and near-nude bodies are just a glance away. Come-on eyes peer at us from colourful, provocative ads on television, in magazines and on billboards."

If lust catches fire, then it spreads to your mind and your mind is your most important sex organ...Is your mind consumed with sexual thoughts, desires and dreams? When lust smoulders in your mind, it's only a matter of time until it explodes into your body. Your body is blazing with lust, not because of what you have done necessarily but what you have seen and what you have thought about what you have seen...

If lust has gotten past your eyes and into your mind, that's where you determine how bad it is. The old saying goes - garbage in-garbage out. If you put garbage into your mind, eventually garbage comes out. When He said: "The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks"(Luke 6:45).

The garbage-in stuff that fuels your fire can be

- television
- books
- magazines
- posters
- movies
- music videos
- conversations
- music

Although nothing is wrong with any of these means of communication they are often used to influence your mind negatively toward lust. If you feed your mind trash, then trash will come out.

[Do you rationalize your impure lustful thoughts?] Do you ever find yourself using these excuses to give in to your desires?

- I'm only human
- No-one is perfect
- I've tried and tried but I can't win
- After all, God created me with these desires
- When I get married it will be all right...
- I don't feel guilty
- A few mistakes won't hurt that much.
- Most of my friends are worse off than me...

It's not the one big forest fire of passion that gets you, it's the little brush fires. The little compromises get the fire hotter and hotter. To illustrate this to his son, one student's dad had him drive a nail in a tree every time his son had a lustful thought. After a month they went out and looked at the tree. It was full of nails and dying...

Now, instead of you controlling lust, lust controls you. You want to stop, but you can't. You want to change, but you don't. And now lust is burning you up...When this goes on long enough, a pattern develops in your life:-

sow a thought -> reap an action
sow an action -> reap a habit
sow a habit -> reap a lifestyle
sow a lifestyle -> reap a destiny (Sex – Desiring the Best, p.100-108)

On the subject of lust Tom Eisenman in his book “Temptations Men Face” makes these comments:

Sex has enormous power. It has power to create and sustain a community. Power to live in love. Power to know another deeply. Power to express the image of God. It is both a gift and a profound blessing from the Lord of love.

If perverted, sex is a power that destroys. It holds men captive. Turns quickly to an obsession. Burns with lust. It demeans human beings, reducing them to things to be used, abused and discarded.

Held in its bondage, otherwise reasonable men will lie to themselves and others, turn their hearts and minds away from God, leave their wives and the children they love, and choose to live in tension, guilt and shame, all for the promise of tasting again the brief, pulsing current of its seductive pleasure...

Key principles in God's design for sex cannot be violated without causing great harm. For one thing sex can never be the meaning of life. The powerful illusion that has cast its spell over our entire culture today is that sex is a magical experience which will bring into our lives the true intimacy we desire. It is a lie. Sex which ignores God will

only increase our loneliness. But there is a seductive power in the illusion. The physical sensations of sex make people feel like they have engaged in something authentic. But beneath the physical sensations there is nothing...As J.R.Braun puts it, "Orgasm can never be the meaning of life"...

The paradox in the sexual revolution is that what is really wanted and needed after by men and women cannot be achieved by the experience of free sex. True intimacy and irresponsible or free sex are opposing in nature. Free sex by definition must be temporary, anonymous, self-centred, otherwise it wouldn't be free.

The propaganda promises that irresponsible sex will somehow bring warmth, caring and genuine intimacy. But the images of the sexual revolution betray a different reality. The pictures are often inhuman and unreal. The magazine photographs are touched up, unknown bodies without personalities. The bodies feed our fantasies but not our souls. If we indulge ourselves we will only be hungrier than before... Our insecurities and emptiness feed the power of the images...

Only a real woman and a real, loving, monogamous relationship can bring a man the genuine joy of true intimacy and vice versa...Biblical sexuality demands accountability to the fact that physical love expressed between a man and a woman has the potential for producing offspring...

The dark forces of sex are powerful. Each time we give in – stimulate ourselves through fantasies [or pornographic material], become involved in casual sex or argue for the rightness of physical sex outside of marriage or between partners of the same sex – we participate in the lie. But when we hold out for God in the various areas of our sexual lives, refusing to play the world's games, insisting on behaviour we know is right and true, we will realize a deep blessing from God (p.54-59).

What's Wrong With Pornography?

Tom Eisenman makes the following comments on the danger of pornography in his book "Temptations Men Face":

The ugly reality of pornography is that it reduces women to sex objects and it lures men away from a true relationship. They become lost souls chasing an illusion, a mirage.

The longer they chase the titillating image, the longer they will live empty lives, not able to find and enjoy the deep integration of their personalities with a woman in love, which is the goal of God for our human sexuality (p.67).

There are many other dangers that can result from obsessive pornography. It can feed sexual desires and cravings to such an uncontrollable degree with many men that it can lead to rape and sexual violence. This is evident by the number of rape cases that have been connected to pornographic material.

Another danger of pornography is that it can pre-occupy you so much that you're distracted from much more important things. You can become so pre-occupied with the physical pleasures that you can't focus on giving true love to a woman and focus on other important goals and duties in your life.

The final danger is the increased potential of having an affair when you're married. God made us as sexual beings and He evidently did not make us to be exclusively attracted to one person. No matter how gorgeous your future spouse might be there will always be men and women of great allure who you will find attractive.

Our hormones will always be polygamous even when we're married. It's the mind that controls whether we are going to be faithful and true and monogamous. If you are constantly in the habit of lusting after lots of different women your hormones are getting the better of you instead of doing what you know is right in your mind. Your deep cravings make it difficult for your mind to think monogamously. If the opportunity to have an affair arises it could be very hard to hold oneself back if those sexual cravings are strong no matter how much you love your wife.

On that point I would like to make an aside and look at a common male pre-occupation, that of girl watching. Cecil Osborne makes these comments on this habit:

Virtually all normal men are "girl watchers". In our culture "watching" is done somewhat more discreetly than in some European countries. In Italy, for example, a man desires pleasure from looking at a pretty face or an attractive figure. His interest does not imply any disloyalty to his wife. He has not been struck blind simply because he's married.

He might enjoy his own new car and appreciates its beauty, yet glance with whole-hearted appreciation at another car on the road. His approving appraisal of the other car does not imply that he would prefer it to his own. He is simply appreciating something highly attractive to his male eye.

Women, however, are not "man watchers" to the same degree nor in the same manner. A woman may admire and make mental comparisons much more discreetly and would be embarrassed to be caught eyeing a man in the same direct manner a man employs in looking at a woman (The Art of Understanding Your Mate, p.41-42).

Women tend to be more insecure than men and with the emphasis the world puts on looks we men need to be more sensitive to how such habits as "girl watching" affect women.

I don't mind guys "girl watching" when they're with each other if it is not over the top but when they are with other girls or on a date I think it's rude to stare at other women and only courtesy to control your eyes and devote your attention to the girl or girls you are with.

What's Wrong With Masturbation?

A troublesome subject for many young men is the habit of masturbation. For their comments on this problem I'd like to quote again from Barry St Clair and Bill Jones' book "Sex – Desiring the Best":

Statistics vary, but all agree that over half of young people have been involved in masturbation – stimulating one's one sexual organs to achieve an orgasm – at some time in their lives. Little wonder! Your insides feel like the radiator of a car. The more the heat rises in the motor, the more the pressure builds in the radiator until it can finally explode...

When a person goes through puberty, he or she matures sexually. The sex organs become more developed. Strong sexual feelings and tensions result. [A man's] body produces sperm and is stored in seminal vesicles [in his testes.] When they are filled, the sexual desires increase. God designed the male's body to handle the release of tension in a natural way. The seminal fluid can be released through the penis while a guy is sleeping. If this happens you don't need to be ashamed of it.

If the semen is not released through masturbation or intercourse, then nocturnal emissions or "wet dreams" are inevitable. One pediatrician illustrates it vividly: "It is like a water bucket left out in the rain. After the rain has reached the top, any more water will make it overflow. It simply cannot hold any more."

A girl's sexual desires and responses differ significantly from a guy's...

[Guys tend to struggle more with sexual problems than girls, though many girls have their own sexual struggles. Part of the reason behind this is that men focus more on the physical and women on the emotional in regard to sex. There are also differences in sexual arousal. For a man he can be aroused and have an erection and be ready for sex in a few seconds whereas a woman's desires generally take a few minutes to be awakened and aroused and ready for intercourse - RW.]

For a girl those desires must be awakened. Because a woman's sexual desires are tied more to her emotions, she must learn masturbation. Rather than sights or thoughts of nakedness, it's thoughts of romance that stimulate her. Usually daydreaming about guys and imagining that they are paying attention to her draw her into sexual stimulation. Those thoughts not only make her feel good physically but they make her feel good emotionally. The problem is that she is trying to get her emotional needs met through lust(pleasurable fantasies) rather than through real relationships (p.111-115).

Rather than helping in controlling the sex drive masturbation for men often has the reverse effect of feeding the sexual drive.

An orgasm is an intensely pleasurable physical feeling but it is a bittersweet one outside of marriage. The emotional consequences can be devastating. It's very easy to get hooked on a feeling – hooked on that sexual high.

Sex quite literally is a drug. At the height of an orgasm naturally occurring drugs are released by the body as it experiences that high. It can become an addiction every bit as powerful as many drug addictions. There is both a physiological addiction – bodily cravings of body tension and urges from the genitalia and a separate psychological addiction – the seductive, deep, mental cravings associated with sexual addiction which can be just as hard to beat as any other drug addiction.

My heart goes out to anyone caught up in the deadly trap of any sexual sin who wants to get out of it. For a man once he gets hooked on a sexual sin it can be the hardest sin he'll ever have to overcome. Tom Eisenman makes these comments about the habit of masturbation:

The person engaged in the behaviour is looking at pictures of or imagining women. He is living out vicariously the sin of sexual lust. Braun writes: "The masturbator sees in the sexual fantasy a body for his own gratification rather than a person he must interact with in Christ. His (or her) goal is not to create a unity of persons with Christ the mediator, but to indulge himself. The more he masturbates, the more he learns to seek his own fulfillment. It is very difficult for the masturbator to move from self-absorption to community."

Masturbation...or "sex on a desert island" [as John White puts it]...more often increases rather than decreases the sexual drive to have the [opposite sex] whether they are real or imagined (Temptations Men Face, p.64).

Turning Around Sexual Problems

When I first started coming along to church I was very naïve when it came to how good people were in the church. I didn't think that the problems of the world affected people in the church all that much.

The longer that I attended church more and more of that naivete has been stripped from my eyes. No more so than in the area of sexual problems. As I've grown up in the church, especially when I was living in Sydney for a year and a half, I've come to see how the seedier side of the world does affect the church.

One of my old flatmates used to spend much of his time with what I would consider, from my experience travelling around Australia, the worst clique of young people in the church at that time, all of whom no longer attend. They were fairly heavily into fornication and drinking and wild partying.

One myth I would also like to comment on is the one that guys just about always make the first move to come on to a girl physically when a couple has fornication in the church. From the stories I have heard from single over the years I believe both that guys and girls are guilty at making the first move toward fornication when it has happened sadly in the church.

Sexual immorality is a problem that I believe needs to be addressed more in the church amongst the mature adults and older teenagers and not just swept under the carpet. It

shouldn't be handled by just saying fornication and lust are wrong. Positive practical steps need to be compassionately given more to help those who struggle with these issues. So what steps are there to help our young people turn around their sexual problems?

[1] First [of all], refuse to rationalize the problem. Name it. Admit the addiction. Admit your powerlessness to gain control over the obsession. You will make no progress if you can't accept the fact that you have a real problem in the area of sexual control (Temptations Men Face, p.73).

Be honest with God. You can fool yourself but remember how stupid it is to try and fool God. You can't! Openly confess to God your sin and guilt and ask for His forgiveness. Tell Him that you want to get out of the problem. Turn the problem and everything associated with it to God. Psalm 51 is an excellent Psalm to read which is David's Psalm where he sought forgiveness for his horrible adultery with Bathsheba.

The Bible promises that because of Jesus' death on the cross for your sins, you become clean: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). You are forgiven – clean. And every time you mess up in the future, come immediately to God, be honest about your sin and ask for His cleansing.

[2] Nail down a stake. A stake is a fixed point that marks the start of a journey. You must decide now that you are going to win this battle. Even though you will make some mistakes in the future you will win – no matter what! Determine that you want to please God more than you want to satisfy yourself. Decide that you want victory and you won't stop no matter how hard the struggle until you have it. You must make the decision to "walk by the spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16). Make that decision now...

[3] Confide in a friend. When you share this problem with someone else, it provides the extra motivation you need to deal with it. Look for someone of the same sex who is spiritually mature and can help you. Ask that person to keep it confidential and hold you accountable. Get him or her to ask you regularly if you are avoiding lust. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says "two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work. If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up." (Sex – Desiring the Best, p.118-121)

Sexual problems are particularly difficult to control as long as they are kept our private secret...but God will bless this kind of sincere attempt at spiritual growth and progress if we seek the help of a friend (Temptations Men Face, p.73-74).

[3] Focus your eyes [and avoid tempting situations]. Keep your eyes away from anything that turns you on sexually. Obviously you can't live in a monastery, so your eyes will see sexually stimulating things. But don't keep looking at them!...You can easily get drawn into sexually stimulating situations every day. Be on guard when your alone, especially where it's easy to be tempted...[Occupy your time when you know being idle will only lead you into trouble - RW.] Don't hang around in the bed in the

morning. Guard against fantasizing about past sexual encounters. Stay clear of conversations with others about sex (Sex – Desiring the Best, p.120-121).

Put as much distance between yourself and sexually stimulating things as possible. Take Paul's words to "flee fornication" (1 Cor. 6:18) seriously. Be on guard at all times especially when you're feeling down which lowers your resistance to sin and willingness to put the hard stuff in to overcome it.

Do as Job did – "I have made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl" (Job 31:1). Commit yourself that you will not look lustfully and that you will focus on Christ and His way anytime you are sexually stimulated.

Important also in the often long, slow and often painful process of overcoming sexual sins is the building up of a track record. A friend of mine who gave in to the pressure of sex many times once painfully lamented "How on earth is my wife going to trust me when I get married?"

You may have broken down most of your inhibitions and had sex many times over and have no control over the past but you do have the present and the future which you can control. The long, slow process of building up a good track record is important to God and your future spouse to show you can be trusted and to your own self-esteem to prove to yourself that you can control your hormones and beat this sin. Take the battle for your mind seriously.

Once you've broken down inhibitions the ease and pace at which you can move down the steps towards going all the way can be phenomenal. That's why it's so important to prevent yourself going past the earliest and seemingly tame first steps along the way. Learn to stop the process at the earliest possible stage to gain control before the sexual urges pick up strength and is too powerful to stop.

Don't go near the magazine racks. Don't arrange a meeting with that particular woman. Cut off that relationship if you have to. Erase the videotapes and get rid of the magazines. Control your environment to make it holy rather than an environment filled with temptation alive with the possibility for sexual sin...(p.75)

[5] Think about the price you are paying for your addiction. Consider the effect your habit is having on your relationship with those you love. What effect might this sin have on your [boyfriend or girlfriend, your work or your progress in school or uni?] What if this practice picks up intensity and builds to another level, then another? [Are you scared of that happening?]...

