

All About
DATING
and
COURTSHIP

by David C. Pack

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Countless millions of shattered families began with wrong dating habits. These habits made proper courtship impossible. And the results have been tragic.

The almost universal *effects* of modern dating demonstrate widespread ignorance, even on the most basic points of right dating.

Almost no one understands the real PURPOSE of dating or of the courtship that can ensue. The next step, achieving a happy marriage, then also becomes impossible.

There is a *right* way to date! What is it? And there are right and wrong *people* to date. How can you know the difference?

It is time to unlearn the wrong principles, acquired from society—and to learn and apply GOD’S true principles, leading to HAPPY marriages and families! Presenting God’s perspective, this book reveals those principles.

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INTRODUCTION

The world is ignorant of almost every RIGHT VALUE that produces the RIGHT RESULTS all people seek. While everyone wants to be happy—and assumes that following the established norm is the *right way* to achieve happiness—most remain miserable and never know why. This is especially true in the world of modern dating.

Dating, followed by courtship, is supposed to lead to a happy marriage. But marriage cannot be happy if it is not built on the RIGHT FOUNDATION. Most couples have no idea that the foundation of a successful marriage begins *long before* the wedding day. In addition, a direct by-product of the wrong foundation is that most people have no idea *how* to select the right mate.

Just what *is* dating? A sampling of opinions reveals a variety of definitions, with seemingly no two alike. In the simplest form, a date is merely a set time agreed upon by two people to engage in an activity. The most commonly recognized definition is “an appointment for a specified time; especially a social engagement between two persons of opposite sex” (*Webster’s Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*).

What about *courtship*? Most know little or nothing of this lost art, and many no longer know—let alone use—the term. Those few who do, know virtually nothing about the *principles* of courtship—or its true PURPOSE. As a result, if two people are “dating,” this could mean they have dated only twice, yet have become interested in pursuing marriage. Even if both were serious, and technically courting from this point (this is often the case today after just *two* dates), most would still refer to this as *dating*.

In fact, there is no common understanding of just what dating and courtship are, or the plain difference between the two—and there is a BIG difference!

Also, because it sounds too “official” and “old-fashioned,” teenagers today rarely even use the term “dating.” The idea of a date—when a man formally asks a woman, for instance, if she would accept an engagement for dinner—is nearly non-existent. Many simply slip or tumble into dating situations, seemingly not caring how this happens, or even *what* happens. Instead, they seem more concerned with “going with the flow.”

Yet, you should care! Too much is at stake not to. There are many important principles behind dating that one *must* consider in order to successfully date—and be able to eventually move on to the more serious courtship and pursuit of marriage. You must have a means of knowing if or when you have found that special person. There are specific processes involved in proper dating that will help lead you down the right path.

When was the last time *you* either heard or used the word “courting”? Again, this term is very rarely used in society today, and most do not have any idea what it really means. Webster’s

states that courting is “to engage in social activities leading to engagement and marriage.” Most would reply, “But isn’t that dating?” The answer is no. Courting is a separate but important and intricate part of the process pointing toward and leading to marriage. Therefore, you must also come to understand and apply the *right way* to court.

And then there are those who may want to date, court and marry for the second time. Of course, some lose a spouse to death. Many others, having already established a pattern of marital *failure*, hope to do better “the second time around.” But no one is telling them *how* to do better. Wounded, and perhaps feeling burned, many stumble into a “rebound” relationship, often choosing the exact same kind of person they just left behind! These people need guidance as well, and this book offers it.

There are many manuals available, written from the human perspective, on how to date, court and find a mate. And there seems to be no end

Understand that the situations addressed in this book, and the guidelines presented, sometimes apply to both genders. Where issues overlap, it is not written from *either* perspective, but from the perspective of God’s Word, with the goal of teaching *both* how to better relate to each other. However, to avoid extra words, ambiguity and awkwardness in sentence structure, the author has chosen to occasionally alternate between masculine and feminine pronouns. This does not mean that many of the questions seeming to address only one gender cannot be applied by the other.

of sociologists, psychologists, marriage counselors and others considered to be experts, who are only too willing to offer what are no more than the *opinions* of people. This book does not merely present *my* perspective—*my* view—of the subject. That would be of no more worth than so many others.

Consider the intensifying debate about the status and legal recognition of same-sex couples. The United States and other Western countries are caught in the middle of a conflict—an outright WAR—over whether homosexual partners should be granted marriage licenses. In America, civil unions have already been permitted for some time in certain states. As the battle lines continue to form, the U.S. President and his allies are pursuing a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriages. Frustrated that “the courts are defining marriage” for the whole country, he stated that “marriage should be defined *by the people*.”

But is this true? Is it really “the people” who have devised the institution of marriage? Should “the people” decide who and what constitutes a marriage? If so, then is it also human beings who should define the traditional means of selecting a mate pursuant to this goal?

The answer to all these questions is an emphatic “NO!”

Let’s be clear. While religionists and theologians assume that this is God’s world, it is not! Let me repeat, this is *not* God’s world—it does *not* reflect His Way. Its customs, beliefs, values, philosophies, traditions and practices are not of God. But God is calling—and working with—a small number of people, whom He is training for a very special purpose. Who and how one chooses to date, which can lead to courtship and marriage, is inseparable from this purpose.

This book is far more than another manual containing dating “tips” or “helpful hints.” What you will read here reveals what *God* has to say on the matter. What *people* may say or do—and the “*will* of the people”—is irrelevant and usually just PLAIN WRONG! It is GOD’S perspective—His view—that offers the way to everything good in life.

God intends that every human being enjoy a HAPPY MARRIAGE. This is directly tied to whom and how one dates—and courts—*prior* to marriage!

In order to fully grasp the many principles that apply to dating, courtship, engagement and marriage, much foundation *must* first be laid. Be patient with the need to establish the right framework. It is essential to appreciating—to truly COMPREHENDING—all that follows. The reader makes a big mistake by skipping over or skimming through *any* early portions of this book in search of “specifics” describing what should happen on a date. If this is *your* interest—if you are merely looking for “keys,” “tips” or “good ideas”—this book is not for you. While it does

contain, later in the book, a *great many* specific points for application, these latter chapters simply cannot be properly applied without first understanding the vital backdrop of the preceding chapters.

A word to parents and teens: Parents, this book can be absolutely invaluable to you in training and preparing your children throughout the years preceding the eligible age of marriage—if you use it! Teenagers, this book will also guide *you*—and will protect you from endless, and usually unseen, traps and pitfalls. Read it. Study it. Adhere to it. You will be enormously glad you did!

All About DATING and COURTSHIP is truly different, and applying its contents could change your life forever!

DATING TODAY

Why do you need to learn more about dating and courting? Is this not something people just pick up from others and “learn as they go”? Is there a right and wrong way of dating or, like learning to walk or ride a bike, can people just naturally figure it out as they experience it?

The cold, hard facts are that today’s standards of dating, courting and engagement are wrong—ALL WRONG!

But how can I say this? All you need do is look at the astonishing array of ill effects to realize that the dating and courtship practiced today are far off-track. But, before we address this, the principle of CAUSE and EFFECT must be explained.

The Cause-and-Effect Principle

Most people live their entire existence completely unaware of WHY things either “go right” or “go wrong.” They seem unable to grasp that what they do, or do not do, has a direct effect on their lives. Most do not recognize that for every CAUSE there is an EFFECT—or, conversely, for every effect there is a cause. Nor do they know that this is a *law*. Scientists recognize this in physics, but society is unaware that the same is true in life—that the law of cause and effect is no less immutable than any law of science.

Let’s reason together, considering a few basic points. How does the law of cause and effect work in one’s life? Some simple examples:

If you routinely eat too much, what happens? You will become sick or overweight—or both! There is no mystery to this.

If you drink too much alcohol, you will become intoxicated. This could lead to a long list of bad effects: A next-day headache, being arrested, or even an auto accident resulting in injury or death to yourself or others. Again, there is no mystery here.

If you break society's laws, the effect is that you might go to jail or prison. This will hurt your family, your career opportunities and your entire future. Once again, no mystery to this.

In this fashion, the law of CAUSE and EFFECT directly impacts your life—and the life of everyone on earth. The ways that this happens are endless.

Let's go further. If industry pollutes the environment, the result is contaminated air or water, or even the much-debated problem of global warming. If countries go to war, the results—the effects—are economic upheaval, disease, famine and general misery for all involved. If parents neglect the proper rearing of their children, or if children do not obey their parents, the effects could be poor performance in school, drug addiction, criminal conduct or worse.

Of course, none of this is hard to understand.

God's way of life—including the principles of right dating, courtship and engagement—is also based on the law of CAUSE and EFFECT. The Bible contains hundreds of laws and principles, each carrying the power of cause and effect for those who KEEP—or BREAK—them!

Whether one identifies and knows all the laws and principles of the Bible is not relevant to whether breaking them will bring *certain* punishment. Just as speeding can result in a ticket, whether the driver knew the speed limit or not, so those who break the laws of God reap penalties, whether they know they are violating specific laws or not.

Look at the world around you. It is littered with broken families, unhappy marriages, single-parent homes, STDs, astonishing ignorance and widespread misery. Have you ever asked *why*? WHY has mankind never been able to solve these and other great problems? Why do they only grow worse with the passing of time? Because the laws and principles of God are being routinely broken by earth's billions of human inhabitants.

The Being who wrote the Bible states that His great Law, the Ten Commandments, is “holy, just, good and spiritual” (Rom. 7:12, 14). Again, consider the basic understanding of cause and effect. When *God's* laws and principles are obeyed, they bring countless blessings, benefits and good things into the lives of those who obey them. But mankind has routinely rejected—and even lampooned—the INSTRUCTION BOOK that reveals the cause of all its problems, evils and ills.

The Effects

So how does the LAW of cause and effect apply to dating and courtship? Where do these practices *lead*? The answer is simple. Dating, and the courtship that may ensue, are the precursors to relationships—and ultimately marriages. The effect—successful or failed marriages—is what results *from* either right or wrong forms of dating and courtship.

The cause-and-effect principle goes both ways. For every cause, there is a resulting effect, and for every *effect*, there is a traceable *cause*! So, let's look at the effects of modern dating. We could ask: Are they good?

To determine whether the dating practiced today is correct, we should first examine its fruits. In other words, we must analyze the *effects* of dating today. If the effects are bad or rotten, then we should be able to admit that something is wrong, possibly very wrong, with the cause—the ways that people in society practice dating, courtship and even engagement.

Therefore, it is essential to examine the *overall state* of the marriage institution. If dating and courtship are being done properly, we should expect the general condition of marriage throughout society today to be healthy.

Today's Marriages

Greater numbers of people are questioning the institution of marriage every day. Many are concerned with the direction of current trends. Some ponder whether marriage can even survive. Still others get married on their own terms or only on a “trial basis.” Millions simply live together, unmarried—and ever-greater numbers now cohabit in “same-sex” partnerships.

All of this would have been unthinkable just 50 years ago. Virtually everyone back then planned and expected to “grow up, get married and have children.” And marriage was for life! Entire *communities*—and NATIONS—functioned on this premise!

If dating and courtship were practiced correctly today, they would form the foundation of a beautiful relationship between a husband and wife as God ordained it. The two would spend a lifetime together enjoying much happiness and joy. This God-plane relationship would include expanding the family to children who would experience more productive and abundant lives, because their home and family would provide a

strong, positive environment, capable of nurturing them to adulthood and into their own successful marriages with children. Parents would teach children all they need to know, and the process would continue through successive generations.

Does this sound like a fairytale—a children’s bedtime story? Today it does! This is because modern society is shot full of wrong education, misinformation, hollow opinions, pop psychology, ignorance, bad advice—or no advice—all of which virtually prevents young people from having any hope for true happiness in marriage.

The following are revealing statistics, trends and facts derived from census data, and what sociologists, psychologists, marriage planners/counselors and others report. While shocking, this is only the briefest thumbnail—a very tiny sampling—of all that could have been included. Take the time to consider the enormous implications of these statistics. Make them personal, and imagine the individual lives behind them:

- 50% of married women and 66% of married men in the U.S. commit adultery (combined, these statistics indicate that five out of six marriages—over 80%—involve at least one adulterous partner).

- Divorces per 1,000 marriages: 1969—140; 1990—380 (up 171%); 1996—451 (up 222% since 1969).

- Compared to first marriages, *remarriages* are 50% more likely to end in divorce during the first five years, and tend to be unstable, break up more often, and more quickly (*Statistics Canada*).

- Divorced status in America is the fastest growing marital category. Between 1970 and 1996, the number of divorcees more than quadrupled, going from 4.3 million to 18.3 million.

- The National Institute for Healthcare Research says that divorce now ranks as the number one factor linked with suicide in major U.S. cities, ranking above all other physical, financial, and psychological factors.

- More than 50% of people in their 20s, interviewed in a Gallup survey, agreed to the statement, “One sees so few good or happy marriages today that one questions it as a way of life.” Among single young adults, more than half stated that one of their biggest concerns about marriage is “the possibility that it will end in divorce.” Incredible!

About half of all marriages fail! How can this be? Try to imagine the pain, suffering and frustration that so many experience. Is there a reason for all of this? Is it merely because many people just cannot get along? Most have no idea—no realization—that if they follow the correct way—God’s way—they could avoid all this misery and unhappiness!

But divorce is not the only sad and shocking effect of wrong dating and courtship. Improper dating and courtship practices carry the side effect of leading the large and growing ranks of wounded, jaded, cynical people to decide to just live together—or, more accurately, share a bed together—instead of committing to marriage.

Consider just these statistics from Britain: In 1972, there were 480,000 couples who chose to marry. By 2001, less than three decades later, only 286,000 weddings took place, even though the population had grown by seven percent. Just since 1986, the number of women choosing to cohabit has more than *doubled*, going from 13 percent to 28 percent. The figures for men are only slightly lower.

All of this describes a world in revolt against the institution of marriage!

The Young Victims

Cohabitation is not the only bad side effect resulting from divorce. It is important to stop and look at the children—the *most painful* fruits—of these failed marriages. Again, you will be shocked by the far-reaching implications of the telling statistics below, describing the United States, and reflecting the disintegrating fabric of what is considered the most powerful nation in the world:

- 75% of children of divorced couples also end up going through divorce.

- The school dropout rate among children from divorced families is twice that of children from intact families.

- Among teenage and adult females, parental divorce is linked to daughters’ lower self-esteem, earlier sexual activity, greater delinquency, and difficulty establishing fulfilling, lasting adult heterosexual relationships. Yet, their parents’ divorce usually occurred years before any difficulties were observed.

- 50% of children today will spend at least part of their childhood in single-parent homes.

- In 2000, 33% of babies were born to unmarried women, compared to only 3.8% in 1940. (More than 1/3 of children never experience a married home!)

- The high divorce rate directly affects one million children *every year*.

- In a recent survey, 62% of men agreed that “while it may not be ideal, it’s okay for an adult woman to have a child on her own if she has not found the right man to marry.”

■ Studies show that children from broken families are twice as likely to have emotional and physical health problems. Again, these are also more likely to suffer from low self-esteem, with this leading to difficulties in friendships.

Many children today are victims of their *parents'* ignorance of the correct way to date and court. If their parents had only taken the time to study God's principles on the subject, these children would not suffer in the way that they do—both during childhood and later in their own unhappy marriages.

Will *your* children, or future children, be statistics? Will *they* suffer in uncounted ways? Will you wait until you *experience* all the wrong effects of improperly dating, courting and preparing for marriage before addressing the gaping wounds you and your children will experience? Or will you deal with the cause *now*—*before* it is too late?

Other Shocking Statistics

Let's return to the subject of *unmarried* couples who live together. Over half of all first marriages today are *preceded* by cohabitation, compared to virtually none early in the twentieth century, just 100 years ago.

Young adults now so often postpone marriage until their late 20s to early 30s. While most men and women are choosing to establish themselves in jobs and careers before marriage (which can be good), they also most often spend a long period unmarried but sexually active. This newer phenomenon has been described as “sex without strings, relationships without rings.”

Yet, looking at destroyed marriages, wounded children and broken families does not paint the full picture of the effects of wrong dating habits today. Sadly, dating today directly *leads*—almost universally—to premarital sex. “Leads to” is probably not even the right term, because “dates” today often involve sex *on* the first date! Actually, more often than not, sex is the *expected* norm as part of the first date, and most of the “dates” that follow. Millions do this.

So many, blinded by pure lust, are committing fornication as a veritable way of life! Surrounded by illicit sex on every side, and often guided solely by their hormones—and what the dating partner almost certainly EXPECTS—rather than by what is right, couples routinely commit every kind of sexual sin imaginable. And many do this without the slightest pang of conscience giving them pause. Within minutes, often induced by a variety of drugs, alcohol and an unwholesome environ-

ment, young people unconsciously reject the possibility of a healthy, fulfilling, God-ordained and designed wonderful relationship of husband and wife. Instead, they choose to dive into mindless, instant gratification, giving little or no consideration for the devastating long-term effects they will surely experience.

One shocking previous statistic brings this trend to the forefront: One-third of all children in the United States today are born out of wedlock! Think what this means! One out of every three children now begins life without a proper family and lacking the environment that the Almighty Creator designed and intended.

The Downward Spiral

Breaking this down, we can begin to understand the compounding trouble afflicting most families today. What happens to all those in our generation who have lost even the most basic knowledge of how to have a happy, abundant marriage? What will happen another generation from now? What will happen to today's children's children?

While statistics reveal that teenagers from intact families are less likely to be sexually active, adolescents from broken families are twice as likely to have children out of wedlock. Also, as mentioned, 75 percent of children who have suffered through their parents' divorce will experience it themselves. In other words, the choices people make now regarding dating and courtship may well lead to divorce, which, in turn, could destroy the marriages of their children, and their children's children, in an endless and worsening cycle. The effects of dating habits *yesterday* have caused horrible conditions in countless lives *today*, and the trend can only grow worse for greater numbers *tomorrow*!

Relationship destruction spreads like an infection, like a cancer, making it easier for others to follow bad examples and take the easy way out themselves. The tragic end result is that divorce and ruined lives breed *more* divorce and *more* ruined lives. On the present path, this worsening trend would continue until the marriage institution and the entire concept of traditional families are irreversibly destroyed—except that God will soon intervene in the affairs of mankind and cut short the downward spiral before such extinction is permitted to happen!

Failed Marriages—So Unnecessary

Vast numbers of marriages have needlessly failed. This has been because couples were not taught *in advance* how to carefully select someone who

could be a *real* companion—and a truly *compatible* partner—for life. Divorce resulted simply because there never should have been a marriage in the first place. Of course, many other marriages fail because couples who could have otherwise succeeded simply did not know HOW to make their marriage work—a very different problem, and one largely outside the parameters of this book. But no marriage can reach its full and wonderful potential, and could possibly even fail altogether, if singles either do not know WHAT to look for in a prospective mate, or even that they *should* be thoroughly examining those whom they are dating seriously.

When most people carefully look at the effects we have discussed, they will admit that they are real—and that something is terribly wrong! Tragically, these same people often remain *unwilling* to believe that all these *bad* effects could have resulted from *wrong* causes! Will YOU examine these causes? Will YOU come to understand and accept the principles of proper dating, courtship and engagement?

Before these things can be discussed—and we will do this in great detail in later chapters—we must carefully lay the all-important foundation, so crucial to truly comprehend all that you will only then be prepared to learn.

A FATAL MIXTURE

Today's dating practices are almost entirely wrong. However, before we can understand *how* they are wrong, we must ask *why* this confused state of affairs. Why are so many people unable to correctly date, court, and reap the benefits of a happy marriage and family life? To fully grasp why the masses do not follow sound principles of dating and courtship, we must learn the underpinnings of society as a whole. The BIG PICTURE must be examined.

To do this, we must go back to the beginning.

From the Beginning

Almost 6,000 years ago, the first man and woman were created. These two—Adam and Eve—were history's very first husband and wife, and lived in the Garden of Eden. As Chief Designer of marriage, God also explained this relationship to them, and the laws that govern it. He called it "very good."

Touching on the high points, a summary of this account is found in the earliest chapters of Genesis. What is clear is that God taught this first couple His Way—the way that would bring peace, supreme happiness, abundance, prosperity and all the good things of life.

Yet, because of His infinite Purpose, God created these first human beings as free moral agents. Adam and Eve had the power to choose. God did not *force* His way of life on them, but rather taught them the right way, leaving the choice to them as to what they would do.

Genesis 3 records what happened in the garden with Satan tempting Eve. This account demonstrates the devil's cunning subtlety as he tried to discredit God and appeal to Adam and Eve's vanity.

There were two special trees in the garden. First was the "Tree of Life," representing God's Way. Adam and Eve were instructed to eat as much from this tree as they wished. There was also the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." This first married couple was expressly forbidden to eat of the fruit of *that* tree. God told them that in the day they ate *that* fruit, they would "surely die."

Understand. God—and God alone—decides *what* sin is. Man was not given the authority to decide what sin is but rather only *whether* he would sin.

Adam and Eve had a clear choice! Through Satan's subtlety and their rebellion, they rejected God and took of the forbidden fruit. They rejected God's perfect Law and rule—His GOVERNMENT over all creation—and were taken captive by Satan and his way of sin. Because of sin, they no longer had access to God's blessings, guidance, protection or the free gift of His Holy Spirit, which they could have acquired by eating of the Tree of Life.

From that day forward, mankind has been cut off from God, having *rejected* God and His ways (Isa. 59:1-2). THIS is why mankind *does not*—CANNOT—*know* the truth about the purpose behind right dating and the purpose behind right courtship. He has chosen his own path—a mixture of good and evil—and the fruit of his choice is literally a "mix," with some marriages working somewhat, others constantly riding the rollercoaster of extremes, and many not working at all. Therefore, all but a select few couples lack the supreme happiness and joy that God intended for EVERY MARRIAGE!

Any mixture of good and evil is always fatal! If one mixes even a small amount of arsenic or cyanide into a cake, it will still just as surely kill those who eat it. However, a truer analogy here is that humanity is ingesting a veritable "ricin" (a poison 6,000 times more deadly than cyanide) of wrong thinking!

The Real Author of Modern Dating

Most assume that this world belongs to and is guided by God—that civilization as a whole is being supervised by Him. Is this true? We must ask, who is the *real* ruler over this world? Once this has been established, we will have identified the *true author* behind today's dating practices. In other words, to coin a phrase from a well-known song of several

decades ago, we should ask, "Who wrote the book of love" so popularly followed by this world's masses?

It is critical to understand Satan's role! The serpent deceived Eve, starting mankind down the path away from God and His Law. By choosing the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve handed themselves and their descendants to the serpent's thinking.

Open your Bible and read these plain verses. The devil is the "god of this world" and he has "blinded the minds" of everyone in it (II Cor. 4:4). Satan is also called the "prince of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) and "prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2). The apostle John added that Satan "deceives the *whole* world" (Rev. 12:9). Astonishing, but true—and most will never accept this statement, or that it could apply to themselves, much less that it could have any bearing on their dating practices.

Isaiah 14:12-15 tells a remarkable story containing many clues about where Lucifer (who later became Satan) once resided, what he did, and what happened to him: "How are you fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How are you cut down to the ground, which did weaken the nations! For you have said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds: I will be like the Most High. Yet you shall be brought down to hell [the "grave" – verses 9 and 11], to the sides of the pit."

Ezekiel 28:12-17 parallels and reinforces Isaiah 14 and is equally important to understand. This account describes one whom some scholars claim was a human "king of Tyrus." However, careful reading shows this is impossible—and even ridiculous.

This passage speaks of one who "seals up the sum, full of wisdom, perfect in beauty," who had also "been in Eden the garden of God." No human has ever been perfect, and the devil was the serpent who beguiled Eve in the Garden. Verse 13 states, "you were created." Satan is a *created* being. Verse 14 calls him "the cherub that covers." (Exodus 25:17-20 describes the two remaining faithful "cherubs that cover[ed]" God's throne in the Old Testament tabernacle. Their wings covered the "mercy seat.") No earthly king could ever fit this description.

The latter part of Ezekiel 28:14 states that this "king" was "in the mountain of God" and "walked...in the midst of the stones of fire." This describes the area around God's throne. Verse 15 says, "Iniquity [lawlessness] was found in you" and verse 16 refers to it as "sin."

Verse 16 also describes this cherub as having been "cast...out of" heaven. God also said He would "destroy" (Hebrew: *expel*) Lucifer from

heaven. Verse 17 reveals that his “heart was lifted up because of [his] beauty” and that his wisdom was “corrupted...by reason of [his] brightness.” The verse ends with God “casting him down to the ground,” where the kings of the earth would “behold him.”

Lucifer was a brilliant being, an “angel of light”—as are “his ministers” today (II Cor. 11:13-15). The word Lucifer actually means “the light bringer.” This brilliant, wise, perfect being once brought great light to all that were around him. But he rebelled and sinned—thus becoming the “prince of darkness.” His rebellion turned him into a twisted, perverted, fallen angel. While of great intelligence, he has literally become insane—a being who no longer knows right from wrong!

Yet he is still the one in charge of—in CONTROL of—this world!

A lengthy passage in the New Testament offers more insight to the devil’s authority and influence over the nations of earth. Matthew 4 contains the well-known account of Christ’s confrontation with the devil after fasting forty days. The devil repeatedly tempted Christ by twisting scripture (one of his favorite devices). At one point, “the devil took Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and said unto Him, All these things will I give You, if You will fall down and worship me” (vs. 8-9). In a moment, we will see that this stunning event reveals more than meets the eye! Notice that Christ rebuked Satan (vs. 10) and quoted Deuteronomy 6:13: “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve.” At this point, the temptation ended and the devil departed.

Also notice! At no point did Christ say, “These kingdoms are NOT yours to give” or “Who do you think you are, trying to offer Me what is already Mine (God’s)?” Christ said no such thing. Why? Because He knew that the kingdoms (governments) of this world *are* the devil’s kingdoms. Christ clearly knew that they *were* Satan’s to give. Therefore, He rejected the terms for receiving them from the one—Satan—who had the authority to offer them.

Stop and consider the implications here. This world’s nations and governments, with “all the glory of them,” are still under the control of the “god of this world”—the “prince of this world.” This is the PLAIN TRUTH from your Bible! This world, with its ways and systems, is under the control of the devil! And this has a direct influence on—an overarching connection to—why the world cannot, of itself, ever come to the RIGHT KNOWLEDGE about dating, courtship and marriage—and why this world’s religions and educational institutions have failed so abysmally in teaching these things.

Complete Deception

As mentioned, Satan “deceives the whole world” (Rev. 12:9). That’s right—“the WHOLE world.” This is a staggering statement—but there it is in your Bible.

How can the devil deceive over six billion people? Verse 9 concludes, “He was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.” Notice that it says, “his angels.” These beings are referred to as demons. They assist Satan in his work of mass deception.

And if Satan has deceived the *entire* world, then it is not God’s world. It has to be one or the other! Since the whole world is deceived—and since “the WHOLE WORLD lies in wickedness” (I John 5:19)—it becomes clear *why* it is cut off from God. Deceived people practice lives filled with sin. (Recall Isaiah 59:1-2.) For our purposes here, continue to view these passages in relation to the process of how people are influenced to date, court and select marriage partners.

