

## Dating (Part 1): The Purposes of Dating

### Dating Related to Temptation and Faith

**Martin G. Collins**

**Given 20-May-06; Tape #775**

As many of you know, my wife Sue and I have been married for more than thirty years. We have a daughter who is 27, and we have two grandsons. We have a daughter who is 25, and is single. Our son is 17, and of course, he is single as well. The reason I mention that, for those of you who did not know, is that the subject which I have to talk to you about today is one that I have been thinking about for many years. I have been back and forth, so to speak, on how to approach the subject. In the last year or so, we have had a lot of questions about this subject—so many questions that I thought it was important to speak on it. This subject directly affects my family, and has directly, or is directly, affecting anyone that is at least 16 years old. I think you will find this subject interesting. Please do not tune out if you think it is not directed to you because there are principles in it we can all learn from. The subject in one word is "Dating."

I would like to begin today, by reading part of the transcript of a speech given at Hillsdale College, on March 6, 2006, by Rebecca Hagelin, Vice President of Communications and Marketing for the Heritage Foundation, and author of, *Home Invasion: Protecting Your Family in a Culture That's Gone Stark Raving Mad*:

It used to be that the home was the nurturing oasis providing relief from outside dangers. It used to be that a parent's greatest worry was looking out for the guy in the trench coat lurking in the shadows at the edge of the school playground. Well, that guy in the trench coat is now in our homes.

Don't believe me? Log on to the Internet. According to the London School of Economics, nine out of ten children who go online, usually to do homework, will stumble across hardcore pornography. Let me repeat: 90% of children will fall victim to pornography in their own homes. And then there's intentional porn consumption by kids. Oh, children might pass around a pornographic Web address at school, but it's in the safety of their own homes—often in their own bedrooms—that they close the door and consume hours of pornography. Over 50% of kids who enter chat rooms—where conversation is often raunchy and racy—say they have given out personal information to complete strangers. Chat rooms and sites such as MySpace.com have become playgrounds for sexual predators, often luring kids to situations of abuse and even death. Online pornography is a more than \$10 billion a year industry, working 24/7 to make porn addicts out of our kids, and too often succeeding.

Tired of Internet porn? Turn on the television and flip to MTV. Why? It's what your teenagers are watching. As a matter of fact, MTV is the number one viewing choice for teen girls. And if you haven't seen MTV in a while, well, let me just say that our kids are not just watching artsy music videos anymore. Today's MTV programming is filled with reality-based shows that feature kids dressed in teeny-weeny bikinis licking whipped cream off each other. Or "pooh diving" a "sport" in which teen boys swim in open sewers filled with human waste. Or the infamous "pooh cams" where kids watch other kids go to the bathroom. Think the problem is just on cable? Why not switch to *Desperate Housewives*, the third most popular television show among today's teens. ...

Had enough Internet and television porn? Check out the video games our teen boys are playing. The second most popular of these games is *Grand Theft Auto*, in which the player actually becomes the character who steals cars, rapes women, has sex with a prostitute and then clubs her to death. And that's not to mention the decapitation of policemen.

If that's not enough, check out the books. *Gossip Girls* is one of the most popular romance series for girls ages 12-16. Published by Simon and Schuster, recurring themes are incest and graphic sex among children. What about some of the books our kids are reading for school assigned reports? When I was researching *Home Invasion*, I decided to thumb through a few books from a list of those recommended by the American Library Association for ages 12-14. Well, I pulled a few novels off the [library's] shelves and what I found disgusted me. One described a sexual encounter between fourth graders. Another was written from the perspective of a 14 year-old boy who describes, in detail, watching his first homosexual encounter. In one book, you only need to get to page four for the first of many uses of the term "motherf---in". Of course, you should also check out the Sex Ed class materials that may include contests where kids race to put condoms on dildos and cucumbers.

And then there's the music. The number one music genre of choice for today's youth of all races and socio-economic groups is the often verbally pornographic and violent rap and hip-hop. According to the media study I mentioned earlier, our kids are consuming 6.5 hours of media every single day. And as I've described, the vast majority of it is sexual, violent, uncivil, and often plain stupid.

But what's the harm? Isn't this just entertainment? Well, let's see. Corporations spend billions of dollars every year on advertising. Why?

