

Dating and Preparation for Marriage

I. LAYING FOUNDATIONS FOR A GODLY MARRIAGE

- A. Three purposes for this seminar—first, to encourage a fruitful discussion around the ***biblical view*** of dating and marriage. Second, to expose naïve thinking in some who think that they do not need ***clearly defined boundaries*** for dating because they assume that they will manage their desires well without them. Third, to ***expose idealism or false expectations*** for marriage so that they do not get married with false expectations and then grow disillusioned with their marriage.
- B. Four issues that often cause great pressure on a marriage are *wrong communication patterns*, *financial problems*, *pornography*, and *idealism* (having the wrong expectations about marriage).
- C. The foundation of a godly marriage is in being equally yoked by setting their heart to seek first Jesus and His kingdom, to encourage their partner verbally to press into their relationship with Jesus in a wholehearted way, and to obey God’s will in their personal life and relationships.

³³But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness... (Mt 6:33)

- D. Do you have the same vision and values spiritually? Does he or she search the Scripture to find out how to be more committed to Jesus *or* to find ways to validate being less committed? Living consecrated to the Lord is a significant part of preparing for your future spouse.
- E. The importance of sexual purity in God’s grace: Paul called believers to abstain from all sexual impurity by learning how to possess their vessel or body in sanctification (purity) and honor.

³This is the will of God, your sanctification [purity] that you abstain from sexual immorality ⁴that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel [body] in sanctification and honor, ⁵not in passion of lust...⁷God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. ⁸Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit. (1 Thes. 4:3-8)

- 1. There is much deception even in the body of Christ today related to immorality. The Bible calls believers to resist all sexual involvement outside of the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman. Fornication is sex outside of the covenant of marriage.

⁹Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites...¹⁰will inherit the kingdom of God... (1 Cor. 6:9-10)

- 2. Paul called young people to flee from lust and promised that in doing so they will be equipped and prepared for the ministry assignment that God ordained for them.

²¹...if anyone cleanses himself...he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. ²²Flee also youthful lusts... (2 Tim. 2:20-22)

- F. The best preparation for dating and marriage is to work on *yourself*. Work through your own brokenness with the help of wise counsel, e.g., our Foundations program. Grow in your true identity and gain tools to help you continue to live authentically by owning your sin, asking for and extending forgiveness, bringing your thought life captive, etc.

II. DATING, COURTSHIP, AND MARRIAGE: DIFFERENT PURPOSES

- A. We will briefly address three stages of the relationship that ends up in marriage—*dating*, *courtship*, and *marriage*. Each has a different purpose and therefore different activities.
- B. Deep love is built on respect. Dating is a time to search out the answers to these questions to discover if the first “seeds” of romance will ultimately blossom into respect in the years to come.
- C. **Dating:** The purpose of dating is to go on a discovery process to see if that is a person whom you would want to marry. I define dating as a relationship that is committed, exclusive, and public.
1. The purpose is to get acquainted with one another’s life vision, values, goals, personality, gifts, and weaknesses to determine if you want the relationship to grow to courtship.
 2. Dating is more than having fun with someone attractive, then moving on to another.
 3. I recommend not to kiss during the dating stage, but to wait at least until you are engaged. The biblical standard is to get to know each other without touching (cuddling, etc.). It is easy to confuse the *pleasure of physical touch* with *real love*. Immorality brings confusion and distortion to the process of discovering more about each other as a potential spouse.
¹It is good for a man not to touch a woman. (1 Cor. 7:1)
 4. **To put it simply**—do not kiss before getting a ring, and do not take your clothing off until after the wedding. I know more than ten couples whose first kiss was at their wedding.
 5. I refer to “pre-dating socializing” which has no commitment (absolutely no touching or intimate conversation). One purpose of this is to determine if you want to officially start dating someone. This is going out for a cup of coffee, etc. It is okay to meet a few times with someone without knowing if you want a long-term relationship that results in marriage.
- D. **Courtship:** One purpose of courtship is to establish the relational and lifestyle patterns that will be foundational to one’s marriage relationship. These involves how you will communicate, spend time and money, solve conflicts, and how you view sexuality, children, raising children, planning the future, seeking God, doing ministry, and relating to the local church, etc.
- E. **Marriage:** One purpose of marriage is to develop a strong partnership in doing God’s will together as a couple and family. This involves enjoying His blessings, enduring hardships, and obeying Him in small things and routines of every-day life.

- F. The foundation of godly relationships is each individual genuinely setting their heart to seek Jesus first. Great problems are caused by people not being authentic in a dating relationship
- G. I encourage all who are interested in dating to clearly define and write out their commitments for their *standards of behavior, boundaries of relating, and use of time* (how they will spend their time together). Some see a false distinction between prayer as their “*God time*” and dating as their “*personal time.*” Thus, they want to invest all their “personal time” in ways that do not enhance their spiritual lives together. They end up creating a false dichotomy in their life.