Think of the emotional pain the sin is having on you. At the same time, think of the peace and freedom that could be yours if you would step with God into the future of a new life and never look back. You pay an enormous price for sexual sin in guilt, shame and low self-esteem.(Temptations Men Face, p.74).

[6] Plug into power and renew your mind. Recognize that you can't win this battle by your own power. Only Jesus Christ living in you can change your desires and habits.

“No, in all things we are conquerors through him who loved us”(Rom.8:37). This promise is true for you in this situation. The best way to build up his strength in you is to pray [and pray often and very fervently!] Begin now to have a regular, consistent time with [God] for at least [30 minutes] a day. When you pray, commit your mind and body to Him, asking Him to “strengthen you with power through his power in your inner being”(Eph.6:13)...

The problem started in your mind so let God change your mind. Paul tells us, “Do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind”(Rom. 12:2). [Read the Bible regularly]...That’s where God’s thoughts are found. He wants His thoughts to become your thoughts. Then at any time you have a lustful thought you can immediately counter it by turning to God’s thoughts (Sex – Desiring the Best, p.119).

Change your perspective to God’s ask Him to fill you with His love so instead of thinking selfishly to indulge yourself you can think more about how your thoughts and actions are going to affect others. Remember love cares enough not to want to commit fornication or hurt someone by it. A gentleman does not think of those sort of thoughts but devotes himself to the woman that he loves.

Don’t look at women as sex objects. Think of them as people with feelings and emotions. In one sense, lusting for a woman who doesn’t belong to you but to someone else is mental rape. You may not ever dream of physically violating a woman if she was in the flesh but if you lust for her when she would not consent that is mental rape.

Even if they are seemingly asking for it by coming onto you in reality or pictures, instead of focusing on indulging yourself focus on having sympathy on them for the pain, guilt and hurt they have or will face from their actions. Focus on God’s best for you and for the other people involved as much as you can and counter the world’s lies with God’s truth.

[7] Press on despite failure. If you fall, don’t get discouraged. It took time to get into this habit, it will take time to get out of it. Don’t hang around condemning and hating yourself...If you fall don’t lie in the dirt, but get up and dust yourself off and keep trying no matter how many times you fall...Don’t worry about how many times you have to ask for forgiveness. Jesus has forgiven you and He will keep on forgiving you “seventy times seven” (Matt.18:22) [and even more if He has to if you are really trying.] Don’t, though, accept failure easily (Sex – Desiring the Best, p.121-122).

You may fall many, many times but never quit! Most people don’t stop immediately and never do it again. Remember it’s natural when you’re trying to conquer sin. Proverbs 24:16 says:

For a righteous man may fall seven times but gets back up again.

James also wrote:

Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you (James 4:7-8).

Get in the habit of holding on grimly and doing God's will even if it hurts and you don't want to but over time think of the rewards God has for you in this area and change your thoughts so God's will becomes your will.

Growing in love over a lifetime takes intentionality. It takes a dedicated refusal not to be duped by this world's lies about sex. It takes consistent prayer and a willing desire to be a one-woman man [and vice-versa.]

"May your fountain be blessed and may you rejoice with the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer – may her breasts satisfy you always. May you ever be captivated by her love" (Prov. 5:18-19) (Temptations Men Face, p.76).

MANAGING YOUR FINANCES

A common area into which many people fall into all sorts of problems these days is in handling money. The Bible has much to say about the subject of money. For our look at how to properly manage our finances in a godly and positive way I'd like to quote, first of all, from the United Church of God booklet "Managing Your Finances":

God placed us on this planet (among other reasons) to be productive, show initiative and develop our gifts so we could support ourselves, our family and others in need. Diligently applying [God's] principles of economic well-being is essential for financial success. However, to seek a successful outcome in our daily endeavors, we must also have God's blessings in our undertakings.

We should heed the words of wise King Solomon: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

The Bible makes it possible for us to glean God's thoughts on every major area of life. God is an expert on the human condition. He knows what we lack, and He knows what we need. He knows we need His help in making important monetary decisions and in keeping our financial houses in order...

The Bible is full of sound advice about money matters. It even cautions us not to be so concerned about them that we seriously neglect other important aspects of our life. Our dependence is to be on God and not on money. "Where your treasure is," warned Christ, "there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). Is your heart – and your treasure - focused primarily on things of this life, or is it focused on God in heaven?

The Scriptures teach us not to set our heart on riches but to help people in genuine need and generously support the work of sharing God's truth with others. Such priorities are an important part of loving our neighbors as ourselves.

We should seek to live a balanced life, putting our finances into proper perspective. One of the ancients asked God: "Give me neither poverty nor riches—feed me with the food allotted to me" (Proverbs 30:8)...

Money of itself is neither good nor evil. It is a tool we use throughout our lives to accomplish tasks and goals. The way we use our money is important to God because it demonstrates our priorities.

God sees whether we honor Him with the blessings He gives us, how we care for our families and how we treat the poor. As exciting as our physical life can be, it pales in comparison with the gift of everlasting life our Creator offers us (Romans 8:18). God promises that obeying Him in this life has value for the present and future (1 Timothy 4:8)...(p.43-44)

When we decide to use our money according to applicable scriptural principles, we soon see the need for planning and review. Notice some advice from the book of Proverbs:

"Be diligent to know the state of your flocks, and attend to your herds; for riches are not forever, nor does a crown endure to all generations. When the hay is removed, and the tender grass shows itself, and the herbs of the mountains are gathered in, the lambs will provide your clothing, and the goats the price of a field; you shall have enough goats' milk for your food, for the food of your household, and the nourishment of your maidservants" (Proverbs 27:23-27).

This passage shows why we need a financial plan – a budget – for our household. Notice that several timeless principles spring from this passage.

First, we need diligence to successfully implement any financial plan. In the example above, we are advised to carefully monitor the state and condition of our animals. If an animal becomes ill, it needs special care. Insufficient food or water for livestock requires immediate attention. A farmer with herds must look after his animals if they are to survive and the household is to prosper.

How does this apply to those of us who aren't farmers or ranchers? The fundamental lesson is that we cannot expect financial success by simply devising a plan and then blissfully ignoring the factors that affect it. Instead, we must know where, how and why we spend our money. If we ignore this principle, we will find ourselves making poor decisions and spending money we don't have.

This passage also outlines the needs of a household and how they must be met throughout the year: hay and herbs harvested at the proper time, property purchases where and when appropriate, and the need for household necessities such as clothing and a steady supply of food.

Planning is another key to successful money management. From the book of Proverbs we glean the need for foresight. "A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished" (Proverbs 22:3).

These principles demonstrate the value of making and following a budget. Budgeting allows us to systematically allocate resources to meet our current and future needs. When we accept God's instruction to tithe, we automatically begin the process of budgeting. We calculate what comes to us as an increase and set aside percentages of that increase for God's work, suitable offerings, helping the needy and caring for our families. Now let's tighten our focus and apply these budgeting principles to our households.

Figuring your net worth. Where and how do we begin to formulate a workable financial strategy for our families? Following are some practical steps to consider.

The first step in designing a personal spending plan - a budget - is to determine your net worth. In other words, find out your overall financial condition. Begin with a list of your assets: possessions (and their fair market value) that you own and could sell. Then make a list of your debts: the amounts you owe to creditors (banks, mortgage companies, stores, credit cards and the like).

Subtract your total indebtedness (the total of your debt list) from your assets (the total monetary value of your asset list) and you have your net worth: a summary of your financial condition.

If the combination of your assets and debts is a positive number, you have a positive net worth. If it is a negative number, you are in debt. If you have a significant amount of debt, regardless of your net worth, you need to prepare and follow a budget that will help you improve your financial picture.

Analyze your monthly cash flow. After determining your overall financial condition, the next step is to analyze your monthly cash flow. This will show you which direction you are headed - whether you are accumulating money, holding steady or going further in debt. You can do this by examining your monthly income and expenses.

If you have money left over at the end of the month after paying all your expenses (including housing, food, clothing, utilities, transportation, insurance, taxes and recreation), your net worth is increasing, and you should have money to save or invest. If you are not meeting your expenses, you need to make adjustments so you can pay your bills...No matter your financial direction, diligent, periodic examination of your expenses is important to successfully managing your money. Here are a few things to consider about some typical expenses.

Education. One of the first issues to consider in a financial plan is education. Although obtaining a college degree or certification in a particular trade costs money, this expense is almost always one of the best investments we can make. On average, people with higher education and marketable job skills consistently earn more money.

Proverbs 4:5-7 tells us: "Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; love her, and she will keep you. Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding." Gaining additional education is one of the best financial investments we can take.

Proverbs 24:27 similarly advises: "Prepare your outside work, make it fit for yourself in the field; and afterward build your house." In other words, prepare yourself with the

resources to make a living through education and job training - before settling in and making yourself comfortable with material possessions.

Managing debt. Going into debt is generally not a good idea. "The borrower is servant to the lender" (Proverbs 22:7). The difficulty with debt is that, in addition to paying back the principal (the amount borrowed), we also have to pay interest on the outstanding balance. Over the course of a typical 30-year loan for a house, for example, the borrower pays more than double the purchase price of the house, with the additional money going to pay the interest on the loan. Skyrocketing costs of new cars and multiyear loans create a similar problem with automobile loans. The more we can avoid borrowing money, the better off we'll be in the long run.

On the other hand, sometimes it may be necessary to borrow money. You may need it for business purposes, buying a house or purchasing a car. Even when you borrow money for these reasons, it is good to be sure you have sufficient extra funds for emergencies within your budget before proceeding. Emergencies and unexpected expenses always arise.

Be cautious before committing yourself to any debt. Debts we cannot immediately repay have a way of compounding our financial problems.

Buying a house. In addition to costs associated with buying a house, such as a down payment (often 10 or 20 percent of the purchase price) and mortgage fees, you should also consider maintenance costs and taxes.

If you choose to sell your house, you often have to pay fees to a selling agent that can range up to 7 percent of the selling price. Because of these costs, buying a house and living in it for a short time before selling it again may be a chancy financial decision. Other factors you should consider when purchasing a house are the local market (whether houses in your area are gaining or losing value), the location (those in desirable areas usually resell better) and whether the house will serve your needs as well as the needs of a future buyer.

Transportation. Owning an automobile is a wonderful convenience, but it can consume a large portion of any household or personal budget. Considering the costs of fuel, insurance, repairs and car payments, if you cannot purchase a vehicle outright automobile expenses can quickly add up to a significant amount. Because of these costs, using public transportation (buses, trains, etc.) may be a better choice. Although not as convenient, this option is generally less expensive.

If we need a car because public transportation is not available or for other valid reasons, we should be sure we are able to pay for all the costs involved with owning a vehicle, including insurance.

Many countries require drivers to carry some form of automobile insurance. God expects His followers to obey the laws of the land (Romans 13:1-7) and to love their fellowman by covering the cost of accidents or injuries they may cause (Matthew 22:37-39; Exodus 21:18-19). Lack of insurance may leave you vulnerable to a huge financial liability should you be involved in an accident.

Food. The cost of food is a significant portion of a household budget. In general, purchasing basic commodities in bulk and preparing meals at home is cheaper than buying highly processed items and eating out at restaurants. Some families find that

having a garden and purchasing fruits and vegetables in bulk when they are in season are also helpful in stretching their food budget.

Clothing. Everyone must have clothes, yet this area also provides opportunities for economy. A planned wardrobe vs. impulsive buying is much easier on clothing budgets. Purchasing good-quality, but traditionally styled, clothing will often be the most economical approach in the long run.

Because such clothing will last and remain in style for a long time, it is less expensive over time than clothing of poorer quality or fashions that match the latest fad but quickly go out of style.

Insurance. Many types of insurance are available today - life, home, automobile and health. As the Bible tells us: "A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished" (Proverbs 22:3). Because of the potential for tremendous expense in these areas, each of us has to make important decisions regarding insurance. Concerning life insurance, the time of greatest need for this insurance is when a family has small children. As children leave the home and are able to provide for themselves, the need for life insurance lessens.

With the potential for property destruction from storms, fire, vandalism and the like, home insurance is especially important if we do not have funds to repair or replace damage. If we have a property mortgage, lenders generally require insurance to safeguard their investment.

In this day of mounting costs for medical services, health insurance is also vital. Although premiums can be expensive, trying to pay astronomical bills that can arise from a single accident or illness can be devastating if we do not have insurance. Since a wide variety of insurance is available, we have to consider our individual circumstances in making decisions about the kinds and levels of insurance we need.

Savings. Last but not least, let's consider savings. Although savings are often considered a luxury or afterthought, they should be included in every household budget. The reason is simple: Emergencies and unexpected expenses will always arise. When we have savings to cushion the blow, the effects of these surprises are not as devastating. From this perspective, saving is simply delayed spending.

In addition to having a cushion set aside for emergencies, there are many other reasons for saving money: homes, cars, personal items, education and leaving an inheritance. All of these, of course, require setting money aside on a regular basis. Self-discipline is one of the most important characteristics necessary for accumulating wealth.

Be aware that marketing techniques try to focus your mind on the opposite. They encourage you to buy now and pay later and convey a "you deserve it today" mentality and approach to life. Having the self-discipline to save, and then to know when it is appropriate to buy, is one of the most important principles for successfully building up financial reserves...(p.17-23)

Financial Black Holes. Perhaps you have heard the humorous definition of a boat. It is a hole in the water into which one pours money. This view reflects the frustration that can arise over uncontrolled or unplanned expenses that can accompany ownership of a boat. Of course, many pertinent examples could be used to describe unwise drains on our financial resources. The prophet Haggai described it as putting one's money in a

bag with holes in it (Haggai 1:6). Along similar lines, astronomers speak of black holes in the universe that suck up the matter, and even light, in their surrounding areas. In this chapter we will consider some financial black holes that can undermine and sabotage our financial planning.

Credit cards. One of the greatest financial conveniences is credit cards. Besides eliminating the need for the inconvenience of carrying cash, credit cards make it possible to buy goods and services at distant locations via phone and the Internet. If one pays off all credit-card charges each month, there is no fee to the cardholder. The service is paid for through fees assessed to merchants who accept the card in lieu of cash or a bank check.

When one does not completely pay off the balance each month, however, little plastic cards quickly turn from lovely conveniences into financial black holes. Some of the highest interest rates allowed by law are assessed on balances that are not paid off but carried over from month to month.

Many people use their cards so frequently they are actually spending credit rather than spending income. In the United States credit-card debt is the fastest-growing portion of consumer debt. It's no coincidence that bankruptcy filings are growing alongside consumer debt.

When people make only the minimum payment (often 2 percent of the balance) each month, the cost of each item charged to a credit card almost doubles by the time the debt is paid off. In the long run we are much better off waiting until we have saved up the purchase price of an item before buying it rather than financing it with a credit card.

The best way to use credit cards is to pay off the entire balance every month. For those who need to borrow money, other options (such as mortgages, home-equity loans and car loans) are often available with lower interest rates than those usually offered through credit cards.

Late fees. Some creditors impose late fees for bills that are not paid on time. In the case of utilities, reconnection fees can be charged if services are shut off because bills have not been paid. These kinds of fees can be avoided simply by making sure bills are paid when due.

Eating out. Instead of preparing and eating meals at home, many people choose to eat out. Growing numbers of restaurants are taking advantage of this trend. Even grocery stores are recognizing and responding to the desire for more convenience foods that require little preparation.

