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# GETTING READY

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## I. GUIDELINES FOR COURTSHIP

### A. Understand the Purpose of Courtship

*He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD.*

*Proverbs 18:22*

1. The beginning of a courtship marks a major accomplishment in one's life. It indicates that a young man or woman is ready to consider marriage.
2. Starting a courtship is fun and exciting but it is important to remember that courtship is purposeful. It is the process whereby you seek to discover whether this is the person you are to marry.
3. Courtship involves the exploration and cultivation of a relationship with the thought of marriage as a realistic possibility. Courtship is a means to an end – determining if you should marry the person.
4. Dating is about personal gratification and an end in itself. It involves little or no commitment. It brings all kinds of temptation to sin.
5. Scripture talks about “he who finds a wife finds a good thing.” It does not say “he who finds a girlfriend finds a good thing.” A young man should not pursue a young lady until he is able to execute a plan for marriage.
6. Young men initiate the process of courtship. They go to find a wife. Not the other way around. Young women are called to respond.
7. Courtship is an investigation regarding whether to marry. Engagement is a decision to be married.
8. You don't enter into courtship having concluded you are getting married or having discussed getting married with one another.
9. In a courtship, you seek to discover who the other person really is and what they're really made of. That is, you find out about their love for the Lord and fear of God, their beliefs and convictions, their passions and interests, their sins and temptations, their plan for growth and understanding of the church, their respect for parents and relationship with siblings, their heart for the lost and love of the gospel. These are also the very things your must honestly reveal about yourself.

10. Involve both families during the process of courtship. In particular, spend time relating to the parents. Their observations can be invaluable.

## **B. Don't Pursue Courtship Prematurely**

*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.*

*Genesis 2:24 (NIV)*

1. A father should talk with his son about a future wife and his readiness for marriage. The son should ask his father's permission to court.
2. Ask your parents and pastor their opinion as to whether or not you are ready to get married and start a family. If you're not ready, work with them on a plan to get ready.
3. You must exercise discipline, self-controlled, and patience. You cannot indulge yourself in a relationship prematurely. Be selfless and put the interests of the woman ahead of your own.
4. Since courtship is a means to an end, a young man must show he has the character necessary to care for a wife and children. When he marries, he must also be able to provide for his wife and children. Otherwise, don't begin the process.
5. Don't just think about your readiness to marry. You must also be prepared to have children and provide for your family. If you are not ready to have children you are not ready to get married. If you won't be a position to provide for your family you are not ready to get married.
6. See "Thoughts for Young Men and Women on Vocation" and "Thoughts for Young Men and Women on Procreation" later in this conference binder.
7. A young man should endeavor to have a good job (i.e., the beginnings of a career) before he starts courting. Minimally, he should be realistically assured he will have a job that provides adequate income when he marries.
8. Problems arise when a young man starts a courtship in college only to discover when he graduates that he is not able to find a job that will support a wife and family.
9. A young man should not invite a woman into his immaturity (e.g., serious patterns of sin) and confusion (e.g., no direction for a career).

## **C. Ask Her Father for Permission to Court**

1. It is the father who first approves of the courtship and affirms the readiness of a suitor.

2. Fathers should screen all applicants. A young man might be a “great guy” but don’t give permission unless you believe he is ready and sufficiently proven. You may want to spend time with him first to find out.
3. If you have concerns, you can direct a potential suitor to others in order to help him get ready for courtship. He can approach you again at a later time.
4. Courtship happens under the father’s authority. A pastor or mature married man can provide oversight if the father is not interested or qualified.
5. The father has the responsibility to provide protective leadership for his daughter and guard her purity.
6. A young man should do all that is possible to proceed with the father’s blessing. A daughter should welcome her dad’s involvement. Don’t let your daughter cultivate an independent attitude. She must be willing to follow her father’s lead.
7. God is pleased to direct children through parents. Daughters are given in marriage by fathers. This means the father approves of the marriage.
8. A young man must be willing to respect the authority of the woman’s father. The girl’s father can break off the courtship if necessary for godly reasons.
9. The father should ask his daughter if she is interested in courting the young man. She may be pleasantly surprised, initially not interested but later reconsiders, or is disinterested altogether.
10. A daughter may need to be encouraged to consider a courtship relationship but she should not be pressured into courting.
11. If a young man treats a young lady like a sister before courtship, she may be surprised to find out you are interested in courting her. She will respect the pure and holy way you have related to her as a brother.
12. Avoid gossip about “crushes” and talk about “matches made in heaven” with friends. Don’t make it difficult for individuals to relate with one another as brothers and sisters. Don’t speculate. Don’t presume. Don’t pressure.