Because they know that media affects behavior. Today's youth are the most marketed-to generation in the history of the world. Our kids are spending an estimated \$200 billion a year on trinkets and toys and clothes and media. Marketing executives at MTV and other youth oriented media do not brag about how they know what kids want, but about how they have learned to manipulate the teenage mind. They are selling a "lifestyle" to our children that robs them of their innocence and their best futures, and capitalizes on the natural raging hormones that mark the teen years. Instead of helping channel that energy into worthwhile activities, the media fuels the flames in an effort to keep them tuned into the programming. These marketers are teaching our young girls that their lives are all about their sexual power and our young boys that life is all about who can be more crudely funny or irresponsible. Sexual activity is expected and has no consequences. Civility does not exist. The only brand of respect that's taught is a twisted brand of "self-respect."

The harm, then, is that in addition to the obvious degradation of our humanity; to the destruction of common decency and morality; and to the virtual death of civility; our children are paying a terrible price with their bodies, their emotions and their futures.

A September 2004 report in the medical journal *Pediatrics* reveals that children who watch a lot of sexualized television have twice the rate of sexual activity as teens who don't. One out of three teenage girls will become pregnant at least one time before she is 19 years old, giving the U.S. the highest teen pregnancy rate of any industrialized western nation. Twenty-five percent [one in four] of sexually active teenagers will contract a sexually transmitted disease that they will carry with them for the rest of their lives. Half of the new STD cases in this country every year are in young people ages 15-24. The suicide rate among children 14 years old and under has increased 75% in the last ten years. According to the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, freshmen are entering colleges in record numbers with clinically diagnosed depression. The college suicide rate is the highest it has ever been.

And have you ever heard of "cutting"? It's a heart-breaking phenomenon of self-mutilation now common in middle schools across the country. Our teenage daughters are using razor blades and knives to make slashes in their arms, just so they can feel alive.

Are we crazy? Has our culture gone stark-raving mad?

[Reprinted by permission from IMPRIMIS, the national speech digest of Hillsdale College,

[www.hillsdale.edu](http://www.hillsdale.edu).]

Every last one of us has a problem in our homes because we are being bombarded constantly, and if we have children still at home, then we are in dire danger.

Millions of teenagers have had considerable sex experience, and yet possess little sexual knowledge. It is largely because of ignorance—or lack of right instruction in the right manner at the right time—that teenagers seek to satisfy curiosity by experience. Moreover, of course, although they think of themselves as unique individuals, they act like "sheep going to the slaughter."

When it becomes a 'trend', human nature wants to 'belong'. Young people flow with the crowd and parents are oblivious to it. Even when growing children and teenagers do receive some formal sex education, it is always presented from the physical, the material perspective and therefore the sensual approach.

If teenagers had been properly taught what they needed to know about sex (from the early years of their lives) by informed and loving parents, the many frightful tragedies of teenage and premarital sex would have been avoided.

If you tell a teenager that "necking" or "making out" is wrong, that it should never be indulged in outside of marriage, that it robs his future marriage of much of its possible joys, delights, and blissful happiness in marriage—the young man or woman will probably look at you rather pityingly, wondering how you could be so naïve! He would probably reverse the truth and shoot back, "Where have you been for the last hundred years, that you do not know the facts of life yet?" This is the attitude that many teens have toward adults.

Actually, it is the teenager who is untaught in and ignorant of the truth about the facts of life! Parents should never feel intimidated by the ignorance and naivety of their teenagers. Concepts about dating begin in the home where proper or improper attitudes are programmed into a teenager's mind. Dating practices reflect a way of life, and the results of choosing a mate for marriage may be positive or negative depending on the way of life by which we live.

A liar enjoys being with a hypocrite, but does not trust him. A whoremonger is attracted to a slut but does not want to marry one. A person of integrity will be attracted to a person of truthfulness; a moral person will be attracted to a faithful person. Everyone wants to marry a decent and trustworthy person, but most people do not want to make the effort to be one!

I am going to cover some biblical principles that apply to the sometimes-frustrating situation in which singles find themselves. I have no one person or one couple in mind. The mistakes I will mention are not unique to any one person or couple—they happen repeatedly to millions of people. I am giving this because I care about the spiritual, mental and physical health of you teenagers and singles.