No one enjoys being told that they are deceived, and no one enjoys hearing that they are ignorant of God’s Purpose. These statements wound human pride, but not as much as remaining in deception wounds those who permit this.

If one cannot accept Revelation 12:9 as coming directly from the mind of God, any hope of breaking free of this awful deception will be lost! Such people will have *chosen* to remain under their captor for the remainder of the age. (If you doubt the Bible as the inspired Word of God, read our free booklet *BIBLE AUTHORITY...can it be proven?* and take the time to prove its authority to yourself. This Book is the most misrepresented, misinterpreted, misunderstood book of all time. Yet, it can be PROVEN to be the plain Word of God!)

Prince of the Power of the Air

Now consider the following vital scripture. Ephesians 2:2 speaks of the devil when it says, “...according to the course of this world, according to the PRINCE of the power of the air, the SPIRIT that now works in the children of disobedience.”

This is a fascinating passage, with the thought continuing at the end of verse 3. The apostle Paul tells the Ephesian brethren that at one time, they “were by nature the children of wrath.” Who are the “children of wrath”—also called the “children of disobedience” in Ephesians 5:6? How do they relate to the phrase, “prince of the power of the air”?

Again notice Ephesians 2:2. It says that Satan’s “spirit...works in the children of disobedience.” Did you see that? He has “power” to use the “air” to broadcast, through his spirit, an attitude of disobedience! He sends moods, feelings, attitudes and pulls of the flesh into people’s minds, and this broadcast “works” within people’s minds and thinking. This “air power” gives the devil tremendous INFLUENCE, allowing him to send thoughts of confusion, deceit, anger, pride, hate, foolishness, vanity, jealousy, lust, greed, envy, rebellion and much more directly into people’s thinking!

Let’s continue examining the devil’s influence through the use of an analogy. In a manner of speaking, Satan owns the largest radio station on earth, broadcasting 24 hours a day, reaching and deceiving the ENTIRE WORLD!

Are you beginning to see from *where* the preoccupation with merely dating for sex comes—why so many singles seem to have so little else on their minds?

At this point, some vital understanding is necessary before continuing. A Christian obeys God, through His Law. Paul recorded that God has a SPIRITUAL law (Rom. 7:14). Christians keep it. When they do, it “keeps them,” so to speak. But when people break God’s Law, similarly, it “breaks them”!

In Acts 5:32, Peter referred to “the Holy Spirit, [which] God has given to them that OBEY HIM.” Take time to turn to this verse and read it carefully. True Christians understand and practice—FULFILL—its meaning. God’s Holy Spirit is given upon repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38). This Spirit helps Christians obey the Ten Commandments!

A Sexless Being

There is a central aspect of Satan that has a direct bearing on dating and courtship.

Consider the design of all angels. The Bible explains that these beings do exist and that they are on a higher plane than men. God created man a “little lower than the angels” (Psa. 8:5).

Notice how Jesus spoke of how the future Sons of God will have a certain parallel to angels: “...they neither marry, nor are given in marriage...as the angels of God in heaven” (Matt. 22:30). Although angels invariably manifest themselves as men, they are neither male nor female, and are therefore without sex. The devil—a fallen *angel*—is also SEXLESS. He has no ability to reproduce himself and is completely unable to experience the marriage and family relationship, including

sexual relations, made available to human beings! He resents its great purpose and potential, offering men a “Son of God” status that he can never receive. He resents the marriage institution. It is therefore in his interest to twist and pervert the institutions of marriage and the family. This includes inspiring the growing acceptance of alternative unions and “marriages.”

In contrast, God has given human beings the marvelous ability to reproduce. In the correct atmosphere of a wholesome family, this brings unparalleled joy and happiness. And, as parents rear their children correctly, those children will grow up to be wonderful parents themselves.

Grasp this all-important truth. Satan can *never* experience the wonderful blessings that God has given to mankind. Hence, the catastrophic mess the family has become through his influence. Recall the awful statistics listed in Chapter One.

Brilliant in intelligence, Satan understands the law of CAUSE and EFFECT. He knows that to ultimately defeat the fulfillment of happy marriages and families—and to destroy the values of children and teens before they reach the age of marriage—he must begin at the cause. One way he does this is by attacking the FOUNDATION—right dating and courtship!

Today’s Society

For 6,000 years, the devil has been relentless in guiding mankind off track. All that you see around you today—your community, your country and every institution within them—have faulty foundations.

You must come to accept that this is not God’s world—that He is not the author of its governments, religions, cultures, education systems, family values, and “alternative lifestyles,” practiced by ever-increasing numbers. These are all humanly-devised institutions and ideas, created and developed by men under the sway of the devil. While some of these things are not completely evil, they are, at best, the mixture derived from the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

Take a hard look at the world around you. Search your local newspaper. Visit the magazine section of any large bookstore. Scan through television channels. At best, most of what you will see is semi-lewd, and filled with an emphasis on physical beauty, excess, grossness of culture and driven by lust. These are the messages—and influences—that are competing for your attention, and the attention of young people moving toward the dating age. Recognizing them sets the stage for understanding their effect on the modern dating culture.

Further, the western world is drowning in communication devices such as mobile phones, pagers, handheld computers, e-mails—possessed by people who must be instantly, and continuously, linked to each other for fear of being “out of the loop” for even a moment.

Then there are those who, wanting to rebel against mainstream society, choose to wear “character” clothing outfits to “express themselves.” Today, large numbers of middle and upper class teens dress as though they are no more than hardened urban street thugs. It is as though they want to reflect a culture that is trapped in an endless cycle of poverty, violence and hopelessness.

Some who are “depressed” about growing up in a two-parent, middle-class family dress in black “Goth” styles, also wearing black and white makeup and black lipstick in the most garish fashion. Others fill their lives with endless parties, including parties *after* the parties, all the while pouring a virtual pharmacy of drugs—often on top of alcohol—into their systems. Seeing no hope or purpose in their lives, large and growing numbers live to “get high,” refusing to face the sober realities of life. Needless to say, the large majority of singles are left completely unprepared to choose lifelong mates or to understand what such relationships mean if they found one.

But let’s continue. A visit to virtually any independent music store reveals another subculture of the modern world: A generation of youth full of pride and vanity, yet “pure in their own eyes” (Prov. 30:12). With hairstyles resembling everything from spikes to “lions’ manes,” to unkempt, unwashed and undesirable, today’s teens and twenty-somethings collect the latest “underground record.” Such lyrics set to noise could be rock, rap, punk or hip-hop, but to a young person, it does not matter—as long as his peers approve. So many idolize whatever is the most popular band to unleash crashing wails labeled as “music”—but more accurately described as howling shrieks emitted by people who must be in some kind of severe pain.

Also observe any music-award television show. Notice how so many in the audience wear tight-fitting, virtually painted-on outfits that are flashy and attention-getting. They reveal parts of the body that were meant to be concealed, and often make those wearing them look like aliens from outer space! Yet, almost an entire generation has come to consider such garish dress and outlandish behavior to be normal—even chic and fashionable.

Next, notice the way people walk, especially in the inner cities. They swagger as if to say, “Don’t mess with me.” Full of haughtiness, arrogance and a kind of bravado, they are often covered in tattoos, body

piercings and outrageous hairstyles. Worse, however, is that endless television commercials explicitly *promote* this culture by a daily bombardment of an entire generation of young people who are watching—and copying what they see. The almost endless—and outrageously crude—sexually suggestive beer commercials alone tell you this.

Then listen to how people speak. Even those with master’s degrees curse and use slang words as though they have little more than a third-grade education. It is as though some have chosen to “dumb down” themselves to be accepted by people whose opinions never used to count. Others love to copy those who cannot form complete sentences without cursing or using God’s name in vain.

Take a look at mainstream entertainment and media. So much of this is little more than what has been described as “what’s hot, what’s new, what’s next”—the latest hit movie or sitcom. Today, entertainment means “how far can we go?” in pushing (or blurring) even past *human* boundaries of decency and good taste. Nevermind what *God* thinks, or what *His* standards are. Most want more extramarital sex, more violence, more blurring of the lines between good and evil, less morality, less common sense, less decency, and the promotion of situational ethics instead of having to choose between right and wrong.

Desperate to show how sophisticated their tastes are, many embrace the world of independent films—a subculture of absolute sickness and depravity passing itself off as intellectually fashionable.

The music, dance, dress, language, books, plays, conduct and other trends that are underground and cutting edge today invariably become mainstream tomorrow. This drives the underground scene to be even more extreme, knowing that today’s *extreme* is tomorrow’s MAINSTREAM!

Across college campuses, and in high school and middle school hallways, the air is charged with sexual tension, mixed with peer pressure and bad judgment. Using a “band-aid” approach, adults turn a blind eye to the misadventures of the next generation, which is sexually active, jaded and always ready to move on to the next perversion, generally translated as the latest “trend.” Sadly, many are in awe of homosexuality and lesbianism, thinking these to be “cool,” and as something to experiment with. More and more early-teenage girls are adopting the trend of having a casual lesbian relationship with a school friend on the side, while simultaneously—and *actively*—remaining heterosexual.

So many have gone from periodically *visiting* the sewer to *living* in a cesspool—and the cycle of perversion will continue and grow worse,

until this world mirrors the times of Noah and of Sodom and Gomorrah (Luke 17:26-30).

This is the world YOU live in—and it is trying to instill in you *every* wrong principle of dating and courtship. But Satan’s world is not the only roadblock to a happy marriage.

Human Nature—Whose Nature?

Recall Satan’s influence. Before the invention of radio, his power—as arch broadcaster and prince of the power of the air—could not be as easily understood. Now you can comprehend!

We can now better understand the “children of *disobedience*.” Like Christians, these people are also inspired and guided by a spirit—but that of the god of this world. Satan broadcasts a *spirit of disobedience*—through attitudes—into humanity. Ephesians 2:2 is plain. But a deceived world knows nothing of this understanding!

If you listen to radio, you usually select a station that plays what you desire to hear. Of course, today, people more often “surf” television stations. Eventually, something interests them, and they stop at a station of their choosing. In every case, stations are selected by *choice*. People have control over what they hear or watch.

It is not the same with Satan’s “radio station.” No one *decides* to tune into the devil’s broadcast. And no one ever sets out to be deceived! But every human being on earth is automatically tuned to Satan’s wavelength! His wickedness, hostility, rebellion, deceit and selfishness are continuously “on the air.” Though you cannot see it, anymore than you can see radio waves or television signals, the air around you is literally charged and “crackles” with the power and energy of Satan’s broadcast.

Therefore, it is really *Satan’s* nature that is being labeled as *human* nature. In fact, once injected into people, the devil’s nature becomes *natural* to them. It becomes *their* nature—now *human* nature!

It is critical to realize how this spirit works in people. It is the single greatest key to understanding exactly how Satan can deceive and manipulate almost six and one-half billion people.

Human Nature

Although we now understand that human nature comes from Satan, we must also understand that it is not *inherited*—but rather *acquired*! A parent who loses an eye, hand or leg does not produce children having only

one eye, one hand or one leg. When God used one of Adam’s ribs to create Eve, it did not mean that all men ever after would lack one rib. Also, the Bible refers to their son Abel as “*righteous* Abel.” Their disobedience did not prevent his obedience.

Adam and Eve were adult “babies.” Just like babies born today, they were pure at the time of their creation (“birth”) but were quickly exposed to a “broadcast” they were not able to resist. They were created on the sixth day of the week (Friday), rested on the Sabbath (Saturday), and were seduced by Satan (Gen. 3:1-6) probably the next day (Sunday)—at the age of *two days old*! Thus, Satan was waiting for “baby” Adam and “baby” Eve. No two-day-old child can discern right from wrong. Like so many young people, Adam and Eve just *thought* they were grown-up enough to make their own decisions.

Think of it this way. Again, like most children today, Adam and Eve chose not to listen to their Parent, God. Instead, they believed Satan’s lie that they would not “surely die.” Once again, in so doing, they rejected the rule of the government of God in their lives. If Adam had obeyed God’s instruction, he would have qualified to replace Satan and *restore* the GOVERNMENT OF GOD on earth.

Notice this New Testament evidence of how human nature is acquired, not inherited: “But I fear, lest by any means, *as the serpent beguiled Eve* through his SUBTLETY, *so your minds should be corrupted...*” (II Cor. 11:2-3).

Paul was writing to people who lived 4,000 years after Adam and Eve. He recognized that the devil was still alive and active. The Corinthians were adults capable of being deceived (“beguiled”) in the same way as Eve, and Paul warned them to be on guard that they not return to following the ways of human nature. Just as Eve’s nature was not evil and hostile to God (see Romans 8:7) *before* she was deceived, neither was the nature of the Corinthians *after* they were converted.

Once called and converted, having received the Spirit of God, one has put off the old human nature of his past life. Paul also added in Ephesians 2:3, “Among whom also we all had our conversation [conduct] in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were BY NATURE the children of wrath, even as others.” These statements follow, and are actually part of, the passage identifying Satan as the “prince of the power of the air.”

Think for a moment. It would be grossly unfair of God to inject newborn babies with human nature and place them under His “wrath.” Do you see this point? Human nature is *acquired*—and THIS puts people under the wrath of God!

The following is the same scripture from the Phillips translation of the New Testament (1962 edition). It better describes how all people have ACQUIRED human nature from Satan—and the influence driving all modern social practices. The parenthetical portion is part of this translation: “You drifted along on the stream of this world’s ideas of living, and obeyed its UNSEEN RULER [Satan] (who is still operating in those who do not respond to the truth of God)...We all lived like that in the past, and followed the *impulses* and *imaginings* of our EVIL NATURE...like everyone else.”

How true! Most people simply drift along in life following whatever impulses and ideas (“imaginings”) strike them from moment to moment. All of Ephesians 1 is Paul’s accounting to those brethren of their calling into God’s way of life. Take time to read it, possibly using the Moffatt translation of the Bible. The Ephesians had come out of the course of this world and were no longer “by nature” the children of wrath and were no longer yielding to the “prince of the power of the air.” They had begun to “dis-acquire” human nature by yielding to God instead of the impulses, pulls and temptations of Satan’s wavelength.

With the understanding of Satan the devil, society and self, one must realize the great danger we all face. Step back and recognize the pulls that have affected you throughout your life.

Realize that you live in a world completely devoid of the right way and therefore unable to produce happy, successful marriages. Realize that you have absorbed many ideals—and perspectives—of the world around you. These have *conditioned* you to assume the characteristics and values—the nature—of society. But, like the Corinthians, you can also dis-acquire the world’s values.

Combining Satan and society with human nature creates a dangerous, explosive situation, especially in regard to dating. For those with eyes to see, the world has proven that it does not know the correct way—God’s Way.

Are you now willing to examine the world’s wrong form of dating from God’s perspective?

LUST AND INFATUATION— THE WRONG FOUNDATION

Satan has counterfeited virtually all aspects of God’s Way. Think for a moment. Everyone understands the crime of forgery. A forger’s goal is to create a *counterfeit* that is indistinguishable from the original. For example, if one is going to make twenty-dollar bills, it would make no sense to produce forgeries that will not be accepted.

Consider. If you want to counterfeit Christianity, you would not offer Buddhism. You offer something that looks, feels and seems to be exactly like Christianity.

The Bible describes three forms of *real*—TRUE—love. To confuse and trap the unsuspecting, the devil has produced counterfeits to these, which, among other things, form a *faulty* foundation for dating today.

Let’s now closely examine one of the biggest counterfeits produced by the greatest “forger” of all time.

True Love?

Various definitions and misconceptions about love abound. Some feel that it is devotion, others feel that it is sexual passion, and still others feel that it is affection. Then there are those who feel that it is adoration, or respect, or caring, or admiration or even warm feelings. Still others see it in poetic terms—or as a mystery that cannot be explained.

So then, what *is* love?

By looking at so many bad marriage results—separation, divorce, and the endless cycle of cohabitation for those who at one point *thought*

they were “in love”—it is evident that the world simply does not understand *true* love. The problem is that so many initially *felt* that a relationship was right, when it was not. So many thought that they were in love, only to find out that their feelings were little more than “easy come, easy go.”

Society often bases its values on the opinions of the least-qualified voices—those of the entertainment industry. One such “voice,” Madonna, a famous pop icon, said, “The most important thing is to have love...that happens with a marriage, without a marriage, with a single parent, whatever.” What does this statement really say—other than give license for people to define love any way they wish?

Then there are those who want to hear what the “experts” say. Here is one example:

“What is love? Is it the same as lust? Tough question. There are many different kinds of love—romantic, parental, platonic. Mostly, love is feeling emotionally attached to another person. You want to be close to that person. You want to share things with her, understand her and have her understand you. You want to care for her and have her care for you. Romantic love usually comes with a strong physical or sexual attraction. You want to hold, touch and sometimes become sexual with that person.

“Lust is physical attraction. Lust can sometimes turn into love. Often, when two people are first getting together, they have a really strong physical connection. When two people fall in love, lust may fade over time but it is replaced with a deeper, more intimate emotional connection.

“When you’re falling in love, it’s often tough to tell the difference between the two. Usually, time tells.”

This definition certainly sounds nice. Everyone wants to be close, to share, to understand and to care for each other. All of this appeals to the listener or reader because many of these *are* good qualities. But the “experts” remain terribly confused about the exact definition of TRUE LOVE. As a result, they offer opinions that are a mix of right and wrong.

We see these explanations of “love” throughout society. For example, look at the scenarios in so-called “romantic comedies.” Many feel warm and happy when seeing typical “romance” between couples. No matter how skewed the Hollywood picture may be, it makes people dream of true love when the leading man tells the leading lady that he wants to be “close to her, understand her and care for her.”

This idea of love is a classic mixture of good and evil. Remember, Adam and Eve chose the knowledge of good *and* evil. The kind of good

described in this way of life, however, is primarily *selfish*. People generally do good things because they expect something in return. In short, they give to get.

God’s way of life is different—it is selfless!

Recognize that Satan’s goal is to make his counterfeit *seem* right—FEEL right—seem and feel *natural*. However, close scrutiny will expose the counterfeit—the common misconceptions—and lead you to understand *true* love.

Infatuation

Many speak of finding “true love.” Though opinions abound as to what it is, virtually all people would say that they are seeking this. Sadly, many spend entire lifetimes looking for true love but never finding it. You have probably heard the question, “Is it love or infatuation?” The fact is that most do not understand the difference. Why? Society is missing the vital DIMENSION of knowledge that would make it clear to them.

Do you understand what true love is? Or, are you willing to accept the fact that the world and your own nature have *conditioned* you to only *think* you do? Remember that what *seems* right can lead to disaster (Prov. 14:12; 16:25)!

The difference between TRUE LOVE and INFATUATION requires honest examination.

Let’s begin with the definition of *infatuation*. It comes from the French word “*fatuus*,” meaning fool—or foolishness! *Webster’s Dictionary* defines it as: “To make foolish; to affect with folly; to weaken the intellectual power of; or to deprive of sound judgment.”

Therefore, in one sense, people who have become infatuated might be considered fools! However, few would admit that the choices they make are foolish, and fewer still would ever consider themselves to be fools.

Why? Because they ignore the *signs* of infatuation. Actually, they do not even *see* them, because they are caught up in the *feelings* of infatuation, which usually begins with a “crush” or “puppy love.” Tragically, parents often promote this, thinking childhood boyfriends and girlfriends are cute, and encourage pairing off, starting with young children. This is dangerous thinking, often ingrained into children beginning as early as *kindergarten*!

Infatuation can involve *very* powerful attraction. Never underestimate it. While it stirs up the emotions and feelings that make couples

think they are in love, infatuation is nothing more than a starry-eyed experience—a romantic daydream. But, at this point in a relationship, it is nearly impossible to convince anyone of this. Reason and logic seem to magically disappear as people feel they are going through a wonderful, even divine, experience that will last forever.

Recognizing Infatuation

All of this understanding is of no use if one cannot recognize the *beginnings* of infatuation. How then can you know if you are becoming infatuated?

The biggest symptom of infatuation is an almost complete reliance on emotions—to the exclusion of almost everything else about a person—allowing these emotions to first lead, and then dictate, your actions. In the earliest stages of a relationship, ask yourself the following questions:

What is your *major attraction* to the person? If infatuated, your main interest will almost certainly be physical appearance. On the other hand, if you truly love the person, you will—among many other things—be interested in his or her total personality, and this will come to include the person’s character.

How did the attraction *start*? While infatuation almost invariably happens quickly, love always develops more slowly. “Love at first sight” does not exist, and should more properly be called “*lust* (or infatuation) at first sight.” Anything of worth takes time. But, when it comes to one’s own life, most fail to see—let alone apply—this simple truth.

How *consistent* is your interest? Infatuation is like a rollercoaster ride—rising and falling, often on trivial events, fluctuating between high peaks of certainty and deep valleys of doubt. With love, one’s interest becomes deeper and more consistent with time. Infatuation involves feelings, comparable to hot and extreme, while love involves character, reflecting balance and temperance.

How do you *see* the other person? The infatuated live in a one-person world. Their attraction is like the earth’s attraction to the sun—their whole universe revolves around the other person. Seemingly nothing else matters, and both are completely wrapped in each other’s orbit—and this almost invariably turns to being wrapped around each other’s *bodies*.

During *this* stage of infatuation, many become blind, rendered almost completely unable to see anything wrong with the other person. While danger signals might be everywhere, the infatuated person does not recognize them—*any* of them. He tends to see what he *wants* to see

rather than what he *NEEDS* to see. (Consider this: Studies reveal that no more than two percent of people counseling for marriage will even *consider* that they may be *INCOMPATIBLE*. Even fewer heed counsel urging them to actually break it off.)

Now ask: How do others see *you*? If you are infatuated, your parents and most of your friends will most likely *not* approve of your relationship. Their objectivity can allow them to see a range of potential difficulties, when the infatuated person often cannot see even the most *obvious* problems.

The Role of Emotions

Let’s repeat for emphasis: Emotion is the bedrock of infatuation. Do not misunderstand—emotions can be good, even wonderful, and certainly perfectly normal in the right circumstances. However, the emotionally *immature* are incapable of controlling emotions and, as a result, quickly become infatuated.

Obviously, *physical* maturity takes time—from birth to adolescence to adulthood. Also—and most generally recognize this—coming to *mental* maturity is a process, similarly involving much time. Yet, few realize the importance of *emotional* maturity.

Most think that “love” is an emotion that takes over a person. This is one reason why the counterfeit feels and looks so much like true love. This kind of “love” never lasts, because it is built on an improper foundation! This is not to say that an emotionally mature person *suppresses* emotions, but rather that he properly exercises them. As with anything of value, emotional maturity takes time and effort to acquire.

Let’s look realistically at what happens with such emotional “love.” Too often, it begins with a high that dominates and controls a person. Remember, however real they seem, these feelings will not last! If couples base their marriage on these emotions, the relationship will quickly crack under stress.

Many never come to recognize that marriage is much more *MENTAL* than emotional. As one well-known author has stated, people too often “think” with their hormones and sex organs instead of sound logic! Marriage (and dating) is a mental decision, something that should be objectively thought through over a period of time. But there is also a *SPIRITUAL DIMENSION* to those who seek God’s guidance in finding a suitable lifelong mate.

The real proof of emotional maturity is not whether one “falls in love” (becomes infatuated). The *true* test of maturity is how you handle

situations, circumstances and relationships—what you choose to DO about them!

Falling in Love?

Most are familiar with the many clichés surrounding the idea of “falling in love.” Endless songs carry lyrics such as “just can’t help falling in love” or “I get a feeling I just can’t control...falling in love with you, baby.” Many movies depict couples falling in love at first sight, and novels and magazines are filled with this scenario. Even our everyday conversations often include such terms!

This is seen everywhere, and everyone, to a certain degree, accepts it as natural. But the truth is that one cannot “fall” into love! Real love is *not* something that happens by chance. It develops over time, based on the all-important foundation that the Creator has given us.

People do not fall in *love*, but rather they fall in LUST!

Falling in Lust!

Remember that human nature is naturally hostile toward God (recall Romans 8:7). This is because the arch-broadcaster is filled with vanity, jealousy, lust, envy and greed, and he instills these feelings within each human being. His way can be defined simply as the “get” way of life, and lust is a foundational building block of this way. Lust has purely self-ish motives, and is concerned only with fulfilling its own desires and wants.

The advice offered by social programs, such as *Planned Parenthood*, which places little emphasis on abstinence or self-control, but rather only on being careful when one is sexually active, only serves to fuel this self-ish desire. Teens wondering when to have sex have already been told by society (probably many times) to “always do what’s good for *you*—do what will help *you* enjoy *your* life—and fulfill *your* plans for the future.” This translates into “Think only about yourself.”

Here is what Christ inspired John to write: “For all that is in the world, the *lust of the flesh*, and the *lust of the eyes*, and the *pride of life*, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (I John 2:16). John divides all that is in the world into the following THREE CATEGORIES: Lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and pride of life! Pause and think for a moment. The three phrases in this passage, describing the world at large, sum up how so many people typically date, court and, consequently, get married!

One of the most powerful forces behind dating today is little more than the basic sex drive. While God did instill the sexual desire in human beings for a pure and holy purpose, the world, held captive by Satan’s influence, has turned this into lust. Sizing people up for sex has now become a common practice. For decades, “girl watching” and “boy watching” have been national pastimes. Millions routinely lust after men and women to whom they are not married.

Today, God’s most basic commands are routinely broken. Notice: “You have heard that it was said by them of old time, You shall not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already *in his heart*” (Matt. 5:27-28). Throughout society, people are confronted—even BOMBARDED—with the temptation to lust.

Almighty God created sex. In the right setting, it is one of the most wonderful physical experiences that a man and a woman can share. Yet, Satan has twisted this God-designed pleasure, reducing it to a sinful act, practiced almost universally between virtual strangers. He has used sex to preoccupy young minds so that, in time, it destroys character and ruins any potential for a happy, wholesome, lifelong relationship between a husband and wife.

It is easy to understand what John meant by “lust of the eyes.” Today, people would think of this in terms of what is considered “hot” or “sexy.” Many discard their virginity after a night of “clubbing” (hopping from one singles’ bar to another) merely because someone seemed “sexy.”

Lust is deeply entrenched within human nature! Paul wrote, “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and you shall *not* fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that you cannot do the things that you would” (Gal. 5:16-17). This describes the Christian’s everyday battle.

Understand! Those who seek to please God are not to fulfill the lust of the flesh. Yet, millions do this exact thing when dating, and do it almost non-stop. So few use even the most basic *common sense*—which tragically seems to be not very common anymore—but rather follow their hormones into wrong relationships!

A Simple Greek Lesson—*Pornos*

In today’s world, lust is the fuel for sex, and vice-versa, and the right use of sex in a happy marriage has become so perverted that virtually an entire generation no longer knows even the rudiments of right and

wrong. Many simply do not understand that pre-marital sex is harmful—and is SIN—ruining otherwise potentially healthy relationships. Anything and everything goes as teens today practice sexual immorality on a grand scale!