Although the convenience is attractive, especially when both a husband and wife work outside the home, this practice almost always adds considerable expense to the food budget. Sometimes eating out is justified or a helpful change of pace, but care should be taken to minimize the practice.

The most economical way to make one's food budget stretch the farthest is to buy food in bulk and prepare it at home. This also goes for taking lunches to work instead of purchasing meals. Eating out is enjoyable and sometimes a good decision when both husband and wife are tired from long days at work, but a price must be paid for this pleasure.

Entertainment. Doing things that are fun is an important part of life, and every budget should include some funds for this purpose. Unchecked spending in this area, however, can quickly devastate even the most carefully prepared budget. Entertainment does not have to be expensive. With careful planning, enjoyable activities such as visiting parks, hiking and attending free concerts can be incorporated into an entertainment budget.

Impulse buying. Although many other financial black holes could be identified, a common problem is impulse buying, which is simply uncontrolled spending. When this happens, some people are tempted to say that budgeting does not work for them or that a budget ruins their fun. Budgets, however, are simply plans for spending our money, and we alone choose how we will spend it.

Impulse buying is an important basis for many sales. Advertisers understand that the desire for instant gratification is a powerful influence, and they often urge us to buy their products so we will feel good about ourselves. We may even be told that we "deserve" to have their products.

Instead of making snap decisions, the Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Sacramento, California, recommends setting spending limits we will not exceed without thinking about the decision overnight. Nor should we use shopping as entertainment. This service also suggests consumers go through a short list of questions before making a purchase.

Identifying financial black holes. One of the easiest ways to identify areas that drain our financial resources is to look closely at the things we buy. By keeping records of our expenditures for one or more months and totaling them by category (housing, food, clothing, entertainment, etc.), we can see which areas consume the most money. These are the areas we can then examine for ways to economize and manage our spending.

What do we do when our budget is full of black holes? Such a situation calls for immediate and decisive action.

In Case of Emergency. Occasionally everyone incurs unexpected expenses. Cars and appliances break down and must be repaired or replaced. Medical emergencies requiring extra funds can strike without warning. Although temporary situations can be covered through savings, habitual excessive spending requires special attention. What can we do when we find ourselves in a prolonged financial crisis? How does one plug up financial black holes and reverse poor monetary decisions? Here are a few steps that can help resolve some long-term financial difficulties.

The first step for someone who wants to structure his life according to God's instruction is to ask Him for wisdom in setting financial priorities and for the self-discipline that will be needed to carry out a sensible plan of recovery. James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him."

When our spending exceeds income, common sense tells us of only two solutions to the problem. First, we must increase our income, or, second, decrease our spending. In some cases we may be able to do things on the job that will increase our salary. Other options include taking a temporary second job or starting an additional part-time business, but these options may bring unwanted side effects to a couple or family.

If we cannot increase income, the alternative is to cut expenses. We can do this by controlling the typical financial black holes mentioned in the previous chapter and by carefully analyzing each expense. Expenses that are necessities—such as food, clothing and housing—could possibly be cut back. Expenses for luxuries, ones we can live without, are candidates for drastic reduction or elimination.

Ideally, when facing a cash-flow problem, we should strive to increase income and decrease expenses. Striving to incorporate both of these principles yields the fastest results.

A Buying Self-Test. Before committing to a purchase, give yourself this self-test to determine whether your purchase would be a wise decision.

Do I really need this?
Is the price reasonable?
Is this the best time of year to buy?
If this is a bargain, is it a current or suitable model?
If it's on sale, is the price a true sale?
Am I sure no less-expensive item can be substituted?
Am I sure there are no major disadvantages?
If excessive in price, will it truly satisfy an inner need?
Have I comparison-shopped for price and quality?
Have I allowed for this item in my spending plan?
Do I know the seller's reputation?
Does the seller offer any special services with this item?

Scoring: 9-11 yes answers: Consider buying the item. 6-8 yes answers: Think again. Fewer than 6: Forget it! (Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Sacramento, California, www.cccsact.org, "Library of Helpful Money Tips, Controlling Impulse Buying").(p.36-40)

To continue our look at the important subject of properly managing our finances I'd like to quote from a summary of a bible study given by Ross Beath:

Directly after marriage problems, financial problems are the next most dominant problem in God's church today. Handling money correctly is something I think is very important in teaching children. It is very important for anyone considering marriage that they look for someone who shows a pattern of handling money correctly and more importantly for them to know how to manage their finances. If you haven't developed or are interested in a person who hasn't developed the ability to handle their money correctly, you're looking for a marriage with trouble.

Many, many people are up to their necks in debt. We live in a society that wants to have everything now and I think it is important that we learn to crawl before we can walk. The big problem in our western world today with so much glittery advertising is buy now, pay later. In Proverbs 21:17 we read: "He that loves pleasure will be a poor man and he that loves wine and oil will not be rich."

It is possible to blow your money very quickly. When a person even with a high income has the wrong financial foundation of consistently spending money on material goods

and entertainment without restraint that person will never be rich. Somewhere the cycle has got to stop.

If you're 18 years old and I gave you a million dollars and if your foundation was of seeking of pleasure and fun without restraint you could blow that money in record time and have nothing to show for it while someone with \$1000 could do a lot more with it. In Proverbs 23:4-5 we read: "Labour not to be rich, cease from your own understanding. Will you set your eyes on that which is not, for riches certainly make themselves wings. They fly away like an eagle toward heaven." Riches are transient. They don't deliver. Someone who is tight-lipped with their money on the other hand saving as much as they can and being stingy will not be happy either. Riches are not the most important thing in life. They don't satisfy. Labour for the right reasons. Labour to have something to give and use the resources to enjoy life properly. I'd like to now give a number of points that will help us be financial winners.

1) Tithing is the first law of financial success. In Malachi 3:8-10 we read: "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed me. You say wherein have we robbed you? In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse even this whole nation. Bring you all the tithes into the storehouse that there may be meat in my house." God as we read in Psalm 24:1 owns everything and He tells us to pay a tithe - an exact tenth. It's His! We can't say, "It's mine" because He owns everything. It's all His and He gives man a certain responsibility to pay His tithe for His work and wisely use the rest. We need to teach our kids this principle of giving. It teaches generosity because that's the reason they've got anything. God has given us the opportunity to work. He has given us a body. He has given us the soil, the grass, the sun and rain to grow what we have and everything we use to earn a living. He has given us the money and the means to live off what He has given to us. Often we grumble because of what He hasn't given us rather than be thankful for what He has given us. Tithing is the first law of financial success.

2) The next principle to financial success is to learn how to budget. The word budget means proportioning your income into a series of categories. The first 10% of your income is God's. The remaining 90% can now be allocated. But how much and what for?

There are two categories into which you must divide your budget. The first area we will call fixed expenses. Fixed expenses are those that come every week or fortnight and will be about the same each time.

Second, there are variable expenses. Include also all your debts and the regular payments you make each pay. Things to include in your budget are rent or mortgage payment, food, petrol, public transport costs, car payment, utilities, life and health insurance, clothing, savings and recreation/spending money.

For utilities and other bills and debt payments divide the payment by the number of pays between payments. Eg. If you have a phone bill each 3 months for around \$120 and you get paid fortnightly then divide \$120 by 6 to find out how much you have to put away each fortnight. In this example you'd need to put away \$20 per fortnightly pay. This budget will tell you exactly how much to put away for each current and upcoming expense, so you will have precisely what you need to pay the bills as they arrive.

3) The next important financial key to help fit in with your budget is developing a savings habit. Contingencies and unexpected bills often come up so it is always good

to have enough savings to cover that extra bill you did not anticipate. Even if you are in financial difficulty, try to begin a savings habit. It need not be large at first, just enough to develop the habit in you. Later, when you have gotten out of trouble you will have established the pattern in your life. Financial experts say a good amount to have as a contingency fund is approximately one month's income.

Proverbs 24:27 teaches us something about saving. "Prepare your work without and make it ready for thee in the field and afterwards build your house." It's very important to get a foundation laid financially before marriage. Study and education is laying the foundation for the procurement of good income from a good job. It's best to acquire that education and those skills during high school and the years of college or uni immediately following on from that. Then when the foundation is laid of putting away some savings from the first years of working it is time to build a marriage, family and home.

We should teach our kids these principles from an early age with their school work because they're laying a foundation that's going to affect them for the rest of their life. A young boy who's besotted with girls in his teens and stops doing his school work because he can't get his mind off girls is making a big mistake. When he starts to compromise he's making a mistake because if he concentrated on school work and get good results and worked hard he's going to be laying a foundation to procure a good income where he'd be able to get married a lot sooner and have the pleasures of married life a lot sooner than what he would if he didn't spend half his time daydreaming and not producing the goods at school.

"Do what you have to do. O.K., so the teacher's a ratbag. Fine, still do the work. Get that assignment in. There's a lot to do. It's hard. Keep going. It'll soon be all over." Ask anyone in their early 20's and they'll tell you how quickly those high school years went and if they've let down they'll tell you how they'd knuckle down and do a lot better given a second chance. It just snowballs. Every year is precious.

4) Learn to save for big items like a house or a block of land. Why can't a teenager start thinking about saving for a block of land? Why does it always have to be a porsche or a lamborghini or a mustang? A car - it's the worst investment. Have a think about this - a young man if he starts work at 18 and is able to save \$50 a week, in 5 years at age 23 he'd have saved \$12 500. With interest it'd be over \$15 000. Five years might seem like a long time, but it's not. What a great foundation for marriage! Teach your children especially about preparing for the future - striving for a good job and saving.

5) Avoid the pitfalls of easy credit. Credit, in many ways, is like alcohol. It's easy to get hooked on it if it's not used in moderation. Sometimes the only solution for the "credaholic" is to go cold turkey until his financial system has a chance to return to equilibrium.

This, in no way, implies that the use of credit per se is wrong. On the business level, the proper use of credit has significantly facilitated the flow of goods and services. Long-term, low-interest loans have made it possible for individuals to purchase items such as homes and automobiles that would otherwise have required the accumulation of many years of savings. Another credit mechanism, the credit card, has been a tremendous boon to the consumer who is temporarily low on cash. It has eliminated the danger of carrying large amounts of currency - especially during prolonged periods of travel. And credit cards provide a convenient form of identification when cashing

cheques or renting cars. But buying on credit can be a financial curse as well as a convenience, particularly when a person gets behind on his payments.

Credit buying often creates the illusion of prosperity. The small size of the monthly instalment, its delayed arrival at the end of the month and the lack of cash at the time of purchase make the "goodies" of life seem suddenly within reach. This kind of "get now" reasoning is causing millions of families, with otherwise adequate incomes, to spend their paycheques before they even receive them. Just as some think it is impossible to save, some think it is impossible to live without credit cards and accounts. The fact is that you must be capable of getting along without them or you will never enjoy financial happiness.

Despite how much you are presently tied to credit payments you need to start getting away from them. It takes some time to break their stranglehold but it will be worth it to your peace of mind. Remember you can only save so fast so don't let it get you down but on the other hand make sure you have a plan to get yourself out of debt as soon as you reasonably can. Be willing to take the short-term pain of limiting your expenses in a balanced way until you can clear your debts. Solomon wrote, "The rich rules over the poor and the borrower is servant to the lender" (Prov.22:7).

In some cases today credit buying has almost become a necessity. The principle to follow, however, is that credit purchases should be made for necessities only such as a home. When it comes to purchasing a car try if at all possible to pay for it in cash but if it's required and can't be done without then paying for some or all of it by credit may become a necessity. In general, you shouldn't buy luxuries on credit or other things on credit cards if you can't afford to make the payment by the initial billing period. In other words, don't charge anything that you can't completely pay for when the first bill arrives.

Interest rates are so high on credit cards that you will end up paying much more for the items than if you paid cash. Television sets, electrical appliances and sporting and hobby goods should be paid in cash. It is usually these items that give people trouble in credit buying. It just seems so easy to buy the extras now and delay the payment until later. Don't fall into this trap.

6) Another point is to learn to be a handyman and do jobs around the house. Learn to make things and do repairs and how to cook and grow vegetables. Such skills can help you save a lot of money.

7) Learn to buy quality. Buy that which is reliable rather than that which is attractive and glittery. Buy the best within your price range. When it comes to buying property buy the most affordable property in a quality area so if you need to ever re-sell you will be able to get the best resale price.

8) Avoid extremes in fashion and be content with what you've got. Don't covet and buy things out of your financial reach. That's the reason why many companies in our western world are going broke. They've overextended themselves and kept pushing their acquisitions right to their credit limits with the major banks. Now the banks are suffering as a result of irresponsibly lending companies beyond what they could possibly afford to pay back to the banks. As individuals with easy credit it's so easy to do exactly the same thing. Have realistic financial plans.

9) Be careful of impulse buying and look for it in yourself and your kids. Don't buy things that you'll later regret you bought. If you feel the urge to buy something impulsively then tell yourself I'll come back in 2 days time. If I still want it after evaluating my finances then I'll buy it. Usually the urge to impulse buy lasts no longer than 24 hours. What's a good trick with little children is to keep a little notebook and take a price down for everytime he says, "Dad, can I have this or that?" After a week or so you can show him and say, "Son, if I bought everything you asked me to buy you this is how much it would have cost me and this is how long you'd have to save for it." Help them to analyze and think these things through.

10) Learn to be generous. God tells us in Proverbs 11:24-25: "There is that which scatters yet increases more and there is that who withholds more than is right but it leads to poverty. The generous soul will be made rich and he who waters will also be watered himself." Some seem to scatter - are generous and give and have a certain outgoing attitude with their money and increase. There are some that are just scroogy. Their whole attitude to life is tight-fisted. We shouldn't be like that. We should give generously with pleasure and not overdo it irresponsibly if we are hardly financial ourselves. Giving sets a cycle in motion where God will help look after you if manage your funds wisely and are generous to others. Develop your own financial base so you are able to give more generously both to the church and to others. As strange as it may seem giving is an important law of financial success.

11) When assessing why you're in financial trouble determine God's reason for your lack of funds. Is it (a) Don't need it (b) God wants to test your faith (c) You haven't asked Him for what you need or want or (d) You've misspent it irresponsibly? Never blame God for what you lack and also don't put God in a financial corner by buying on faith hoping He'll provide for you later if you can avoid it.

12) Treat your money with respect. There are a lot of people who don't respect money and some people can find themselves in the company of people who don't respect the fact that they've worked hard for the past 5 days and they just want to blow it. Little children need to learn that lesson and have the healthy respect and understanding where they, as they grow up don't blow their money on junk things and junk pursuits. Remember each dollar is important. Ben Franklin said, "A small leak can sink a great ship." Each dollar should have a certain respect.

Learn to budget properly, carefully spend your money and not abuse credit and put God first when it comes to your money and you can be a financial winner.

ROCK MUSIC

Music is a tremendous part of our culture. Like money, music is a tool that be used for both good and evil. How can we discern between good and bad music? To start off our look at this subject I'd like to quote from Darien Cooper's book "How to Be Happy Though Young":

A catchy song can literally dominate our thinking at times. Barry Manilow points this out in his song "I Write the Songs". He says a songwriter's word's have a way of making a home within us, and this songwriter is aware of the truth that music can reach right into our souls and wrap itself around our hearts...