It is my purpose and goal to help you singles avoid the mistakes that many others have already made and are making in their lives right now; and possibly, to help people with marriage problems recognize some of the root causes of their troubles.

In their late teen years, group activities can help girls and guys get used to doing things

together on a social level. This usually allows everyone to feel more relaxed around one another before guys and girls start dating one-on-one.

"Teenage dating" (which I prefer to call 'an activity') should not be "romantic." It should be a fresh, wholesome, and constructive activity that is intellectually stimulating and physically up building. It means taking a look at group activities, such as skating, tennis, volleyball, golfing, horseback riding, respectable dancing, whitewater rafting and other good things such as these.

It means breaking the dating mold of the present pop culture and taking a completely fresh and rewarding approach; instead of the pop culture's thinking of the opportunities for immorality and dangerously harmful intimacies while lying around aimlessly.

Counter-pop culture dating means the sharing of clean, straightforward and decent ideas, fun, and laughter, with no adverse effects. One way to know if an activity or date has been rewarding is by the fruit it produces. Is there a pleasant, "Thank you, it was lots of fun," and cordial goodbyes or prolonged and breathless attempts at sexual experiences by trying to kiss and paw one another?

Why should wholesome activities with members of the opposite sex have "romantic" overtones?

It only leads to frustrations, to the broken-hearted split-up of the former steady couple, the jealousies and hot-faced embarrassment when someone else is seen talking intimately to "your" girl or guy, and to secretly imagined amorous events. But, it does not lead to happiness and fulfillment. It does not lead to decent attitudes, balanced minds, good health, and a happy marriage. The world's form of dating, which the society has programmed into everyone in this society, is a wrong, distorted and perverted type of dating.

Did you know that you were not created to live this life alone? God intends you to grow to love another person of the opposite sex that will be your complement. He designed the two of you to fit perfectly together physically, spiritually and emotionally like pieces of a puzzle. It is easy to see why God has not given the ability to be content to very many singles.

Genesis 2:18, tells us it is "not good for man to be alone." The Hebrew word translated "alone" better translates into a phrase that means something like, "incomplete" or "part of something greater." God wants each and every one of you, as singles, to be part of something greater, to be part of someone else.

This suggests that, in a way, God created Eve to help finish and complete Adam. The creation was not finalized until both man and woman were together. Eve completed Adam just as Adam completed Eve. No one wants to be alone because God designed us to live with others. It is natural for us to feel lonely, if we are not with others.

As human beings, we desire relationships with others. God created us as social beings. "And the LORD God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him'". Then God instituted marriage in Genesis 2:24. God wants men and women to develop relationships leading to marriage.

That is how humans were designed, except for a very few who have been specially gifted to live a permanent single life. God put within us the longing for that completeness and that longing

leads us into dating and courtship. However, dating can be deceptive.

What is really going on in your mind while you are dating—or looking for someone to date?

When you are attracted to someone and date, you see the absolute best in the other person, and the other person sees the absolute best in you. You bathe, dress for the occasion, and act your best. You focus on the other person and do nearly everything to please him or her.

When the date ends, you return home to an entirely different world, where, driven by human nature, you live to please only yourself. You dress how you choose, you eat what you want, and watch what you want. All of this applies to your date's return to reality and old habits as well.

In dating, most of you intentionally hide what you think might cause the other to reject you and, in turn, you see an incomplete version of the other person as well.

It is easy when you are infatuated with someone and dating to see only the best side of your date interest. There is not the same commitment in dating as in marriage, so if you grow tired of dating the person, it is relatively easy to take some time off without harming the relationship.

So dating is not a good predictor of married life. The apparent health of your dating relationship does not guarantee that you will have an easy transition into a healthy marriage. Dating is not a realistic look at your relationship's ability to persevere. This is important because commitment and perseverance play an essential role in marriage. Commitment and perseverance are hard to see in a person through dating alone. It takes time to see the way a person truly is.

Is the purpose of dating just a pre-marriage ritual that you must go through to hook someone for marriage? What are the true purposes of dating? The reason many singles have failed in the dating game is that they have never clearly understood their objectives. If you ask a group of singles, "Why are you dating?" the answers would range from "to have a good time" to "to find someone to marry." In a general sense, they know that the end of all of this may lead them to marriage, but they are not clear as to other specific objectives.