Paul describes more thoroughly what people lust after: “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; *adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like*” (Gal. 5:19-21).

Many seem to understand how terribly destructive *adultery* is to marriages. But what about FORNICATION—a term rarely used anymore, and even more rarely understood? If you challenged someone with “You are committing fornication,” he or she would lampoon and ridicule you as “old-fashioned”—and that you need to “get real and grow up to the higher level of freedom that society has achieved today.”

What then *is* fornication? In the simplest terms, it is sexual relations outside marriage. Looking up the New Testament Greek word for “fornication” reveals an interesting point. This word is *pornos*—and the English word “pornography” is derived from it.

At least on the surface, society generally seems to admit that pornography is lewd and vile, and ruins lives. (Yet, ever-growing millions secretly view it.) But fornication is even more destructive! Incredibly, many now believe that it is *good* for a relationship, even helpful in learning whether a couple is “sexually compatible” before committing to marriage.

This is never the case! God designed sex to be *within* marriage. When sex occurs *outside* marriage, it destroys relationships—and ultimately the individuals involved!

Forms of Dating

There are numerous wrong forms of dating today. In addition, the vast majority of people seeking marriage partners lack quality social organizations and places from which to draw potential partners, as well as recognized social institutions that can *correctly* teach them how to date. Many freely admit that the following popular, trendy forms of dating are not the right solutions—that they do not really work. Yet, singles and teens are left with no choice but to accept what is offered for those “looking for love.” Here are a few methods of choice:

Clubs: Perhaps one of the most common settings for young people today is meeting people through so-called “dance clubs.” This involves

trying to find potential dates—or more often, one-night sex partners—in an atmosphere of loud, pulsating music mixed with drugs and alcohol.

The atmosphere in these establishments causes participants to lose all semblance of self-control. Typically, young women are scantily clad, and it is common and considered perfectly normal for men to grope and fondle their bodies at any time while “dancing.”

The dancing occurring in these settings is little less than an orgy set to music!

Further, the noise is so loud that audible conversations are practically impossible. Could *anyone* in such an environment, filled with alcohol and focused on the thrill of the moment, possibly employ sound reason and logic to make right dating choices? The clear answer is NO! Rather, they are focused only on fulfilling sexual urges and desires!

The entire picture revolves around selfish lust and hoped-for instant gratification!

Astrology: Others “consult the stars” about dating. Lacking *true* knowledge, they seek their “romance forecast.” To do this, they go online to find out if they are truly compatible by taking five-minute quizzes that are supposed to solve all their dating confusion!

Online dating: This exploding trend involves a simple Internet search to select one or more of the many—seemingly endless—dating services that all claim to be able to “help find love.” Those looking for “a date, sex or a relationship” have “found the right place!” These sites profess to “bring passion and excitement to your life.”

The following statistics show that fast-growing numbers are caught up in this kind of dating: The “Personals/Dating” category surpassed both “Business/Investments” and “Entertainment/Lifestyles” on the Internet, and is one of the largest paid-content categories available. Revenue quadrupled from \$72 million in 2001 to \$302 million in 2002—just one year. Some websites see 10,000 registrants *a day!*

Advocates of this type of dating have gone so far as to say that online dating could actually fix what is wrong with marriages today. Astonishing!

This trend has turned dating into a “science” in which the person fills out a questionnaire often including hundreds of different questions. After a close analysis, couples are matched.

As a direct consequence, however, *sex crimes* have also dramatically increased. In Japan alone, sex crimes due to online dating nearly doubled between 2001 and 2002.

Needless to say, newspapers are filled with accounts reflecting the danger of meeting strangers through the anonymity of a computer or the *classified ads*, a similar type of dating.

Speed dating: Another recent trend is the practice of “speed dating.” This is billed as being able to “put an end to your lonely nights” because, apparently, it is seen as a more *efficient* way to increase your chances of finding “love.”

Simply described, it involves a group of people who sign up for the “speed event.” All gather and spend five minutes with each person in a continuing rotation. At the end of the evening, they choose whom they would like to date.

Only *five minutes* is the basis for their decision! Physical appearance obviously turns into the main consideration—and many are now beginning entire relationships like this. The rat race that continues all around us has even taken over dating, with singles now able to be “efficient,” rather than “wasting time” on getting to know one another through a gradual process.

A November 2003 *USA Today* cover story described the enormous shift in the way young adults date and select mates. Introduced with the statement “Courtship is out as today’s cupids shift to ‘speed’ dates, online connections and action plans,” the article described in detail the trends we are discussing. Notice:

“When it comes to finding that special someone, [name] waxes analytic: In 16 months, [he] sped through 2,500 three-minute HurryDates, at about \$1.45 a date, not to mention 100 ‘real dates’ that lasted at least the length of a cup of coffee...

“[This man’s] method, though perhaps systematic to the extreme, illustrates what experts are calling the most significant shift in American dating culture since the mid-1960s. Back then, there existed something called courtship, in which couples came together with the help of college mixers, church socials and meddling parents, and were often engaged before their 21st birthdays.

“These days, twenty- and thirty-something singles who spent their post-college years focused on their careers instead of their love lives don’t have such matchmaking resources. Nor do they have the time to look for a mate the old-fashioned way—or wait for one to stumble into their lives.

“So they’re shunning the serendipitous, sweaty-palmed aspects of courtship and embracing efficiency in the form of ‘speed’ dating, on-line dating and 15-step dating action plans.

“Speed-dating events take singles through a series of three- to 10-minute mini-dates, often at bars. At the end of the night, suitors desig-

nate whom they’d like to see again, and if there’s a match, the wooing begins...

“Online personals have all but shed their stigma, evolving from a last resort to, as one Internet dater put it, a first line of defense.”

Obviously, dating in the 21st century has radically changed from just a few years ago—and the concept of courtship has become all but extinct.

Space does not permit the listing of all the wrong forms of dating that have resulted in what we see today. But realize that you have much to UNLEARN! Most of what you have learned and been conditioned to believe about dating is *not* correct! It is founded on wrong feelings of lust and selfishness! Accept that as fact!—and realize that looking to the all-powerful CREATOR for the correct way is the only path to long-term happiness!

ESTABLISHING THE RIGHT FOUNDATION

Every engineer and architect understands the importance of a building's foundation. To construct a huge skyscraper in the middle of a city, experienced engineers would first examine the land, before planning, let alone laying, the foundation. The bigger the structure, the stronger the foundation required to support it. Miscalculation can lead to disaster. Therefore, every precaution is taken to make sure that it is built correctly. Otherwise, an enormous amount of effort and money would be spent in vain.

Why do billions of people seem unable to apply the same principle to their own lives, especially when so much is at stake? Marriage, in a sense, is the second biggest “building” in one’s life (next to salvation), yet few see the importance of laying a RIGHT FOUNDATION—or any foundation—under it. Sadly, no school of marital architecture or engineering is teaching how to do this.

Necessity of a Good Foundation

Jesus was a carpenter. This meant that He understood the importance of carefully laying a right foundation before starting a building’s actual construction. In Luke, using this analogy, He described the man who “...built a house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation *on a rock*: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded *upon a rock*.” He contrasted this with “...he that hears, and does *not*, is like a man that WITHOUT A

FOUNDATION built a house *upon the earth* [Matthew’s account says “sand”]; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great” (6:48-49).

The world does not understand that proper dating and courtship form the rock-solid foundation that every marriage must stand on. Instead, most unconsciously build marriages on little more than emotional and psychological sand! When troubles come into marriages—as they invariably do—failure results because they are improperly anchored. So many couples are unnecessarily swept away by “floods” for which they were never prepared.

How many years are required to build a towering skyscraper? Including clearing the worksite, digging and pouring the foundation alone can often take many months, or even a year. Likewise, it takes much time and effort to build a successful, solid relationship. And this also does involve *first* clearing the “worksite”—*unlearning* all of the wrong knowledge upon which your understanding of selecting a mate is founded.

Most human beings live their lives guided by feelings, and many times by mere momentary impulse. Using their own logic and experience, countless couples do not realize that absolute destruction lies ahead. What “seems right” can lead to the “death” of a marriage (Prov. 14:12).

Another important aspect of this analogy is that the foundation is not often noticeable. When standing amid a neighborhood *full* of houses, foundations are not easily seen. In a city, the huge pillars that go deep in the ground under the skyscrapers are concealed. The same is true of dating, courtship and other areas of our lives. Often, we may not see the foundation, but it is critically important!

In the first stages of a relationship, when one is having a good time, all can seem wonderful. On the *surface*, a relationship founded on lust and infatuation is often hard to distinguish from one based on true biblical principles. Infatuation often comes disguised as true love, and few can—or will—see the difference. Nevertheless, the relationship built on infatuation is almost certain to collapse (and often so will some of the many lives directly connected to it), and usually very quickly, while the one built on true love will not.

Often, statements like, “They were so in love” or “I was there with them the evening they fell in love, and I knew it would be forever,” could be made by friends or family. But all those involved—participants and observers—were blind to the importance of a solid foundation.

Happy marriages do not come about by chance! Success requires much work and patience, and preparation must start *before* beginning

to date. And the foundation of true marital success has several components.

Understanding the True God

There is no book in the Bible titled “How to Date, Court and Marry.” Nor are there specific chapters or verses with the words “date” or “court.” As a result, many professing Christians resort to their own beliefs and feelings on this matter. Yet, there are attributes of God, and very critical elements of His laws and principles, that must be understood to form a proper foundation in order to realize a happy and abundant life.

The world is ignorant of the true God and His laws. This is why so many ask themselves, “Who or what *is* God?” Because God is Spirit, and He must draw individuals to Christ (John 6:44, 65), it is actually *impossible* for humans to know the true God—or to grasp the laws that He put in place, which govern everything, including marriage—without Him calling them and revealing Himself to them.

You must be willing to absolutely **PROVE** the existence of the true God. This book is designed for those who will be able to understand the principles it contains, which are based upon what the God of the Bible teaches.

Scores of passages would be necessary to *fully* understand the true God of the Bible. However, for our purposes here, I John 4:8 states, “God is love.” Because God is also perfect, He has a perfect understanding of what *constitutes* love. Within His Master Plan is a supreme purpose for every human being.

God understood from Creation that it was “not good that the man should be alone.” Therefore, He created a wife for him (Gen. 2:18). Recall that He taught Adam and Eve His Law and explained how, if kept, this would bring wonderful happiness and joy to their lives.

The Give Way

The Bible teaches that there are two different, opposing ways of life. One is best described as the “GIVE” way—the other as the way of “GET.”

The give way is outgoing, outflowing concern for the needs, concerns and welfare of others. It is focused away from self! It is diametrically opposite in thinking from the get way, which is incoming, focused on self, with one’s own interests and needs at heart.

The Bible teaches that God has a “divine nature” (II Pet. 1:4). This nature is “natural” to God, but it is *not* natural for people. While His Way

reflects the give way of life (Jms. 1:17), human beings practice the opposite. As simple as this sounds, your dating will reflect either the *get* or *give* way of life.

Though most will never admit it, they are almost totally preoccupied throughout their lives with getting, accumulating, satisfying, and focusing on the self. The average person views a date with one thing in mind, from the perspective of the number one person in his life—HIMSELF! One may not consciously admit this—or even be able to recognize it without God’s help—but it is true nevertheless. Influenced by your carnal nature, you will automatically—naturally—think selfishly, always putting your needs first.

Be determined from now on to ignore those selfish desires. Remember, God’s way is GIVE. When approaching each aspect of dating and courting, keep this fundamental perspective in mind. You are here—you were born—to GIVE to others. (Actually, when fully understood—and there is not enough space to cover more than the basics of it here—learning to give is the greatest goal in life!) In dating and courtship, this approach will benefit you in untold ways if you always keep it in the front of your mind.

Always ask yourself and be concerned with what kind of date *you* are GIVING, rather than what the other person is doing—whether you are GETTING from the other person what you expect, because you expect him or her to do the giving. And, in effect, this is what you are saying if you are focused on *getting* a good time.

God’s Way Simplified

Man has established millions of laws. Yet, he does not realize the awesome significance of *God’s* laws, embodied in the Ten Commandments. To most, these are merely considered to be ten Jewish principles of morality. Yet these commandments are far greater than that! God’s Law existed long before Moses received the stone tablets, given to Israel at Mt. Sinai.

God’s Law can be simplified into one word—LOVE. The Ten Commandments are summarized as love toward God and love toward fellow human beings. The first four teach man how to love God. Notice: “You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make unto you any graven image... You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain... Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Ex. 20:3-8). In Matthew 22, Christ summarized these four, saying, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment” (vs. 37-38).

The last six of the Ten Commandments instruct man how to love his fellow man. Notice these: “Honor your father and your mother... You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet...” (Ex. 20:12-17).

God’s Law Magnified

The Ten Commandments form the only true foundation of EVERY ASPECT of the right way to live—including how to form and maintain proper relationships. This Law existed before Moses—from the time of Creation. All ten were magnified in the New Testament and are still in effect today. As the same One who was the God of the Old Testament, Christ states that He “is the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8).

Jesus said, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am come not to destroy, but to fulfill” (Matt. 5:17). Christ knew that the commandments form the foundation on which all of God’s laws were built. As the God of the Old Testament, He inspired the prophecy in Isaiah 42:21: “The LORD is well pleased for His righteousness’ sake; He will MAGNIFY THE LAW, and make it HONORABLE.” (This prophecy was fulfilled at His First Coming.)

Christ referenced several of the Ten Commandments in the New Testament, in each case magnifying and strengthening them. Recall, for example, what He said concerning the Seventh Commandment, most important for our purpose here: “You have heard that it was said by them of old time, you shall not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looks on a woman *to lust after her* has committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matt. 5:27-28).

Violating the spirit of any of God’s Law is sin—and all sin is against God (Psa. 51:4). This is the perspective that one must take to understand correct dating and courtship. Your perspective should mirror *God’s*. Although the Bible does not tell us specifically how to approach every aspect of dating and courting, there are principles that *must* be applied to build a successful, long-lasting relationship. Everything you do in the course of dating and courtship should be based on GIVE, continually asking if your conduct reflects both love toward God and love toward your neighbor.

Sin is the opposite of love, and this includes vanity. Competition, strife (arguments), greed, envy, jealousy, hatred and lust *all* stem from vanity. The briefest look reveals that relationships today are filled with these attitudes.

What is Sin?

The Bible teaches that you have at least one thing in common with every man, woman and child who has ever lived: “For ALL have *sinned*, and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). The Bible also says that when—not *if*—you sin, you automatically earn the penalty of death (Rom. 6:23).

But what *is* sin?—What is it that people *do* to earn death?

Many religious leaders teach that Christ died for our sins and that His shed blood cleanses us *from* sin. They preach about being set free from bondage to sin, while they preach about freedom from keeping God’s Law. Have you noticed that they never define what sin *is*—that they never challenge people to search their Bibles to see how *God* defines sin?

If they did, they would have to read I John 3:4, where John wrote, “Whosoever commits sin transgresses [breaks] also the law: for sin is the *transgression* [breaking] *of the law*.” When you sin, you break the law.

But what law? Paul wrote, “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, *but by the law*” (Rom. 7:7). God’s Law reveals sin.

Again, what law was Paul writing about? Notice: “...for I had not known *lust*, except THE LAW had said, You shall not covet” (same verse). This is the Tenth Commandment, found in Exodus 20:17 and Deuteronomy 5:21. Paul and John were both clearly referring to the Ten Commandments. Both apostles taught that breaking *this* Law is sin.

John also wrote, in I John 5:17, “All unrighteousness is sin.” Since God’s commandments are righteousness (Psa. 119:172), then unrighteousness—sin—must be the opposite. Therefore, sin is the breaking of God’s commandments.

The apostle James expanded this principle when he taught, “Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend [sin] in one point, he is guilty of all. For He that said, do not commit adultery, said also, do not kill. Now if you commit no adultery, yet if you kill, you are become a transgressor of the law [a lawbreaker]” (2:10-11). Of course, James was also referring to the Ten Commandments.

Consider. People may go through life without ever physically committing a murder or adultery, or stealing or lying. Nevertheless, all have sinned. How can this be? Because even when we obey the *letter*

of the Law, we can break the *spirit* of the Law in our MINDS—and this is sin.

Sin *always* begins in the mind. Given enough time, what you *think* eventually becomes what you DO (Prov. 23:7). Notice what Christ said: “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart [mind]; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders [Sixth Commandment], ADULTERIES [Seventh Commandment], FORNICATIONS, thefts [Eighth Commandment], false witness [Ninth Commandment], blasphemies [Third Commandment]: These are the things which defile a man” (Matt. 15:18-20).

Also, James 1:14-15 demonstrates that wrong *thoughts* eventually produce wrong *actions*: “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death [the wages of sin].”

The typical singles scene in today’s society is a veritable study in temptation, lust and the sexual sins “conceived” as a result.

Lust Conceives Sin

Most never make the connection between thoughts and actions. The Bible records a tragic example of how lustful thoughts can lead to disaster. Even beginning Bible students are familiar with the account of King David’s adultery with Bathsheba. This story bears examination at this point to see how lust can conceive one sin, that leads to others, and results in death.

One spring evening, as David walked on the roof of his palace, he spotted a woman who was bathing (II Sam. 11:2). Instead of looking away, and putting her image out of his mind, he allowed himself to entertain wrong thoughts, and broke the Tenth Commandment—coveting another man’s wife.

These thoughts led him to inquire about the woman (vs. 3), and he discovered that she was the wife of Uriah, one of his most trusted servants. Unfortunately, this did not stop David from going forward to break the Seventh Commandment by committing adultery with her (vs. 4). His sin also involved breaking the Eighth Commandment. David took (stole) what did not belong to him—Uriah’s wife.

These sins eventually resulted in the birth of an illegitimate child (vs. 5). Earlier, wanting to cover up the pregnancy, David conspired against Uriah, who had been away faithfully fighting a war for his king. Recalling him from the front lines, David urged Uriah, through deceit, to

sleep with Bathsheba to make him think he was the unborn child’s father (vs. 6-13). These actions broke the spirit of the Ninth Commandment—bearing false witness.

When Uriah refused to sleep with Bathsheba, feeling he must be with the troops instead, David orchestrated Uriah’s *murder* by having him placed in the most intense part of the battle, thus ensuring his death (vs. 14-17). David had now broken the Sixth Commandment—“You shall not kill.”

What began merely as impure thoughts led to *multiple* sins—and catastrophic results! Sin *often* begins in a seemingly harmless and innocent manner, but unless stopped and repented of in the early stages, it leads to catastrophe and complete destruction.

Eventually, when David came to see his sins as God did—as terrible lawbreaking and iniquity—he repented. This is why he wrote, “For You are not a God that has pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with You. The foolish shall not stand in Your sight: You hate all workers of iniquity [sin]” (Psa. 5:4-5).

Foundation Established

The need to establish and then build on the basics is especially important with dating and courting. If one is not rooted in sound, clear understanding, it is *impossible* to build a sturdy house—physically or spiritually. You now have the necessary foundational knowledge to be able to understand principles we must yet discuss from God’s Word regarding dating and courtship.

The Bible compares Christians to general contractors—builders. Notice Paul’s words: “According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a WISE MASTERBUILDER, I have laid the *foundation*, and another builds thereon. But let every man take heed how he builds thereupon. For *other foundation* can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon THIS FOUNDATION gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is” (I Cor. 3:10-13).

What you have learned to this point is PRECIOUS KNOWLEDGE. We could ask: Are you determined, in any potential relationship, to build with gold, silver and precious stones?

TRUE LOVE—AND HOW IT RELATES TO DATING

We have seen that when Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they cut humanity off from God. Therefore, mankind is also cut off from the SOURCE of real love. As a result, because millions lack God's revealed knowledge of what *is* true love, the feeling they have is *only* a feeling!

You need no longer be ignorant of this. God created men and women with the ability to love and be loved—and He wants them to experience this in their lives. You *can* find true love in a relationship—and we have seen that it is far different than simple infatuation—but to do this you must *first* understand what it is!

Love Defined

The New Testament uses two different Greek words generally translated “love.” One is found in Colossians 3:19, where husbands are commanded, “*love* your wives.” Here, the word “love” derives from the word *agape*. This word means the LOVE OF GOD, and to understand the fullest love that can be shared between a man and a woman, we must first know what the love of God *is*.

One must accept that men's opinions do not count! The Bible is the sole authority. Now how does God's Word define *His* love?

John wrote, “FOR THIS IS THE LOVE OF GOD, THAT WE KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS: and His commandments are not grievous” (I John 5:3). Previously, we have talked about love and we have talked about God's

Law, but we have now established how they are connected. The Bible plainly defines the greatest love as the keeping of God's commandments. Sadly, while every professing Christian wants to experience the love of God, most believe that the commandments *are* grievous—and harsh—and would say that this law was done away by Christ's sacrifice.

Is it any wonder that the state of dating, courtship and marriage today is in such confusion, yielding so many tragic results and ruining so many lives? What hope could any marriage have without understanding and having *access* to the love of God?

Recognize that the COMMANDMENTS and the LAW are the same. Notice how Paul amplified what John wrote: “Love works no ill to his neighbor: therefore LOVE IS THE FULFILLING OF THE LAW” (Rom. 13:10). Once again, love is defined here as “the fulfilling of *the law*.” Obedience to the Ten Commandments fulfills the Law—and it is *this* that “works no ill to his neighbor.”

Remember that the Bible speaks of “the Holy Spirit, [which] God has given to them that OBEY Him” (Acts 5:32). True Christians obey God's spiritual Law. Jesus never taught that we need merely “believe on Him” to be saved. When asked what one must “do” to have “eternal life”—be SAVED—Jesus did not say, “Just believe on Me.” He said, “If you will enter into life, *keep the commandments*” (Matt. 19:17). Now read how having the Holy Spirit is directly connected to the love of God: “...the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us” (Rom. 5:5)—but only if we obey God!

Where is the harshness in a law God equates to love? The “sentimental fluff” standards of the various humanly-defined forms of so-called “love” mean nothing to God. As with sin, only God can define *real* love!

Once again, commandment-keeping demonstrates out-flowing, selfless concern for others!

Consider God's greatest gift to mankind, which has been reduced to little more than a religious slogan: “For God so loved the world, that He *gave* His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Recognize that *God* is the only Source of true love, and only through His Word—the Holy Bible—can we find exactly what constitutes true love between a man and a woman.

Returning to the Greek

As mentioned, two words were translated “love” in the New Testament. The Greeks recognized that there were different forms of love, and by

understanding these two words, plus a third Greek word (not found in the New Testament) that can also be translated “love,” we can better understand the love one must strive for in relationships.

The next New Testament word translated “love” is *philia*, the root word for “Philadelphia,” meaning “brotherly love.” This love is between brothers, friends or comrades—a *physical* love of companionship and friendship. Parents and children, siblings and close friends all share this type of love in their relationships.

But the Greeks also had a third word for love, *eros*. You may recognize the English word *erotic*, which is derived from it. *Eros* is romantic, sexual love between husband and wife, but it is NOT lust! Remember, it is a form of love, which God designed to be the pinnacle of physical pleasure when expressed in a marriage relationship between husband and wife, the *only* proper place for it.

Clearly, *eros* is not wrong, but it should never be the *only* form of love in a marriage. Sadly, however, most couples have no idea that marriage cannot be based solely on romantic love. This excludes both of the much deeper forms of love that couples can go on to experience. While romance and sex certainly bring *some* happiness and closeness in a marriage, and this is not to be understated, this is not enough to make the relationship truly fulfilling—or even to last.

Grasp this! Though the love of friendship and companionship is vital, both *philia* and *eros* are—and can only be—practiced on the physical level.

Before delving deeper into the meaning of *eros*, let’s first see the kind of love the Bible instructs spouses to have toward one another: “Husbands, *love* your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Eph. 5:25). The love referenced here, as with so many other scriptures, is *agape*. God expresses *this* love to mankind SPIRITUALLY through His Holy Spirit working in converted minds. Recall Romans 5:5.

Agape is not merely a FEELING, although it can *involve* various feelings. It is a conscious, controlled way of thinking. It is absolutely crucial to recognize that the natural, carnal mind, lacking God’s Spirit, simply cannot experience this kind of love—and neither can any marriage that leaves God out of the picture!

All three forms of love are important, and vital, for the bond of marriage to remain strong—and to endure. But remember, these three are vastly different. *Philia* is the love within friendships. *Eros* is the love expressed through romance and sex. *Agape* is the most critical and important love—SPIRITUAL love. (Take time to study I Corinthians 13, often described as the “love chapter.” It expands on the many specific attributes of *agape*.)

Some marriages never get beyond *eros*. Others grow to involve a genuine *philia* for one another. But marriages—and any other relationships—that reach the pinnacle of supreme happiness have graduated to *agape*, the greatest form of love.

While the first two may, over time, come naturally to a relationship, *agape* is not natural in human beings. This is truly the dimension of which the world knows nothing.

Recognizing True Love

Again, what is true love? We have learned that it is a selfless, sharing, out-flowing concern for others that is founded on the way of GIVE. This love involves putting one’s own feelings and interests aside to better see—and serve—the needs and feelings of others.

Remember, God is love. Although man is and always has been hostile toward Him, God still gave His only Son to redeem humanity. This is why Christ said, “Greater LOVE has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

Understand the enormity of this gift. If Christ had not succeeded in His goal when He was human, God would have been utterly alone *for all eternity*, having no one remaining except the angels with whom to share His love!

Because God *is* love, He desires ALL to have—to experience—the same love He experiences! As one submits to God, repents and is baptized, he gains access to God through His Holy Spirit. As this love flows through the newly converted, it will flow into his relationships throughout his lifetime.

Grasp this all-important point. This love overarches absolutely everything having to do with dating and courtship. True love is UNSELFISH. It is *not* an emotional high (although it certainly *involves* emotions). It combines both outgoing concern and genuine affection for the other person in a relationship. But it must always continue to extend further—to include every other human being.

Many songs croon of “love at first sight.” One describes “strangers in the night exchanging glances, wondering at first sight, what were the chances they’d be sharing love before the night was through.” Others speak of gazing “across a crowded room,” somehow able to “know” they have just “fallen in love.” But can this truly happen on a genuine level? No! Instead, there can only be *desire*—LUST—at first sight! Based upon appearance, one may be *attracted* to someone across a room but a relationship founded on this *alone* is wrong, and will never work.

One simply cannot *fall* in love at first sight, although one can GROW over time to deeply love a person. This develops out of mutual admiration and respect for one another, and involves, as we will learn, much thought and careful analysis.

Do Not Be Deceived!

I have counseled teenage couples who sincerely believed that they were “in love.” While perhaps only 18 or 19, they were convinced that they would someday marry each other. Guided by their human reasoning, these teens sought to validate their feelings in what were inappropriate relationships. Even after hearing real love explained, they continued deceiving themselves into believing they *were* “sharing” and “giving”—that they *were* practicing unselfishness—true love. They “knew” they loved each other, and only wished others would understand.

Teens are generally incapable of analyzing their motives in a relationship, either until it has failed, a pregnancy or disease has resulted, or virginity has been lost and disillusionment has entered—in other words, when it is TOO LATE! For some, even these are not enough to jolt them to reality.