#### **D. Remember Courtship Is Not Engagement**

1. Courtship does not obligate you in anyway. It doesn’t imply future commitment. Both parties must free feel to say no. It is only a discovery process.
2. Courtship doesn’t inevitably lead to engagement. No one should be pressured into marriage – on lookers must not assume that courtship means engagement is inevitable.

3. Friends should be guarded in the excitement they show and the assumptions they express. It is inappropriate to convey at the time of courtship the joy that is expressed at the time of engagement.

### E. Keep Courtship Pure

*<sup>1</sup>Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father. Treat younger men like brothers, <sup>2</sup> older women like mothers, younger women like sisters, in all purity.*

*1 Timothy 5:1-2*

1. Romantic infatuation and sexual sin cloud the mind to think clearly about marriage and God's will. They can blind one to reality.
2. You may increasingly like the person and be attracted to the person but exercise restraint. Don't give your heart and affections to someone who hasn't proposed to you or said "yes" to your proposal.
3. Courtship is not a time to be telling the person how much you love them and then express your feelings for them in romantic and physical ways.
4. Do your best to guard your heart so you will not despair if the courtship ends. Commit the relationship to the Lord every day.
5. There will be some anxiety in courtship. Trust in the Lord. Christ is the source of contentment.
6. Preferably, ask your parents or pastor to help monitoring your heart and affections. Work out a plan to avoid sexual immorality. Be accountable. Guard your heart and restrain your body. During courtship you are simply friends.
7. In courtship, win the guy or girl's heart with godliness. Don't seek to stir up strong affections in the other person. They will occur naturally if marriage is to follow. Courtship doesn't entitle you to romantic and sexual pleasures.
  - In courtship you don't talk about wedding plans, look at rings, or plan the honeymoon.
8. You should not be devastated if engagement does not follow. There may be some hurt or disappointment but you will not have stirred up intense passions, gotten involved physically and then dumped her (or him).

## F. Keep Courtship Brief

1. If you've been part of the same church for a while, you'll often know the most important things about the person you are courting. That is, their spirituality and Christian character in the context of the local church.
2. If the two individuals are relatively unknown to each other, or if it is a "long distance" courtship, more time will be necessary.

*<sup>13</sup>Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. <sup>14</sup>But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.*

*Romans 13:13-14*

3. The longer a courtship goes the greater the likelihood a brother and sister will get involved emotionally and physically in ways that are inappropriate or sinful.
4. By keeping the courtship brief (suggest 3-6 months but could be longer) you are trying to prevent this from happening. There is a balance between getting to know the person better and escalating temptation.
5. Thinking in these terms also keeps the courtship purposeful. That is, you are seeking to make a decision regarding engagement and marriage in a timely fashion.

## II. INADEQUATE REASONS TO MARRY

- A. **If engagement is to follow, there will be a growing affinity and attraction to the other person as the courtship progresses. This is important. Strong affections for the other person will be present. You'll experience great joy and satisfaction being together.**
- B. **Nevertheless, people often lack discernment of the other person's true character and say "yes" to engagement for reasons that are inadequate. Consider the following:**

1. He/She Makes You Feel Good

*Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.*

*Proverbs 31:30*

- a. Protect your son or daughter from a feeling oriented or self-focused love.
  - "Fall in love" – can easily believe your love is true and godly.

- b. Love is not a self-seeking or a self-gratifying feeling. Love is not simply a fluctuating emotion or attraction. Covenant love is fundamentally about joyful sacrifice and unwavering commitment for the good of the other person.
  - “I like whom I am when I am around you.”
  - “I love you for how you make me feel.”
2. He/She Is Attractive

You are marrying a person not a physical appearance.