Let us look at four main purposes for dating:

Purpose 1: Developing Wholesome Interactions with the Opposite Sex.

One of the purposes of dating is to get to know those of the opposite sex and to learn to relate to them as persons. Roughly, half of the world is made up of individuals of the opposite sex. If you fail to learn the art of building wholesome relationships with "the other half," immediately you have limited your horizons considerably.

God made us male and female, and it is His desire that we relate to each other as fellow creatures sharing His image. Our differences are numerous, but our basic needs are the same. If we are to serve people, (which is one of life's highest callings) then we must know the basic difference—male and female. Relationships cannot be built without some kind of social interaction. In Western culture, dating provides the setting for such interaction. Even though dating has been perverted by society, it still has its place if done correctly.

One of the problems is that we have been trained to view each other as sex objects rather than as persons. The proliferation of cable TV, movies, and now the Internet, has encouraged this perception of others as sex objects. The perception of others as sex objects has become deeply ingrained in our thinking, especially the thinking of impressionable teenagers and young adults.

For some single women their unspoken lifestyle objective is to "turn the heads" of the men they encounter, and most of you single men are happy to turn your heads. Those who proceed further and give their attention to the production or purchase of "skin" magazines often find themselves addicted to this impersonal, disconnected perception of members of the opposite sex. Early, many of these teens are distorting their viewpoint of women and there is no way that they can have a proper future relationship with one if they do not put an end to that, or avoid that altogether.

When this distorted viewpoint becomes a fixed perception, then one ceases in the truest sense to be human. He or she becomes like an animal playing with his toys or allowing oneself to be a toy with which another animal plays. In this society, people have been degraded to the level of animal instinct.

Dating is necessary for personality development. Although they do not correctly understand human nature and human development, psychologists recognize that there is something different about the shy boy and the wallflower girl, both of whom have stunted personalities and lack personal charm.

Wrong dating techniques destroy personalities and character, but proper dating encourages the constructive developing of these two elements. The type of dating that does develop personality is the kind where people can get together, play together, and talk together with no adverse effects. Only destructive things happen in the back seat of a car, parked on a dark roadside.

Dating is also useful for having plain, pure, good fun. Fun is not ending up in premarital pregnancy or marriage to the wrong person. Real fun is wholesome fun that is fun today, tomorrow and forever. True pleasure is paid for before it is received—destructive pleasure is paid for after experiencing it, in the form of bad health and suffering (including STDs, sexually transmitted diseases).

There is not a single person who does not think about whom he is going to marry, when it will happen, where this person is. Marriage is something to look forward to; it is a great blessing—at the right time. Only God knows when that right time is.

Too many people throw away a happy future for a shot in the dark. They get thrown together in dates, as immature teenagers, often as immature adults. As a lark, they get involved, often sexually. Perhaps they get married. Their whole lives are usually wrecked from that moment on.

There are some mistakes that you cannot do much about, once you have committed the sin. If a young girl loses her virginity, it is lost forever. No matter how much she wishes she were still a virgin as she realizes the negative impact in later years, it is just too late.

You young guys will eventually find out that being sexually active before marriage distorts your mind toward right relationships, and it perverts your thinking toward family and marriage.

Dating is far more important, and has far greater impact, than most of you singles realize.

The purpose of dating is not for marriage or romance until you are old enough. Its purpose is to develop personality and to cultivate proper feminine and masculine friendship.

When you date from a right point of view, you know a date in a parked car is not where you should be. But, this is only if you have been prepared, and prepared your own mind beforehand, to understand that your way of life will determine whether you are successful in dating or not. When you date from a right point of view, you know a date is bad when bad things start to happen, but it is too late then. We should be able to read the predator type of individual and the non-predator. There are predators, both male and female. When you know the purpose of dating—you will know what kind of person to avoid. You will not succumb to the smooth-talker who wants to get something from you. There are more of those smooth-talkers out there than not.

Proper dating takes some preparation. First, you will guard your mind from the types of things that brainwash you into the point of view of the immoral world. You will not swallow the lies promoted by today's decadent society such as: advertising about romance, sexually immoral music, TV shows and movies. Entertainment that endorses and encourages living together out of wedlock, homosexuality and out of control partying will only drag you down.