Human nature could be described as an onion with a rotten core. Each layer of skin is a different motive, and while the upper layer seems fine (in this case, supposed “true love”), one must be willing to shed each layer in order to see what is at the core. Any two teenagers who sincerely think they are in love must analyze the *motive behind the motive*, and honestly acknowledge the basis of their relationship—INFATUATION driven by LUST!

Notice what the Creator God states about your feelings—and your heart: “The HEART is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9). And recall again an earlier reference, “There is a way which SEEMS right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of *death*” (Prov. 14:12).

If you are a teen and feel—“know!”—that you are in love, BEWARE! Notice: “The way of a FOOL is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkens [listens] unto counsel is wise” (Prov. 12:15). Take time to periodically reread these three passages, and remind yourself to honestly face the facts and to hear wise counsel!

Vast numbers of teenagers go down the path of sincerely believing they are in love. Deceiving themselves, they are actually ruining their lives and the lives of others! Fornication, terrible diseases, unwanted children, shamed and disappointed families, financial hardship, disillusionment, psychological problems (sometimes even leading to suicide),

lost education, lost innocence, lost friendships, lost happiness—and *lost futures*—are the painful results!

Make no mistake! These things do *not* just apply to *teenagers*! Laws are laws—they play no favorites. They apply to every person who violates—breaks—God’s eternal spiritual Law, which, if kept, is capable of preventing every human ill. Breaking them brings a host of effects that WILL “break” all who ignore this supreme cause.

A simple principle applies here: “Wherefore let him that thinks he stands take heed [beware] lest he fall” (I Cor. 10:12). This can—and *should*—be applied to *every* aspect of life. Are you certain you are walking the right direction in your dating relationships? What dangers might you be overlooking—or ignoring? Will you set the right priorities, demonstrate character and do the right thing?

Your entire future could depend on it!

Conversion Comes First

The single greatest goal of every person is to be born into the coming kingdom of God, to share rulership with Christ at His Return. All other goals, including pursuing and achieving a happy marriage, are of lesser importance. This means that receiving the Spirit of God, which begins the path of conversion, is one’s single highest priority after reaching adulthood.

However, while serious dating should wait, there is a certain type of dating that can be done before one is converted. (The difference between these two stages will be explained later in greater detail.) First, one should *never* date one-on-one or advance to the more serious stage of *courting* until after CONVERSION—which begins with repentance, baptism and the receiving of God’s Spirit!

Why should baptismal status matter? Grasp this crucial fact. Husbands and wives are to express the love of God (*agape*) to each other and, for this to be possible, God must be working within a marriage. This can only occur if His Spirit is present in the partners. Again recall Romans 5:5, in addition to Galatians 5:22, which explains that love is a “fruit” of the Holy Spirit.

Let’s make clear *when* one receives the Holy Spirit. Notice Acts 2:38: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” You must repent—which is turning from disobedience to God’s Law—and be baptized *before* you can receive God’s Spirit. Without it, you are utterly incapable of loving a mate in the way God designed. (Be sure to read our booklet *What do you mean WATER BAPTISM?*)

Some will ask, “What does conversion have to do with dating or courting?”, adding, “I have no intention of getting married at this point.” However, if you are becoming serious or courting someone before conversion, you are already—albeit unconsciously—building a foundation of *physical* attraction, *physical* “love.”

Think of the above in the following way: Failing to see the importance of receiving God’s Spirit *before* serious dating (not speaking of marriage yet) equates to telling God that you do not need His guidance in *selecting* your mate—that you only need His help in blessing a marriage after the fact—after *you* decided who would be best as your life-long partner! Ultimately, you have formed a relationship without seeking God’s guidance as to whether there was hope for success.

Would you make a big *business decision*—certainly not as importing as marriage—without first determining your chances of success?

Some marriages should never take place, regardless of how the couple feels and whether they are converted. Later portions of this book will more thoroughly address *why*. All those who select a mate without God’s direction are “rolling the dice,” with no assurance whatsoever that the relationship can work long-term.

Many readers may have already made the mistake of marrying the wrong person, sometimes more than just one. In almost every case, lack of maturity was involved with one or both spouses in the previous marriage. If this is you, you could be reading this book for guidelines (if the marriage failed), asking how to do better the “next time.” (This is another question that will be addressed later.)

No matter how “mature” one may be (and *mature* teenagers would be the *last* to ignore sound advice), it should now be clear that anyone of teen age cannot possibly develop true, godly love. This does not mean you *cannot* date, but that you must adjust your definition of dating. ALWAYS keep it general. Teenagers should NEVER allow themselves to get serious in a one-on-one relationship. (See chapters 7 and 8 for much more detail.)

An unconverted mind *can* practice the principle of “it is more blessed to give than receive” (Acts 20:35), to a certain degree, but, lacking God’s Spirit, a carnal mind that is *also immature* cannot even *begin* to face and overcome the trials and challenges of marriage.

Parents of Teens

If you are a parent of teenagers, you should be careful not to force your children to date only those of your choosing. (This is qualified later in the book.) If you do, you will drive them the opposite way.

God Himself is a parent and, like every parent, He wants the very best for His children. However, He recognizes that He made human beings as free moral agents, able to make mistakes, but also able to learn from them. And while experience is a very good teacher, it is far better (and less painful) to learn from *instruction* and from the *examples* of others.

Parents are responsible for teaching their children God’s Way. As your children grow older, gradually give them more responsibility. Under your overall guidance, this will help them learn to make right decisions. During the late teens, a teenager should be making some of his own decisions. But there may be times when you need to intervene. If your teenager wants to spend time with the wrong companions, disregard all protests—step in and stop the contact! As parents, you are often the only ones truly guiding your teenager. Be willing to take the time to actively teach them God’s principles and truths—and to intervene when necessary to protect them from themselves.

Be assured that if you do not teach your teenagers, someone else will—and it will probably *not* be what you want them to learn!

Emotional Maturity is Vital

Most people in the modern age no longer base decisions and actions on solid moral values. They have been programmed to act according to their feelings. Very few are any longer taught that they must learn to control their emotions.

A well-known singer once recorded what became a famous song, titled “Feelings.” My father enjoyed this particular tune, and I came to enjoy it as well. Looking back, it became, in a sense, prophetic of our entire age—and this age has had an impact on you, and it will directly affect how and with whom you form relationships in your life.

This has been called the age of “feel good.” Most people now make decisions, come to conclusions or react in given situations based almost exclusively on how things *feel* to them. For more than a generation, most human beings have become subtly conditioned—by education, pop psychology and society—to listen to, and stay in tune with, their feelings, as a guide to their course of action in any given situation.

Part of this conditioning involves people having been virtually trained to look for and almost exclusively respond to their FEELINGS. They have even been taught to elevate their feelings to the point of almost continually asking themselves how they feel—about almost everything!

This represents an enormous change in the overall way that most people think and react—and view the circumstances in which they find themselves. Dating and courtship are not exceptions, and may have been affected more than most other areas of human activity.

Here is what is different—what has changed today. The vast majority of people, including society as a whole, once generally reacted to circumstances, and the environment around them, based on the VALUES that they had been taught—based on ethics, principles, morals, beliefs, integrity and overall character. This meant that people once viewed matters based much more on *right* versus *wrong*, *good* versus *evil*, *proper* versus *improper*, *wise* versus *unwise*, and even *law* versus *sin*.

Sadly, even tragically, a regard for VALUES of almost any kind now carries very little weight in the thinking of most in the world. Today, hurt feelings, emotions and perceptions have become much more important—have been given much greater credence in people’s thinking—than at probably any other time in human history.

There is no aspect of life left unchanged by this trend.

Living Daily “Soap Operas”

Millions of children and teenagers today cannot handle even the simplest obstacles, problems and challenges so basic to everyday life. In part, this is because they have never or only rarely been told “no” by their parents or other authority figures—they have rarely been denied anything. Therefore, seemingly every “issue” or crisis causes them to “go to pieces.”

The result has been that much of today’s generation is living out a kind of daily “soap opera.” Everything involves emotional melodrama because society has been and is being conditioned, now through the recent phenomenon of “reality television,” to continually await the latest twist, next chapter or new episode being played out on screen.

More often than ever, when young children do not get their way, they throw temper tantrums if not disciplined. Usually, parents do nothing, but as these same children grow up, they eventually realize that it is unacceptable for an adult to fall to the floor, kicking and screaming. So, most—but not all—learn to *hide* or *suppress* tantrums.

But little has changed on the inside. While teens and adults may have learned to cover up some or most of their emotions on the *outside*, many are still screaming, crying and going to pieces *inside*. This is exactly why so many grow up appearing to be mature but, in reality, have remained incredibly *immature*.

Many young people and even adults today battle moodiness, often brooding and becoming easily annoyed when they are not the center of attention. In the pursuit of happiness, most of society almost constantly caters to their every whim and desire—without regard for the consequences. Just look at the pampered athletes throughout professional sports, and these are the “role models” that millions of children, teens and young adults are copying.

Today’s teenagers are also much more easily influenced by their peers than just a generation ago. Rather than using their own minds and character to make sound decisions, they succumb to the easier path of following the crowd. Acceptance has become all-important in today’s world. Worse, and even more common, most individuals now refuse to TAKE RESPONSIBILITY for *anything*—feeling, in the age of “victimhood,” that almost *nothing* is ever really their fault. The “blame game” has become epidemic.

By the age of 16, a teenager has usually reached a certain level of *physical* maturity. It is at this point that he may begin to think more seriously about life. Yet—and this is critical to comprehend—it is usually not until around age 25 that one reaches a significant level of *mental* maturity. But even this applied more to generations past.

What About You?

The above examples of immaturity are best described as an epidemic afflicting millions today. What is *your* maturity level? Are *you* certain that *you* are growing in maturity—enough to properly handle dating, and possibly courtship, assuming you are of sufficient age and conversion?

Real maturity is absolutely essential to successful dating. This is true for two reasons. First, most people do not find it pleasant to date an immature person. If you are immature, and refuse to grow and develop in emotional and mental maturity and stability, the only people you will be able to date will be the same—immature and unstable.

Second, and more important, as you grow older and begin dating one-on-one, it is essential to have *already* achieved a certain maturity level *before* becoming serious. Love and the proper perspective of the relationship are impossible without it! A person *must* be mature enough to understand the implications of a serious relationship. A lifetime of marriage and commitment may be just over the horizon!

Again, take heed lest you fall! Analyze where, in your personality and character, you need to grow and develop. Work on these areas! Set

goals and move forward. Go to God and ask Him to show you other areas in which you need to grow:

Can you make right decisions? Do you take responsibility? Can you handle setbacks? Are you able to cope with crises, or do you “fly off the handle”? Can you acknowledge your faults? Can you differentiate between infatuation and real love? Are you addicted to wrong television? Similarly, are you addicted to wrong entertainment and wrong music?

Also ask yourself: Are you striving to become more well-rounded—in interest and culture? Do you have a strong work ethic? Are you most often happy, rarely allowing things to “get you down”? Are you patient with others? Would others describe you as composed—in control of your emotions? Are you generally thought by family and friends to be a responsible individual?

While maturity is crucial to *every* aspect of adulthood, it is an especially vital building block for dating, courting and, ultimately, marriage! To enjoy a thriving, successful marriage, one must be spiritually, emotionally *and* intellectually mature! There are no exceptions. While some may seem physically and mentally able to *enter* a relationship, they are often unable to *maintain* one. They lack too many essential qualities so necessary to endure the ups and downs that every relationship experiences.

Other Aspects of Love and Dating

Maturity and conversion are the most fundamental building blocks of proper dating. Maturity is directly related to responsibility. As children become teenagers, they begin to ask the bigger questions of life: “What will I do for a living?”—“How will I support myself and my family?”—among others.

Marriage is a God-plane relationship and, as a direct precursor to marriage, dating should not be a simple, animalistic pursuit of pleasure. Yet sadly, many young people never take time to plan their future. Instead, one night of succumbing to lustful impulse can bring disaster crashing down on foolish, unsuspecting minds—an unwanted pregnancy forcing couples to begin preparing for a family without the benefit of foresight and the joy of planning.

In contrast, God began planning to expand His Family long before even creating the earth. Notice: “According as He has chosen us in Him *before the foundation of the world*, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption

[“sonship”] of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of His will” (Eph. 1:4-5).

Be willing to shed society’s influence over you. Admit that you may need to UNLEARN almost *everything* you have absorbed, and replace it with sound biblical principles. Once armed with this new set of values, you can firmly rely on God to bless you with the best possible prospective mate.

If you seek counsel, exercise *foresight*, and are willing to wait, God’s way will reap far greater rewards than you can imagine!

THE PURPOSE OF DATING

Now that you have begun to *unlearn* the wrong way of thinking and understand how to build a solid foundation on God and His Way, you are ready to learn the right *purpose* of dating.

This chapter addresses *why* people date, coupling it with the practical realities that accompany this activity. If you ask several passersby on the street why people set dates to do things together, you will get a variety of responses. These might include: To have fun, get to know other people, have a girlfriend or boyfriend, have sex, peer pressure, find companionship, defeat loneliness, etc. Some of these reasons are fine, but obviously some are not!

There are other basic—and much more important—reasons for dating.

Times Have Changed

Recognize how society has developed over the past century. Both the “dating scene” and dating practices have changed dramatically! A brief look at recent history shows that times and morals have undergone a drastic change.

Few customs have changed more than dress. There was once a time, in the mid-1800s, when women dressed modestly. They wore floor-length dresses, with long sleeves and high necks. Men wore shirts and ties, and such dress among men and women carried over to the workplace, and even to sporting activities.

Society followed the “old morality” concerning dating, marriage and sex. If a young man wanted to date a young woman, he would first ask her father for permission, and at some point ask if he could “court” her. Of course, the prevalent attitude then was that “sex is shameful,” making fornication and its tragic results much less frequent. Despite the pervasive inhibition ingrained by the widespread misconception (known as “Victorian prudery”) that all sex is inherently evil, ironically, at that time, happier, committed marriages were much more common than today. This is because people generally had much more character than those of the modern age. And this was true even though most people then also did not know how to select the *right* mate.

As the century turned, a new picture slowly emerged. The tradition of requiring a chaperone to accompany young couples vanished. Even yet, young people still understood clearly-defined limits. At this point in history, a couple might have shared a short kiss, but *only* after their interest was serious or they had become engaged. This is in sharp contrast to the widespread idea of “no limits” followed by couples today, where “fooling around”—“making out,” “necking” or “heavy petting”—and sexual relations are the norm, long before couples are inclined to consider, let alone entertain, the thought of lifelong commitment.

Society continued changing even more rapidly as the century developed. Many new books, magazines and other publications discussing and describing sex became available, and people began to throw off the restraints of prudery. By the 1950s, a “new morality” had arrived, and with it came the jump from the ditch of *prudery* to the opposite ditch of *permissiveness*.

Dating is now a practice that almost immediately involves sexual intimacy. Many today disdain—or, again, have not even heard of—the concept of courting. Teenage morality has dropped to its lowest point in history—with no apparent end in sight to the worsening trend.

Of course, society today flaunts sex in *everything*. The effects are so far-reaching that a return to modesty would almost instantly collapse the economy. Advertising would change overnight, as would the clothing industry. Thousands of Internet companies would declare bankruptcy, as would advertising agencies, now completely unequipped to offer a different way. The music industry would fold as we know it, and the change in movies and television would make the whole entertainment industry almost unrecognizable. Many could not make the shift fast enough.

To learn more about the right purposes of sex, read our vital book *SEX – The Unknown Dimension*. That book is a companion to this one, and is necessary to understand the God-ordained purposes for sex.

What Is a Date?

The dictionary definition of what constitutes a date was briefly discussed in the INTRODUCTION. At this point, it is worth repeating. Recall that the most commonly understood definition of a date is “an appointment for a specified time; especially a social engagement between two persons of opposite sex” (*Webster’s Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*).

In the simplest terms, a “date” is merely a set time agreed upon by two people to engage in an activity—any activity. Another way of stating this is that it is merely social contact with a person or persons of the opposite sex, either one-on-one or in a group.

This leads to the next question, that of *when* dating may begin.

When Should Dating Begin?

During the teenage years, dating should only be within groups and with specific parental knowledge and permission. As one grows older, and closer to the age suitable for marriage, one-on-one dates may begin. The process begins with group dating and leads to one-on-one when the time is right, which, in turn, leads to the more intensive step of courtship if the couple is seriously interested. This, of course, then progresses to engagement and marriage, if continued.

(Conversion is another virtual prerequisite for dating one-on-one. This will be momentarily addressed, and expounded on in Chapter 7.)

Through group dating, you will overcome nervousness and learn to relax and naturally respond to those of the opposite sex. This will prove beneficial when moving on to courting. You will be able to evaluate situations more realistically.

Above all, try to date widely. Fifty years ago, this was referred to as “playing the field.” This meant dating as many different people as possible. This gives one exposure to a broad range of personalities, with the important side benefit of learning which kinds of personalities are compatible with yours and which are not.

This is most critical to recognize. You need to know which kinds of people make you comfortable, and which do not. You will probably find that one personality type makes you *most* comfortable. But this may not always be the case. (Remember, at the same time you are learning about yourself, you are also helping your “date” to do the same.)

Paul spoke of being able to be “all things to all people” (I Cor. 9:22), for the purpose of helping and benefiting more kinds of people. Dating widely helps you learn to interact with almost anyone in any kind of social setting.

In the earliest stages of dating, romance is *never* to be involved! As we have seen, teenagers are much too young for this more serious activity. This can only come later, when one is of sufficient age and maturity to contemplate marriage and its vast implications. While “modernists” will howl in protest, only at this stage should one begin to date one-on-one, with the potential to progress to courting and romance. Though this approach may seem old-fashioned, it is absolutely essential to not get ahead of yourself, when you are too young to even know what kind of basic personality match would make for the most successful, long-lasting relationship.

Recognize that society is pushing you from every direction to begin romance long before it is appropriate. Romance too early carries a high price. I have counseled many who have had to pay this price—and my job was often to try to help rebuild shattered marriages, and shattered lives. Countless thousands of teenagers have grown up to sorely regret the daily pain and consequences they now face, because they thought that they were more mature—more ready for romance—than they actually were.

It would be helpful to summarize some important points here: Group dating can begin as early as age 16, where a small number—perhaps six to eight, or so—make an appointment to enjoy a wholesome activity together. Responsible adults or parents should stay close. (Of course, very large group activities can and should begin at an early age, and these would have a variety of parents or other adults present.) But it must be understood that we are talking about a *group* of people of both sexes participating in an activity *together*. Under no circumstances should this slip into “pairing off” within the activity. Parents must be particularly watchful of less responsible teenagers, because these will be the very ones who think they are the *most* responsible—those who think they can “handle” a relationship probably *long* before they are in fact ready.

Before one is baptized and converted (age 18 to 20 at the earliest), he or she should not date one-on-one. With rare exceptions, group dating is the only way one should date before conversion. Remember—to think that serious dating one-on-one is proper before baptism is tantamount to telling God that you do not need His guidance in the second most important decision (*after* conversion) in every person’s life—choosing the mate with whom you plan to spend the rest of your physical life.

There could be an unusual, very rare exception to dating prior to conversion. For example, a teenager could escort (or be escorted by) someone to a Church activity or a special, one-time school function. But all the principles in this book must be remembered during such unique occasions.

Age 18 is the absolute soonest that people should consider dating one-on-one, with 19 to 20 a better age to start this activity. Whatever the age this begins, it is vital to have *already* laid a foundation of much exposure, in all kinds of settings, to those of the opposite sex. There should be a certain comfort level in place *first—before* one-on-one dating. Otherwise, the danger grows that the more shy, timid or nervous-type person will quickly pair off with either the first person with whomever he or she is comfortable or whoever pays him or her attention. I have seen this often.

Through casual group dating, you will be able to overcome nervousness and learn to relax and naturally respond to those of the opposite sex, and you will be able to evaluate later dating situations more realistically. This will also prove immensely beneficial when moving on to the more serious step of courting.

More About Group Dating

Teenagers today have no idea of the danger of one-on-one dating. But how does this differ from group dating? Is it crucial that one come before the other?

One-on-one dating ultimately leads to marriage. Before this, it usually leads to some level of *attachment*. While many are not willing to accept this, they *are* certainly willing to realize that one-on-one dating—in today’s society—almost always leads to some sort of physical, emotional, and sexual relationship.

There was a time, just a few decades ago, when teen marriages abounded. Today, this is less common—people tend to wait longer for marriage. Yet, that does not stop couples from doing the same as couples did during the time when teen marriages were more common—dating one-on-one, which leads them to “going steady” while, at the same time, not yet wanting to be married.

This in turn leads to a wide range of problems. However, there are far fewer temptations in group dating situations.

What then *is* group dating? It is simply several people of similar age getting together and participating in some sort of activity. It is the perfect opportunity to apply all the principles that we will cover in this chapter.

The world has no comprehension of the numerous benefits of group dating—that this is a way to build both your own personality and those of others around you. During the teen years, young people are not ready to date one-on-one. If they do, they are cheating themselves and others out of the opportunity to grow and become better people. Enjoy these times spent with several others, applying all the principles discussed to develop yourself as fully as you are able.

God’s Way is *always* the best! His Law is for our benefit. You must come to deeply believe that they work.

Going Steady

Before going further, it is critical to discuss the implications—and DANGERS—of “going steady,” now more often referred to as “going out.” This trend is accepted as a veritable way of a life by society. Yet, it is wrong and produces much untold misery.

It has been said, “Be careful who you spend too much time with—you tend to marry her (or him).” Ready for it or not, steady dating will eventually lead to marriage. Such couples tend to just fall forward into this next seemingly natural step.

Clearly, one of the purposes of dating *is* to find the right person to marry! There is that “best one” out there (and actually, it is more accurate to say that there is a best “type” out there), and God will provide that special person when the time is right. But, once again, only by waiting for God’s selection and timing—and dating widely in the meantime—will you know that you have found the best possible person!

Millions preclude themselves from receiving this central benefit of right dating!

So many begin to go steady through high school, and some on into and through college, thinking they have found the right person. But, because of immaturity, and because they are not letting God guide them, they cannot possibly know with certainty.

First, we must ask, *why* do teenagers go steady? Often, due to peer pressure and changes in themselves, teenagers are extremely insecure, and they go steady to gain a sense of security. It is the easy way out of wondering or worrying who you will take—or who will ask you to go—to the next movie, school dance, party, sports event, etc. It provides a “built-in date” for all social occasions.

Directly related to security is the status symbol attached to a steady boyfriend or girlfriend—or being part of the “in crowd.”

Obviously, as we have seen, teens also go steady because of their lower level of emotional maturity. It is clearly much easier than *asking* for dates and much easier than conversing and interacting with someone *new*. Going steady enables teens to cover up shyness and bashfulness. It is also “cheaper” to go steady (unless pregnancy results!), because you stop worrying about “putting your best foot forward”—trying to impress the other person. (However, dating should never be solely about *impressing* the other person, anyway.)

In addition, most who go steady never stop to ask, “If I haven’t dated widely, how can I possibly know if I love this person?—if we fit together?” Yet, foolishly, so many with no experience believe they are “in love.”

Going steady is the lazy, selfish, foolish, short-sighted method of dating. It eliminates the opportunity for a host of vital aspects of social development.

Of course, going steady among teens invariably seems to mean premarital sex. Acting on selfish desires of the moment, this is a decision to steal from the happiness of your future marriage, including stealing from your future mate—and from both parties in the future marriage of your momentary sex partner.

While boys may not admit it, they know that going steady over a longer period of time also makes it much easier to convince a girl to compromise sexually. Inhibitions tend to disappear with familiarity.

Determine to always demonstrate the necessary willpower to make the right choice NOW instead of choosing “to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Heb. 11:25).

There is another serious potential side effect of going steady for a long time: Even without fornication, if you spend all your time with that person, you will inevitably later compare your future spouse to him or her.

Also, the emotional distress of a breakup—or several breakups—at a young age can also distort your overall view of the opposite sex. Here is the biggest—and almost entirely unseen—problem in this. Consider. It has been said that “early dating leads to early marriages, which lead to early divorces.” Each steady-dating breakup functions like a miniature divorce, making each additional “divorce” easier. A lifelong pattern can develop from what seemed so harmless in the teen years.

If you are a teen in a “steady” relationship, you probably feel your situation is different. You probably think that you love each other. Yet, if this were true, you would immediately break it off. You would wait until you were both able to properly develop the relationship and, more importantly, until God shows you that He is guiding it, which will be done on *His* timetable not *yours*!

Dating—The Lost Art

Most would scoff at the idea that dating is an ART. However, this is largely because it has become a *lost* art. Generally speaking, there are simply no common guidelines or principles governing modern dating. Driven primarily by impulses of the moment, people fall into shallow ruts, doing what they *feel* passes the test of peer pressure.

In generations past, parents taught their children what to do on dates—and what *not* to do. Parents imposed rules involving dress, where teenagers could go, what was permissible and what was not and when to be home. And these rules were enforced. In addition, young people were taught how to conduct themselves, the problems of going steady, and the dangers of premarital sex and alcohol, and of falling in with the wrong crowd. (In a tragic and telling commentary on society today, the “*wrong* crowd” has seemingly become the *only* crowd.) They were also taught to respect the other person—boys were to be gentlemen, and this meant treating girls like ladies, because these girls were being taught to conduct themselves like ladies.

Such teaching included proper etiquette, the difference between good and bad manners. Just watching young people eat today can be a painful experience, a veritable assault on the senses of older people. (So many today slump over and eat like hogs slopping at a trough!) There was a time when people understood that manners mattered, and those who lacked them did not get to the second date!

I recall the teaching—even “coaching”—that my parents gave me in the 1960s, when, terrified, I went on my first date to a dance. My older male cousin helped me with certain dance steps, including how far apart to stand from the young lady I was escorting. I did not date often, but when I returned home, as a rule, I had to give an account of the date to my parents. They wanted and enjoyed hearing “particulars,” and *I enjoyed* discussing these evenings with them.

It is obvious that most parents today have taken the position of politician, instead of being a teacher of their children. So many have caved into the easy path of “running a popularity contest” with their children or teens, because they are told, “Other parents don’t make *their* kids do *that*.” Unfortunately, such statements are generally true. It takes tremendous courage and conviction—and staying power!—for parents to go against the grain in order to teach their children the true values of effective, purposeful dating. When I mentioned other parents, my parents continually reminded me, “But you don’t have *other* parents. You have *us*!”

Dating truly *has* become a LOST ART, but you can learn to do it! You cannot imagine the benefits—to you and others—that will come with the proper form of dating. It is meant to be an opportunity not only for fun, recreation and exercise, but also to learn about people, to develop social graces and etiquette, and to develop yours and others' personalities, among other purposes.

Conversation—The *Other* Lost Art

The ability to communicate effectively is one of the most important skills to acquire, and dating provides a perfect means to develop it! Being able to communicate effectively will benefit you in countless ways in every facet of life—for the *rest* of your life. It will build friendships, open doors and help you succeed in the workplace.