Our enemy Satan, will do anything to draw us away from the fabulous way of life God has planned for us. 1 Peter 5:8 warns us to be on guard against his clever and subtle traps "Keep a clear head and watch! Your enemy, the devil, is prowling around like a lion, looking for someone to devour"(Beck Version).

Satan knows the key to influencing us is through thoughts placed in our minds. "For as he thinks in his heart, so is he". That's the reason God tells us to "Keep your heart with all vigilance...For out of it flow the springs of life"(Prov.4:23, Amplified Bible). Satan knows the power and influence of music, and he uses it. He begins to trap us into his thinking by taking a catchy tune and placing words in the song that suggest very subtly the wrong way of thinking about ourselves and our relationships with others...

For centuries it has been known that music can soothe or incite. Dr Howard Hanson in the American Journal of Psychiatry once commented, "Music is a curiously subtle art with innumerable, varying emotional connotations. It is made up of many ingredients, and, according to the proportions of those components, it can be soothing or invigorating, ennobling or vulgarizing, philosophical or orgiastic. It has powers for both evil as well as good."

God created music and makes more than 500 specific references to music in the Bible. Ephesians 5:18-19 tells us that one of the natural results of being filled with the spirit of God is singing. 1 Samuel 16:23 shows the power of healthy music to refresh a person and actually drive away an evil spirit. King Saul was troubled by demonic powers as a result of his disobedience to God. Yet when young David played his harp, we are told that,"Saul would be refreshed and be well and the evil spirit would depart from him"(p.183-189).

If someone were to ask whether rock music is a tool of Satan or a tool of God I would say,"Yes, it's both." So are many other things in this world. The tools themselves per se are not intrinsically evil but we can either use or abuse those tools. They can be used for good or for evil. The important thing to remember is that it's up to us to use the tools God has given us for good. Your life is a tool too. God has given you that life along with many talents and gifts and you can use them to serve God and man or you can use them to hurt.

There are two parts to music - the music itself and the lyrics. So what music does God like? Well God likes music of any style or culture that is played skilfully, be it country, rock'n'roll, jazz or classical or whatever. And God likes lyrics that conform to His own holy standards as set forth in Philippians 4:8 about being true, pure, honourable and lovely.

There is a lot of both good and bad rock music. This is Satan's world and he promotes many of his lies through rock music. Let's now look at a few of those lies.

LIE 1: SEX OUTSIDE OF MARRIAGE IS O.K.

The idea of sex anywhere, anytime with whoever you want is a common theme in many rock songs. Take, for example, Bryan Adams hit "Run to You" where he feels no remorse about being a two-timer and commitment is immaterial:

"Oh, but her love is cold and it's so damn easy making love to you. I got my mind made up. I need to feel your touch. I'm gonna run to you."

Take also the hit song "Boom Boom" and it's blatant sexual message:

"Boom, boom, boom, let's go back to my room so we can do it all night and you can make me feel right".

George Michael came out with "I Want Your Sex" in which he sings:

"Sex is natural, sex is good. Not everyone does it but everyone should."

Sheena Easton also espouses the sex anywhere with anybody lie in her hit "Do What Comes Naturally" in which she sings:

"There's a time to be wild. There's a time to be free. Let's get together and do what comes naturally."

Rock is not the only style of music filled with shocking lyrics. A great many country songs promote most of the same lies found in rock music as well. The Bellamy Brothers came out with a hit a few years ago called "If I Said You Had A Beautiful Body Would You Hold It Against Me" which also seems to say that casual sex is O.K.

There was quite a bit of media condemnation when Heart came out with the song "All I Wanna Do Is Make Love To You" which tells the story of a woman with a sterile husband who picked up a guy on the side of the road who's name she didn't even know. It goes on to say they went to a motel, had sex through which she gave birth later on to a son. The only decent part of it is where after they re-met she came to feel the weight of the emotional consequences of what she did. Unfortunately there's no condemnation of the actions she did.

LIE 2: LOVE = SEX OR PHYSICAL ATTRACTION

The second big lie of rock music is that of equating love with sex or physical attraction. Dana Key in his book "Don't Stop the Music" makes these comments about this lie:

For generations, one of the most popular topics in music has been love. But in the last 20 years or so, there have been a lot more songs about lust and sex. Is it so surprising that so many people think love and sex are the same thing? One sex hit of recent years is "Sugar Walls" by Sheena Easton in which she sings:

"You can't fight passion when passion's hot temperatures rise inside my sugar walls."

The song is erotic and explicit. But it says nothing about love - all it describes is the physical changes a woman's body goes through. Sure it's provocative, but what does it teach about love? And how about Tone Loc's "Wild Thing":

"Couldn't get her off my jock, she was like a static cling, but that's what happens when bodies start slappin' from doing the wild thing"...

Incest? Check out Prince's song "Sister":

"My sister's never made love to anyone else but me...Incest is everything it's said to be"(p.37-38)

Robert Palmer had a big hit with his song "Addicted to Love". Everytime the word love appears in the song he really is referring to sex. Billy Idol says in his song "To Be a Lover":

"When I realize that you need love too I wanna spend my life making love to you", again making love synonymous with sex.

Sabrina, a buxom Italian sings in her song "Boys":

"Be my lover. Be my baby. Boys, boys, boys. I'm looking for a good time. Boys, boys, boys. Get ready for my love".

Unfortunately so much of music gives the impression that true love is anytime there is physical attraction between two people as opposed to its true meaning of outgoing concern for people that it's no wonder so many people get confused.

It's refreshing, though, when songs come out now and then which do sing about real love. One good example is Starship's "Nothing's Gonna Stop Us Now". In it they sing:

"I want so much to give you this love in my heart that I'm feeling for you...I'll take you through the good times, see you through the bad times. Whatever it takes is what I'm gonna do".

LIE 3: LOVE = SEX + VIOLENCE

The next lie we'll look at is that forced or violent sex is good. Dana Key makes these comments:

Not only do many songs confuse sex with love, but many also add sexual violence to the mixture, glorifying rape and murder...Guns 'n' Roses in their song "Anything Goes", tries to make sexual violence sound like fun:

"Panties 'round your knees with your ass in debris. Doin dat grind with a push and a squeeze. Tied up, tied down, up against the wall. Be my rubbermade baby and we can do it all. My way, your way, anything goes tonight."

Here's Motley Crue's "Live Wire":

"I'll either break her face or take down her legs. Get my ways at will. Go for the throat. Never let loose. Going in for the kill."

There are many other songs that combine sex with violence but I don't need to include dozens of examples. It's clear that violence is not what God intended between lovers (Don't Stop the Music, p.38-39).

LIE 4: VIOLENCE IS GOOD.

Many rock bands, heavy metal bands in particular, glorify violence in many of their songs. Dana Key makes these comments:

Many songwriters sing about pure violence in glowing terms. I don't know what makes singers think that killing maiming and mutilation are fun topics, but they seem to be popular with many bands, including most of heavy metal. The Dead Kennedys a few years back wrote the song "I Kill Children":

"I kill children, I love to see them die. I kill children, I make their mothers cry."

Slayer (what a positive name for a band, right?) mixed violence with some anti-christian feelings in their song, "Kill Again":

"Kill the preacher's only son. Watch the infant die bodily dismemberment. Drink the purest blood" (Don't Stop the Music, p.39)

Many, though certainly not all, heavy metal bands have an obsession about writing songs about death, violence, killing, maiming and mutilation. It's almost sickening how big their followings are and how so many people like their macabre lyrics and depressing themes. Take Metallica's album "Kill 'em All" and their song "Whiplash" from it:

"Here on stage the Marshall noise is piercing through your ears it kicks your ass, kick your face, exploding feeling nears, now is the time to let it rip to let it f---ing loose we are gathered here to maim and kill cause this is what we choose".

Megadeth's "Black Friday" off their "Peace Sells...But who's Buying" album is even more explicit:

"I hack up my victims like pieces of meat. Blood thirsty demon, sinister fiend, bludgenous slaughters, my evil deeds. My hammer's a cold piece of blood lethal steel, I grin while you writhe with the pain that I deal. Swinging the hammer, I hack through their heads, defiant defilers, your next to be dead. I unleash my hammer with sadistic intent pounding, surrounding, slamming through your head. Yeah!"

How bands get their kicks from such evil, depressing, violent material is a mystery to me but it sure isn't pleasant to digest the lyrics of such music. Their album covers look like something from a horror movie.

It's unlikely that songs like these will make normal, healthy young people run out and commit violent acts. But not all young people are healthy and normal - many are

hurting and confused, lost, afraid, lonely. And these young people may be susceptible to these lies about violence - as well as those about suicide (Don't Stop the Music, p.39).

LIE 5: SUICIDE IS GOOD

Following on the theme of violent lyrics is the lie that suicide is good. Dana Key makes these comments:

Thousands of teenagers kill themselves every year. Suicide rates for teens rise every year. So why would anyone write songs that seem to encourage kids to take their own lives? Unfortunately, many artists are doing just that.

Suicide has been a popular topic in rock music ever since Blue Oyster Cult's popular hit, "Don't Fear the Reaper". Since then, songs like Black Sabbath's "Killing Yourself to Live", AC/DC's "Shoot to Thrill", Pink Floyd's "Goodbye Cruel World" and Ozzy Osbourne's "Suicide Solution" have appeared.

Some of these songs have even been discussed in court trials; the parents of young people who have taken their lives have argued that the song's influenced their children's decisions to take their lives.

Can songs about suicide actually convince young people to attempt suicide? I don't know. But how can any responsible artist record anything that might even accidentally induce a young person to take their life?...

If you're sad and depressed about life, don't listen to the lies saying that suicide is good. Turn to God and some good people you can trust for help! (Don't Stop the Music, p.40).

LIE 6: DRUGS AND ALCOHOL ARE GOOD

Another lie promoted in many songs is that drugs and getting drunk are fun and good for you. Dana Key makes these comments on this particular lie:

Drugs have been endorsed in rock music since the 60's. And somehow the fact that Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison of The Doors and Janis Joplin died with the help of drugs in the 60's didn't diminish the popularity of drugs in music. The one song most remembered for its drug message was J.J.Cale's hit "Cocaine"

During the last few years alcohol - not pot or cocaine - has become the drug of choice among many rockers. So now, when teenage alcohol abuse is on the rise, many in the secular rock world are making things worse.

David Lee Roth proudly tells Hit Parader magazine, "The Jack Daniels I drink on stage is real." Nikki Sixx of Motley Crue tells the same magazine, "My bottle of Jack Daniels is my best friend in the world. It's always there to give me support, even when my friends aren't."

Songs like Journey's "Lay It Down" add fuel to the fire:

"Whiskey, wine and women, they get me through the night...What I'm really needin' ah, double shot tonight."

And Lita Ford's "Kiss Me Deadly":

"Had a few beers, gettin' high sittin', watchin' the time go by, uh huh, it ain't no big thing" ...

It's true that rock music won't make a young person run out and become an alcoholic. But still, the lyrics of some rock songs and the lifestyles of some rock musicians encourage kids to abuse drugs and alcohol – as well as their own bodies (Don't Stop the Music, p.42-43).

LIE 7: IT'S ALL SHOW BIZ

The last that I'd like to look at is not in the lyrics of rock music but in the lifestyles of rock musicians themselves. Dana Key makes these comments:

Some of rock music's fake philosophies aren't found in the lyrics - they're found in the lifestyles of the artists who make the music. Artists love to brag about their orgies, parties and bad habits.

And is it all true? Sometimes it's not. For some artists, the evil, rebellious lifestyle is only part of a carefully designed image. Many of these artists lead a normal life privately. For the majority of those artists though, the evil you see on stage is a genuine part of their evil lives.

Only God knows the truth about people's private lives. It's impossible for us to judge whether Ozzy Osbourne is really into Satanism, as many have argued. But whether the performer truly embraces sin as his philosophy of life does not really matter. What matters is that millions of teenagers are convinced that their rock idols live out sin-filled lifestyles on and off stage and are tempted to imitate them.

Imitating much of the evil that appears on stage at some concerts would be difficult; in some cases, it could get you thrown into jail. Take, for example, this description of concerts by the Beastie Boys, found in Teen Vision magazine:

"Their on-stage displays have included spraying beer at the audience, simulated masturbation, obscene comments and gestures between songs, mouthing the exposed breasts of a bikini-clad caged dancer, encouragement for girls to expose their breasts and an inflatable phallic symbol reportedly 20 feet in length."

Hit Parader magazine reported that Iron Maiden's singer Bruce Dickinson was slapped with a lawsuit for allegedly undressing a woman on stage against her will during an Iron Maiden concert in Buffalo, New York.

In the interests of fairness, I'll add that many rock artists have done some very positive things in public. Jon Bon Jovi and others have spoken out against drug abuse. Bruce Springsteen, Peter Gabriel, Sting and others have worked with Amnesty International.

And others have united to raise consciousness and funds for the hungry and dying in Ethiopia and elsewhere.

But it is my fear that the good some rock artists do is greatly outweighed by the damage others cause in young people's lives (Don't Stop the Music, p.42-43).

On top of those top 7 there are many other lies in rock music we need to be careful of, especially for our children. Are there any principles we can apply to what music we listen to or keep?

Most things in life are a mixture of good and evil including our own lives and character. The same goes with songs and films. For, example a song with good music can have bad lyrics.

Another point to remember is that people with very immoral character can produce beautiful music. To take an example from long ago, Amadeus Mozart was said to be a very profane man but produced some magnificent music so we must take each song or piece of music on its merits from a purely objective point of view, regardless of the character of the artist.

I have several principles I apply to what I keep in my music that I hope can be of assistance in helping you to decide how to filter your music.

1) The first point is be informed. Take a good hard listen to the lyrics of the music you listen to. Measure it up to the principles of the Bible and God's way of life and consciously reject the lies you hear in your music.

2) My rule of thumb when it comes to songs with good music but suggestive or bad lyrics is - if I'm going to be influenced by it or the lyrics and its message are too repulsive for me then I'll toss the song.

For example, Bryan Adams "Run to You" has lyrics which I can't tolerate so its one song I've done that too.

We can't kid ourselves when it comes to what influences us. Often we are more influenced by lyrics or what we watch more than we'll like to admit so try to err on the side of not listening to music in that grey area than listening to it. The same applies even more so with movies which we will cover shortly.

3) One thing I do with songs with suggestive lyrics is to put my own meaning to the lyrics.

For example, with songs that talk about sex I put it in the context of marriage. If a singer is talking about making love to someone we can't judge them unless it's clear he's singing about doing it outside marriage anyhow.

Seek God's direction in the music you listen to. Honour him in your heart and music you listen to and you'll be on the right track.

MOVIES AND THE MEDIA

Just as Satan can subtly use music to influence people, he also subtly uses movies and television to influence us. All of the big lies of rock music are also promoted through films and TV movies. As well as the music in the movies and video clips there is the added element of visual images to put across right and wrong messages and to shock and entertain us.

The two most immoral things in many of the movies that are coming out is the incredible increase in gratuitous sex and senseless violence. Sex is a beautiful, private thing between a loving husband and wife and not something that should be visually flaunted for the sake of titillating viewers through movies or readers through magazines and pornography.