Today, worldly singles do something called "hooking up," where they go out on a group date hoping to "hook up" with someone to have sex with later that evening. Apparently, this is a very common type of dating. If you are totally in sync with the ways of this world—if you are a friend of the world—you will not know how to act because your out-of-control emotions will run you amuck. Scientists have proven that a person's thought processes have not fully developed until somewhere after age 21. A person younger than that makes decisions based on emotions, and logic does not play a great part. As a person moves from his late teens into his early and mid-twenties, that emotional decision making process eventually is balanced out by a more logical approach, and then the emotions are put under control as a person develops self-control. The sad part is that there are 60 year-olds, and 70 and 80 year-olds who have not developed that self-control over their emotions.

Mark my words: You do not want a worldly date. If you do, then you have allowed yourself to be enticed and your desire will lead to misery. Oh, but how tempted we are, especially as teenagers and young adults interested in the opposite sex. In resisting temptation, it is a matter of choosing purity, rather than defilement, a very critical issue.

From the many examples of temptation in the Bible, we can piece together the dynamics of how it works. Temptation exists in the first place because the moral and spiritual world is such that a great battle between good and evil is raging at any moment.

The enemy is within, as the epistle of James makes clear. Temptation is the enticement of a person to commit sin by offering some seeming advantage. When a person's mind is mostly emotionally oriented, there is no end of advantages that can be drug out of a temptation. The sources of temptation are generally Satan and the world. The desire comes from our own human nature. We are exposed to them in all situations, in all places, and all the time. We are being tested constantly.

What more enticing thing is there for a single baptized member of God's Church, (who believes that there is no one in the church to marry) than the temptation of an attractive single unconverted worldly person of the opposite sex?

I hope that you singles will hear me out before you draw conclusions about what I am saying, because this is a whole package, not just a matter of phrases and sentences to take out of context.

The nearest approach to a definition of the process of temptation from within is given us by James.

James 1:14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

The apostle James, the pastor of the headquarters church in Jerusalem, provides some insight into the process toward sin, beginning with temptation

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Temptation, here, is from the Greek noun "*peirasmos*", which can refer to trials or tests with a beneficial purpose or effect, or it can refer to trials or tests designed to lead to wrong doing. It depends on the reaction of the person who is being tempted. Temptation of itself is not sin. It must be accepted before it results in sin. Temptation is a forerunner of sin, and it warns that the potential for sin is not far away.

James 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God" for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

Jesus Christ was tempted as we are, but He remained sinless. God cannot be tempted because in Him there is not the slightest moral corruption to which temptation appeals. Temptation does not proceed from God, but He tests and approves us while we endure temptation.

James 1:14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his *own* desires and enticed.

Temptation is an appeal to think or do something contrary to God's law. We are drawn away from truth and virtue. We are drawn away from God's standard of righteousness.

Desire, in this context, is a force of attraction in the wrong direction: we long for it, crave it, covet it, and want it. That sounds like a good description of what happens to a single that is getting interested in someone of the opposite sex. Desire is something that can be nourished or

stified. We can control and even eliminate it, if we deal with it immediately.

Nevertheless, we can allow our thoughts to follow certain tracks, and our steps to take us into certain places and our eyes to linger on certain things; and as a result stimulate desire. If we encourage desire long enough, there is an inevitable consequence—desire becomes action. Desire always becomes action if we nurture it.

The source of many temptations lies within us. We are tempted by our own wrong desire. We are enticed or attracted when we are offered hope of reward or pleasure. We may hope that the taste of food or drink will give us pleasure.

A single may hope that the attractive person in the world will reward him with a meaningful relationship. But, if you are to receive what you hope for, your primary hope must be centered in Jesus Christ, His way of life and His teachings. This must supersede all other hopes of physical pleasure.

The verbs "drawn away" and "enticed," in verse 14, are taken from the activities of fishing and hunting. The word "enticed" usually describes the drawing of fish out of its original retreat. We are allured, as fish are with bait. The bait on the end of a fishing line is called a lure!