  - Good looking and a sharp dresser
  - “Love at first sight” – may mean “lust at first sight.”
3. He/She Is Popular
  - Drawn to who you think they are. Enhances your reputation to be seen with them.
  - Must ask why they are so popular?
4. He/She Is Fun
  - a. You don’t marry a personality – you marry a person. Not marrying a dream or fantasy.
    - May be a fun guy but not have significant character and humility.
  - b. Easy to be deceived by first impressions.
5. He/She Fills a Void
  - a. Avoid thinking, “I know I will be happy the rest of my life because of him or her. I’ll never be lonely again.”
  - b. Marriage is primarily for the glory of God and secondarily for personal fulfillment. That’s why we are called to glorify God even when our spouse falls short of their marital responsibilities.

### III. GUIDELINES FOR CHOOSING A MATE

#### A. Must Be a Genuine Believer

1. Marrying an unbeliever is prohibited by Scripture.

*Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness?  
Or what fellowship has light with darkness?*

*2 Corinthians 6:14*

*A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to  
whom she wishes, only in the Lord.*

*1 Corinthians 7:39*

2. This is by far the single most important factor when considering who to marry and if you should marry.
3. Don't consider anyone who isn't genuinely following Christ. Make certain they give clear evidences of conversion.
4. Not a new believer but someone who is stable in the faith. Avoid all "missionary dating" so a person is not tempted to "come to Christ" with ulterior motives.

#### **B. Committed to the Local Church**

1. A marriage will not prosper and may not survive apart from wholehearted involvement in a local church.
2. The person should have history of involvement in a local church. They must be passionate about God's plan for the church.
  - Committed to small groups
  - History of serving in the church
  - Heart for larger mission of Sovereign Grace Ministries

#### **C. Has a Significant Degree of Proven Character**

1. Don't ignore gapping holes in character and think you will change them when you marry.
  - Messianic love – "I know I can change him."
  - Must be trustworthy – a lack of integrity will result in serious problems.
2. Don't put too much confidence in your ability to assess the suitability of the person you desire to marry. Pride can interfere. Listen to the observations of your parents.

3. Guys can be attracted to girls based purely on physical appearance with little concern for their spirituality or character. Girls can be attracted to guys who give them attention and make them feel good.
4. Marriage is not about how the other person will serve you but how you will serve the other person. Marriage is for giving your life away. In so doing you will be blessed.
5. Be more concerned about being the right person rather than marrying the right person.
6. Marry someone with a proven track record in biblical fellowship and building friendships.
7. In our culture, many people get married with fear and apprehension. If you have done well relating to parents, siblings and friends, you will do well in the marriage relationship.
8. Sexual attraction is important but tends to come “naturally.” Character is critical and must be worked at.

#### **D. Committed Roles as Biblically Defined**

1. Hold to a complementarian position. Appreciate the intrinsic differences between men and women.
2. Believe in differing roles and responsibilities for men and women. This is why “arranged” marriages can work in other cultures.
3. Is the young man committed to lead? Is the young lady committed to follow?
  - Man – embraces priorities as a husband, father and provider
  - Woman – embraces priorities as a wife, mother, and homemaker

#### **E. Biblical and Theological Compatibility**

1. Doctrinal unity on the essentials of the faith is very important.
  - Living for the glory of God. Affirm the sovereignty of God. Marvel at doctrine of election. See the Cross of Christ as central to all of life. Believe in the power and gifts of the Spirit for today. Love the local church.
2. The world promotes compatibility on non-essentials. It is okay to marry someone different than yourself.
  - It is okay to have different personalities, be opposites in likes and preferences, or have different hobbies. It is also fine to be similar in these ways.

**F. Believe It Is God's Will**

1. Don't marry out of obligation or pressure from others. You should believe it is God's will less doubts plague you or fears haunt you.
  - Number 1 excuse for divorce – thinking they married the wrong person.
2. You want to marry within the revealed will of God but when this does not occur, you can still find comfort in knowing you have married according to his sovereign will.
  - Marrying an unbeliever
3. Future marital challenges can test your conviction and resolve. Once married, don't fret or worry that you married the wrong person and in so doing, missed marrying the right person and thereby conclude you will be miserable the rest of your life.
4. Don't impose your conviction on a person that you feel it is God's will for the two of you to be married.
  - "God told me to marry you!"
  - Expect conflict and difficulties – not an indication you married the wrong person.