The art of communication takes practice. It takes time to learn to accurately and tactfully express yourself, and to communicate well with others. Socializing on group and single dates will certainly help you acquire this ability. Most people use the same words, terms and phrases over and over, generally because they never learned to develop their vocabulary. They continually fall back on very weak expressions. Here are just a few things people say when they do not know what to say next—do not know how to respond with something of *meaning* or *value*: “You know,” “okay?,” “really!”, “yeah, right,” “you know what I’m saying?,” “like...,” “uh-huh,” “whatever,” “and what not,” “totally!” and “sure?!”

Learn to express your thoughts with color and enthusiasm, and try to expand your vocabulary by learning and using new words. You will discover that others can find you interesting, and even fascinating, to talk to. Believe me—you will stand out to those who think!

Perhaps most important, strive to become an attentive and active *listener*. This involves giving *others* the opportunity to express themselves and showing sincere interest in what they have to say. Learning the skill of being a good listener is probably the most important aspect of right communication. You will be surprised at how many consider you an excellent conversationalist when you primarily just LISTENED. The biblical admonishment “Be swift to hear and slow to speak” (Jms. 1:19) has more than one application, and will work wonders in conversations.

Dates are opportunities to share clean, wholesome ideas. Ask questions about your date’s background. Discuss interests, travels, hobbies and world news, among other things. Although it goes against today’s societal norms, the man should strive to take the lead in conversation and

try to make the woman feel at ease. However, this does not mean ladies should just sit back, not actively participating, taking an “entertain me” approach. Both parties should strive to be active and interested in making the date a learning experience.

Most dates today are not edifying or uplifting. The universal first date seems to be little more adventurous than “Let’s go to a movie.”

This greatly limits the potential for conversation—for getting to know one another. We have already discussed another common dating environment—the club scene—that is hardly an atmosphere conducive to stimulating conversation. Without conversation, in any setting, it is much easier to default into other activities (primarily sex, overdrinking and drug use, but also, especially with teens, just plain *trouble*) and it is impossible to learn much about the person with whom you are spending time.

Not only was dating once seen as a chance to build social skills and graces, but it also served as an opportunity to grow intellectually. This is virtually absent today, particularly among those who are younger. Rarely anymore are dates mentally uplifting or interesting. Today, the idea of actually sitting across from another person (of either sex) and holding a truly interesting, let alone fascinating, discussion covering complex topics is foreign to most young people, and most young adults.

Once Upon a Time...

Not so long ago, families and lives were very different from those of today. Before radio, television, movies, computers, telephones (let alone cellphones) and the endless variety of shallow magazines available today, people had much more time for other things. They usually learned more boardgames, played cards, enjoyed nature and talked more around the dinner table, usually for long periods.

For the educated, there was once a strong emphasis on doing a tremendous amount of reading, particularly of longer books. This greatly enhanced people’s ability to converse across a wide range of diverse ideas and thought. People were familiar with famous authors, philosophy, world history, geography, current events and world conditions, great leaders, and so much more—and their discussions reflected depth.

Remember, for the first approximately 5,900 years of man’s existence on earth, none of the modern tools of communication and entertainment existed. This means that the only lifestyle today’s young people know only *began* to develop just a little over 100 years ago. It means that people have almost no idea—no concept—of how the vast majority of humanity lived—and *talked*—for almost six millennia.

Tragically, and partially as a result of this overall lifestyle change, an even worse condition afflicts young people of the modern age. Many have grown up not even having been taught to *think*, let alone *talk*, about anything of depth. Obviously, this is because most people no longer read very much, including any of the important parts of a newspaper—let alone books or even news magazines. As a result, conversations too often quickly turn to a kind of shallow “he said, she said” gossip session, with an emphasis on updating each other about what *other* people may or may not be doing.

So much conversation today offers little more edifying information than would a soap opera or sitcom. All of this is not by accident. As we have previously discussed, most people today seem to live their lives as though they are *scripted* from soap operas—hopelessly trapped within the trivial and the superficial. The reservoir of knowledge and experience from which they should be able to draw is either nearly empty, or does not even exist.

A wise man once said, “Big minds talk about IDEAS, average minds talk about *things*, and little minds talk about *people*.” Which of these describes you? If you are in either of the latter two categories, determine to change this—and be prepared to spend some time learning to do so!

Plan Your Dates

Dating should be an enjoyable activity for all involved. Of course, an important goal in *every* date is to have a good time. But (and this may be surprising) if you are truly dedicated to providing a nice time for others present—and this takes planning—you may actually benefit the most!

Do not neglect to *plan* your dates. This takes some effort, but it is important that you take time to do this. Not only will you be glad you did, you will not find yourself falling into what so many practice today: When the date arrives, instead of taking the lead as he should, the man asks, “What should we do?” While the man could at least occasionally solicit the woman in advance for ideas—for things she may enjoy—something specific should always be pre-planned.

Think of ideas and generate plans that will be enjoyable for everyone—going for a hike, playing some kind of sport (bowling, tennis, swimming, skiing, sledding, etc.), touring a museum or historical site, taking a walk, visiting the zoo, going to dinner, and many other interesting and uplifting possibilities. Again, remember to not just fall into going to the latest movie, in part because most movies today virtually assault the senses—and have no real worth or value.

Try to make your dates educational as well. Of course, this does not mean that you need to do something like studying archeology at a museum on every date. But you should try to help others learn while also striving to increase *your* fund of knowledge whenever you have the chance. You will also learn much more about *your date*.

Education and recreation are two important aspects of any schooling. Teachers understand the need for this, and it should not stop when school is out and dating begins.

Also be sure to be relaxed and to try to enjoy yourself. Remember again that, as you are just beginning to date, your focus must not be to get serious with *anyone*. Instead, you are dating to enjoy an activity with the opposite sex.

Personality

Developing your personality is another wonderful benefit of dating, and this should be one of your goals. As you date widely with a variety of people, you not only get to *know* different personalities, but you also learn to *understand* them. As you talk and spend time with various individuals, you will observe aspects of their personalities, and you will learn to deal with certain idiosyncrasies in people. While you may conclude that you do not want to date seriously a particular person, you will still benefit from wide exposure to many types of people, and you will probably notice certain character traits that you may wish to emulate.

Learn to be comfortable around the opposite sex. Obviously, you will be most drawn to those of a certain personality, but be careful to avoid a cliquish pattern. Throw yourself into unfamiliar situations and plan dates that will force you to converse. Every man has something to offer every woman, and vice-versa.

Unfortunately, society today seems to be in a continual “battle of the sexes.” Due to the emphasis of modern psychology and the enduring falsehood of evolution, there now exists a kind of gulf of “mystery” between men and women. Both sexes are led to believe that they cannot truly figure each other out. This is utterly false—and it makes it too easy for anyone to say to those of the opposite sex, “You don’t understand me.”

Ask: Would God design men and women so that they could not understand each other? Evolution might. God would not! While *psychologists* and other “*experts*” may not be able to understand even the most basic differences between men and women—because they ignore God’s Instruction Manual—you can! However, be careful not to assume too much in this area. Set out to understand the opposite sex. Becoming

acquainted with various types of people will help you understand the psychological differences between men and women, and this will be of utmost value when you do marry.

Apart from appreciating anatomical differences, learn to recognize and genuinely enjoy the many *other* differences between men and women. At the same time, be careful not to stereotype “all men” or “all women” into a pattern that may not universally apply.

Men are designed to understand women. How else will they successfully lead a woman for life, and help her achieve her wonderful human potential? Conversely, a woman had also better be able to understand her husband, or how will she be able to similarly inspire him? Further, without properly understanding each other’s differing roles, how would couples work toward the mutual growth, benefit and success of their children, once marriage arrives?

While there *are* obvious differences between men and women, there need not be a communication gap—or a gap in understanding one another.

Sadly, OUTWARD APPEARANCE is often the sole determining factor in choosing a date. If someone is physically attractive, he or she seems to have a much better chance of dating others (the assumption seeming to be that such people’s personality and character must also be more attractive). However, this again focuses on the physical—and the “get” way of thinking. Often, the “average-looking” men or women have the better personalities—and more character, mixed with less vanity. This is because they have not been as inclined to spend a lifetime focused on *themselves* and their “good looks.”

A good personality involves a positive outlook on life. It includes a genuine interest in others and attentiveness to them, as well as a good sense of humor, enthusiasm and adaptability. One who has a good personality is versatile—flexible—able to interact with all types of people with a wide range of interests.

The practice of “going steady” does not develop one’s personality. When done too early, a wonderful opportunity is lost. As explained, having a steady boyfriend or girlfriend puts a person into a comfort zone that restricts the vital ongoing development of personality. Personalities should be vibrant, alive and interesting to the point of fascinating to be around. Pairing off too early is hardly conducive to such vitally important personality development.

You will find that as you date more widely, certain personalities will appeal to you—certain attributes will automatically be more or less attractive to you. You will learn how others view entertainment, clothing, world events, etc. And you will *learn*, period!

When you date, try to be kind, gentle and considerate. These are personality traits that can *always* be improved, and dating is a wonderful opportunity to develop these important characteristics.

In the end, dating is a tremendous opportunity to *change*—to IMPROVE—your personality! It is also, at least in part, a character-building activity. And these two aspects of *every* person are interwoven—your character is invariably reflected in some aspects of your personality, and vice-versa.

Determine to become a better date—the result will be *both* improved personality and improved character!

Social Graces

Even a cursory glance at most young people today demonstrates how most are sorely lacking in the areas of dignity, propriety, decorum and related areas of conduct. Many are rude, and even outright coarse and crude when it comes to manners and etiquette—and this is true in almost every one of the “social graces.” Everyone can continually improve in this area, and dating others is also a terrific opportunity to learn—and *practice*—the social graces.

The social graces represent—and reflect—a specific application of God’s law of love. They are based on giving others respect and high regard. The Bible teaches that love “does not behave itself *unseemly*” (I Cor. 13:5). Try to make it your goal to “esteem others better than yourself” (Phil. 2:3), giving to others, making them feel uplifted and special. In dating, little things mean a lot.

Strive to be a gentlemen or a lady. Like so many other aspects of dating—and LIFE—this takes practice. You can study etiquette by reading books or visiting certain websites. Ignore those who feel you are “lost in the past.” You may have to learn to open doors, help others get seated, assist your date with her coat—and endless other ways to be concerned and attentive to the needs of others. While worldly women may think it chic to occasionally be the one who pays on a date (and some men may be only too happy to allow this), other than an emergency, the well-mannered and trained gentleman or lady would not do this.

Often, the best way to learn is by example—observe older husbands and wives and notice how they react *to* others. Also observe how they interact *with* other people. You will find this opens you to a gold mine of proper etiquette and good manners. You will learn how to react and how *not* to react to others. Go to school on the ways you can improve your social skills.

As you put your heart into dating widely, you will grow in the social graces. It will also help those you are with to be more comfortable in your presence. Work to be an *example* in an age when so few any longer practice even the *basics* of proper etiquette (Matt. 5:16).

You now understand the fundamental purposes of dating: Develop your personality, build character, learn from others, grow in the social graces, enjoy fun, experience widely, learn to communicate. As the teenage years pass, dating provides a wonderful opportunity to learn a world of information about the opposite sex. This will greatly enhance your ability to one day become *properly* acquainted with the person who will go on to be your lifelong partner.

THE ART OF DATING

At this point, I feel that it would be helpful to tell the story of how I met my wife, and the circumstances that led to our engagement and marriage.

In February 1971, I was four months from graduation (Ambassador College in Pasadena, California). It appeared that I was going to be reassigned into the ministry of Jesus Christ. (I had spent the previous summer between my Junior and Senior years serving in Indianapolis, Indiana.) To be most effective in this full-time calling, I knew that I needed to be married. Yet, I had just ended a relationship that I recognized had been a terrible waste of time for the several months that I had been involved. It was a shattering, devastating experience, and I wondered what I had done wrong—what I had been missing in my assessment of the relationship. The woman that I had been interested in had turned out to be very immature—and would have been a terrible match. Yet, because I had been much too “involved,” I was completely unable to see this until it was over.

I decided to immediately seek counsel with a faculty member who was also a senior minister. It did not take him long to discern that I had not *truly* sought God’s guidance in the selection of a mate. I had made *my* choice, without being certain that it was *God’s* choice. I went straight back to my dormitory and began a 48-hour fast (going without food and water), accompanied by much prayer and Bible study. It quickly became evident to me that the minister was correct—I had not been fully seeking God on this matter, but rather I had merely assumed I was.

I determined to get God's counsel at every turn in any future relationship.

Within a couple of weeks, I had thought of several graduates I felt I should ask for at least one date. But this time, I was determined to take it slow, allowing time to be absolutely certain whether God was guiding me toward a particular person, whether there should be a second or third date, or more. I decided in advance that, no matter how interested I was after the first date, I would make myself wait *three weeks* until the second date. About a week later, I had enjoyed my first date—13 hours of sledding, including lunch and dinner—with the woman who would become my wife and the mother of our three children.

A little older than I, she had all of the maturity and more that had been missing in all previous dates and relationships I had experienced. While I had known this young woman at a superficial level for several years (she had been a senior when I was a freshman), I had no idea that she could have been such a perfect match for me. I wondered why I had never thought of dating her. In any event, I took the early weeks of our dating very slow so that I could keep my commitment to God to be truly sure that *He* was putting us together—that *He* was the matchmaker in this enormous decision to affect both of us for the rest of our lives!

This occurred over 33 years ago, and, three children and numerous grandchildren later, I have never had any regrets. Over and over again, in ways far too numerous to recount, we have seen the hand of God in our marriage, guiding, sustaining, teaching, blessing, protecting—and never abandoning us!

Include God

You can learn the lesson I did, without the anguish. Although we have already covered the basic purposes of dating, we have not yet covered in detail the crucial need to be close to God *throughout* the process. He is willing, even eager, to help you and to guide your dating experience—but only *if* you actively and regularly seek His counsel.

All human beings need wisdom, and are designed to correctly function when using it—in every situation. Wisdom comes from God. If you seek Him, He will meet all your needs with *wise*—and PERFECT—answers (Luke 11:9-13). Also, try to make the following passage part of your daily prayer: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not; and it shall be given him” (Jms. 1:5).

Proper dating is a process based directly upon godly principles. There are not specific laws or commands for every question or circumstance that might arise in life. The Bible was never intended to answer *every single question* the human mind might have about *every single issue*. Otherwise, it would be millions of words in length, instead of the approximately 750,000 words that it already is. While some things are clearly spelled out through law, the Bible is a living book (Heb. 4:12), written in a way that clear principles and guidelines can be found and applied to all of life's important decisions.

Pray about dates before you go out—and not just the “big” dates! Solomon wrote, “In *all* your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (Prov. 3:6). After each date, pray about it again, asking God for His assessment and guidance in any possible next step.

Do not allow friends or others in the world to pressure you into dating their way. Be on guard and ask God to give you a clean, right perspective. While none would ever consciously say this, never allow yourself to *unconsciously* conclude, “Everything is going fine. I can now proceed on my own without God's guidance.”

But God is not the only Person you should directly involve in the dating and courtship process! Depending on your age, it is also essential that parents be involved, at least to some degree, in crucial dating decisions.

Parents in the Picture

A common basis for dates and courtship today is, “Let's get away from the old folks, and go off by ourselves! It's not fun to hang out with our parents (or other adults) around!” However, remember that parents have their children's best interests in mind. Although they need not be told about every aspect of every date, parents who care (sadly, not all do) should be generally kept “in the loop.”

Society today promotes antagonism between young people and their parents—often couched benignly as a “generation gap”—and this hostility includes viewing nearly all adults as the “enemy.” Worse, authority figures of any kind almost seem to carry the label of “arch-enemies.”

A virtual battlefield now exists between parents and their teenagers. The Fifth Commandment—and it is a COMMANDMENT!—is “Honor your father and your mother” (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). Yet, millions of young people show little or no respect to the people who brought them into the world, and who worked to nurture, feed, clothe and teach them. They are

too busy feeling *misunderstood*—when, in fact, their parents understand them only too well.

No parents want their children to learn lessons the hard way. If you refuse their counsel, this is the path you choose, ensuring a future of much pain and possibly irreparable harm. (Read Proverbs 13:15).

How many times have you heard your parents say, “When I was your age, I thought I knew it all”? Yet, most teenagers ignore this, still acting as if they “know it all.” Young people often feel that parents do not understand their present circumstances. Yet, the reality is that “there is no new thing under the sun” (Ecc. 1:9). Every parent was once a teenager. They have experienced every phase of the teen years.

Listen carefully to your parents. Tap their knowledge. They can offer sound advice in a broad array of areas. Keep their counsel close, and take advantage of their *many* years of experience. Ask *them* about dating and courtship instead of relying on what your friends have to say. In a world cut off from God, peers and friends can offer little or no sound advice!

What Makes a Good Date?

Everyone wants each date to go well—to be successful. There *are* certain earmarks of a good date that all should strive to achieve.

Today’s fast pace of life affects almost everyone. The rat-race existence that describes the day-to-day routine for most is everywhere, at times seeming to create an almost palpable nervous tension in the air. First dates and beginning dates can be nerve-racking experiences, especially one-on-one. Before the date, both man and woman are worried about whether they look attractive or will say the right things. (Then there is the man’s worry about even asking the woman for a date.) Rest assured—the date will *NOT* go *perfectly*! However, going with the right perspective greatly increases the chance of *success*.

One of the best ways to create a relaxed atmosphere is to use humor to break the ice. But be certain that it is clean—and mature. Some people consider it “funny” to continually act immature, but this turns mature people off. Avoid silliness at all costs!

As men and women get older, there is a natural tendency to look deeper into all dates as prospective mates. An attitude of “hyper-analysis” can develop, with every first date becoming an opportunity to “size up” a potential husband or wife. This can turn into trying to *remake* the other person. This never works (Jer. 13:23)—and the last place to ever offer suggestions of almost any kind is on the first couple of dates.

Possible relationships can be ruined in an instant if this advice is ignored. The only time to do this is much later—and then only when solicited.

Focus first dates on the principles discussed in the previous chapter instead of trying to “quiz” the other person. Both parties will enjoy a date much more if they can get to know the other person. This objective is almost non-existent in dating today. Try to make this a goal in your dates, and, as explained, choice of environment must be conducive to conversation.

As also mentioned earlier, some feel it is impossible to understand the opposite sex. As you have seen, this is simply not true. Dating should be a time to get to know how the opposite sex thinks. Be sure to be open with each other without prying or probing into personal matters.

It is essential, especially to girls, to feel comfortable on a date. Always strive to make your date feel comfortable, whether in a group or one-on-one setting. Ask questions about the other person and be genuinely interested in the answers—this opens people up, and puts them at ease. Continually strive to cultivate a cheerful, thoughtful attitude. It will enable you to enjoy yourself more, *and* it will provide your date with a pleasant experience.

Are You a Good Date?

In life, there are optimists and pessimists, and which of these roles you choose will make an enormous difference in whether you and your partner enjoy the date. Strive to enter dates anticipating a good time. Be enthusiastic (but with sincerity)! It will leave a great impression on all those you date. Keep the **BIG PICTURE** in mind—always remembering that there is much more to a date than sensual pleasure.

Of course, if you practice the first goal of each date—to make sure the other(s) have a good time—this will certainly classify *you* as a “good date.” Be considerate of others. Ask them what they would like to do, or what they would like to talk about. (Again take note, men—you must be willing to take the lead when necessary.)

A good date begins with how you prepare for it—and your dress speaks volumes about what kind of date you will be—and what kind of person you are.

People are generally slaves to fashion. In the past, this included trying to look as wholesome and clean-cut as possible. Modern trends virtually require people to spend hours before a mirror carefully creating an *unkempt* look. The goal—especially among men, but very much including women—appears to have become one that seeks to look TER-

RIBLE!—baggy pants, worn too long, too low and without belts, oversized shirts, unpleasant colors designed to clash, wild, though carefully contrived, hairdos, often covered in grease, unshaven, tattoos, body piercings, ostentatious jewelry (and in too many places), and clunky, unflattering or untied shoes.

This “fashion” trend has been established almost entirely by rock stars and big-city youth street gangs, who try to maximize a kind of “shock factor” appearance, which is designed to draw attention to themselves. Many strive to be known for how different they look—from anyone else on planet earth!

The *hidden* goal in such dress, yet it is discussed *openly* by the millions who practice it, centers around trying to stun others with styles that can only be described as outrageous, repulsive, even grotesque—seeing who can go the furthest and look the worst. Amazingly, many people actually think they look good at the end of the process!

Be careful WHO you are copying. While being a slave to fashion is *never* good, following modern trends is taking a bad practice and turning it into something worse—a foolish, degrading, time-consuming, expensive and usually sensual practice that results in an awful finished product!

On the other hand, while you should always try to look your best, it is wrong to approach your appearance with “I must look drop-dead-gorgeous” or “Hollywood handsome,” done also to get maximum attention. This represents the other ditch. Your perspective should be to present—*give*—the other person a neat, clean and well-kept appearance.

Also strive to be polite and respectful through both words and actions. Remember again. Everyone can improve in their manners. Learn more. It will bring a level of CLASS to the date that will make it more enjoyable—and memorable!

Asking for a Date

There is a correct way to ask for a date—and a variety of ways *not* to do this.

For instance, if you are organizing a group date—and pre-planning *is* important—the opinion of others involved could be helpful. So often, teens want to do *something* together, but they gather and do NOTHING!—usually ending up just “hanging out.” At the very least, *nothing* is accomplished, and this generally leads to trouble, which often is all that is “accomplished.”

Be sure to plan something *before* you go out. Dating is a constructive, mentally stimulating and fun activity when done properly—loitering around late-night convenience stores, malls, diners or in parking lots does not equate with beneficial group dating!

If you have progressed to one-on-one dating, how should you ask for a date? First, the man should initiate the request. Be organized and purposeful—it should not happen by chance or be driven by convenience only.

The first few times a man asks for a date may involve some anxiety. But view it as an opportunity to grow in courage and leadership (characteristics sorely lacking in men today).

The Role of Religious Belief

The question of religious belief, and/or affiliation, plays an enormous role in determining whom you should date. In fact, it is the very STARTING POINT of whom you should even *consider* dating.

The general principle for those in God’s Church is to not spend a lot of time with those in “the world” (Jms. 4:4). Further, Amos 3:3 asks, “Can two walk TOGETHER except they be *agreed*?” The answer is a resounding “No!” God states plainly, “Be you not *unequally yoked* together with unbelievers: for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion has light with darkness?” (II Cor. 6:14). This passage offers no exceptions to the rule.

Christians must avoid every circumstance that involves extensive fellowship with those of different beliefs. This includes business partnerships, clubs and organizations involving fellowship agreements—and, obviously, this instruction is inseparable from the very personal activity of dating and courtship, which could, and generally will, quite literally, lead to being “yoked together”—MARRIED!—to an “unbeliever.” Actually, one who has God’s Spirit—who has been baptized and converted—is *prohibited* from even *dating* one who does not. (Also note Romans 8:9 and 14.)

Those who are young, and beginning to group date, could, on rare occasion and under very special circumstances, go out with a group of wholesome, *decent* friends when it involves a school activity.

Let me repeat a previous point for emphasis to explain why you should be very careful here. There was once a time when people spoke of those who “got in with the wrong crowd.” There has always been a certain “wrong crowd” in every school, and in every society and every age. But things have radically changed, and not for the better. Again, today, the *wrong crowd* has generally become the *only* crowd. Clean,

wholesome friends are very few and far between. If you have even one *true* friend, you are rare.

Understand! Your friends—good or bad—will influence you. Even the best of friends will have a completely different set of priorities than any who are striving to live God’s Way. Their thinking is in no way geared toward God or His Church. Therefore, be *extremely* cautious if you do choose to occasionally group date with those of different belief, and allow your parents to be the final arbiter of whether the “exception” you want to make *is* really an exception.

Again, if you choose to date those of different beliefs, they *will* influence you. Remember, your mind is already naturally hostile against God (Rom. 8:7). While they may not set out to purposely influence you, it *will* slowly happen with time. God realizes—and this is why He gives His instruction—that you *will* eventually be pulled away from Him into disobeying His laws.

Ignoring II Corinthians 6:14, some point to I Corinthians 7:14—“For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy”—and argue that this verse justifies Christians getting married to the unconverted.

This passage has nothing to do with dating or courting! The context is a believing HUSBAND or WIFE who was called into the truth after the couple were *already married*. In such cases, God made the decision to call only one marriage partner into His Church, and the automatic result was an unbelieving mate.

In all matters involving religious belief, be certain that you use great discretion. If you feel God may be calling a person into the truth, seek counsel with your parents or a minister before dating. However, be careful that you are not deceiving yourself into thinking that the person is about to “join the Church.” While this virtually never happens, many fall into this self-deception.

“But Our Beliefs Are Similar!”

A more complicated question arises. In this age, many of even those who *are* true Christians have compromised their religious beliefs, having grown confused or lukewarm on many doctrines they once understood. In such cases, when contemplating marriage, the same principles apply as above. If the person you are interested in does not believe the *full* truth of God as you do, you are in disagreement with him or her, and you still cannot walk together. Potential marriages between such people would

still involve *at very least* a partial unequal yoking together. The fact that this may be to a lesser degree is irrelevant!

Grasp this all-important point. The true Christianity of the Bible is far more than just “one’s religion.” *Real* Christianity is lived 24 hours a day, seven days a week! It touches on every facet of life—the truth about the afterlife and the nature of salvation, whether or not God’s Law should be kept (including certain annual Holy Days, along with God’s Sabbath—and various pagan holidays that should *not* be kept), the Bible’s many financial laws, its various dietary laws, the role of husbands and wives in marriage, the nature of God, understanding of prophecy, matters having to do with health and healing, the truth of the gospel...and much, much more!

There is a related understanding that applies here, and it is intrinsic to virtually every marriage. The Bible teaches that there are principles of correct childrearing—and they are almost diametrically the opposite of what society believes and permits. Proper childrearing is a full-time job, and it involves both parents nurturing the children in a UNIFIED way.

If you decide to marry one who holds merely *similar* beliefs—but not truly the *same* beliefs—you ensure that your children will grow up exposed to subtle nuances and influences reflecting *different beliefs*, invariably practiced by what must be a *less committed* spouse. Those even considering marriage to one of different beliefs have very wrong priorities. Because of what prophecy reveals, more is at stake here than meets the eye!

Do not dismiss religion as merely “something that can be worked out.” God expressly forbids His true servants from marrying those of different beliefs—yet this instruction is one of His truths that many people ignore. While certain other differences *can* be worked out, religious differences—where the truth of the Bible is concerned—cannot. This is the last area in which you should attempt to compromise—to “work things out.”

Other than the rare exception already addressed, dating outside your beliefs or apart from those who are converted should never be done. The reasons include all the principles previously discussed. There are many reasons why it is unwise to even *date*, let alone marry, those of different beliefs.

On a related note, many have made the grievous mistake of urging others to “get baptized so that we can get married.” This mocks God and the true meaning of conversion by trivializing it into a necessary, minor *detail* that one *orchestrates* en route to what will be a marriage that God is not involved in! God sees through all such charades.

Are Necking and Petting Wrong?