I remember when I was a teenager that guys in high school would talk about going out on Friday and Saturday nights "trolling." By trolling, they meant driving down the street angling for a catch with a hook, lure, and line drawn through the water to catch some nice looking fish. The trolling was figurative, of course, and a fish was a girl. This was the idea of some boys on how to get a date. Other terms have been used for the same thing, such as "cruising." Apparently cruising is still used today. They are looking for easy, loose women to "hook up" with for sex, like animals.

James pictures our desire first, as attracting our attention and persuading us to approach the wrong thing, and second, as luring us by means of bait to yield to the temptation.

In "trolling or cruising", the bait was the guy and his car. The fish were of the sort that any decent guy would throw back. This is part of the pop-culture's dating practices, and a part that someone in the church should not have any part in.

James 1:15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

That is very final. Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are the result of sin! They will kill you in the end, and at the very least, they will shorten your life. According to the National Center for Disease Control (CDC): While substantial progress has been made in preventing, diagnosing, and treating certain Sexually Transmitted Diseases in recent years, the Center for Disease Control estimates that nineteen million new infections occur each year, almost half of them among young people ages 15 to 24. There are 8.5 million new cases of STDs occur each and every year among people 15 to 24. In addition to the physical and psychological consequences of STDs, these diseases also exact a tremendous economic toll. Direct medical costs associated with STDs in the United States are estimated at \$13 billion annually.

It just is not worth it, you singles.

James changes his description from a snare to conception and birth in verse 15.

James 1:15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. [Notice the reference to the growth of a person from fetus to adult—from complete innocence to corruption by the world.]

First, comes temptation then, desire, like a mother, conceives and "gives birth to sin." Then sin, the child of desire, develops till it is full-grown and ready to produce offspring. When sin is full-grown, it has become a way of life and gives birth to death. Sin brings forth death. If that is never repented of, it brings forth eternal death—which is very final.

This world's dating game is a wrong way of life that leads to nothing but misery.

You are very familiar with what Paul says in Romans 6:23: "*For the wages of sin is death.*" This is the same meaning as '*sin brings forth death*'. "*Brings forth*" in James 1:15 is an 'animal phrase' for "birth". It means that sin "spawns" death. Conquered by desire, man becomes less than a man and sinks to the level of a beast.

The process is: Temptation leads to desire. Desire leads to sin. Sin results in death! Temptation often comes through deception!

James 1:16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

Obviously, when a person follows that temptation, and allows his own desires to entice him, then he has been deceived, and does not realize the route he is taking. It is so very important to stop at that temptation. When that temptation comes, that is the point at which to stop right there and go no further.

In Matthew 26, Christ admonished the disciples concerning temptation when He went to pray in Gethsemane during His final night with them before His crucifixion.

Matthew 26:41 "Watch and pray, lest you enter into [or yield to the pressure of] temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

We are cautioned by Jesus to watch and pray against yielding to the pressure of temptation by our own carelessness or disobedience; in all such cases, God provides the way of escape. Temptation of itself is not sin. It must be entered into or accepted before it results in sin. Therefore, we are to watch and pray. Please, you teenagers and young adults, please remember to pray about your dating practices. Ask God to give you the strength to resist the ways of the world, because you cannot do it on your own, no one is strong enough.

During the dating process, it is easy to let your relationship with God slip. Because dating is

usually so greatly affected by emotion, it is common for single Christians to neglect their relationship with God in favor of a romantic relationship with someone of the opposite sex.

Giving in to such "*cares of this life*," and making this mistake is a form of idolatry, and therefore is a sin.

Luke 21:34 "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.

We are at the end of this age and time is short. We do not know how short it is, but we know that we cannot tell ourselves as singles, "Well, I will just repent of this later." You do not know if you are going to be in a car accident today, or tomorrow and die before you have a chance to repent of anything that you have done wrong concerning dating. Luke here, in quoting Christ, is really sounding urgent. *lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life*," [You could just put in there dating, romance or immorality.]

Beware of the lukewarm factor. Of itself, having a party is not wrong. But, what happens when the world influences its activities? People fall into dissipation, into abuse of their God-given responsibilities. Christ worries that although we intellectually say the world is full of self-centeredness and excess, we will still find it attractive. He warns us to be careful because, if we are not, the consequence is that the Day of Judgment, or the day of Christ's return, will come on us unexpectedly.