Excessive exposure of one's body, especially the female body, can too easily create sexual arousal for the opposite sex and those responsible for many magazines and movies are partly responsible for the sexual pressures that are making it so difficult for men and women in the world to keep themselves pure for their future spouse or faithful to their husband or wife.

Violence and profanity have dramatically increased in movies over the last 20 years. It has been estimated by the time the average preschool child reaches 14 years of age, he will have witnessed 18 000 murders on TV and countless hours of related violence, nonsense and unadulterated drivel!

Our liberal media and movie industry promote ideas and values that are opposite to the conservative values that were more prevalent before the moral degradation of the western world that began in the 1960's. It seems that each TV program director feels compelled to include all the avant-garde ideas - go a little farther - use a little more profanity - discuss the undiscussable - assault the public concept of good taste and decency. In doing so, they are hacking away at the foundations of the family and all that represents the christian ethic.

Be informed about what movies are out there before you see them if you can. The same principles of what music to listen to I discussed earlier can be used in deciding what movies to watch and what magazines and books to read.

Movies are usually a mixture of good and bad. Some movies are outright rubbish and filth. For example, semi-pornographic and pornographic movies and horror movies are not the kind of movies that a christian should watch.

Again the same principle goes for magazines and books. A lot of immoral, worldly and irresponsible advice is given in many magazines so be careful when wading through magazines such as Cleo and Cosmopolitan, etc. Have an educated conscience and match it up with what God has to say about those topics and you can't go wrong.

The media is a very powerful influence in our society and can be used for both good and evil so be careful of the values that are being pumped out in our society. Firmly

hold onto the christian values that Dr. James Dobson in his book "Dr. Dobson Answers Your Questions" puts so brilliantly.

Here are according to Dr. Dobson the four fundamental values of Christianity:

- 1) A belief in the inestimable worth and significance of human life in all dimensions, including the unborn, the aged, the widowed, the mentally retarded, the unattractive, the physically handicapped, those of different races and backgrounds to us and every other condition in which humanness is expressed from conception to the grave.
- 2) An unyielding dedication to the institution of marriage as a permanent, life-long relationship, regardless of trials, sickness, financial reverses or emotional stresses that may ensue.
- 3) A dedication to the task of bearing and raising children, even in a topsy-turvy world that denigrates this procreative privilege.
- 4) A commitment to the ultimate purpose of living: the attainment of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord, beginning within our own families and then reaching out to a suffering humanity that does not know of His love and sacrifice. Compared to this overriding objective, no other human endeavour is of any significance or meaning whatsoever (p.502).

DRINKING

Another tool that can be used for good or evil is that of alcohol. Drunkenness and alcoholism is very common in this world and it also affects many people in the church. Darien Cooper makes these comments on alcohol and alcoholism:

A staggering number of teenagers have already succumbed to alcoholism. Statistics from the U.S.A.'s National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism tells us that among America's 9 million alcoholics, about 1.3 million boys and girls between the ages of 12 and 17 have serious drinking problems...and the number is growing at a frightening rate.

Why has alcohol become the number-one turn on for teenagers? Perhaps many drink for the same reasons that young people smoke marijuana - to be accepted in the group, out of curiosity and to escape problems. But the main contributing factor is that alcohol is much more accessible than other drugs and it's not illegal. According to the N.I.A.A.A. of America about one third of high school students in America get drunk at least once a month.

Whether it's beer, wine, whisky or vodka, the substance that affects you is ethyl alcohol. Ethyl alcohol is extremely soluble in water. So soluble, in fact, that when you sip it, part of it is absorbed right through your tongue and gums before you have time to swallow it!

When ethyl alcohol enters your stomach, it is absorbed directly into the bloodstream. It is quickly carried to every organ in the body - especially to your brain. When the alcohol reaches [around the current drink-driving limit of 0.05%], the centre in your brain concerned with worry will be affected. Your worries will be temporarily pushed aside and you will have a sense of being lifted up.

After a few drinks some people who are normally shy and quiet become lively and even boisterous. Because of this effect, many think that alcohol is a stimulant. But actually it is a depressant that works on the central nervous system.

If you drink enough to raise the blood alcohol to the next level (0.1%), the part of the brain which controls your muscles is affected. High levels of alcohol in the blood will depress brain activity, reduce inhibitions and self-control, sharply alter behaviour and personality, severely affect judgment and dull sensory perception.

If a person drinks enough to reach the 0.2% level, he tends to become sleepy. Still higher levels of alcohol in the blood from steady, heavy drinking can anesthetize the deepest levels of the brain and may result in coma or even death (How to Be Happy Though Young, p.169-171).

Donald Schroeder writes the following about alcohol in the WCG brochure "Conquering Alcohol Abuse":

Many devout, religious people sincerely believe that God has forbidden any use of alcoholic beverages - that any use of alcohol is totally wrong and sinful. God is the creator of every good and beneficial thing. The scriptures reveal the divine will and mind of God about how man should live (2 Tim. 3:16). God has certainly not neglected to reveal His will in such a vital area as the use of alcohol.

Wine is frequently mentioned in the Bible...The particular Hebrew word translated wine is "yayin". This word is used over 130 times in the Hebrew Bible to mean fermented wine, not grape juice. This same beverage, when used excessively, causes drunkenness. Proof is found in Genesis 9:21 where Noah drank "yayin" excessively and became drunk. Lot also became drunk on this same beverage (Gen.19:30-36). It was also the same beverage used by Nabal so that he too became drunken (1 Sam.25:36)...

It should be mentioned that naturally fermented wine is between 10 and 14% alcohol. Higher alcohol contents are fortified wines. The high alcohol drinks, called hard liquor today (40% to 50% alcohol or 80 to 100 proof) were not in existence during the writing of the Old and New Testaments.

The hard liquors are produced by the distilling of grain-based mash or material from other vegetable sources. They did not come into widespread use until the Middle Ages. The danger of these high alcoholic drinks is that, unless one carefully dilutes and uses them, they rapidly lend themselves to abuse, drunkenness and alcoholism. Liqueurs, flavoured and sweetened distilled liquors, are somewhat different in that they are usually served in small amounts and sipped slowly.

The Bible says that God gave wine to make men glad (Ps.104:15). Why have some men and women turned this blessing into a curse? The answer is that most have refused to follow God's instructions to living [and in the use of alcohol]...

[The New Testament Greek word for wine is "oinos". In Matthew 11:19 and Luke 7:34 we read that Jesus drank "oinos". His very first miracle was when He changed] six jars of water into wine. This was no small miracle. This kind of wine the steward of the feast said was of the finest quality - "You have kept the good wine until now" (John 2:10). At such wedding feasts where there were a great many people to drink the wine Jesus produced, after men had drunk the better wine, the hosts brought out lesser quality wines.

Another proof that "oinos" is fermented wine is the fact that the apostle Paul said, "Be not drunk with wine(oinos)" (Eph. 5:18). Paul did not mean to avoid getting drunk on grape juice! Sick, perhaps, but not drunk...

Paul instructed Timothy, "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine(oinos) for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities" (1 Tim. 5:23). Notice, he said to use only a little wine, not a lot. The purpose of this wine was Timothy's frequent stomach ailments. Medical science has proven the benefits of small amounts of wine for some human stomach problems.

Both the Old and New Testaments contain many examples and commands against excessive use of alcohol and drunkenness. Drunkenness is listed as one of the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:21). That means it is the result of the undisciplined, indiscriminate use of alcohol.

Throughout the Bible God is strong to judge those who are "mighty to drink" (Isa. 5:22). Excessive drinkers are committing a grave evil in God's eyes (Prov. 23:20-21, Isa. 28:1-8)...Total alcohol prohibitionists focus on those scriptures which condemn or show the results of wrong alcohol use but neglect those scriptures that show there can be a proper moderate use...(p.16-17)

The degree and amount consumed to which alcohol affects people varies from individual to individual. Depending on learned and conditioned cues or expectations when drinking, alcohol may produce a calming, relaxing effect in one situation, belligerence in another, frivolity in another, sleepiness in another and sexual abandon in another...A small amount of alcohol often takes the edge off self-criticism and self-doubt. Many persons feel emotionally freer, more communicative yet are in control of their emotions and actions. Many find this adds enjoyment to certain social occasions (p.3-4).

Generally between the legal alcohol limit for driving of 0.05% and 0.1%, intoxication will start to occur for most people but again this varies. The general formula for working out the blood alcohol in your system is subtract the number of hours since your first drink from the number of full strength beers(250ml) or alcohol equivalent you've drunk and multiply it by 0.015%.

eg. 5 Beers (5%, 250mL) - 2 hours = 3. $3 \times 0.015\% = 0.045\%$.

2 Small glasses of wine (10%, 150mL) = 3 beers (5%, 250mL).

3 - 1 Hour = 2. $2 \times 0.015\% = 0.03\%$.

Once intoxication proper starts to occur from 0.10% and beyond depending on how accustomed your body is to alcohol, loss of social restraints, loss of control over body movements and loss of emotional control start to occur. Harmful aspects of the human personality - defects of character normally controlled - often then come out. A person may manifest a Dr Jekyll-Mr Hyde personality.

I quote again from Donald Schroeder and the WCG brochure "Conquering Alcohol Abuse":

Most, but not all, alcoholics go from controlled social drinking to complete addiction in seven phases.

- 1) Controlled social drinking
- 2) Purposeful occasional drinking to escape from tensions
- 3) Frequent escape drinking in which tolerance to alcohol steadily increases
- 4) Early alcoholic phase with first blackout
- 5) Progressive preoccupation with alcohol
- 6) Complete alcohol dependence, danger of withdrawal symptoms
- 7) Social, medical and spiritual help needed or death occurs.

[Our western world in particular promotes the attitude of "do your own thing" and this attitude has led to great numbers abusing alcohol and into alcoholism.]

Millions of adolescents do not receive their alcohol education in a disciplined, happy home environment. Instead they receive it in the peer-pressured "beer bash" with its so-called fun of "getting smashed", "bombed", "loaded", "soused", "plastered" or "clobbered". There is a lot of popular terminology to lessen guilt and dress up the evil consequences of drunkenness and lack of self-control.

In the western world there have been stronger and stronger social and advertising pressures to lead many to believe alcohol is indispensable to having a good time. In many social occasions people are expected to drink (a trend which is now fortunately changing). There are still widespread attitudes that associate drinking and "holding one's liquor" with masculinity and virility and being part of the "in" group...

Alcohol abuse starts occurring when a person automatically reaches for and consumes alcohol excessively whenever he or she has emotional problems or difficulties. Over a period of time a person can become psychologically addicted to alcohol as a method of coping with personal problems. By persistently keeping alcohol in the bloodstream, a person may alter his metabolism and become physically addicted to alcohol as well.

Alcohol should be never be used to escape problems or cure loneliness, boredom or depression. Using alcohol for such reasons is habit forming and worsens, not solves, these problems. The Bible teaches us to resolve our problems the right way. God's way to solve personal problems and frustrations is through prayer, seeking forgiveness and setting our minds and values aright or straightening out our interpersonal wrongs. God's way is not to reach for an alcoholic drink!...(p.5-7)

[The hardest thing about alcoholism is the incredible difficulty alcoholics have in admitting their problem and seeking the help they need.] But it is critically important before any attempt is made to confront an alcoholic that there be a well educated

understanding of the nature of the confrontation process by those doing the confronting from experts trained in such matters. Proper treatment for the alcoholic must be more than a drying out period and an interlude between binges of drinking. Treatment must be a well designed program to get the alcoholic back on his feet and started in a new life of sobriety. They must learn how to cope with life and problems without alcohol...(p.15)

[Two nationalities that have very low alcohol abuse are the Jews and Italians. Their example is one we can learn from, especially when it comes to teaching our children about alcohol. They have the] custom of providing children with a long education of moderate alcohol use, usually low-proof wine and encouraging responsible drinking with family members at meals. Alcohol used by children is often diluted with water and drunk in small amounts. Such drinking diminishes the alcohol "high" and tends to establish and enforce moderate drinking habits. Drunkenness is also frowned upon...(p.7)

Alcohol is not a necessity of life. In God's eyes, one does not have to drink to show maturity, virility or sociability. Alcoholics, or anyone who reacts adversely to alcohol for any reason, should not drink alcohol. Nor should one use alcohol in the presence of a recovering alcoholic. There are many other non-alcoholic drinks a person can enjoy (p.17).

Darien Cooper makes these comments about drink driving:

Drinking and driving should never be mixed. Did you realize that each 5 years more than 125 000 Americans are killed in alcohol-related auto accidents? That's more than all the deaths of Americans in Korea and Vietnam combined. Alcohol related car deaths make up over half of all fatal auto accidents...It takes one hour for the alcohol in one bottle of beer to be eliminated from your bloodstream.

[There is a difference between being over the safe driving alcohol limit and being intoxicated so it can be deceptive.] You may not show any visible signs that drinking has affected you [but that is part of the problem.] While the alcohol is being eliminated from your blood, you may be convinced that you are sober enough and perfectly capable of driving but you aren't.

A few beers can make the traffic light, the stop sign and the speed limit seem unimportant or nonexistent...The reflexes aren't so sharp. That fire hydrant (or that pedestrian) pops up out of nowhere. Distances are misjudged (How to Be Happy Though Young, p.172-173).

Alcohol is a great blessing from God to enjoy as long as we don't make it into a curse by overindulging. If we decide to drink then He holds us responsible for how we conduct ourselves. It is a test of our character!

SMOKING

The evidence for smoking cigarettes being hazardous to one's health is overwhelming. Mr Armstrong many years ago made the church judgment that smoking is a sin based on fact that is a violation of the principle of glorifying God in our bodies.

Every cigarette is doing you harm. The body was not designed for the ingesting of the toxic chemicals that are inhaled through cigarette smoking yet millions are seduced into smoking by cigarette companies and are addicted to smoking. For her comments on smoking I quote again from Darien Cooper's book "How to Be Happy Though Young":

"It makes me feel like a man", 15 year old Steve said as he blew smoke around his head. At 15 he takes up smoking to prove that he is a man and 10 years later he tries to give it up to prove the same thing. I could write pages explaining that heavy smoking increases one's chances of dying from lung cancer and other diseases. There is no question that smoking is harmful to a person. In 1970 the U.S. Congress legislated that each pack of cigarettes carry this warning: "Cigarette smoking is dangerous to your health". The following testimony of a smoker says much better than I ever could what a habit begun in your youth can produce only a few years later.

"Dear Ann Landers,

This letter is based strictly on my own feeling about cigarettes after 24 years of smoking. I'm ashamed to admit I'm still at it. I doubt that my words will have the slightest impact on the heavily addicted. For me, all the words in the world will not take the place of that first cigarette in the morning. I'd rather address myself to your readers who are 17, as I once was, with a set of healthy set of lungs, white teeth, clean blood coursing through my veins - and in my pocket my first packet of cigarettes.

How was I to know that 24 years later I'd be so hooked that any thought of quitting would be out of the question? How would I know, at 17, I'd be waking up each morning to a mouth that tastes like the bottom of a birdcage? How could I know my teeth would be stained dark brown and my chest would feel as if it were filled with cement dust?

All I knew was that smoking was the cool thing to do. It made me feel grown up. Although I have never seen my lungs, I know how they must look. My uncle, who is a surgeon, once showed me some "before" and "after" pictures. "Sit in on an autopsy one of these days", he said. "You'll see that the nonsmoker's lungs are a bright pink. When I open up the chest cavity of a smoker, I can tell about his habit, because the entire respiratory system is black, depending on how long he has smoked."