We have already discussed sex prior to marriage, but there are other aspects of this subject to be understood.

We have seen that society is almost entirely driven by sex. Sexual influences abound—everywhere. Both men and women in this society are programmed to think that sex is good in practically any situation or circumstance.

God created human beings male and female. By extension, this means that He designed marriage and the family relationship—and there cannot be families without sexual relations. As the Designer and Author of sex, God determined where it belongs—*within marriage* (Heb. 13:4)!

While sexual intercourse brings a husband and wife together, to share the wonderful sensations that God created for the marriage relationship, *any* form of it outside of marriage is expressly forbidden—and is sin (Gal. 5:19-21)!

But what about “necking” and “petting,” more commonly known as “making out”? To most teenagers today, the very question of whether these are wrong seems absurd. Simply put, petting is a form of caressing or passionate embracing, and necking is heavy kissing. These belong in marriage—and *nowhere* else, no matter the opinions of friends or society. Think of it this way: Do you want someone else putting his hands all over your future wife? Then don’t put your hands all over someone else’s! Also, in a society where women have become much more aggressive, it now needs to be emphasized that the same is true for them.

Only God decides what sin is and what it is not. Because human beings do not know His wonderful purpose for sex in marriage, they try to twist God’s definition. (Recall the national debate defined by the now infamous statement, “It depends on what the meaning of the word *is* is.”)

Necking and petting outside of marriage are not the stages leading to the pinnacle of LOVE but rather to the valley of LUST! Prior to marriage, these merely add temptation to go further. Recall: “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth DEATH” (Jms. 1:14-15).

Most understand that necking and petting will eventually lead to sexual intercourse. Actually, God designed this to be so! In fact, necking

and petting are the beginnings of sexual intercourse. To believe otherwise is extremely naïve, ignoring the fact that no young person or adult has enough “brake leather” to resist for very long what naturally was intended by God to come next.

Determining “sexual compatibility” has become a catchphrase—actually a copout—used by many today as nothing more than an excuse to have pre-marital sex. The thought here is that couples “need” to find out if they match sexually—just as with personality, perspective, interests, etc.—before getting married. Some want to “test drive the car before buying it.” This unconscious way of thinking has taken root in the wake of so many millions of failed marriages that can be attributed to having had an unhealthy sex life.

With no exceptions, sex outside of marriage is driven entirely by lust. Will you heed God’s Word? Will you obey Him and keep your virginity until marriage, saving yourself as you would wish your future spouse to do for you? If you both do this, the rewards will be wonderful beyond belief.

Masculinity and its Role in Dating

Before discussing courtship, we must analyze the distinct differences between the sexes. The world today is largely unaware of them and, in a society driven by “equality,” most do not realize that there are God-designed—GOD-ORDAINED—purposes for men and women.

If you are a man, are you truly masculine in the way you were designed to be—or are you guided by the thinking and stereotypes of a confused world?

Women, are you striving to be feminine in the way God intended—or do you accept the pressures and influences of SOCIETY, allowing *it* to define your role for you—meaning you have allowed the loudest, brassiest, haughtiest women to become *your* standard?

True masculinity has been undermined at every turn for almost half a century. Nearly every movie and television “sitcom” degrades men into bumbling fools—Dagwoods stumbling after Blondies—and ineffective leaders who have to be “bailed out” of problems by shrewd, sometimes conniving, sharp-tongued, more competent women. The subtle message is that men are weak, barely functioning “neanderthals,” who only survive through the continual assistance of an intelligent, assertive woman. And “savvy” teens often “assist” the wife. Men are depicted as morally weak and lacking the character to make *any* decisions—let alone the *right* ones!

On the other hand, women are pictured as aggressive—and more masculine than their counterparts. They are pictured as always knowing what to do, and how to manipulate men into doing what they want, while making men think they did things on their own.

Strength and courage are rare in men today, with most having become weak and indecisive. The impact of what millions watch in almost daily entertainment has made ever larger numbers of men effeminate. Tragically, particularly since the 1960s, men have been all too willing to abdicate their leadership roles, leaving women to fill the void. God never intended such confusion. Reversed roles cause unhappiness, unnecessary tension and severe frustration in a relationship. Isaiah's prophecy has been fulfilled: "As for My people, children are their oppressors, and WOMEN RULE OVER THEM" (3:12).

God created the man first and put him as the head—the leader—over the woman in the marriage relationship. But those even modestly fulfilling this God-ordained role have all but disappeared! No wonder the marriage "misery index" is higher than ever before.

Take note that man was created physically different from woman. He is generally taller, with a deeper voice, a coarser complexion and hairier skin. He has broader shoulders, larger, more-defined muscles and, overall, of sturdier build. Proverbs 20:29 describes how the "glory of young men is their strength." More often than not, today's men are fat, and not very strong. A man should always strive to be fit, healthy and strong. He was *designed* to be the provider for the family and to do hard, manual work when necessary.

On the other hand, I Peter 3:7 describes women as the physically "weaker vessel" to whom men must "give honor." In the six verses prior to this, godly women are described as having "a meek and quiet spirit"—hardly what society is producing for role models.

The differences between men and women are not only physical, but exist on the mental and emotional levels as well. Men are more competitive and more aggressive—generally willing to take more risks when facing challenges. Women are usually more intuitive—they feel things at a deeper level—while men are generally more logical and analytical, which are related to how God designed them to be natural leaders of a family.

In addition, a masculine man finds himself on solid principles and spiritual values, and is unwilling to bend or compromise with decisions based on his morals. He has purpose and drive, and uses intelligence and initiative to be decisive. His strength should be far more than just the physical.

Masculinity is the ability to be temperate, to use common sense and judgment, and to be able to take charge when necessary—all of which so few today seem to recognize as vital to the male role. The slide into male weakness is only compounded because, with so few now any longer demonstrating these basic masculine traits, there are almost no role models for young men to emulate.

But you *can* be different, if you set your will to be—and truly feminine women will notice and appreciate it, because this is the way they were designed to think!

Of course, this is only a brief overview of the many reasons why men are—and should strive to be—distinctly different from women.

Femininity and its Role in Dating

What has happened to true femininity? Remember, this is Satan's world—he does not want mankind living God's Way. As a sexless being, he wants neither men to be masculine nor women to be feminine! He wants confusion of roles, in every possible way.

Like its masculine counterpart, true femininity is almost non-existent today. The feminist movement has led society from one ditch to the other. Through its distorted cry for humanly-devised "equal rights," actually seeking to have strong women leading weak men, it has helped to turn the marriage institution upside down.

Sadly, there was once a time when male abuse of women (and they are "weaker vessels") was widespread. While "equal rights" has greatly reduced this problem, such "equality" has come at a terrible price. Having absolutely no comprehension of the GOVERNMENT OF GOD—and no understanding of the need for *this* government in the family—society has produced families in which husbands, wives, children, grandparents and others of the extended family simply do not see the direct connection of the correct understanding of each person's role to happiness, peace and unity in the home.

The "women's lib" movement has also influenced and virtually taken over the rearing of children. As a result, an enormous void now exists, with women no longer being taught about or trained in—through society, school, family or religion—the definition of true femininity or how to exude it.

A truly feminine woman *wants* to be a woman. She does not want the role of the man, understanding she would be uncomfortable doing something she was not *designed* to do. God purposely made women unique from men. The feminine woman honors the uniqueness of her

womanhood—knowing that THIS is what is attractive to the masculine man. She understands and respects the differences God installed into each of the sexes.

Women are physically weaker and emotionally different. They cry more easily and often need to express their feelings more openly with others.

A truly feminine woman knows *why* she was created. She understands the role she was intended to fulfill in marriage—as the man’s support and “helpmeet” (Gen. 2:18). Doing this helps her to be happiest.

A feminine woman recognizes her responsibilities of submission and service. God designed wives to be most comfortable when submissive to their husbands and when responsive to their needs—and to feel fulfilled when they are doing this. They know to disregard that society puts them down, or even lampoons them, as “old-fashioned” or “out of step,” recognizing that *society* is out of step with God—and miserable as a result!

If you are studying how to properly date, you are not yet married. Be sure to think ahead—into the future—and try to practice this essential way of thinking *now*. Make it a habit to give, help and serve wherever you are able.

A feminine woman of virtue is also resourceful and diligent in what she does. Ignore the popular image of the “feminine” woman as a *helpless* woman. This is far from true! She understands finances, strives to be imaginative and inventive, and works hard at whatever endeavor she undertakes.

Another important aspect of femininity, almost COMPLETELY lost to girls and young women today, is *modesty*. Are you modest? Are you aware of your posture and stance—the look in your eyes and the tone of your voice? Do you wear provocative clothing that does not cover as much as it should, while also knowing that it is intended to be suggestive and sexually arousing? Or do you dress elegantly and modestly, with dignity? A woman *should be* naturally concerned about her appearance, yet never in a way that is vain (Prov. 31:30).

Women: Keep your trust firmly in God. Because the man takes the lead in asking for dates, the woman must recognize that it takes real, enduring faith to believe a godly man will be sent to her. The wise woman knows that “taking matters into her own hands” would ultimately backfire. She patiently waits for God to intervene on her behalf.

Are you kind, patient, cultured? Do you have an attractive personality that you are constantly striving to build—to polish? Are you continually happy and joyful, and, if not, are you striving to be?

What is your overall GOAL? Do you wish to be the best wife possible when the time comes for marriage? Apply these principles of femininity. Take the time to read, study and possibly write out Proverbs 31—the “virtuous woman” chapter. Most of all, enjoy the fact that you *are* a woman—and that one day a special man will appreciate you for it!

What About Remarriage?

Some special instruction is important here. This may be your second time around looking for a mate. If so, all the principles in this book are still relevant, although many may need slight modification for obvious reasons, and depending upon the uniqueness of your circumstances. But, whether you are age 25 or 50, all are still applicable.

People hoping to *remarry* can bring a host of issues to potential new relationships. They must address whether only one or both interested parties have been married before. If only the man has been married before, this is one kind of circumstance. If only the woman has been, this is another. Be certain to discuss your previous marriage with your prospective mate. While you do not need to go into highly specific or excruciating detail, the matter has to be one of open discussion between you, including *all* marriages that a couple may have experienced.

Since you have been married before, you must be willing to ask yourself what went wrong and what fault or faults may lie with *you* from your first experience. Where can *you* improve? Focus on weaknesses or shortcomings *you* may have. Learn from past mistakes. When a marriage fails, it does not mean that one person was perfect and the other single-handedly ruined the relationship. In all likelihood, whether you were the initiator or recipient of divorce action, you played some role in the demise of the marriage.

Of course, you must also face additional considerations.

Has the other party been married before? Will he or she be able to understand you if you have? Will you be able to set aside your previous relationship, good *and* bad experiences, truly understanding that you are starting over in every sense? If the person marrying you has never been married before, are you willing to wait for this person to “catch up” with certain aspects of marriage with which you are experienced and he or she is not? Are you prepared to recognize that there may come moments when you both are simply “on a different page”? What will you do when this happens? Are you prepared to be flexible and tolerant at such times?—or are you considering building the proverbial “bridge too far”?

The circumstances that ended your previous marriage, as well as *how long ago* it ended, also play a role. It may have ended for any one of several reasons, with each carrying its own implications: Your spouse left you; you left your spouse (and, of course, a host of different reasons could possibly come into play—infidelity, alcoholism, etc.); death of a spouse by accident; death of a spouse after a protracted, agonizing illness; loss of a child, with which one or both of you could not cope; bankruptcy, etc.

Here is the point: All such circumstances bear consideration. For better or worse, whatever happened affected you. These could, and probably to one degree or another *will*, have an impact on your future marriage. But this does not mean that they are automatic strikes against you or factors that “knock out” a potential relationship.

Another factor that could be driving the desire to remarry is that you are lonely. Perhaps you have memories of love and companionship that are pulling you prematurely back into marriage, setting you up to enter another wrong relationship. Be careful not to permit loneliness to rush or push you into a second marriage.

“And I Have Children!”

Also, with the second time around, or because of children born out of wedlock, either one or both people could be bringing children into the marriage. You could soon become a step-parent. Can you handle this, and are you preparing yourself for the possibility, particularly if this is happening later in life? Is your prospective spouse prepared for *your* children?

Get to know all the children in the picture, and include them on *some* outings during both dating and courtship. Talk with them and help them understand what is happening. But never allow them to dictate the circumstances, let alone the outcome!

A whole host of complicating factors—all important to consider—can come into play with such couples. A “yours and ours” arrangement and a “mine and ours” arrangement are different from what could become a “yours, mine and ours” situation later. And then there is the question of whether you will permit the other person to help “rear” what are “your children.” Also, will he or she *want* to help you? There must be agreement on the matter of *how* the children should be reared as part of a joint effort, with both spouses understanding the need to work *together* in all situations. All these are absolutely crucial issues. They **MUST** be resolved, at least in principle, in advance of marriage.

Another related point for consideration is that if only one person has had children, this party may feel that he or she is “through” with having more. Is this agreeable to both parties? If one *seems* willing to “bend,” is this being done largely against his or her will? It is absolutely vital that this matter also be understood and worked out *well before* the wedding day.

And Finally...

It is critical that those considering remarriage do not try to makeover a potential new spouse in the image of a previous husband or wife. That marriage is behind you—FOREVER! The person or persons you were married to were *unique human beings*. So is the person that you may *now* be considering for courtship and marriage. It is critical you both recognize that you have come to be in love with *each other*, not merely in love with the idea of reliving a memory. Chasing the past is fraught with problems and is a hope that can never be. If you have not yet fully accepted that there is no way to return to or relive the past, you are not ready to date seriously, let alone remarry.

We are now ready to discuss the most serious stage of dating—**COURTSHIP!**

ADVANCING TO COURTSHIP

To this point, we have almost exclusively discussed dating. But what about courting? Every relationship reaches a point at which the couple will either become more interested, and want to pursue a more serious relationship, or they will decide that they are not seriously attracted to each other, and will (or should) agree to “just be friends.”

There is no specific moment when you suddenly find yourself “courting.” However, as dating becomes more involved, and as a person becomes more seriously interested in that *one* other person, there is a transition period when the couple goes from dating to courting. It should generally not occur like the flipping of a switch, as with engagement, but rather like the gradual turning up of a light on a rheostat.

Prior to this point, it is a mistake to believe that dating is done exclusively with one person. There is a process during which you slowly progress from dating many different people in one-on-one settings to perhaps thinking someone is particularly interesting, and choosing to date her a few more times, in order to determine that she is the person you want to more seriously pursue. This process could take many months, or even years, depending on how quickly you find someone compatible with you at all levels. (This phase could be preceded by having narrowed your dating down to two or three possible candidates for marriage.) It is at this final stage, however, that courtship begins, and you only date that one person from that point forward.

But reaching the stage of courtship should *never* mean that a couple has already decided to get married. They have merely reached the stage

where more serious exploration of what has already become a *mutual interest* should occur.

There are many important things to evaluate as you begin to court. *This* is really the point when you begin to consider a person as a possible lifelong mate. Using wisdom and judgment is crucial *before* getting too emotionally involved. Following is a series of areas for couples to consider after having become more interested. In essence, courtship is the decision to take the *next* step—a more serious step, but not the FINAL step!

Seeking God’s Way

Return for a moment to the starting point. The *best* way to pick the BEST PERSON for you is to not pick at all—to leave the decision in God’s hands! His ways and understanding are infinitely better than ours (Isa. 55:8), and He is the only One who can lead you to the right person!

But you must be willing to do your part.

In a sense, God’s way of dating is a natural process—you will *naturally* enjoy being with certain types of people more than others. But this natural feeling of comfort and discomfort with certain types of personalities will come, only *if* you have made it a goal to date widely before *ever* considering a serious relationship. By the time you are ready to court (if you have followed God’s way), you will be successful in finding a mate.

Finding and choosing a mate is a process best left to God’s overall direction. You cannot know if you have found the “right one” unless you have (figuratively speaking) allowed God to take you by the hand, and lead you to him or her—and He will if you let Him! Remember, God’s Spirit will not guide you if you are unwilling to wait until the *right time* to even begin thinking about the *right person*. Be willing to let God activate your mind! Allow Him to cause you to react to—to lean more and more toward—that one person!

At the same time, seek wise counsel and advice! Do not allow yourself to reach the point where you have succumbed to emotion without first counseling.

Do not misunderstand. It is a wonderful feeling to be on “cloud nine”—to be in love. Few things in life are comparable to this. Nevertheless, there is a period during the first stages of serious dating and courting when you can still make sound judgments without heavy emotional attachment. Try to think of this in the following way: It is important to suppress feelings of romantic love (eros), while carefully

focusing on and building the bond of true friendship (*philia*), all the while practicing and developing the love of God (*agape*) within the relationship.

Take advantage of this time!

Let me repeat. No matter your age, counsel with your parents. Ask them for *specific* advice on your situation. Where possible, talk with others with the same values and who have recently experienced dating, courtship and marriage. If they know you well, this is even better.

It is important to pay special attention to those who set the right example, but also learn from those who are willing to share their stories of difficulty or regret. Ask yourself, “Am I going to learn by following a right example, or will I force myself to learn the hard way by following *my* will instead of *GOD’S* will?”

As you court and consider engagement, it is absolutely vital to counsel with a true minister of God. And while many postpone counseling until the last moment, it is always better to err on the side of counseling too early in the relationship rather than too late. God’s ministers are in place to guide you, to help you further understand God’s will. Although there can be exceptions, the man may generally take the lead, and counsel with the minister first. But the woman should not fear to come first.

Remember that in this world, dating and courtship are founded on lust: “For ALL [all means *all*] that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is *not* of the Father, but is OF THE WORLD” (I John 2:16).

Recall that, within this passage, attitudes of the world are identified by three categories: Lust of flesh, lust of eyes, and pride of life! These three describe the way society typically dates—the *natural*, physical approach to picking a mate! Be absolutely certain that *you* are not, however unconsciously, using the world’s standards in choosing a mate!

Never forget that you must build an entirely different kind of foundation. You must care—have outgoing concern—for the other person. The Bible exhorts us to “love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loves is born [begotten] of God, and knows God” (I John 4:7).

Remember, the kind of “love” in the world is always selfish. While it does not always *express* itself selfishly, in the end, the motive is always centered on *SELF*! Also remember that a carnal person is not capable of having anything but selfish love!

Now, let’s examine additional points that must be considered during courtship. Remember, there is no such thing as the *perfect* mate, and

these should *never* become merely an analytical “checklist” based solely on the physical. There are no perfect people, including you. These principles are to make you stop and think as you work toward finding a truly healthy, fulfilling relationship. Understand that if you ignore them, *many* people (future children, in-laws, etc.) will suffer—but not as much as will you and your potential spouse!

Physical Health

It has been said, “You are what you eat.” How true! Having grown up in a family that has owned a natural food business for over thirty years, I have seen firsthand the degeneration in diet of the western world. The results have been devastating—increased disease and corresponding increase in health care, obesity, depression, dependence on a host of drugs, lost work, lost school days, lost energy and stamina, and loss of zest for life.

Modern society moves too fast. This has bred a reliance on junk food and the fast-food restaurants that make it readily available. This alone has produced a predictable result, described as “globesity,” the new term researchers have coined for the exploding obesity problem now sweeping the world. This has happened because, from early childhood, most children are given “foodless” foods that fill them with “unmeritorious calories,” instead of regular fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Few seem any longer to even remember the fact that healthy bodies are largely built on *these* foods. Instead, most live on fats, “sugar-bomb” desserts, soda, potato chips, too much meat (particularly red meat), and insufficient water intake.

And then there is the decline in—or total lack of—regular exercise with so many. Similarly, very few, including youth and teenagers, exercise even close to as much as they should—the daily 30 to 60 minutes that studies recommend.

All these factors and others contribute to the huge and growing health problems now worldwide in scope. The physical health and vitality of the world generally, and western countries in particular, is diminishing rapidly.

Have you looked closely at the health of the person you are courting? He or she should be doing the same with you. What do you see—and what does your potential spouse see in you? Less by words, and more often by actions and habits, people most accurately show who they *really* are (Matt. 12:34).

Be conscious of the following:

Is your prospective mate health-conscious? Does she continually try to think of areas in which she can improve? Will he care and be diligent with the health of your children? What does she eat? How much sleep and exercise does he make time for? Discuss these things thoroughly to be sure there is practical agreement, remembering to think of how you can apply these questions to yourself!

In addition, consider physical heredity. Do his parents have physical impairments or ailments that may be passed on to their children? Are you willing and capable to accept those possibilities and live with them—not only now, but later, when there might be much more stress in your life?

It has been said that if you are interested in a girl, you should look at her mother, because you are probably looking at your future wife in 25 years. This same thing could be said about fathers and sons. While it may not happen exactly, and should never be the sole determining factor, this is an important reality check, not to be overlooked or ignored. Genetics, coupled with the ingraining of health and dietary habits, play a big role in body type, physical tendencies and future health.

When describing their out-of-shape, overweight bodies, some choose to hide behind the modern cliché of “I am comfortable with my body,” but with such people, what you see now will only grow worse after marriage.

You are left with this thought: No one can go back in time and change many years of having violated most of the principles of good health. But you can start where you are, determining to make steady improvement and maintenance of your health a way of life. Will your future spouse also do this? (You may wish to read our booklet *God's Laws of HEALTHFUL LIVING*.)

Mental Health

Mental health is directly connected to a person's physical health. The minds of both parties must not only be compatible, but must also be stable and balanced. Two aspects of this bear consideration here.

Take an analytical perspective. Ask yourself if the person you are considering is truly mentally balanced. Is his or her family mentally stable? Does the family have a history of depression or mental disorders? I must stress NOT to dig too deeply, or to critically analyze every mental health issue and nuance of the entire extended family. But careful—and very discrete—observation, with some analysis, is much more important than you may think. Just as family *physical* health

problems can often reappear in later years, so can *mental* health problems do the same. Children tend to grow up absorbing much more of who and what their parents are than they can possibly know prior to becoming adults themselves. This is when latent tendencies can leap to the fore.

Then ask, how do you relate to each other mentally? When you talk, are you intellectually stimulated? Are you able to have—and do you enjoy—LONG TALKS about various aspects of life. Do you find it hard to carry on a continuous conversation, with the inability to stop at a given subject and take it much more in-depth than might normally occur? Also, do you find that you run out of things to talk about?

So many people think that fun in dating comes from exploring each other's *body*. The greatest fun comes from exploring each other's MIND. You should be able to easily open up with one another, and to do so over a broad range of topics. You should be able to have a genuinely good time, and to enjoy sharing yourself with this person. If, on more serious or complex topics, the eyes of the other party are “glazing over” too often, this should give you real pause. This is because, in a dating situation, people invariably put their best foot forward, trying to ensure that they make the best possible impression. If you are not regularly hearing meaningful or in-depth responses, on a range of issues, “buyer beware!”—what you see will be what you get for a long, long time!

Make sure that you do not mistake the *first impression* of a person with a *considered judgment* of that same person, which can only come after more time spent together.

Having a high IQ is nice, and possessing a formal education—a lot of “book knowledge”—is very good, but it should never be the all-important factor. But you should certainly strive to find someone with similar intellectual capacity and ability. You will be much happier and much more fulfilled if you do!

Be aware of this: It is rarely good that the woman be a great deal more intelligent than the man. Such situations carry the potential of bringing undue stress and friction within the relationship—especially as the man tries to take his proper leadership role. He could feel inferior and resort to putting his wife down and insulting her to compensate for his inadequacy. While intelligence level and mental capacity cannot be measured or quantified exactly (and you should never attempt this), it is critical to remember this guideline.

For example, a woman with a college degree who has her own business and has become quite successful will probably never be compatible with a man who has a third-grade reading level, works at a gas station

and has no further ambitions in life. While this scenario is an extreme example, it makes the point.

How about her perspective on learning? Is it similar to yours? How does he view further education and the importance of doing well in school? What are her study habits, and does she enjoy research and expanding her mind—even if school homework and college studies did not seem to require this?

There will be times in the marriage when you will need to really “go to school” on a topic or subject—purchasing a car, buying a house, rearing children, searching for a new job or apartment, or battling an illness, to name a few! Will you *both*—as a TEAM—be able to tackle these things together?

“Breeding”

Society once talked in terms of a person’s “breeding.” As with courtship, people rarely use this term anymore. Having “good breeding” seems to carry a connotation of either snobbery—people looking down one’s nose at another—or something done with dogs and cows. However, “breeding” really only means—and here is the social definition—one’s “training in the proper forms of social and personal conduct or their manners, knowledge of, or training in, the ceremonies, or polite observances of society.”

In a previous chapter, we discussed the importance of the social graces and etiquette. These areas of deportment and decorum are all related! Think about whether you are both at a similar level of polish. Obviously, if one party comes from “high society” and the other wears “bib overalls,” there can be no compatibility. But more subtle differences ought to be noted.

Ask: Did her parents teach her how to graciously host guests, tactfully converse and courteously conduct herself with others? If not, has she personally striven to improve herself in her knowledge of such propriety? Is he loud, crude and brash in mannerism and conduct, and are you willing—and able—to live with that?

Similarly, do not overlook a person’s cultural background. Is it vastly different from yours? When two people grow up in completely different cultures, and/or completely different regions of the world, they will naturally have different values, beliefs, perspectives and methods of approaching situations.

If this is the case—if the person in whom you are interested comes from a very different culture—pay attention to the possible conflicts or

trouble spots it could create *before* deciding to marry. Background in different clothing styles, cuisine, music, sports, language, traditions, customs, architecture, travel and other differences come into play.

Talk to each other about how you grew up. Practice picturing yourself having to compromise in various ways after marriage, seeing if the two of you are *really* able to form your own combined culture. Possibly be willing to blend or give up some things you may have always thought of as normal—“the only way things are done.” Either way, be realistic.

Cultural differences can stem from growing up in households with different nationalities or from having been reared in different countries, or even different regions of the *same* country. In addition, do not discount or overlook differences stemming from one of you having *grown up* with your religious beliefs, while the other person may have acquired these same beliefs *later in life*. These differences may not, of and by themselves, prevent a successful marriage, but couples should consider and discuss as many potential areas of stress or friction as possible *before* deciding to get married!

This is one of many reasons for God’s instruction about interracial marriage. The stress this can place on such a marriage—and the children that come from it—often causes couples from totally different cultures much unnecessary pain and unhappiness.

Emotions and Personality

The element of personality, which is closely tied to how people tend to express or suppress emotions, is an equally important factor to evaluate. Couples must “wear well” with each other—they must be able to enjoy long hours together without one or both grating on the other. A particular personality may make one person very comfortable, while driving another person “up the wall.” For example, some men enjoy women who are very talkative, and other men cannot tolerate this quality.

When it comes to personality, “one size does *not* fit all.” Therefore, there are a variety of questions you will want to consider regarding the personality of your prospective mate.

Earlier, we discussed the absolute necessity of emotional maturity. Is the person you are courting emotionally stable? Try to see the person in as many circumstances as possible as you begin to spend more time together. Does the person have a temper? Once again, when people first begin to date or court, they unconsciously put their “best foot forward” when in the other person’s presence. This is not necessarily bad or

Below are two lists that will help you analyze whether you are properly preparing yourself to be a good spouse. Whether you are far from marriage or already considering a particular person, examine them carefully for where you are deficient. It should also be of interest to you whether a potential spouse is doing or will do the same.