I know that some of you singles drink too much. If you want to head the way of the world in dating, and eventually do something wrong, and maybe even get pregnant, then go ahead and keep on drinking too much. That is a sure way and a guarantee that you will be hurt drastically, dramatically, horribly later. I have read time and time again, and I have seen example after example, where a single person has become pregnant when she has been under the influence of alcohol. Think about dating and not drinking, and think seriously about it. Do not do it, it is not worth it.

Luke 21:35-36 For it [the Day of the Lord] will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth [including singles, in and out of the church.] Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.

He is not saying we should always pray, "Father, save me!" That would be self-centered, and it would be against God's will. But, ask God to give you the strength to bear up under temptation, to resist and to help you to have a closer relationship with Him. Grow obedience and be repentant of sins, and asking for His forgiveness. He says, "Develop this beautiful relationship with God that I have made possible for you. Remain in contact with Me".

Our prayers should take on the quality of communication that is the ideal when a man and a woman date toward marriage. On the first date, they may not know much about each other, but with further contact their knowledge of each other grows. In talking back and forth, the relationship develops. They discover common interests. They begin to find each other attractive and fascinating as they get to know them better.

As events progress, they work to improve the relationship so they can eventually marry, continuing the relationship with greater intimacy, pleasure and productivity. God desires this kind of relationship with His people. Jesus warns that the same factor that ruins a marriage—if one or the other begins to find someone else more attractive—can ruin this relationship with God just as it can ruin a relationship with another individual.

Ironically, this can happen when a baptized member of God's church puts the person he is dating in higher esteem and importance than his devotion and responsibility to God. In this sense, he or she neglects being the spiritually betrothed in favor of his or her physical engagement. This is a type of rejection of God—a very serious sin and even to the point of idolatry!

When a baptized member of the family of God becomes too emotionally interested in an unconverted person, the converted person begins to change his priorities and the unconverted person begins to supersede his dedication and loyalty to Jesus Christ. The Church has been betrothed to Christ, the bridegroom. Every member of the Church must be loyal and faithful to Jesus Christ.

Today, divorce claims roughly 50% of marriages. This beautiful covenantal institution is destroyed because the world has successfully squeezed the couple into its mold. What should have been built on a love of a beautiful relationship paired with a love of righteousness, in reality, was built on the perverse perspective of self-gratification and lust.

God intends prayer to be communication with Him to develop a wonderfully fulfilling relationship begun through the acceptance of Christ's sacrifice. We show our commitment to Him by keeping our appointments with Him, upholding the vow we made at baptism, keeping His commandments, showing we are trustworthy by overcoming our sins.

There are certain things at which we must be consistently vigilant. While we work on this spiritual relationship, we are on guard against things that may damage our relationship. A person can become a lukewarm person in his approach to upholding that relationship. He may be distracted by other desirable physical things.

A lukewarm person is lulled into a spiritual complacency and apathy by the attractiveness of the world. This can happen in dating, in the engagement period, and in the marriage. Maybe that is one reason why there are so many single men and women. Hardly anyone gets permanently fired up over anything of value and importance any more. Single men and women are unwilling to zealously commit to a mate. I think it is primarily the men who are at greater fault.

Too many men are self-absorbed and complacent. They are seemingly content to just sit around playing video games and zoning out. The average age of those playing video games is 25-30 years old. Here is another statistic that will show you why marriages are failing so badly, or why

women are not getting married: 26.5 years old is the average age for marriage today compared to 21.5 thirty years ago. At the very age, that the average single gets married is also the average age that the video gamers are hitting their height of enthusiasm. They get married and they play video games. Then by the time they are thirty, when they are ready to give up video games, they have ruined their marriages. That is not the only factor, but it is a very important factor. One article I read said it is because men are so immature, and they get together with their friends and play these video games. Video games of themselves are not wrong, but who has the time for them when you are a father, or when you are at the prime age for marriage?

Because they are "wimps" and "lace hankies," they do not even have the "oomph" (i.e., the vitality, the liveliness, the get-up-and-go) to prepare themselves for marriage. They are not making themselves men that women can have respect for and confidence in. It is so sad, and what is even sadder, is that it has dramatically affected men in the greater Church of God. They have fallen into, and have become a product of this society—many of them, not all of them. I am actually quite proud of the singles that we have here in this congregation.