III. COMMITMENTS FOR DATING AND COURTSHIP

- A. When two people officially start dating (in an exclusive way), I suggest that they compare and agree on their dating commitments. I urge them to write it out and sign it, then share it with a trusted leader to whom they give permission to ask them if they are keeping their commitments.
- B. I recommend that a written dating commitment include *activities to pursue* and *activities to avoid* in order to have a godly relationship.
 - 1. *Commitments to activities to pursue*—to encourage one another’s spiritual vision instead of seeking to talk them out of it (e.g., to allow for introductory sexual contact), to be actively involved in ministry and a local church, to go to prayer meetings together, and to read or study the Word together, etc.
 - 2. *Commitments to activities to avoid*— not to kiss (before publically engaged), not to be in compromising situations, not to drink alcohol together, not to watch movies that stir up desires that cannot be righteously fulfilled, not to be alone together in a home, etc.
 - 3. I urge ladies to ask the guy whom they are considering committing to date if they have looked at porn at all in the last three months. If so, ask them how much/how often?
 - 4. Talk in safe places. Spend time talking privately on the phone or in public places such as the park or in the kitchen while others are in the living room.
- C. We urge our ladies to stand courageously and boldly for boundaries and not to assume that all the guys here are godly in their relationships.
- D. Couples who walk out their dating commitments for a long period are far more likely to marry someone truly committed to its values. Sooner or later, those not truly committed to godly standards will insist on some sexual involvement and will not want to spend some of their free time seeking first Jesus and His kingdom, nor will they regularly verbalize encouragement to the one they are dating to press into their relationship with Jesus in a wholehearted way.

IV. WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A SPOUSE

- A. The most important issue is to be in unity in commitment to Jesus, life vision, and values including ideas about family, finance, sexuality, child-rearing, etc. If there is unity about these important subjects, then most of the other obstacles can be worked out over time.
- B. In what ways must people be equally yoked? What about dating an unbeliever to win them?
¹⁴Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. (2 Cor. 6:14)
- C. The most important question is not, “Will I be attracted to this man or woman for the rest of my life?” Attractions can change very quickly. The question is, “Will I respect him or her for the rest of my life?” Are they interesting in ways that go beyond physical attraction? Is his or her heart set on the right things, and do they consistently follow through on their convictions over time?
- D. Do they truly see marriage is a covenant before God that lasts for life—for better or worse?
- E. Watch how they act when under pressure, mistreated, put down, disappointed, or when they fail. Do they respond to Jesus in a right way, or are they focused on payback with bitterness, self-pity with complaining, or seek to escape with alcohol, drugs, food, or excessive entertainment?
- F. Are they good listeners? Do they rush or interrupt you? Do they multitask when you talk to them? What kind of entertainment do they want and how much? Are they lazy or are they self-starters? Are they complainers or are they mostly grateful? Do they have a sense of entitlement to be treated better or are they preoccupied with helping others? Do they have a plan for their spiritual growth or are they casual about this, thinking that it will just take care of itself?

V. COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT DATING AND/OR WHOM TO MARRY

- A. Some believe that the Lord has one person picked for them and that He will lead them to that person, while others believe that God allows a godly person to choose their mate. See the article: *How to Marry the Right Person for the Right Reasons* by David Sliker (davidслиker.com).
- B. Will God give a prophetic dream to you or to others to confirm whom or when you are to marry? There can be confusion created by prophecies about whom to marry or when to have children.
- C. Do not say, “God told me to marry you.” Some guys hide behind “the prophetic” because they are afraid to fail, be rejected or be hurt in pursuing a relationship with a lady.
- D. Do couples need to have the same ministry calling?
- E. I urge young adults to involve their parents and seek to receive their blessing on courtship. The Lord releases an added blessing on those who honor their parents and receive their blessing.
- F. What makes people fear dating or marriage? There are many reasons which include the fear of rejection, fear of divorce, fear of “maybe” finding someone better later on, fear of boredom in the marriage, fear of the relationship ending and then being hurt plus being criticized for breaking up.

- G. What is the role of single woman in making a relationship happen?
- H. What about being single? The Bible honors the commitment to be single to serve God's purpose with greater focus (1 Cor. 7) as seen in the life of Jesus, John the Baptist, John, Paul, Elijah, etc.
- I. One of the main tensions in marriage is in growing in our communication skills individually and together as a couple. The main predictor of success in a marriage is in effective communication. Someone who is kind, fun, and sincerely seeks the Lord with diligence does not automatically have relationship skills that are wise, healthy, and holy.
- J. I recommend pre-marriage counseling because it identifies communication principles and forces the couple to think about future situations and to answer questions that are not obvious to them during their engagement.

VI. SMALL GROUP ASSIGNMENT

Meet in groups of 5-6 people to identify commitments that you would insist on when dating.

1. Identify commitments regarding *activities to pursue* as foundational to a godly relationship.
2. Identify commitments regarding *activities to avoid* in establishing a godly relationship.
3. Identify ideas or public places good for a dating couple to go and do, to talk and be together

4. Identify specific things that you are looking for in a spouse.