A word of caution: Do not apply either of these lists in reverse. Some have done this by making a checklist of all the things the *other* party in the marriage should reflect. Others have even been tempted to rate men or women through use of such written lists.

There was a somewhat famous (more like infamous)

Will I Be a Good Husband?

- Will I study her reaction physically, mentally and emotionally, and encourage her to confide her hopes and dreams to me?
- Will I always demonstrate my affection, not expecting her to always take my love for granted?
- Will I try to see things from her perspective as well as my own to avoid becoming set in my ways?
- Can I lead interesting discussions of important issues without it ending in an argument?
- If we do have a misunderstanding or a peevish outburst of irritation, will I put it behind us, settling the difficulty one way or the other—or will I sulk or pout, inviting the problem to return?
- Will I make allowances for irritability brought about through over-tiredness and a build-up of little household annoyances, pretending not to notice it?
- Will I inspire her and take an interest in her hobbies and in her more ambitious ventures that are necessary for her happiness?
- Will I take an interest in her clothes, show her my appreciation and pay her the little compliments and the attention that I did in our courting days?
- Is our mutual relationship ever-growing in understanding, sympathy, and depth?
- Will I spoil her friendships with others by unnecessary suspicion when she has proven her loyalty and devotion?
- Will her life be enriched, her interests broadened and her happiness and general well-being increased by marrying me?

example that occurred when I was going to college. One male student had rated a variety of co-eds, including a range of very specific strengths and weaknesses, on a list that he inadvertently dropped on the student lunchroom floor. Not only was he embarrassed, but certain girls were hurt once his list became known.

While you should certainly be carefully assessing any prospective spouse, be equally careful of following this inverted approach. Remember that people are not cattle being bought and sold at auction. However, having a detailed list of weaknesses, that you are using to work on *yourself*, is a healthy exercise. □

Will I Be a Good Wife?

- Will I help him to achieve a fuller life by constantly endeavoring to broaden our horizons?
- Will I use tact and sympathy with his little personal problems and help him understand himself?
- Will I study him and get a clear idea of all the little things that make him happy and confident?
- Will I share with him my little joys and successes and let him realize how much he contributes to *my* happiness?
- Will I overlook his little irritabilities due to overwork and fatigue, pretending not to notice them, making allowances for the strain that the workplace can be and that the responsibility of a family can bring?
- Will I see that he has enough time for relaxation and quiet thought?
- When my feelings are roused and out of proportion due to misunderstandings, will I always try to better understand him, our mutual relationship and myself, suspending harsh judgment with thoughtful self-inquiry?
- Have I noticed any mannerisms in myself that may be irritating to him?
- Will I let him enjoy women's company without undue suspicion and jealousy, encouraging him to be sociable, and helping him to feel natural and at ease?
- Will I allow him an evening off sometimes and not rely on or demand constant companionship?

wrong, but recognize that everyone naturally tries to be on his or her “best behavior.” However, over time, and as you attempt to be in different circumstances, take note of the following:

How does the person react under emotional duress? Does he “go to pieces” when the going gets tough? How does she handle stress? Can he push forward and keep the big picture in mind, or does he begin to lose control of his emotions at the slightest disruption? Can she deal with a suddenly changing situation, one that might cause a flood of emotions to immediately leap to the fore because maturity is not present to withhold them? Does he exercise and control his emotions when the chips are down? Is he steady and in control in the face of adversity? Is she a strong person?

Be honest with what you have observed so far, because it is a likely snapshot of a long future.

These points illustrate why it is essential to spend as much time as possible with your prospective mate before deciding to marry. Many do not even *consider* these things—let alone *ACT* on them. They bring themselves to believe that the person in whom they are interested is bright and sunny at all times. Unfortunately, they are sadly disappointed—and often disillusioned—at some point during the marriage, when their spouse’s “true colors” appear.

Be prepared! Understand that marriage represents a *PARTNERSHIP* that links you to all that the other person is—or is not!

What about the individual’s personality? Is it *truly* compatible with yours? Do you always have a wonderful time together, or do you often disagree or argue? Keep in the foremost part of your mind that such disagreements tend to greatly intensify after the familiarity of married life begins.

We have discussed those who attempt to change the other person’s *character* prior to marriage. Similarly, some foolishly try to change a person’s *personality* to make it fit what they believe it should be. Similarly again, as with forcing character changes, this *NEVER* works! On the other hand, others completely ignore flaws, oddities, idiosyncrasies and negative personality traits during the “good times” of dating and courting while thinking in the back of the mind that they will be able to change the person *after* marriage.

Do not kid yourself by believing you can do the impossible. *YOU CANNOT!* “Leopards” rarely “change their spots” (Jer. 13:23).

Guided by God’s love, you can overcome many obstacles, but *major* personality differences will not resolve easily! At the same time, however, this does not mean you should give up and walk away just because

you encounter slight problems unique to *every* human being. Marriage involves a great deal of mercy, patience and tolerance with one another. Remember that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23), and that marriage is a God-plane relationship, meaning you have to conduct yourself as God would if He were married to your spouse—or you.

A final word here about emotions and personality: Never forget that there is a big difference between dating and courting! Dating consists of casual, relaxed friendship and enjoyable good times while getting to know persons of the opposite sex. Courting is more serious—more focused. Marriage is permanent. Remember that at this point, you are still looking at qualities that can be simply left behind by going on to another dating partner. Therefore, *look closely* when courting. Doing this the day after the wedding is too late.

Throughout the dating and courtship process, continually strive to grow in understanding of each other’s emotional makeup and personality.

Spiritual Condition

We have already mentioned that in order to date just one person, both must be converted. For reasons explained earlier in the book, if the courtship stage has been reached without both parties having become Spirit-led (Rom. 8:9, 14), break it off *completely* until both of you are converted.

The Church of God endured an apostasy in the late 80s and early 90s. At one point, God’s Church was over 150,000 strong, with generally all those who were baptized thought to be converted. With the passing of time, and the radical changing of doctrine, scores of thousands almost eagerly changed their beliefs back to the traditions of mainstream “Christianity.” In retrospect, most proved to have never been truly converted.

When considering marriage, what happened in God’s Church still has application. Although you must be constantly aware of your own spiritual condition, the true spiritual strength and condition of the other person is also crucial.

Ask yourself these questions (among others): How *truly* converted is this person? How much does he pray and study the Bible? Does she really show fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23)? Is he really striving to live the give way of life in *all* circumstances—or does he seem to be mostly concerned about what is in it for him? Does she have a spirit of service and sacrifice? Is he doctrinally sound? Does she exhibit complete loyal-

ty to God's Church and people? Is he applying sermons to himself? Will she rear our children according to what God says?

If you are seeking God's kingdom and His righteousness first (Matt. 6:33), you should never even consider marrying one who may be converted but spiritually weak. Such a person *can* drag you down, hold you back—and possibly keep you from the kingdom of God!

This is most serious, and the problems that flow from ignoring it are VERY REAL!

Are You Romantically Attracted?

One of the most important elements in every marriage is romantic attraction. Without it, the relationship will lack spark, zest and the interest necessary to keep it from fizzling. God commands married couples to be "one flesh," and this is a direct reference to *sexual intercourse*. Without romantic attraction, this will quickly turn into a sense of duty, eventually followed by discontinuation—and will almost certainly be replaced by temptation to go outside the marriage to obtain what is "missing." Of course, this means disaster for all concerned.

We should return for a moment to romantic love, which is *eros*. The beginnings of this are physical attraction—that spark that every couple growing to love each other must come to feel.

This spark has sometimes been referred to as "chemistry." If a couple has this, they appeal to each other. This is often referred to as "sex appeal," and it is natural—and essential—in a marriage. Without physical attraction, resentment and even contempt can easily appear.

However, although *some* level of physical attraction is absolutely necessary, this should never outweigh all other elements of consideration. If there is *none*, a marriage will SUFFER, but if there is *nothing else*, a marriage will NEVER LAST!

The person absolutely MUST be attractive to you. Yet, that does not mean he or she is the most handsome or beautiful person in the world! She must be beautiful *to you*—and this includes more than just *outer* beauty. And he must be handsome *to you*—but his *inner* person must also be attractive.

"Are We in Love?"

With all these considerations, many are still left asking the BIG QUESTION, "Are we *really* in love?" As you try to answer *that* question, ask the following:

Do you love to talk to one another all the time—in all occasions? Do you enjoy virtually every minute that you spend together? Do you find that with each new date, you become *more* interested in the other person—in what he thinks, what she does, what he hopes and dreams, what she has to say?

Respect is one of the most important aspects of human relations, and it flows from many tangibles and intangibles. Do you deeply respect each other? This is not a simple, friendly respect, but a deep and growing mutual respect that leads directly to TRUST.

Once you make your decision, it is no longer a matter of finding a man or a woman who is pleasing to you, but instead trying now to see how you can best please this man or this woman you have come to deeply love—and have CHOSEN to love. Are you prepared to make the continual enhancement of that love a lifelong goal?

Recall that the world is all about "falling in love at first sight." But this DOES NOT HAPPEN! Most of humanity continually looks for a "quick fix" in life, not understanding that doing things God's way almost always takes time! It takes time to grow in character, and anything of beauty and worth takes time and effort. Artists must realize this if they hope to create a masterpiece. Some of the greatest masterpieces take months, or even years, to produce.

Love is the same! It cannot happen overnight or in an instant. You may feel *physical attraction* immediately, but real, deep love is entirely different. Be careful and, quite literally, "take heed lest you fall" (I Cor 10:12) in LUST, not love. Do not allow your human nature to deceive you. Many have been blinded, to their own hurt. Will this be you?

Love *develops* only through careful and proper dating and courtship. A relationship between a man and a woman is a wonderful, God-ordained institution, *if* you allow it to grow and develop. This is applicable to everything of quality.

Real love is never blind. Too often, when a couple allow themselves to become infatuated, they ignore all differences and all weaknesses in each other. Grasp this next point—it is most vital. If you feel there is NOTHING wrong with your prospective mate, you are kidding yourself—and perhaps willingly *deceiving* yourself because you are too focused on the physical, what it will be like in bed together! Acknowledge and accept that there *will be* little idiosyncrasies in the other person. Be sure you are willing to live with both those you see and those you may not yet see.

Finally, on the matter of "Are we in love?": Are your feelings and actions toward each other selfless? Does the relationship "line up" in all

the critical ways discussed? Is God's involvement EVIDENT in your relationship? Do you find that you simply "cannot get enough" of all that is the other person?

Anything less than brutal honesty with these questions brings a failing grade on the test!

Discussing Children and Family

An important item of discussion should be each other's perspective on family. As with everything else, the world's view of family and childrearing is drastically different from God's. Every person has grown up in a different home with different parents, having at least somewhat differing approaches to rearing children.

Marriage eventually means "family," and family is equated with *children*. When you become serious in a relationship, talk to each other about your views on children and family. Have you discussed these things? Do you share similar ideas of how you foresee a future family? Have you both read material available explaining God's view of childrearing? Do you share these same principles? Have you discussed *how many* children you hope to have? Are you in agreement as to *when* the children should come?

Then think about this: Your children will, in a sense, be "one-half" you and "one-half" your spouse. While every person is unique, and this includes your children, this "one-half" factor applies to strengths, weaknesses, mannerisms, personality, appearance, and potentially even character. If you do not like things in your potential spouse, prepare yourself to see them in more than one person!

Also, as future parents, you must take the time to prepare yourselves for the roles of FATHER and MOTHER. When you spend time with young children, imagine yourself in these roles. And, historically, have you enjoyed time spent with much younger siblings, or the children of brothers, sisters or friends?

Take note of how the other person reacts to children, or when children are around. Does she love to spend time with children or is she bothered by their presence? Is he gentle and kind, obviously enjoying talking to and playing with children, and having them on his lap?

Be certain that you are of similar mind when it comes to HOW you would rear children. Significant differences will cause a tremendous strain on a marriage relationship, and the children will observe—and take advantage of—the husband and wife who are divided in this all-important aspect of family government.

Children are able to discern disagreement at a very early age, and will tend to play parents against each other. Parents must be flexible and willing to work *together*. There are few things more damaging to developing children than parents who send conflicting or divided signals to their children. Where differences in opinion could arise, try to learn if the other prospective parent in your future marriage will *support* you in matters of discipline, household rules, and the other guidelines that pertain to the conduct of children and teenagers.

Consider. The children you have with your spouse are potentially future members of the God Family! Your combined STEWARDSHIP in this area represents a colossal responsibility that begins NOW—with a proper understanding of dating and courtship!

The Best Age for Marriage

Another common question, often asked while already dating, concerns the best age for marriage. Obviously, when one is already involved, particularly after having allowed this to occur at too early an age, such a person is in no position to any longer be objective about whether he or she is old enough for marriage. Sadly, it is often *too late* to even help such people. They have *already* chosen a path toward almost certain tragedy.

There is broad disagreement among so-called "experts" on this matter. Further, such "experts" have, in the first place, been shown to be entirely unaware of all the spiritual aspects behind maturity and conversion. This largely disqualifies them from having a valid opinion.

The time to be concerned with proper age is *before* involvement—and there is *another* good reason for this. Of course, many people who are too young to marry get involved anyway. At least partially recognizing what happened, they decide to wait until they are old enough to actually get married. Here is the problem—and it is a BIG problem! While they are willing to adjust *when* they should be married, believing they need more maturity, they have already decided *who* they want to marry before such maturity has arrived!

Let's look at this from another perspective: By now you have seen there are many complex factors that come into play when selecting a mate. Think! Would a person at age 18 select the same person that he or she would pick at age 24? Put another way, do you not think you will grow—in a host of ways—over what would be the next six years, in your ability to know *how* and *who* to pick as a lifelong partner? Of course you will.

I have asked this question of many young couples, and they invariably acknowledge that they *will* grow. They have to admit that an 18-

year-old mind simply would not necessarily—and probably only rarely—pick the SAME PERSON as would a 24-year-old mind. For those who fall back on “But we are already in love,” the rest of the book applies. Break it off! For those who say, “We are still going to get married, but we will wait,” I answer, “Well at least you have decided to postpone your misery!”

Assuming YOU do not want misery—either now or later—decide to wait until you have reached proper marrying age to get serious!

Although the Bible never outlines a *perfect* age for marriage, principles and experience *can* be applied here.

Christ said this about marriage: “What therefore *God* has joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mark 10:9). It is *God* who puts two people together. Reflect on that knowledge, and continually keep it in mind. Tell yourself that God has a plan for you, and He *will* provide a mate when the time is right. I repeat again for emphasis: Never rush courtship so you can get married sooner. Instead, completely rely on God to provide!

The best way to address the issue of optimal marriage age is to go back to the nation of ancient Israel. God instructed that people under the age of 20 should not even be counted in the national census. In one sense at least, anyone 19 and under quite literally “did not count”! In addition, it was not until age 30 that men reached the maturity level to be ordained priests. It was only at *this point* that God considered them as having reached sufficient maturity, leadership ability and influence to be capable of handling the responsibilities of a priest. Christ Himself did not start His ministry until He was 30 years old. John the Baptist was the same, and the apostles were apparently of similar age.

While these are not absolute rules regarding the right age to marry, the above models or guidelines are related. These ages were referenced in the Bible because God recognized that men and women reach certain levels of maturity at these “mile-markers.” We might conclude, and centuries of experience demonstrate this, that somewhere between 20 and 30 is the ideal time to marry, probably best described as about age 23 or 24, ranging to 26 or 27, for both men *and* women. This is the stage in life when one has most typically already been converted—and has practiced living God’s Way for some years. Additionally, schooling has generally been finished, and possibly there has been sufficient time for debts to disappear and at least some savings to accrue.

The fact is—and statistics have long born this out—teenagers should absolutely NEVER marry. Teens of a century ago were more mature, having been thrust into much more hard work and responsibil-

ity at an earlier age, often so their family could survive, making them more ready for serious responsibility. (Yet, teen marriages still often had great difficulty.) All this has changed today—and radically! Modern teenagers would all do well to take off the “rose-colored glasses”—and, in most cases, *blind*ers—so that they can properly see the facts as they are, about themselves and the generation of which they are a part.

Understand this. People mature at different ages, and there is no specific moment that will be right for EVERYONE. The basic principle is that you must “Prepare your work outside, get everything ready for you in the field; and AFTER THAT build your house” (Prov. 24:27, RSV). The “house” in this scripture is referencing a family, *and* the house needed for it. In essence, you must be prepared physically, mentally and spiritually—“build your house”—before you are ready to marry.

Age Differences

One other point should be weighed—that of significant age difference between the man and the woman. Either way, there will be *some effect* on the marriage if the age difference is too great.

If the man is more than ten years older than the woman, and she is in her early twenties, this represents a significant difference in maturity levels. (The older both parties are, the less important age difference becomes.) If the man is not patient, he will find himself continually trying to pull the woman to his level of experience. This cannot be done! Any man who tries to do it will “inherit the wind” (Prov. 11:29). If you are a man who is determined to marry a woman much younger than you, *accept* what this means and let the woman grow at her own natural rate. Do not try to be her father—she already has one!

Also, the woman in this kind of relationship may find herself continually trying to “catch up” with the man. It will be difficult for her to enjoy herself doing things that the man may likely see as something he has “already done.” Therefore, the woman determined to marry a much older man needs to recognize all that this means.

Conversely, the much older woman may have an even more difficult task in trying to marry the much younger man. Besides the danger of falling into mothering him, she may find it much more difficult to respect him, and to properly submit to him. She may find herself doing a lot of “biting her lip” until he gains sufficient maturity and experience to match hers—and to be deemed worthy of her as a submissive follower.

The man must be careful that he does not resent or feel threatened by his wife's greater age and experience. Men who choose to marry much older women had better be prepared to accept that the woman may be more difficult to lead than would be someone closer to his own age. Also, he must be very careful that, as the woman continues to physically age before he does, he does not permit himself to have a wandering eye toward any younger woman he may come to wish he had considered. Men must recognize that, with the passing of time, women do not continue to look like "young things."

Keep these points in mind. Women generally mature faster physically than do men. But men generally mature faster mentally than do women. Although there may be a slight adjustment period, the man who marries a woman who is only slightly older will usually have little difficulty properly leading her. However, the ideal is that the man be slightly older than the woman.

Career and Finances

More basic, practical questions must be asked before considering marriage.

What about job and career aspirations? If you are a man, are you solidly established in a career—one that allows you to provide for a family? Do you have a clear plan of what you are going to do—where your life is going? Have you set specific *goals* and plans for how you will support and sustain the family? Perhaps you are still in the final stages of your training and education. If so, you should still have specific, attainable goals in mind, and the ability to be a productive wage-earner should be very close at hand.

Consider: What are his work habits? Many today lack the motivation to work hard. Yet success, in both marriage and life, requires that one be both driven and willing to work hard—sometimes very hard. DRIVE is one of the laws of success. (It would be helpful to read our booklet *The Laws to SUCCESS*, with marriage in mind.) Marriage and family life will require hard work by *both* partners. Everyone wants a successful family—but not everyone is willing to pay the price to achieve it!

This, of course, is more important for the man. But, in many ways, it should also be a serious consideration for the woman. While there will be a period later in the marriage when the woman should forego employment, in order to better care for the home and focus on the children, there are times before and after (and possibly during, if it is a part-time job) when the woman will also have to help support the family.

With the high cost of living today, it can become essential in many cases to have two incomes within the family to even survive. (But be sure that your motive is not just to accumulate what you do not really *need*.)

Does the woman have ideas, and marketable skills, to help support the family financially as she is able? Is she thrifty? Can she carefully budget the family's income? Can she "stretch a dollar"?

In addition, bear in mind that MARRIAGE and MOTHERHOOD are their own career, no matter the opinion of blinded, self-absorbed, secular, God-rejecting feminists. In fact, other than practicing Christianity and rearing children, marriage is the most important "career" you will have throughout your life.

After communication problems, financial difficulties are the biggest reason for the divorce rate being at or above 50 percent. Try to do everything possible to achieve financial stability before marriage. The Bible states, "A prudent man foresees the evil [trouble], and hides himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished" (repeated twice, in Proverbs 22:3 and 27:12).

When discussing finances, there are many things to consider, and some have long-term implications. For instance, if children are involved from previous marriages, child support may be a big consideration. What financial responsibilities do your children bring? Does the other person bring obligations that you are agreeing to "take on"?

Also ask: Do you have a savings account? Are you in debt? Try hard to avoid at all costs the trap so many slip into so easily—borrowing and owing money at an early age. Teenagers and young people today foolishly fall prey to the lure of multiple credit cards and the often ensuing large debt. If you are serious about courting and marriage, be serious about first eliminating any debt you may have, and certainly do not fall deeper into it. (Take time to read our thorough booklets *Taking Charge of Your FINANCES* and *End All Your FINANCIAL WORRIES*.)

Understanding Roles in Marriage

At the courtship stage of a relationship, the couple has begun to look forward to what their future together will bring. The very first step—AND THIS IS TRULY VITAL!—is to know what it *means* to be a HUSBAND, and what it *means* to be a WIFE.

Take time to study *together* the last thirteen verses of Ephesians 5. Paul covers in detail the role of the husband, who is in charge and responsible for truly loving his wife—and the role of the wife, who is to

submit to the leadership of her husband. Also read Colossians 3:18-19 and I Peter 3:1-7, to be sure that you both understand God's PLAIN INSTRUCTION about the role of each spouse.

Apply to yourself all the passages in the Bible and the points in this book. It is not sufficient to have only an academic understanding of principles. Ask of each point what it means—how it applies to YOU. Then summarize which areas of character, personality or understanding need improvement before marriage. If applied correctly, you will be prepared to take on the role in marriage that God intends.

A word of caution: It is easy to read all that has been covered here and feel inadequate. While the many attributes of a good marriage—and of being a good marriage partner—take a lifetime to develop and master, think how much better off your marriage will be if you take an active approach now!

Great leaders are known for VISION. My father always encouraged my brother, sister and me to “not be afraid to dream,” and to chase our dreams, recognizing that we were “only limited by our imagination.” His intent was for us to set high standards and pursue them. Similarly, you have a goal—a DREAM—to one day be happily married, with a wonderful family. Given society's current condition, this might seem unattainable. But, no matter your age, pursue your dream—and start *now* by methodically applying the principles for a successful marriage.

The best way to begin is through systematic SELF-EXAMINATION, envisioning yourself in every possible marital situation. Then, ask how you would apply various points. Ask yourself if you are even *able* to apply them as directed. Discern your weaknesses and diligently work on them.

By now, you have developed a long checklist (and we are not yet finished) of things to address in your growth. While this is not the time to be judgmental and expect perfection—in yourself *or* the other person—make sure you believe that the other person is truly prepared to grow and overcome as a WAY OF LIFE. Understand that there are “bumps,” some of them serious, in *every* marriage. The test of a marriage is not how *many* bumps there are, but what couples are willing to *do* about them—whether they are determined to make progress toward always doing better than before.

Remember that once the marriage has begun, it will be essential to always examine *yourself first!* Since this is the Christian way, practice doing this now. Christ taught this. Notice: “And why behold you the mote that is in your brother's eye, but consider not the beam that is in your own eye? Or how will you say to your brother, Let me pull out the mote out of

your eye; and, behold, a beam [is] in your own eye? You hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of your own eye; and then shall you see clearly to cast out the mote out of your brother's eye” (Matt. 7:3-5).

Recall that Paul also stated this principle, although somewhat differently: “But in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Phil. 2:3-4). Christians are to focus on the *needs of others*, while at the same time not neglecting their OWN *weaknesses* and *problems*. Most people do the opposite.

Once again, a word to those who are considering marriage for the second time: Be sure that you have been able to adjust your understanding (unconsciously brought from practicing it in a previous marriage) of your *proper* role as husband or wife in the new marriage.

(To further understand both roles in marriage, you may read our booklets *You Can Build a Happy MARRIAGE* and *The Purpose of MARRIAGE – Ever Obsolete?* We also have several sermons on the subject of marriage.)

Understanding the Sheer Size of This Decision

An enormous decision lies before you. Beyond baptism, the decision to marry is almost certainly the most important you will ever make. You are responsible for evaluating the entire picture! No one can do it for you. It is also vital and necessary to counsel with a minister *before* you make the decision to marry, but beyond that, recognize that, ultimately, counselors do not know you as well as you know yourself!

Those considering marriage are standing at a fork in the road. So very much depends on which road you choose. Each represents an almost completely different path for the rest of your life—either marriage to this person or waiting for another.

This is not a decision that you can afford to “get wrong.” Too much is at stake. Yet, so many just waltz after the first person who strikes their fancy, giving virtually no thought whatsoever to the fact that there even *is* a choice.

But there is!

You are the captain of your own ship. It will go in the direction you choose to steer it. Understand that you are facing a titanic decision that will, either way, forever change the remainder of your life on planet earth. (Momentarily, we will talk about those who have “cold feet,” but this is not our purpose now.) You could start down the path to the most marvelous, continual experience in your life, one that could literally

change you in ways you can now scarcely begin to imagine—enjoying wonderful companionship and building a life together with the one who will become the dearest person in your life.

This is no time to let your emotions rule. Fight against this, continuously seeking God’s will: “For it is *God* which works in you both to will and to do of *His* good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). Ask God to show you if you are courting or planning marriage for the wrong reasons—or with the wrong person.

The Wrong Reasons

Over the years, I have observed people marrying for many reasons. This has meant watching so many go forward with the *wrong framework* in mind. I have learned that, once “smitten,” few will turn back, and most will not even consider that their reasons for marrying might be on less than solid ground.

On the other hand, like baptism and conversion, if someone can be easily talked out of marriage, by hollow arguments, then either this person is not the right one, or it is certainly not the right time.

Many marry out of plain LONELINESS. The first person who will help it go away “gets the nod.” Naturally, if you are past your early twenties and still single, you could be experiencing at least some loneliness. This is certainly not wrong. God Himself said, “It is not good that the man [or the woman] should be ALONE. I will make a help meet [suitable] for him [or her]” (Gen. 2:18). Solomon added, “Two are better than one” (Ecc. 4:9-12). Of course, this is true for many reasons.

But loneliness should never be the sole reason for getting married. If this becomes the main motivation, you are, in effect, telling God that you cannot make it on your own and you need to depend on another human being. This is not true, because many of God’s greatest servants either never married or lost mates after they did. While continuing unmarried is not desirable, it *can* be done (Matt. 19:12).

Others get married at a young age to ESCAPE HOME. Some states permit marriage at the ridiculous age of sixteen. Because many family situations and environments are not ideal—and some are far from it—there may be huge difficulties between a teen or young adult and his or her parents. If this is the case, do not be foolishly led to move out, using marriage as the vehicle. If there are unresolved family difficulties, try to seek wise counsel, and with one of God’s ministers if possible. The age of responsible adulthood may lie just ahead. Never just catapult yourself into another potentially more miserable situation—and this time for

life!—by leaping headlong out of difficulty that may have lasted only a short while longer.