Still I continue the filthy habit, going half crazy on mornings when I'm out of cigarettes. I go digging through ashtrays and wastebaskets for a long butt to satisfy my craving. I pace the floor like a hungry lion, waiting for the store to open. Then I hurry, unshaven, and hand over another 55 cents for a package of suicide.

With that first puff I realize nothing about it tastes good. Those ads are a lot of malarky. But the people who sell cigarettes couldn't care less about me. I'm hooked and they love it. They run those sexy ads, telling you to "c'mon". But don't be fooled, 17, it's not a bandwagon you'll be hopping on. It's a hearse.

If I could write cigarette ads, I'd show you pictures of myself, coughing till the tears come, gargling away a rotten taste that keeps returning, spending money I can't afford - stupid me, sucking on a little, white, stupid pacifier. Then I'd show you the clothes I've burned and the people I've offended with my breath, my smoke, my ashes, my matches and my butts.

This is me, 17, a rasping, spitting, foggy-breathed addict who has let the habit consume me, a "can't quitter" who creates his own air pollution, who prefers carbon monoxide to oxygen, whose sinuses are constantly draining. Me, with the yellow fingers and the foul breath, smoking more and enjoying it less - telling you that I wish to God that someone had wised me up when I was 17.

A fool who hates himself."

A smoker may be thinking, "There is no use to quit now - it's too late." However research shows that not to be true. Even the heaviest of smokers, if an irreversible disease has not yet begun, can, upon giving up cigarettes, reduce his chances of getting these diseases.

After a smoker quits, there is a marked drop in the risk of heart attacks after only one year. After ten years in many exsmokers, according to the Heart Association, the death rate is almost as low as those people who have never smoked.

It is possible for the lungs of an exsmoker to return to almost as normal as those of a person who never smoked. At the very least, giving up the cigarette habit will prevent further damage to the lungs. The risk of lung cancer increases with the amount of cigarettes smoked and the number of years of smoking. However, for the exsmoker, the lung-cancer risk decreases in a ratio roughly proportionate to the number of years since quitting [not to mention all the money you will save from not smoking] (p.175-177).

DRUGS

Along with alcohol and smoking, there are an ever-growing number of harder and more addictive drugs that are available in the world. Drug abuse is very common and is a temptation for so many young people today. For his comments on drugs I'd like to quote from Donald Schroeder and the WCG brochure he wrote entitled "Conquering Drug Abuse":

Cocaine, heroin, nicotine and other drugs have swept through almost every major society like a brushfire. Developing and developed nations alike are plagued with drug problems - both ancient and modern...

According to the U.S. Public Health Service, 20 years ago less than 2% of America's young people had tried an illicit drug. Today about 2 out of 3 have tried an illegal drug before they graduate from high school - over a 3000% increase.

And the reasons studies find so many use drugs and alcohol? To feel better, to cope with life, escape boredom, increase self-esteem, to expand consciousness, for kicks, to relieve stress, ease physical discomfort, lessen depression, diminish fear! What an indictment of society!...

These methods of coping and resolving problems, of finding meaning and enjoyment in life, are unhealthy solutions. They create, instead, new problems for the drug user and society!...

Drugs and alcohol are never real or lasting solutions to human emotional problems. Certain drugs and painkillers may serve at special times to save human lives but they are not the solution to most personal and emotional problems.

Chemical shortcuts to cope with personal anxieties and difficulties, or to achieve "kicks" or relieve stress may seem to give temporary relief. But if persisted in their side effects result in serious - sometimes irreversible - physical, mental or emotional penalties.

Many drugs temporarily allow one to avoid facing and dealing with the true cause of problems. But the drug-taking, in turn, often creates additional serious problems. Wouldn't it be so much better if as much as possible, we could cope with our stresses and emotional problems without the huge costs and side-effects of drugs or alcohol? What have we been overlooking, physically and spiritually, that will help in finding solutions to or coping with our problems?

Has life become dull or lost meaning and purpose to you? Have you failed to find the joys of hope and peace of mind in life? Have you assumed there is no other hope or alternative but mind-altering drugs or alcohol to cope with your problems, anxieties and fears?

Purposeless, hopelessness, boredom, anxiety, despair all have a cause. The cause is broken spiritual and/or physical laws. Pain and suffering are intended to be physical warning signals that something needs to be changed or avoided. Too many feel they must avoid all pain and suffering while they go on doing the things that cause pain and suffering. Why carelessly numb or dwarf your human spirit, your abilities and health by abuse of chemicals?...

If you are ensnared in the drug trap, it is time you learned to solve your personal problems through available human help and through contact with God rather than escaping in drugs and alcohol (p.2-3).

PEER PRESSURE

Peer pressure – the desire to be accepted and respected – is a powerful force that can be both good and bad depending on the character and values of the young people one is trying to be accepted by. More often than not in this world, peer pressure leads many young people astray from the good, positive morals of the Bible in order to be accepted by other teenagers. For our look at peer pressure I'd like to quote from a summary of a sermon given by Bob Morton that he gave on the subject of peer pressure:

Young people in God's church are very special to God. 1 Corinthians 7:14 says that "the unbelieving husband is sanctified" - that means set apart - "by the wife and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband otherwise your children would be unclean but now they are holy". It says that children of members of the church are holy. That does not mean they are righteous. It means they are set apart by God for a purpose and this special purpose includes opportunities that other young people do not have. Now you young people did nothing to earn them. These things are yours because you are children of members of God's church. This is what we call in a sense a birthright.

A birthright is something you have by right of birth. It's something you have because you belong to a certain family and a birthright gives you certain privileges and blessings that others don't have. Your parents had to make some difficult decisions and courageous sacrifices to come into God's church. Now, you don't have to make most of those sacrifices. You have been freely given the privileges and opportunities of God's church as a birthright. Now this birthright gives you three things.

First, it means you are not cut off from God and His spirit like the rest of the world is. The only way the rest of the world can have God's spirit is if they are chosen by God like your parents were. Now with you it's different. You do the choosing and you are free to choose and having the birthright means you have access to God's spirit if you choose to.

The second thing it gives you is knowledge. That knowledge is important knowledge - vital for your future - the knowledge of God's way of life, the way to true happiness and the right kind of fun that doesn't lead to youthful pitfalls and heartaches. Also you have knowledge of the future and what it holds - that there is a fantastic hope for mankind which you can play a part in.

The third thing the birthright gives you is that it gives you a future of fantastic opportunities now and in the future when Jesus Christ comes back to this earth. God is concerned about our young people because there'll be so many young people who'll need your direction in the millennium and after.

You can choose however to lose this birthright if you're not careful. Is there a book in the Bible that is specifically written for young people in God's church? Well, yes there is. It's called the Book of Proverbs. Like any book the Book of Proverbs has an introduction. It tells you what the book is about and why God wrote it. We read why God wrote it in chapter 1, verse 4: "To give prudence to the simple" and "to the young man knowledge and discretion."

Now what does it mean in this verse when he talks about knowledge and discretion. Well it simply means the ability to make right choices. We all have to make choices whether we like to or not. The decisions we make in our life will determine whether we will be a success or a failure in life, whether we will be richer or poorer, whether we will be happy or miserable.

God is saying young people need the ability to make right decisions. In verse 6 of the same chapter He says, "to understand a proverb and to understand an enigma, the words of the wise and their riddles." That's a little difficult to grasp but what it simply means is that God wrote the book to help you, the youth in the church, to understand the adult world and how to be happy and be successful in it because this world is full of pitfalls and God wants you to know what they are so you won't stumble into them and be hurt by them.

Then in verse 7 He says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge but fools despise wisdom and instruction". Now what does God mean when He says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Well, He's saying if you're a young person in God's church the single most important principle to base your life on is this one. The beginning of wisdom comes when we admit only God has the real answers when we believe He exists and respect His laws.

Now if you've been attending church for some time with your parents you know God exists. You don't have to doubt it because it's easily proven but keeping God's laws can be a problem can't it? It can be a problem because none of your friends want to keep them. Well, God also talks about that down further in chapter 1.

After giving us the single most important principle a young person needs to understand He also gives us a second principle which strikes a little closer to home. He says in verse 8: "My son, hear the instruction of your father and do not forsake the law of your mother." Put very simply, that says listen to and obey your parents. Now no-one expects you to be continuously overjoyed by what your parents tell you what and what not to do. God, who gave you your birthright, says you must learn to listen and obey your parents and do what they say unless what they say is directly contrary to God's law.

It goes on to say if you do then many spiritual and physical blessings will come your way. The conditions to those blessings we've read are to obey God and respect our parents, especially if we are teenagers. Now the problem is that it isn't always easy to do these two things. The reason why it's not always easy is because of what has commonly come to be called peer pressure.

We've all heard of peer pressure. Some of us tend to think peer pressure is brand new. What you need to realize is that peer pressure is as old as man. Did you realize that God talks about peer pressure in chapter 1 of the Book of Proverbs. In fact He singles it out as the main problem or the single greatest pressure that a teenager or a young person is up against.

What is peer pressure? Peer pressure, simply put, is that persuasive force that causes a teenager to go with his or her friends - to do what they want to do - to have the same attitudes they have - to behave the way they behave - to go where they want to go - to dress the way they want to dress - listen to the same tunes they listen to and to have the same likes and dislikes they have. Parents often have little concept of the pressure other teenagers can put on their children.

What causes peer pressure? Now it's very interesting. Peer pressure begins with a tiny little child. I don't know if you're aware of it but as a little child becomes aware of the world around it, it develops a simple desire, a desire to be liked. As a child grows older this desire to be liked becomes a desire for approval. Approval is very important, especially from parents and teachers. Now these desires are fine as long as they don't get out of control and become stronger than our desire to do what's right.

Satan tries as hard as he can to feed this desire and as we grow up this desire develops and changes and as we reach our teenage years it becomes a desire to be respected and accepted especially by our own circle of friends. Now this desire to be respected and accepted doesn't last forever. As we move into our early to mid twenties it develops into a desire to be thought of as important.

As we move into our twenties we want to be thought of as important especially by those older than us. Then, as a person enters his thirties, it develops into a desire for prestige and this is what drives a lot of men and women on in their careers, not just to be thought of as important but to attain prestige - to have an important position or office in life. Later on as the individual grows older and if he's given the opportunity this drive for prestige becomes a drive for power and this is why older executives climb over the bodies and careers of younger men to put themselves into a position of great power and this according to those who study it is one of the greatest drives in man.

Now the Bible has a name for all this - this desire which goes through these stages - the Bible calls it vanity. This is not something we're born with but is something which a cunning and very intelligent devil injects into us to hold us captive.

To be accepted and respected by our friends is what makes us the victim of peer pressure and is what stops us saying no when we should say no. Now that word no is a simple two-lettered word but if said with courage it can save millions of heartaches and solve serious problems and untold fears later in life. All of you have done something you knew you shouldn't have done only to find yourself saying afterwards "Why didn't I have the strength to say no?"

Just look around the world today. Millions of teenage girls - unmarried mothers and also many of the unmarried fathers who wish they had said no but now it's too late.

They can never recall, never reverse the decision that allowed the pre-marital activity that has hurt their lives that has hurt their children's lives and their families and their future.

There are multiple millions of people in the world suffering from A.I.D.S., not to mention other more prevalent sexual diseases. Some of them just wish they were given the knowledge that what they were doing was wrong but they didn't have that knowledge. Others knew what they were doing was wrong and wish they had the courage to say no but the desire was so strong to be respected and accepted by their friends who began to put pressure on them. For them tomorrow has been cancelled.

Now you can look elsewhere and you can see the thousands of drug addicts and smokers who wish they had the courage to say no to the first puff of the drug they are hooked to today. Now they have destroyed their dreams and replaced them with a series of nightmarish problems. How many drinkers wish they had said no to those extra drinks that caused a serious accident or injury or even death? You see their desire to be respected and accepted by their friends caused them to foolishly give in to the pressure to prove they could hold their alcohol and as a result today their life is filled with remorse and regret and sorrow.

Perhaps you've said to someone else or someone has said to you "Come on, everybody's doing it." Now maybe it's premarital sex or smoking or drugs. The come on might be in a different form like "Just once won't hurt you" or "Don't be chicken". Sometimes it's "Show me you love me" or "Prove you're a real man". Now we've all heard these or similar lines. Maybe they have been used on you or you have used these on others. These are the lead-ins that young people use to put pressure on others to experiment with things like drugs, drinking, smoking, cheating, pre-marital sex or just compromise on personal integrity.

Now let's face it young people by nature you want to be respected and accepted by others, especially your own circle of friends or your peers. You don't like to appear out of place. Anyway why should someone say no to something that so many others are doing and are seemingly getting away with it. Well, the truth is no-one ever gets away with it ultimately. This is what we need to understand. That's why God warns you in verse 10 of Proverbs 1, "Now my son, if sinners entice you do not consent." In other words say no!

God says to fear Him and listen to your parents because it is from these two sources - our parents and from God's word that we get our knowledge of right and wrong because without that knowledge we'd be swept along in a world where standards have become nebulous, where no-one knows what is right and wrong anymore and the result could be horrible for us. What we need to realize is this - sooner or later in your life you're going to have to confront and lick vanity - the vanity that makes you want to be respected and accepted by your friends so much that it's out of control.

God goes on to say in verse 11: "If they say, come with us. Let us lay wait to shed blood." Now peer pressure doesn't always go this far so God is taking an extreme example to show us where it can end up. He goes on: "Let us swallow them alive like sheol (or the grave) and whole as those that go down into the pit for we shall find all sorts of precious possessions. We shall fill our houses with spoil. Cast in your lot among us and we will have one purse." In other words we'll all be one circle of friends, we'll all be together. We'll all be one group.

God says: "My son do not walk in the way with them. Keep your foot from their path." What God is saying here young people is this - are you being constantly tempted by your friends to experiment with things you shouldn't. If so God says in this verse that you may have to seriously consider that you're amongst the wrong circle of friends and that's something some people need to consider. If you want to avoid being drawn into wrong things simply don't hang around with those who want to indulge in these things.

Why? Well, the next verse tells us. In verse 17 it says, "Surely, in vain the net is spread in the sight of every bird but they lie in wait for their own blood. They lurk secretly for their own lives." What does that all mean? Simply, it means this - ultimately the person who gives in to peer pressure is the one who pays the penalty. God is saying never make the mistake of saying it can't happen to me. Don't make the mistake of thinking others get away with it so why can't I? The truth is others don't get away with it.

Human problems are caused when spiritual laws are broken and those laws are there to show us how to be successful, how to be happy and there are penalties when they are broken and no-one gets away with it. That's why God says ultimately they are lurking and planning and plotting for their own blood and their own lives. In verse 19 He carries on, "So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain. It takes away the life of its owners."

There are penalties and in verse 20 He says this - you don't have to experiment with sin to find out that sin brings penalties! He says: "Wisdom calls aloud outside. She raises her voice in the open squares. She cries out in the chief concourses. At the opening of the gates in the city she speaks her words." What God is saying is that you don't have to experiment with drugs to know the terrible results of drug addiction. You don't have to experiment with pre-marital sex to know the miseries of unwanted pregnancies, the horrors of sexually transmissible diseases, the anguish of the mental problems that stem from the feelings of guilt you go through afterwards.

