

Dating and Preparation for Marriage

I. LAYING FOUNDATIONS FOR A GODLY MARRIAGE

- A. This seminar has three purposes: 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 can manage their desires well without boundaries. Third, to ***expose idealism or false expectations*** for marriage, so that people do not marry with false expectations and then grow disillusioned with their marriage.
- B. Four common issues that cause great pressure on a marriage are *wrong communication patterns*, *financial problems*, *idealism* (having the wrong expectations about marriage), and *pornography*.
- C. A strong foundation for godly marriage involves being equally yoked. Each one sets their heart to seek first Jesus and His kingdom, to verbally encourage each other to press into their relationship with Jesus wholeheartedly, and to obey God’s will in their life and relationships.
- ³³***“But 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 marriage.
- 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.
- ³***This 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. ⁸...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 today, even in the Body of Christ, 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.
- ⁹***Do 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 would 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 Pastoral Support programs. Grow in your true identity and gain tools to help you continue to live authentically by owning your sin, asking for and extending forgiveness, taking your thought life captive, etc.

II. DATING, ENGAGEMENT, AND MARRIAGE: DIFFERENT PURPOSES

- A. We will briefly address three stages of the relationship that leads to marriage—*dating*, *engagement*, 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 some 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 discover if the other person is someone 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 decide if you want the relationship to progress to engagement.
 2. Dating is more than having fun with someone attractive and then moving on to another.
 3. I recommend not kissing during the dating stage, but waiting at least 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 your 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”—going out for coffee, etc.—which has no commitment (absolutely no touching or intimate conversation). One purpose is to determine if you want to officially start dating someone. It is okay to meet a few times with someone without knowing if you want a long-term relationship that will result in marriage.
- D. ***Engagement***: One purpose of engagement is to establish the relational and lifestyle patterns that will be foundational to your marriage relationship. These involve how you will communicate, spend time and money, and 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 the routines of everyday life.
- F. The foundation of godly relationships is each individual genuinely setting their heart to seek Jesus first. Great problems arise when people are not 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 ENGAGEMENT

- 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., not allowing 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 publicly 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 mutual values. Sooner or later, those not truly committed to godly standards will insist on some sexual involvement and will not want to spend any 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 concerning commitment to Jesus, life vision, and values, including ideas about family, finance, sexuality, child rearing, etc. If there is unity in 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 as a covenant before God that lasts for life—for better or worse?
- E. Watch how they act under pressure, when mistreated, put down, and disappointed, and when they fail. Do they respond to Jesus in a right way, or are they focused on payback, with bitterness, self-pity, and complaining, or seeking 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 and a desire to be treated better, or are they preoccupied with helping others? Do they have a plan for spiritual growth, or are they casual about it, thinking that it will just take care of itself?

V. COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT DATING AND/OR WHO 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 (davidsliker.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 the engagement. 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, including fear of rejection, fear of divorce, fear of “maybe” finding someone better later on, fear of boredom in the marriage, fear of being hurt if the relationship ends, and of being criticized for breaking up.
- G. What is the role of single women 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 seeking the Lord with diligence does not automatically have relationship skills that are wise, healthy, and holy.
- J. I recommend premarital counseling, because it identifies communication principles and helps the couple to think about future situations and answer questions that may not be obvious to them during their engagement.