Here is another wrong reason to marry: While there are specific roles of a husband and a wife, some blur these to an extreme, looking for ANOTHER PARENT. For instance, some men feel they must marry to have someone look after them—and such reasoning is often translated “feed and pick up after them.” The more immature men in particular carry this thinking, in some cases seeking someone who will take the place of a mother. Do not ever get married to be looked after, viewing a wife as merely a housekeeper, replacing your mother.

This also applies to women who may be unconsciously seeking a “father figure,” sometimes because they had a *wonderful* father, and other times because they had an absolutely *terrible* father. The latter are trying to fill a void that can only ultimately be filled by their Father in heaven. Your husband should never be “daddy” to anyone but your *children*, just as you should never be “mommy” to any but the same.

Others marry due to INSECURITY. Similar to the previous point, this is somewhat more common in women than men. A certain amount of security comes from being part of a family unit. When one grows up and moves out on his or her own, that security is often lost. Those who depend on it sometimes look to marriage as an opportunity to become secure again. Of course, it is natural to desire this. But, like so many other points, it should not be a primary reason for marriage, to the exclusion of sound examination and logic, overriding the multitude of other points throughout this book.

We are living in what the Bible calls “the last days.” God’s Church is not prophesied to grow large in number at the end of the age. Because of this, or because of passing the “prime” singles’ age, a person might meet someone of similar age and automatically think that this is “the one.” He thinks to himself, “Will I ever get *another chance*? I have been praying for a spouse, and this is the one—because this *has to be* the one.” This lacks faith and is *desperation thinking* (Heb. 11:6). It leaves God out of the picture. Do not confuse asking God to provide you with a mate, with believing His answer is automatically the next person you will meet. In this regard, be careful of instructing—and LIMITING—God that He must fulfill some kind of strange “sign” that you have defined for Him as what you will base your course of action on. I have yet to see a successful marriage born of such humanly-devised “signs.”

I will offer a tragic example. I once knew two otherwise very reasonable people who married this way. The man had told God that who-

ever was the first woman to “take off her shoes” at an upcoming dance was to be his wife. Of course, God did not intervene and block him from carrying out such a silly notion. A woman *did* take off her shoes at the dance. He approached this much younger woman and eventually pursued her all the way to marriage. He felt driven by God’s “fulfillment” of his predetermined “sign” of who was to be his wife. After children came and several years passed, the marriage crashed. The woman had never known of his plan. But later, she *did* know that she was miserable in the marriage. Upon learning his plan—he revealed it when trouble appeared in the marriage—she could not get over the basis upon which she had been selected for lifelong partnership. Sadly, this woman had succumbed to this man’s unrelenting advances—and a horrible mess resulted.

Habits and Hygiene

Every individual has both good and bad habits, exclusive to him or her. What are the habits of your potential mate? Do any of them call undue attention to the person? Do any of them annoy you? Will you be able to accept the bad habits with the good? You may wish to talk about any that are particularly troubling with your potential mate.

Scrutinize your own habits *now!* They can be changed. Various studies show that habits can be changed or overcome in about 21 days. Of course, addictions (actually *sins*) such as gluttony, smoking and overdrinking can be much harder to change because they are more intrinsic to a person’s character than are habits such as biting fingernails, cracking knuckles, twirling of the hair, etc. While these latter habits can be very irritating, they obviously carry far less weight in seriousness. The fewer bad habits you have when the marrying age arrives, the less you have to “hide” or hope that the other person is willing to overlook.

Hygiene is also very important throughout marriage. Few things are worse than dealing with people who do not wash, brush teeth, clip nails, shave, comb hair, pick up after themselves, leave the bathroom clean, use deodorant and much more. Remember, if you have dated and courted properly, you will not have lived together prior to marriage. This means that there is a side of the person that you will not see until starting the day after the wedding.

What you *see now* may not be what you *get later*. How does your prospective mate live? Have you ever visited his or her home, apartment or room UNANNOUNCED? What did you see? Was it neat and tidy—or did it look like one or more hand grenades went off in the room?

Let’s look at the other side of the coin. Are you considering marriage to a “neat freak” who demands a spotless, “germ-free” environment? Taken to the extreme, this could rival the other ditch. Such people are no fun to live with, and some come from mothers who demanded this kind of environment all day, everyday, throughout the home.

Be realistic when addressing the issues of habits and hygiene. Be adaptable, understanding and patient—if issues in either of these areas trouble you, thoroughly discuss them until you are either satisfied or have reached an impasse.

Interests

Most everyone has one or more interests. (Only a few seem to have none.) By the time one reaches adulthood, probably a number of interests have emerged.

Interests can involve a wide range of general kinds of things. For example, they can have to do with SPORTS: tennis, swimming, golf, hiking, ping pong, horseback riding, rock climbing, etc.—or with MUSIC: dancing, singing, playing one or more instruments, attending the opera, etc.—or with COLLECTING: coins, stamps, butterflies, ancient books, autographs, bottle caps?!, etc.—or with GAMES: cards, boardgames, croquet, etc.—or with PETS: dogs, cats, hamsters, birds, fish, guinea pigs, reptiles?!, etc. Take a careful look.

The above list is only the beginning of things that may interest people. Some people read books voraciously, others like to travel and see the world, while still others enjoy model-making or kite-flying. And, of course, some women may like to sew, crochet, knit, etc.

Virtually no two people have the exact same range of interests. Considering all the different *kinds* of interests that exist, and that as people grow, their interests change, there is no such thing as a couple who will always want to do the exact same thing, at the exact same time, in the exact same way, let alone for the exact same reasons. Hopefully, the point is made.

Keep your focus on this: Are your interests compatible with those of the person you are considering for marriage? How many of them are mutual—how many “line up”? If there are not at least two or three, trouble lies ahead. You will find that although you share the same last name, you live in different worlds. Just the matter of whether or not one party wants to have pets, and the other party “hates animals,” probably means incompatibility—because this can almost single-handedly ensure marital misery.

Also, it is good if you have some interests that are dissimilar, even apart from those that may be specific to men or women. Every couple needs time apart, so that they can think, reflect and gather themselves. However (and this can be a problem), some people need more time apart than others. If the disparity in thinking on this point is too great, give pause. “Lone wolves” rarely do well with wives who are “clingy” and possessive.

Much food for thought in this section!

Dealing With the Past

Everyone brings a certain amount of “baggage” into a marriage. The fact that you have been alive for perhaps 25 years means that you have said, done or been things you wish you could change. There are no exceptions to this rule. Of course, many kinds of mistakes, sins, past weaknesses and faults, and habits can remain in the past. Some of them absolutely should! However, there are some that should not—and actually MUST NOT! If left undisclosed at the outset, they can immediately end the marriage in God’s sight once they are discovered.

There are only two valid biblical reasons for ending a marriage. One is marital *fraud*, and this is the one that needs to be addressed here. Let’s understand. If, prior to marriage, a serious problem from the past is not disclosed—one that might have changed the prospective mate’s mind toward marriage had it been known—this constitutes fraud, thus potentially nullifying the marriage in God’s sight.

Sadly, one of the most common issues involving fraud is pre-marital sex. If you are not a virgin at marriage, you must disclose that fact to your prospective mate. While you should be careful not to explain too many details or events, you must bring up the subject in general terms. Once the prospective wife (for instance) is told, she has a choice of whether she wants to continue toward marriage. If she *does* wish to continue, she absolutely has to forgive and strive to forget what was mentioned. (Of course, this is also true if she does *not* wish to continue the relationship. Either way, what has been disclosed can NEVER again be brought up by her to anyone!)

Prior to marriage, a frank discussion must take place having to do with previous sex sins. This is the Bible principle. If one person is a virgin, and expects to marry a virgin, but the other person is not, this must be made known to the first party. At *this point*, the decision must be made. If you did not disclose this, and she learned of it after the marriage, this constitutes fraud and is grounds for annulment of the

marriage. Once again, if fraud *has* occurred, it is at *this point* that a decision must be made to continue or to end the marriage. This is not something that can be revisited for reconsideration, during difficult times, later in the marriage.

Fornication is not the only category of conduct eligible for disclosure. Others would be: past homosexual conduct, drug abuse, alcoholism, bankruptcy or severely bad credit, time in jail or prison, life-threatening illness or some kind of serious genetic predisposition toward specific disease, general lack of sexual interest, among others. In other words, disclose before marriage *anything*—meaning any past really serious misstep or character flaw—that you would want to know (or that you feel would make a difference), and that the other person would also almost certainly want to know (Matt. 7:12). A scriptural obligation exists to disclose all such issues. (The reader may feel it helpful or even necessary to read our booklet *Understanding DIVORCE and REMARRIAGE* in this regard.)

Marriage is a lifelong *contract* between two people. What other contract carries either such profound implications or long duration? Like any contract, both parties must receive what they bargained for. In the courts of men, lack of disclosure can be grounds for legal action.

However, fraud is not merely discovering after marriage that your mate is stubborn—or selfish—or proud—or foolish—or temperamental—or unteachable. You should be able to, and should take time to, discern these things before you ever get married. These are character traits, common to one degree or another in *every* human being. Obviously, real problems, in any of these or other areas, become their own red flag about whether to proceed. But they cannot be considered grounds for fraud.

When Wedding Bells First Ring...

Many think that the first time they will hear wedding bells is on the wedding *day*. In a very important sense, this is *not* true!

At some point in every relationship, each member of the couple begins to hear “wedding bells,” but only in the mind. This may happen at very different times for each party—and usually does.

Typically, in their minds, women advance to the wedding day more quickly than do men. Although this should not happen, for the woman who is carefully withholding her emotions and final commitment throughout the decision-making process, it is still often the case. Because of its specialness, women tend to prepare for and look forward to this day before men do. They often see themselves buying a dress, planning the

details, inviting their friends, etc. A woman may have been working on her “hope chest” for years. This has unconsciously conditioned her to see past where the relationship actually is.

The man should be aware that this may be the woman’s frame of mind before, or even well before, engagement—the time of his decision to propose to her. So, he must be *very* careful not to send *any* signals too early that could be misinterpreted. The woman should also be on guard not to “over-read” the man’s words or actions.

Here is why this is vitally important: At the courtship stage, marriage is not a foregone conclusion. Both parties should be able to freely call it off if they feel led to do this. After all, this is the whole purpose of much of what you have read throughout this chapter. The courtship process, if done properly, is all to occur before a final decision has been made.

Although the woman should be careful not to unnecessarily hurt the man if *she* decides to call it off, the man must be even more careful! The woman has possibly or even probably already heard wedding bells in her mind. As a man, it is your duty to never, *never*, NEVER lead a woman on! Few things could be more cruel. (Of course, this also applies to women, but it does not happen as often.)

Take a moment to carefully read Proverbs 30:18-19. It references the phrase “The way of a man with a maid.” We have previously discussed how a woman is designed to submit to a man—to release herself emotionally, psychologically, mentally and physically to the “man of her dreams.”

A related side note fits here. Solomon’s reference to “the way of a man with a maid”—to a man’s special “power,” if you will, over a woman—often comes into play when his goal is to “get sex” from her. Experience shows that a woman will often “release” herself in fornication to the man she *thinks* has committed to her. While this should not be happening with the couple striving to obey and please God, this special “power” is another reason the man has a serious obligation in the relationship to be completely upfront about his intentions.

All of this said, every man has a real responsibility to be *extremely gentle* when telling a woman that he does not want to pursue her any further. Of course, he should also tell her of his feelings *as soon as possible*. (At the same time, he must not feel forced to say too much *too soon*, before he knows his own feelings, simply because he fears the woman could be hurt if he says nothing.)

The longer a relationship has continued, the more problematic will be the decision to break it off. Both parties should be very careful not to *ever* play with the heart-strings of another human being. Too much is at stake!

When Are We Ready For Marriage?

Whenever I counsel a couple for marriage, I ask them the following questions. This final checklist aids in knowing beyond reasonable doubt that one is ready to make the decision to marry a specific person. Answer each question honestly.

First, do you deeply love her? Similarly, do you know that she deeply loves you? Do you have any doubts? Do not answer this question reflexively on a whim of emotion, but ask—“Is it *really* love?” Trying to foresee your love in many different situations, ask, “Will it last?”

Do you think you are mature enough to get married? In the same vein, do you think that your potential spouse is mature enough? (Take the time to read our article “Are You EMOTIONALLY MATURE?”)

What is your financial situation? Have you carefully planned a specific course of action from now until the wedding? Do you know how much money you will have? Do you have a steady job? Are you still in school? Do you have a car? Are there payments left? What are your savings? You should ask these questions of both yourself and your potential spouse, and be certain to budget together. Also, there are extra, sometimes unforeseen, expenses prior to the wedding. Then there is the cost of the honeymoon. And this is followed by certain essential expenses just to set up the household.

Have you planned for all these things?

Be sure that you are prepared to live within your means. If you do not have enough at this point to make ends meet with some funds left over, it may be best to wait a while. While it is a lovely platitude, do not think, “We can live on love.” Remember, “love” needs to eat and pay the light bill. But neither let yourself fall into thinking that you can only get married when you have achieved 100% financial security. You do not need a vested *retirement fund* before you can think about a *marriage fund*. Many who wait until their late twenties or early thirties do so with this in mind.

Have you adequately talked about your dreams and goals? Are you sure you share many in common? Are you excited about where your relationship will go? Can you foresee working together on small and large projects *throughout your marriage*?

Is there anything in his or her personality or background that is producing RESERVATIONS? Do you have any doubts? Are you uncertain about anything? While you may have certain reservations or questions,

this does not necessarily mean you are not ready. If some concerns persist, leaving you uncomfortable, heed them and seek counsel.

Most importantly, do you have doubts about his SPIRITUALITY? Have you taken the time to discuss sermons or literature that you have read? Is there a depth—a maturity—to her spiritual understanding?

Take time to look for reasons why it would NOT work out—do not only focus on why it WOULD! And do this independently, only later comparing notes. Remember that your mind is naturally deceitful, and you could be fooling yourself (Jer. 17:9). If you cannot cite any apparent weaknesses in your spouse-to-be, you are blind. And, despite what you have heard, love is *not* blind. You should be able to see, come to grips with and accept the particular set of weaknesses you are choosing to live with.

Then, sit down and discuss with each other the reasons you generated. Either you will grow closer together, or doubts will arise and cause you to analyze and prepare more.

Of course, neither your relationship nor anyone else's will ever be perfect. As we have discussed, you both have habits, good and bad, and you will have to continually remember to focus on the other person's GOOD POINTS. But never forget the basic biblical principle, "He who thinks he stands, take heed lest you fall" (I Cor. 10:12), and choose to foresee the trouble in advance and to "hide yourself" (Prov. 22:3) if necessary. You owe each other no less!

Remember, love comes from God. He will trigger your minds to *grow* together if you allow Him. He will bring you together *if* it is His will—be patient and rely on Him.

When you are sure you are making the right choice, you are ready to officially begin the next step of your relationship together.

NOW THAT YOU ARE ENGAGED...

Congratulations! You are engaged! Reaching this point means that you have just enjoyed a wonderful evening with your brand new fiancé(e). It was probably a romantic moment for both of you. You are exhilarated and happy beyond words. People are congratulating you. You are looking forward to the start of something wonderful.

This is an exciting time in your life—savor and enjoy it! A marvelous, dynamic relationship is underway.

But now what? What does engagement mean? Besides continuing to build on the things you have learned in this book, what final issues and matters should be discussed and addressed?

First, we need to understand exactly what happened at engagement. You have *already* decided that you want to get married—that you want to spend the rest of your life with this person. Think of engagement in the following way: When an automobile transmission is shifted from "neutral" into "drive," only then can the car begin to move forward, toward a specific destination. This is because the transmission has been "engaged"—put into gear. With a wedding *engagement*, you are now in gear, moving forward toward the ultimate destination—"date"—that of your wedding day!

Of course, with the final decision to get married now having been made, you may not have actually established the precise time *when* you will get married, and engagement *is* the time to finalize planning *when* this will happen. Therefore, length of engagement is the first order of business for the newly engaged couple.

Length of Engagement

Many couples announce their engagement with no idea *whatsoever* when the wedding day should be. Some wait through a full year of engagement, thinking this is the right thing to do. A few go for several years—often waiting for college, military service or professional training to end—before committing to a date. Many settle on a period between six months and a year. Others pick three to six months. Still others opt for something between one week and one month, while some completely *skip* any engagement period.

What is best?

While the Bible does not address the exact length for a proper engagement, I have learned in my over thirty years of experience in the ministry that shorter engagements are a better alternative, for a variety of reasons. Let me explain.

Often, people become engaged on an emotional whim. (Hopefully, by now, the reader would not consider such a foolish course of action.) These do not counsel with a minister prior to engagement, and they certainly have not focused on or even considered the principles outlined in this book. Such engagements are the ones that often drag out one, two or three years while the couple figures out how to “get ready” for marriage.

If you have followed God’s way and honestly addressed all pertinent issues, you should be married within no more than six months of engagement. The most ideal time is probably about three to four months, with six weeks being a *minimum*. This latter timeframe should be the rare exception, because most weddings require at least this much time to find a hall, prepare and send invitations (allowing enough time for people who wish to attend to be able to do so), plan a honeymoon, find an apartment and plan a household, buy furniture, and a host of other things you can only address as they happen.

For some, the idea of even having guidelines for length of engagement is probably foreign. You may need to drop any resistance you have toward this issue, because these guidelines *are* necessary.

Here is the biggest reason:

Let me state again that, once engaged, you have made the commitment to get married. You now look into the other person’s eyes knowing that he or she will soon be your husband or wife. At this point, you will naturally grow closer in a special way. This means that the desire—the powerful urge—for physical intimacy will grow stronger. The longer

you wait for the wedding date, the more you will force yourself to withhold what is natural. If you wait too long, you are asking yourself to fight a losing battle.

Intimacy Before Marriage

Earlier, we discussed how necking and petting eventually lead to outright fornication—with virtually no exceptions. Long engagements *also* invite fornication—with virtually no exceptions!

God designed sexual intercourse to be the “glue” that binds husbands and wives together. The engaged couple will naturally be physically drawn closer. (Remember, the commitment has already been completed in the mind.) Once engaged—and this is certainly not the first time you will feel such an urge—you will want to embrace and be close to your future spouse.

But you must carefully draw the line, and not cross it prior to the honeymoon!

I have seen couples play every conceivable kind of “game” regarding how far they can go without full fornication. The human mind is God’s most amazing invention. When misused, its capacity to deceive itself, using every possible excuse to believe it is not, can be a wonder to behold!

I have even seen couples who profess to want to do things God’s way try to justify sexual relations during the engagement. One couple went so far as to do the following: Unable to control themselves, yet not wanting to experience pangs of guilt, they simply knelt down beside the bed, asked God to make them “husband and wife,” and declared themselves “married” by common law. They then proceeded to “sleep together”—except that their purpose was not to do much sleeping.

This couple then came to me, as their pastor, explaining what they had done, and asked me to officially solemnize their marriage with a wedding. I told them to go to a justice of the peace, since they were “already married.” Of course, they were *not* truly married in God’s sight, but had merely found a way to fornicate. Obviously, they knew that a marriage license had to be their next step.

Yet society, again, does not address the simple law of cause and effect that drives this and similar situations. Also, because of a lack of sexual fulfillment in vast numbers of marriages, as explained, many couples conclude that they should “test” each other before marriage, thinking this will help them avoid a sexually troubled marriage.

Unhappiness in marriage largely stems from a lack of closeness to God. Not directed by His love, people are *selfish* instead of *selfless*—

they are driven by lust rather than love, which is real outgoing concern for others. Because their lives lack a VITAL DIMENSION—God—they cannot be truly sexually compatible.

Our book *SEX – The Unknown Dimension* explains this in detail, and couples should take time to study certain chapters of this book together during the engagement. Both partners reaching the proper understanding of the true meaning and purpose of sex will not only help you build and develop a healthy sex life *after* marriage, it will help you avoid the pitfalls of sex *prior* to marriage!

In fact, God will only bless you if you do not permit intimacy to enter the relationship prior to marriage. Fornication effectively *precludes* God from the union, and no true minister of God would ever consider performing the wedding of a couple who are doing this.

There is another critical aspect of fornication that almost none understand.

The Bible states that this sin is unique, producing a special kind of emotional and psychological “scarring.” Here is how Paul put it: “Flee fornication. Every sin that a man does is without [outside] the body; but he that commits fornication sins *against his own body*” (I Cor. 6:18). Fornication impacts both the body and the mind in a way that no other sin can, and it does this in two distinct ways.

First, those who engage in it with anyone other than the one they will marry create memories of intimacy that should only bring one face to mind—his or her mate.

Second, those who understand this, but fornicate, thinking, “But I’m going to be married to this person,” still “sin against their body” in a way that Paul said is different than any other sin. Such couples, when engaged in sexual relations after marriage, will always remember the guilt they felt when they were first intimate. Many find it impossible, consciously or unconsciously, to separate this guilt from the sexual relations that, after marriage, are no longer sin. They have forever intermingled—MIXED—something that God said was good (Gen. 1:27, 31) with something that is bad.

Keep lust out of your relationship—during dating, courting *and* engagement—and flee every form of fornication!

However, a final point of clarification is necessary. What has been explained does not mean that you can never hug or kiss during the engagement period. On the contrary, this is certainly natural and, if done only occasionally, it can be good.

But be careful! However archaic this may seem in the modern world, embracing and kissing should remain brief, with both parties

under full control. If you allow yourselves to lose control or push the limits, it will only lead you right back to the dangerous path toward fornication! It makes no difference if you are teenagers or an engaged couple who is three days from marriage, ANY form of sex before marriage—including petting and long, sexually-arousing embraces—is sin!

The Bible makes no distinction. Fornication is sin—and sin precludes God’s blessings (Jer. 5:25) and involvement in your life (Isa. 59:1-2).

Your Spiritual Life

Marriage presents more opportunities for spiritual growth than any other aspect of life. It is literally loaded with situations, circumstances, challenges, hurdles, obstacles—and trials!—to learn from. These will force you to recognize and address your weaknesses, to overcome them, and to develop character in a variety of ways.

But, while you are not yet married, you are laying a foundation during engagement for what should continue after marriage. Upon engagement, life will become more hectic, especially as events speed up prior to the wedding. Having initially sought God’s will in the relationship, but now, feeling placed together by God, and flushed with plans of building a life together, and with so many things to do before the wedding, engaged couples can easily slip into neglecting the most important aspect of their life—their SPIRITUAL CONDITION!

Do not neglect Bible study and prayer during this time. *Continue* to stay close to God, and He will *continue* to work things out for you, and probably a variety of unforeseen things *will* need to be worked out. Do not forget: “In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (Prov. 3:6).

Be careful not to make an idol of your fiancé. It is very easy to get so involved in the present that you neglect to remain focused on the BIG PICTURE. Remember to keep your priorities straight, realizing that, although your whole life *is* changing, it cannot suddenly revolve entirely around your spouse-to-be.

Reflect for a moment. If you allow your spouse to become the most important thing in your life—and the definition of an idol is a person or thing that is an object of adoration—you have put God into second place! This means that *every* aspect of your life will suffer—including, ironically, the very relationship with your fiancé, and later your spouse, if you do not see what is happening. If you always make sure that God is first in your life, all other areas benefit. Your relationship will experience more growth and truly be the best it can be.

“Cold feet”

When people near the end of their engagement and the “big day” approaches, some experience what is termed “cold feet.” They get nervous or worried about the upcoming wedding and marriage. Of course, a certain amount of this is natural. The wedding alone, one of the biggest events in your life, and often occurring with many or even hundreds of people watching, can be enough to intimidate the strongest people.

Further, the marriage itself will change the way you do most everything, because you are incorporating an entire person into your thinking, routine and day-to-day living. Just the thought of something this big can cause some, or even much, nervous anticipation. But this alone should not be sufficient to allow *serious doubt* to creep into your thinking. Satan is the author of doubt, and he will cloud your mind with confusion if you allow him. If you truly apply the principles outlined in this book, you will have no reason to doubt.

“Cold feet” are almost invariably connected with fear. Isolate the concern. Ask yourself exactly what it is that you fear. Is the fear reasonable or unreasonable—logical or illogical? What caused it to arise? Have you had it for some time without recognizing it, or is it new? Whether it is an older or newer concern, pin down exactly what triggered it. If necessary, explore it with your potential mate, but in a spirit of calm reassurance.

But sometimes, “eleventh hour” reservations persist. If you hold *serious* reservations or questions that cannot be resolved, go to parents, very close friends, the ministry and God directly for counseling and help. Remember again: It should go without saying that you should be very discreet about what you tell anyone other than family and the ministry about your concerns.

If the issues causing concern cannot be resolved, DO NOT BRUSH THEM ASIDE!! If they do not *quickly* dissipate, you must never be afraid to break off the relationship! Whatever pain this causes—and there *will* surely be some—will be infinitely less than going forward with a marriage that should not be. This would do a grave disservice to you, your future spouse and the children that could come from the union.

Never dismiss serious concerns without resolving them because you are too embarrassed to “call it off.” The alternative can be much, much worse—your mate “calls it off” later, thrusting you into a messy, painful divorce!

Before You Say “I do”

Many people spend a lifetime striving to accumulate knowledge. Yet, knowledge is of no purpose unless it is put to use. This book has brought you much KNOWLEDGE. But it cannot help you unless you and your potential spouse USE IT!

You have learned the way to date, court and conduct yourself during engagement, all according to God’s principles. This has almost certainly required you to completely change your perspective. Recall that we talked about the fact that employing change does not just involve learning right knowledge and principles, but *unlearning* wrong knowledge, practices and socially accepted traditions.

The Christian has three enemies: human nature, the pull of the society around him and the influence of the ruler of this world—Satan the devil. Individually, these are serious foes. Collectively, they are FORMIDABLE, with each affecting your perspective on proper dating, courtship, engagement and marriage.

Grasp this! God designed all human beings to be happy. Yet, achieving full happiness is virtually impossible if one is in a miserable marriage. Before entertaining the thought of marriage, study and re-study the principles contained in this book. Be sure that anyone you consider for marriage is methodically doing the same. (Pages for “Personal Notes and Observations” are provided at the back for your convenience.) Most of all, be sure that you have grounded yourself in the knowledge revealed here *well before* even beginning to date.

You now have the necessary, vital principles ready for application when that right person comes into your life. When the time comes, if you allow Him, God *will provide* that one person who is the right mate for you. Diligently apply yourself—knowing in advance that a wonderful God-plane relationship filled with supreme joy and happiness can await you!

The following literature expands on topics discussed in this book:

- SEX – The Unknown Dimension
- You Can Build a Happy MARRIAGE
- The Purpose of MARRIAGE—*Ever Obsolete?*
- Train Up Your CHILDREN
- Taking Charge of Your FINANCES
- End *All* Your FINANCIAL WORRIES
- God’s Laws of HEALTHFUL LIVING
- The Laws to SUCCESS
- What do you *mean* WATER BAPTISM?
- BIBLE AUTHORITY...can it be *proven*?
- Understanding DIVORCE and REMARRIAGE

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