God simply says look around you. Observe the results and the tragic lives of those who didn't know the difference between right and wrong, who didn't have the wisdom to make the right decisions when they were young and who didn't have the courage to say no. You see them in the streets, you see them on the beaches, you see them in the hospitals, you see them wherever you find people. That's why God says wisdom cries aloud in the streets!

You don't have to experiment with it to know the potential dangers of marijuana or with cocaine or heroin or other drugs. That knowledge is available if you want to know. There's a great deal written on it. You don't have to be ignorant of the psychological harm and the dangers of pre-marital sex and homosexual activity. The damaged and misdirected lives, the hurt and confused children, the broken marriages, the heartaches, the fears, regrets and the sorrows are all part of the public record.

God then goes on to say in verse 22: "How long will you simple ones love simplicity? And scorners delight in scorning?" Another translation puts it this way: "How long will cynics like to be cynical?" Now God is trying to give the youth the knowledge they need to have through the church. Unfortunately some do pour scorn on it and they do become cynical.

Cynicism is one of the hallmarks of this age and unfortunately in God's church we have a number of young people who are cynical. In verse 24 the Good News Bible puts it like this: "I have been calling you and inviting you to come but you would not listen. You paid no attention to me. You have ignored all my advice and have not been willing to let me correct you." If you know the truth and you allow peer pressure to influence you to do wrong things then ultimately you pay a penalty. You may also possibly lose the birthright you have.

God continues on in verse 27: "When your terror comes like a storm and your distress and anguish come upon you, then they call on me, but I will not answer. They will seek me diligently but they will not find me." In other words when our dreams turn into nightmares, when our hopes become horrors, when what should be the terrific teens turn into the terrible teens we may find we've lost the birthright God has given us.

God gives us wonderful promises, tremendous privileges if we will keep His word, if we will live His way of life but if we turn away from it God says we will have to learn by bitter personal human experience that no one gets away with it.

There is a warning in the second last verse of the chapter. It says "for the turning away of the simple will slay them and the complacency of fools will destroy them." We do have a group of young adult singles in their 20's who have grown up in the church. They are no longer teenagers. They can be baptized if they want to. Peer pressure is not much of a problem for them anymore because they've grown out of that stage but they're complacent in doing what they know they should. They make all sorts of excuses like, "I want to escape the great tribulation but I don't want to do all the things a baptized member has to do like praying and studying and fasting. That would be too much for me." Well, you see God says if we're complacent about what He is offering us we could lose what He is offering us.

At the end of the chapter after all of that God ends on a very positive note. He says: "Whoever listens to me will dwell safely and will be secure without any fear of evil." He will help guide your life for the very best and He is going to reward those who

respect their parents and who stand up against peer pressure and all the other pressures a young person faces in this world.

Remember, you're not alone in the struggle to stand up against drug abuse, illicit sexual behaviour and other harmful practices. There are times when it is right to say yes to good, fun and right activities. But there are also times when with firmness and tact you in your personal life should say no!

PARTIES AND NITECLUBS

What does the Bible say about parties? There are passages that refer to wild paganistic parties and to godly parties after victories and on feast days. For their comments on this I'd like to quote from Alan McDonald and Tony Campolo's book "The Time of Your Life":

[In John 2 we read how He attended a wedding reception. In fact he changed 120 gallons of water into fine wine and had it delivered to the banquet master - RW.]

Apparently Jesus didn't shy away from social gatherings and celebrations - places where some, the passage implies, drank too much. He even contributed to the party spirit.

However Jesus' behaviour raised the eyebrows of some of his...contemporaries, who called Him "a glutton and a drunkard" (Matt.11:19, Luke 7:34). It must have been so radical for a righteous teacher to keep the company Jesus kept that the Pharisees didn't know what to make of Him. Yet He knew how to eat and drink and have a good time with sinners without sinning Himself. He listened to them, sympathized with them, laughed with them - consistently sought to influence through His behaviour rather than be influenced by them along the way...

Parties play a big role in today's social life. But party-going means different things to different people. How will you decide where you fit into the party scene? Here are a few suggestions:

[1] Decide ahead of time what parties you'll attend. Some parties are a good place to catch up with people you might not see otherwise. Others are so wild that no christian belongs at them: "for you have spent enough time in the past doing what the pagans choose to do - living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry." (1 Pet. 4:3) Establishing what's off limits now will make future choices easier.

[2] Be honest. Unless you're consistently open about your lifestyle and convictions as a christian, people who see you have fun at a party may assume your presence lends a silent seal of approval to everything going on there. Stand firm about who you are.

[3] Be realistic about your weaknesses. Are you prone to drink too much, to flirt, to take drugs? If so, limit your socializing to places where these temptations are reduced.

[4] Be realistic about peer pressure. Peer pressure on [uni campuses] may be stronger at parties than anywhere else. If you find yourself compromising your beliefs

to feel affirmed by others at parties, admit that you're letting others control you - and retreat to safer ground, at least for a while...

[5] Avoid put-downs. If you do decide to go to a party where you can't participate in everything that happens, don't be judgmental. Declarations like "drinking is a sin" and "all parties are worldly" only make you sound superior to your friends and reinforce their mistaken idea that Christianity is nothing but do's and don'ts.

[6] Be an influencer. Don't go to parties thinking you're going to change your friends. Ultimately you're not responsible for anyone's actions but your own. Yet your refusal to participate in the excesses of parties may encourage other revellers to have a good time more responsibly (p.21-27).

Those points can also be used to some degree in determining which niteclubs you should or shouldn't go to and how to act at them.

You have to make a personal judgment on how positive or negative the environment is and whether it's going to influence you and from there decide whether this place is the type of place, you, as a christian, want to go to. Everyone and every place is different so the choice is in your hands.

TIME MANAGEMENT

Managing one's time is a vital skill everyone needs to develop in their lives. For his points on time management I'd like to quote from a summary of a bible study given in June 1989 by Gary Harvey:

In Ephesians 5:15-16 we read how we are to redeem our time. Time is a precious resource. Once it passes it's gone and we can't get it back but what Paul is saying is we need to make up for the time we've lost and properly manage the precious time we do have. There are two pains in life - one is self-discipline and the other is regret which is heavier.

Below I have some basic points we can use in managing our time more efficiently:

1) Plan ahead. Control of your life begins with planning.

2) Prioritize tasks. In other words place them in order of the ones that are most important and do them first. **God must be number one in our life so don't avoid prayer, bible study and giving to others!**

3) Set objectives or goals. It's best to have them written down. What do you want to do these coming week, month, over the year or next 5 years?

4) Do what's urgent without neglecting the more important less urgent tasks. Work towards that balance.

5) Develop daily plans. Have them written down and cross them off as you go along.

6) Strive for efficiency - doing most with least effort. Just because you are busy doesn't mean you are efficient.

7) Learn to delegate when you are able to.

8) Don't procrastinate, especially for least liked tasks - just do it!

9) Don't spread yourself too thin. Concentrate on what's really important. That includes putting seeking God's kingdom and His righteousness first as we find in Matthew 6:33.

At times we need to say no, especially if we're spreading ourselves too thin. That may include saying no to going to too many social activities or other things we like doing to get more important things done.

10) Be result-oriented, not just activity-oriented. We may be very busy but we need to ask what are we really achieving.

11) Selectively neglect all but the essentials if you are pushed for time. We have so many distractions and we need to say no. Don't do what's trivial.

With these points hopefully you'll be able to plan better and control your time a lot more wisely and do the things you really want to achieve.

LIVING WITH OTHER SINGLES

Living with single friends while you're single can be a source of much fun and also much frustration. Here are a few points to consider in dealing with the situation of living with other singles.

1) Before doing it wisely assess your finances to see whether it's viable to move out of home.

As far as saving for a house for later on when you get married, staying at home and paying cheap board is often the best way to go. The main advantage of moving out of home for a lot of people is the fun aspect of having a place of your own to invite friends over for dinners and parties and so on.

There are a number of upfront expenses to watch out for when renting a house or flat. First of all there is the bond for the place. This is refundable at the end of the lease and is usually 4-6 weeks rent and the first fortnight or month's rent is due up front. Most leases for rental properties usually run for 6 months and can be renewed after that.

At the end of the lease when you move out any costs involved in repairing or cleaning up the place will be deducted from the bond before it's refunded to you. It's in your best interest to regularly clean the place as this will save you many arguments and loss of money at the end of it. See your rental agent if you don't know where to go to claim your refund on the bond. Next of all, the phone and electricity will have to be put on.. Also do you have enough essentials for the kitchen and furnishing the place?

2) If you have a phone land line that more than one of you use to dial out have an itemized list and mark all your phone calls down in a book.

This isn't so much of an issue these days compared to when I was young as most people just use their separate mobile phones.

3) Look for stable boarders to have as flatmates as they come and go.

When I lived in Sydney for a year and a half I lived at 5 different places with 10 different people - not by my own design. Lack of stability of residence is a frustrating thing when living away from your parents' place so seek flatmates who are going to show some commitment to sticking with you for a while.

Also seek flatmates you know you can get along with as that can make the time together a lot more pleasant. If they're financially unstable, eccentric, very boring, lazy, have gross habits or are untidy that can make life difficult in a household.

You get to learn a lot about yourself and your capacity to be self-sufficient living away from home having to cook and clean for yourself all the time. You learn more intimately about the habits of yours that grate on others. It's a great opportunity, though trying at times, for developing personally and characterwise.

I strongly urge any young person to flat with other single friends at least for a short time before you get married. You need the experience at learning how to get along with others in a living environment and being able to be self-sufficient.

Often you don't really get to know people until you live with them. Another thing, also, is that it really helps you appreciate your parents a whole lot more, especially mums, who so cheerfully and freely fed and washed and ironed and cleaned for you when you lived at home.

4) Go over and beyond in doing your part in keeping the common areas of the house or flat clean.

Keeping the place clean was probably the other main source of arguments apart from bills when I was flatting in Sydney. Try and work out a system in co-operation with your flatmates that can keep the place clean with the least amount of effort.

If the dishes aren't getting done every day I like to have them stacked up orderly on one side of the sink and not left in the sink. At least they look tidy even though they're not done plus stacking them will take no longer than a minute to do.

As well as taking turns doing the different jobs around the house there is also the option of one person solely being responsible for the kitchen while another may be solely responsible for everyone's washing or ironing.

5) Respect each other's privacy.

When you move in it's a good idea to see how particular each other is about others staying out of their room rather than do it later without knowing and a argument happening because of it.

6) Learn to freely communicate.

In some single households it's more like three boarders living together rather than three friends. Make an effort to get to know each other and take an interest in finding out what's happening in each other's lives. Some boarders just seem to be out all of the time and when they are home lock themselves in their own room.

I like to have an open door policy of keeping my door open when I'm in it. That way anyone can walk in whenever they want to have a chat with me and that helps build the bonds of friendship. Also talk over problems early before they get out of hand. Make your household a warm and very friendly environment to live in.

There are many joys and trials from flatting together with your friends when you are single especially the opportunities to invite people over for parties and dinners and barbeques and so on. Hopefully you can make the most of your time flatting with other singles and with these points be able to save some of the hassles and dramas as well.

TRAVEL

Travel is a wonderful thing. It helps give you a completely new perspective on many things and gives you the chance to meet a lot of new friendships. The travel bug is an easy thing to catch but it's also something which must be controlled or it'll send you broke, of which I have some first hand experience with. I'm well aware of the financial dangers travel can bring so I encourage everyone before undertaking a major travel trip to look at the financial aspect very carefully.

Here are some points to consider when looking at travelling.

1) If at all possible combine your holiday with the feast. This will reduce the money that needs to come out your savings by allowing you to use your second tithe. You could also have a cheap local feast one year and save some of your second tithe for the next year if you wish to go overseas.

2) To save getting caught out of not having any money to put towards starting a marriage if you meet someone soon after coming back from an expensive overseas trip, save a few thousand dollars for that purpose before and then whatever you save after that put towards travelling overseas.

3) Ask yourself do you really have to go overseas or can you be content enjoying travelling around your own country.

A lot of people go overseas without even seeing much of their own country plus seeing your own country is usually a lot cheaper.

The wonderful experiences and memories, the friends and the opportunity to see life and places from a totally new perspective really make travelling a wonderfully worthwhile thing to do, so long as you plan it properly and wisely use your funds, without cutting yourself short for your future, so make the most of it!

WHAT SINGLES PERCEIVE ABOUT EACH OTHER

To complete this chapter on the singles scene I thought it would be a good idea to look at what perceptions that singles have and the things they like and don't like about each other. After speaking to quite a number of singles over the years and over the course of putting this book together I have been able to compile a list of some of the most common likes and dislikes that I've heard or had mentioned to me that singles have about each other.

As we look at them we may be able to learn more about the strengths and weaknesses of one another so we can improve our game and do the things that will positively rub off on others and avoid the things that others dislike. I would like to heavily emphasize that these are opinions only, not facts. They are, though, valid feelings and perceptions that some singles do have. These are in complete random order so to kick off with here are some of the most common things girls don't like about guys.

WHAT GIRLS DISLIKE IN GUYS

- Guys only taking out the pretty ones or just the girls they're interested in out. I've known some guys who've been guilty on this point. Guys who do this don't tend to value platonic friendships with the opposite sex enough to also take out girls who they're not interested in but are friends with anyway. One story I heard along these lines was where a guy asked a certain girl he was interested in out to a ball and then after the girl made it clear all she wanted to be was just friends he tried to pull out of the ball date against her will after she had accepted. From what I heard she got her own back and made sure he took her to the ball that year.

- Guys not making it clear who's paying for a date. Personally if I want to take a girl out and I'm not too financial, as many uni students would be, I make it clear at the onset when I ask a girl out if she wouldn't mind going dutch if I can't afford to pay for her. Some guys don't make it clear it's a dutch date until the bill arrives which is a little bit rude. Girls, by the same token, should not expect guys to pay for them all the time.

If a girl is unclear who's paying just simply ask him in advance or when he asks you out if he's paying or not. Just a bit of simple communication can save quite a bit of embarrassment later on.

One time I asked a girl out for a mid-week lunch date. She wasn't sure if she could make it and said she would call me to confirm. Wednesday morning came and no call

so I went to college and didn't worry about taking any money as I assumed she couldn't make it. As it happened, during one of my classes I got this message in class from her to meet her in town and to my embarrassment I didn't have a dime on me. She covered me after we had lunch having explained my predicament. We had a good laugh about it but it was a bit embarrassing at the time, especially getting the message in class back in the days before mobile phones.

- Guys interrogating them on a date to see if they're a good marriage prospect. I've heard some pretty weird stories on this one and how blatant some guys have been on this point. If you're trying to find out more about a girl be very subtle and casual about it and don't get too personal too early on in the friendship. Gauge your speed by their response.

- Guys who come on too strong. Guys who do this spoil it for the rest of us by conditioning girls to be afraid of getting close to guys just as friends. Some guys have a real hard time being rejected by a girl and show little concern for a girl's feelings by continuing to push a girl into spending time with them and liking them.

One good friend of mine who chased heaps of different girls did so in a very quick way. Often he'd meet a girl and ask the same girl out 3, 4, 5, 6 times in a matter of just a few weeks, calling her a few times in between before she'd get sick of him and took the bolt. The odd girl here and there would be responsive to his extra friendly approach but, by far, the majority of girls can't handle that approach.

He had some troubles now and then because he didn't slow his approach down but thankfully he managed to win the heart of a nice lady. Unfortunately some of the girls responses were quite unkind and not very ladylike in return.

The pace at which a relationship / friendship grows is a mutual thing. If you try and force it go to faster than the other person wants it to grow, against their will, then you're not caring for their feelings.

- Lack of mental strength or leadership. Some guys are quite indecisive and never take much of a role in organizing things. The cry goes out "Where are the real men?" Part of this may be due to unreal expectations on the girls part looking for a Hollywood-type man like a Patrick Swayze or a Jean Claude Van Damme or a guy who's quite rich but it is due mainly to guys showing little leadership. Guys hardly ever asking girls out on or organizing both single or group dates, having little direction of where they are going in life, having no goals or not being able to make decisions leaving it to the girls all the time, add to this frustration of girls of not being able to find what they call real men.

- Lack of sensitivity. This is the other factor which frustrates women in finding real men. We men need to learn to be more considerate both to the needs, desires and hurts that women do go through and not have to always wait for them to tell us they need our help. Also we need to be careful of not making cutting remarks casually that might offend or hurt women in any way. One old show that is a real education for guys to learn from here is the hit comedy "Home Improvement" starring stand-up comic Tim

Allen. It's a real take-off of many of the funny and dumb insensitive things men do to women as well as being a great laugh.

- **Being chased by guys much older than them.** Most girls can enjoy the company of guys much older than them in small to moderate amounts but especially don't like it when those guys try and spend a lot of time with them when they're not particularly attracted to them. It's particularly hard for our older single guys in their 30's and 40's who have very few ladies around their age but as is the case with people of all ages we need to give people the space that they want.

- **Guys with a huge ego.** Male chauvinism and proud boasting have never been particularly well liked qualities in men from a lady's point of view. Young guys often have not come to the stage where they have licked the vanity and boasting that is often a part of their teenage years among boys. Just don't let your ego get the better of you.

- **Guys who are looking for perfection.** Just as women have unreal expectations, so too do men. Some guys remain single because they are constantly looking for the woman with the perfect body - blonde, 36-24-36 - or whatever. Many guys pass up many a beautiful lady to marry a pretty girl.

- **Guys who don't ask for your input on anything including where you might like to go on a date.** Find out what a girl likes doing and tailor you dates according to what they want to do rather than always what you want to do. Sometimes, it's good to give a girl a few options and ask the girl what she'd like to do.

WHAT GUYS DISLIKE IN GIRLS

- **Lack of interest girls have in building anything more than a superficial friendship with you unless they find you attractive.** Men, quite often, even in the church, are accused of only taking out the pretty girls out on dates. That's true to a fair degree but women I find also can be just as guilty here.

There's a myth that goes around saying that guys are only interested in a woman for what she looks like and girls are far more concerned about a guy's personality than his looks. I wish that was true about most girls. If it was I'd probably have a lot more success getting to know women. Unfortunately, from the evidence I've seen in my own life and many other guys, girls are probably more interested in looks than they would like to admit.

Just as guys need to examine themselves about whether they are a lot more pre-occupied with looks than character and personality, so too many girls need to examine themselves as to whether they show partiality on the basis of looks because a lot of singles, in general, do show that partiality.

I'm not sure why a lot of girls show little interest in developing close friendships with guys. I think fear has something to do with it. Most girls in the church have had at least one occasion where a guy has pushed them to be more than friends. Often it's a case of the minority spoiling it for the majority.

As well as the fear of that happening, another factor is apathy. Some say that apathy is the opposite to love, not hate. What apathy is, is a couldn't-care-less-about-you attitude. Matthew 24:11 says the love of many will wax cold. In other words, people won't care about others much. Often this is unintentional but it's something we all need to examine ourselves for. Often we're too preoccupied with our own interests to be interested in others.

This happens with both guys and girls, and as a singles group we need to ask ourselves how self-absorbed we are and whether we care enough about others to give unselfish friendship and not just be friends with others for what we can get out of them.

Another factor is shyness. Many girls are quite shy and we guys need to be aware of that and do the best we can to help make them feel more comfortable and draw them out.

- Lack of natural curiosity. A number of girls unless they're interested in a particular guy seem to have little natural curiosity in getting to know guys on a personal level. They seem to show very little interest in asking more about you and how you tick in a casual way. Guys are definitely not to blame totally for why a lot of girls don't get asked out in some areas. Certain attitudes of girls have put some guys off from dating widely. It's hard to ask girls out if you can't even build up enough initial rapport with them in the first place.

It does get discouraging after a while when the only time you ever get to spend with many girls is when you take them out on a date and never after that. I've seen a few close friends almost give up on dating for those very reasons where girls have frustrated them. Girls, if you want dates, be willing to make the effort to build rapport with guys at church and get to know them.

I remember during one singles bible study the minister related a story about how after another singles study during which the men were encouraged to date more widely in their area, one girl in the fellowship afterwards introduced herself to a few of the guys and said, "Hi, I'm Widely". Now that's what I call a funny plug to try and get a date.

- Lack of interest in talking about God's way of life and the things we learn about in the church. Often I find singles will talk about anything and everything under the sun and speak about lots of trivial things but rarely show an interest in talking about spiritual things - God's way of life, the world tomorrow, etc.

While I may find many of the girls in the church physically attractive I don't often find sufficient depth of conversation, not just of spiritual topics, but also of the world around us in many ladies in the church. To one day marry someone like that would be too shallow a foundation to build a marriage on. Personally I'd like someone I could share talking about lots of topics like that with and a number of guys feel the same way.

Unfortunately this world focuses only on things that are superficial most of the time. Our movies, tv, videos and video game entertainment take away so much of our time to talk with each other and learn about the world around us. Also, most singles in the church

are second generation christians and naturally find it hard at times to be enthusiastic about learning and the things they have been taught in the church.

There's this feeling influenced by the world that it's uncool to talk about God's way of life and spiritual things which I believe singles should fight. We should show a PASSION for God's wonderful truth.

- Girls not trying to give you a raincheque after they knock you back for a date. It's nice if a girl does try and organize a different time with you if they're busy when you ask them out. That shows they still are interested in spending time with you even if you can't tee up a date. I remember one girl I asked out quite a few times who said every time she was busy or would be too tired from working overtime with her clerical job. I didn't have a problem with her reasons but it got quite frustrating that she never made the effort to tee up an alternative time with me or be honest enough to say she prefer not to go out with me.

- Girls very quickly jumping to conclusions about you liking them and wanting to be more than a friend with them. It'd be nice if more girls would give guys the benefit of the doubt on this point . Some guys are pretty obvious when they're interested in a girl and the other half of guys are more subtle. I'm amazed sometimes how quickly some girls can jump to conclusions when you're not even interested in them.

One feast I remember I took out four girls. I was definitely not interested in any of the four girls but later through second-hand sources I found out that two of the girls, who I had only just met, thought I was coming on to them. I thought about everything I did on those two dates and for the life of me couldn't figure out what on earth I could have done to give those two girls, who I'd only just met, that impression. I was a bit nervous with one of them so that may have explained that one. The other one I'm still mystified to this day what I ever did to give her that impression.

- Girls who drop a friendship with you as soon as they're suspicious of you being interested in them, whether you like them or not. This, to some degree, can show a shallowness in a person's concern for other people and not something that guys appreciate too much or girls for that matter when done to them.

- Weak excuses to get out of a date instead of giving guys the honest truth. I'd hate to be in a girl's position of having to wait for dates so I can understand why girls can bend the truth and use a weak excuse in knocking back a date with a guy they may not be too fussed on.

Try and give most guys a chance to take you out if all they want to do is take you out for a fun time. Put yourself in the guy's shoes before you knock a guy back for a date. You have no obligation to say yes to a guy's offer and guys also need to aware of that. If you still feel you must say no then, as uncomfortable as it might be, do the fair thing and give the honest truth as tactfully as you can rather than some weak excuse which the guy will probably be able to see right through anyway. A friend of mine once was knocked back every time by a few ladies to go out one night only to find out a couple of them ended up doing up nothing that night anyway.

I was once knocked back for a Brisbane Ball date when I was living away from Brisbane. The reason I was given was that she was disappointed in Brisbane guys and wanted to see if one of them would ask her out that year. Though I had taken her out a few times before I'd left Brisbane the previous year, I had never taken her out to a ball before. Later on I found out from a friend of hers that she really wanted to be asked out by a certain guy and was quite indignant when he ended up taking someone else and she ended up missing the ball altogether.

- **Lack of appreciation and being taken for granted.** As mentioned before some guys get discouraged and disappointed in girls who never show much interest in keeping a friendship going with them if the guy's had the kindness to take a girl out a couple of times for a fun time. If you go out of your way to show a guy you are grateful for the things he does for you he'll really appreciate it.

- **Girls not giving an R.S.V.P. when you have asked them out.** I find it disappointing when this basic courtesy is broken and sadly it does happen a lot amongst our singles. People do have to make arrangements when it comes to dinner parties and dates etc. Try and be reliable when people are seeking a response from you whether it's an invitation or information they are seeking from you by letter or they've asked you to call back or whatever. Try and be reliable every time when people do need information or an answer from you.

- **Being led-on.** Some girls are flirtatious just in order to get something from guys and also show obvious romantic affection to more than one guy. Guys also two-time like that and I think it's grossly unfair to show that romantic affection to more than one person at the same time.

WHAT GIRLS LIKE IN GUYS

- **Guys who don't pressure a girl to spend more time with them than they want to or but are always relaxed and casual on a date and put them at ease.** Girls really appreciate it when they are not pressured and the girl shows genuine care for their feelings.

- **Guys who are sensitive to a girl's needs both emotional, such as a listening ear or a shoulder to cry on, and physical needs.** By the same token if those needs aren't obvious girls shouldn't assume we guys will automatically know them. We're not mind-readers though we can be pretty insensitive at times.

- **The little courtesies such as giving flowers, opening doors, pulling out her chair.** These sort of things in themselves are not what's important to a girl. They're just a reflection of what's in your heart. By doing them they show her you're concerned for her and that you are a gentleman.

- **Guys who are organized in their plans for a date and make it clear whether they're paying or it's a dutch date.**

- **Guys who are good at keeping a conversation flowing.** Some girls are shy and need drawing out and do appreciate guys entertaining them with good, interesting and humorous conversation.
- **Guys you can talk to about anything with and not just cars etc.** Petrolheads beware! Don't overdo the car talk unless you know the girl is genuinely interested.
- **Guys who take a genuine interest in being a friend with you.**
- **Guys who praise you for the way you dress.** Girls often go to a lot of effort to look good for a guy on a date and do appreciate it when a guy compliments them on the way they look and appreciate the effort they have put in for it.
- **Guys who are themselves whether they're around you or others.**
- **Guys who enjoy a good time and having good, clean fun.**

WHAT GUYS LIKE IN GIRLS

- **Women who really do care and are genuinely interested in building a friendship with you even if it's just a platonic friendship - a girl who comes up to you in church from time to time and doesn't expect you to go up to her all the time.** Guys like to dominate or do most of the initiating but they don't like doing all the initiating. There is a distinct difference.
- **A girl who really is curious to know more about you and keep in touch with how you're doing on a personal level - who wants to spend time with you and not just on dates.**
- **A girl who is a lively, get-up-and-go type of girl.** A girl who's willing to give anything a go and show enthusiasm for what you like doing and you've got organized. A lot of guys love a girl who's bubbly and has got plenty of life in them rather than a passive sort of girl. I really love that sort in bubblyness in a girl, in particular.
- **A girl who makes the effort to take an enthusiastic interest in the things you're interested in.** One of the most best examples I know of a girl taking that kind of interest was from a fantastic lady I had a few top dates with before she eventually got married. Her name was Nicole and this story involves a friend of mine, Terry. Now if you've ever met Terry you'll know how sport-mad a guy he is. Now though I have a deep love of sport myself, it's not something I talk much about with a girl on a date but Terry once took Nicole out and started raving on about rugby league football. Now, Nicole at this time knew nothing about football but she made the effort to take an interest in what Terry was interested in and asked Terry about how football was played. During the date he asked her if she would like to go to the next state-of-origin match between QLD and NSW.

We got back to her when it came around to buying our tickets and she still wanted to go. When myself and another sports-mad friend, Nigel, watched Queensland demolish

NSW in the first match and we were jumping up and down madly and high-fiving every few minutes as Queensland raced in to score, I couldn't help think to myself, "Boy, are we going to embarrass the hell out of Nicole when we take her to the next match." When the match came around she really got into the spirit of the night dressing up in the Queensland maroon colours and jumping up and down madly with the rest of us as Queensland ran away to a glorious 3-0 whitewash of NSW.

As I thought about how Nicole got into the spirit of the night I couldn't help but think how amazing her attitude was and all that came about just from caring enough to take an interest in what Terry was interested in. That's certainly an example a lot of girls could learn a lesson from. You don't have to take a passionate interest in whatever they're interested in but it's nice when a woman can take a mild interest in a lot of the things you're interested in or talk about on a date and vice versa.

- Thank you cards and showing a genuine appreciation in what a guy's done for you. The same young lady, Nicole, also provides another excellent example of this point. I got more thank you cards from her than any other girl and that's saying something considering she was never short of a date and she had a boyfriend during a couple of those dates. Guys certainly do appreciate it when a girl goes out of her way to show her appreciation for what you've done for her including thank you cards.

- Girls who are willing to help out financially or otherwise and who don't take you for granted. Guys do appreciate it when a girl is willing to help out with the cost of a date. It's not so important that the lady chips in for a date but the willingness to do it that impresses a guy. While I was living in Sydney I asked a girl to a ball in Melbourne and she said she was quite willing to help out with the costs and accommodation if I needed it. Now I didn't need the help but it was nice to know she was very willing to help out with anything I might need.

- A girl who's capable and intelligent and who can keep a conversation flowing on a date. There are few more things annoying for a guy than to take a girl out and the girl hardly puts anything into the conversation. Now some girls are very shy and their conversation skills have to be developed over time but regardless of whether you're socially adept or awkward you should care enough to make the effort to get to know your date and ask questions and try to keep the conversation flowing.

Along with that, a girl who's intelligent and has a broad range of interests and knowledge that she can share openly with in conversation will always stand out and for most guys be a pleasure to take out, so that's a goal every girl can have - to be like that.

- Girls who have the maturity and brotherly love for a guy not just to say, "I still hope we can be good friends" but who'll actually keep their word and keep on being friendly and take the initiative to keep the friendship going. Unfortunately the church is low on girls who have that kind of maturity and that's probably much the same vice versa.

- **Girls who like to talk about spiritual things, what the church teaches and who have a love of learning which flows openly in their conversation.** Being a first generation christian this is one thing that I especially love and appreciate in a girl.

- **Girls who don't judge you by your looks or by first impressions only and who don't just like you for what you have but for who you are.** Don't we all love to be cared for as a friend for who we really are?

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I think we can all lift our game and make the singles scene in our respective areas even better than they are. We all have this thing called human nature prevalent in both sexes and we all need to encourage each other in the battle against it.

God has given us so much wonderful knowledge in His word and opportunities in the church. Let's all value those precious opportunities and that knowledge He has given to us and make the most of it.