Proper dating provides an opportunity to help singles learn to see others as persons rather than objects. It is in dating that you discover names, personalities, and philosophies of the other person.

These are the qualities of personhood. The name identifies us as a unique person. The personality reveals the nature of our uniqueness. The philosophy reveals the values by which we live our lives. All of these are discovered, not as we stand back and view each other as objects, but as we come close and begin to interact with each other.

Proper dating is important because it gives you a means of connecting with others as persons. Our society increasingly pushes us to live in cocoons, but our isolation has brought us to growing levels of loneliness, emptiness, and sometimes desperation. However, this isolation does not have to be a permanent prison. Dating is an acceptable way of breaking out of isolation and connecting with others.

#### Purpose 2: Seeing Our Strengths and Weaknesses

A second purpose of dating is to aid in the development of one's own personality. All of us are in a process of development. As you relate to others in the dating context, you begin to see various personality traits exhibited. This promotes healthy self-analysis and brings greater self-understanding, and this takes time.

We recognize that some traits are more desirable than others. We come to see our own strengths and weaknesses. The knowledge of a weakness is the first step toward growth. The fact is that all of us have strengths and weaknesses in our personalities. Not one of us is perfect.

Maturity is not flawlessness. However, we are never to be satisfied with our present status of development. If we are overly withdrawn, we cannot freely and effectively help others. If, on the other hand, we are overly talkative we may overwhelm those whom we would help.

Relating to those of the opposite sex in a dating relationship has a way of letting us see ourselves, and cooperate in God's plan for growth for our lives.

One young man perceived, "I never realized how obnoxious I must be until I dated Jane. She talks all the time, and it drives me batty." The light had dawned; his eyes were opened. He saw in Jane his own weakness and was mature enough to take steps toward growth. For him this meant curbing his speech and developing his listening skills.

The apostle James admonishes Christians:

James 1:19-20 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

What we dislike in others is often a weakness in our own lives, in fact that is quite often why we recognize it. Dating can help us see ourselves realistically. But everyone knows that changing personality weaknesses is not easy. Change takes effort, but it is effort well invested.

### Purpose 3: Practice in Serving Others

A third purpose of dating is that it provides an opportunity to serve others. Service is life's highest calling. History is abounding with examples of men and women who discovered that humanity's greatest contribution is in giving to others.

Jesus Christ's washing of the feet of His disciples presented a humble example for all to follow.

Matthew 20:25-28 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

I do not mean to convey the idea that dating should be done in a spirit of martyrdom. Serving is different from martyrdom. Serving is something we do for others, whereas martyrdom is something others bring upon us. We should be wise in our serving, and not allow ourselves to be used time and time again.

Proper dating is always a two-way street. Certainly, you receive something from the relationship, but you are also to be contributing to the life of the one with whom you are dating. Unmeasured good can be accomplished if you could see service as one of the purposes of dating.

Taking serving seriously may change your attitude toward dating. You have been programmed to "put your best foot forward" so that you will impress the other person. Consequently, you may be reluctant to discuss what is bothering your date, fearing he may walk away from you. Genuine service demands that we speak the truth in love. We do not serve each other by avoiding one another's sadness or depression.

Obviously, your service does not involve pointing out the weaknesses of your date. Often, we help them simply by listening as they share their struggles. Empathetic listening is an effective medication for the hurting heart. Then, if you have a relationship with God, and you are studying God's word, you will have answers on how to help the person.

#### Purpose 4: Discovering the Person We Will Marry

An obvious purpose of dating is to help us discover the kind of person we will marry.

In some cultures, marriages are arranged. Contracts are drawn up between respective families. The choice is made on the basis of cultural, financial, or religious considerations. The couple is supposed to develop love once they are married. How many millions of those marriages stay together? Probably a lot, and maybe even more than what we have today. However, I am not suggesting that.

In Western culture, the process is left to the individuals involved (so you singles can breathe a big sigh of relief). Proper dating is designed to help you gain a realistic idea of the kind of person you need as a marriage partner.

Dating people with differing personalities gives you criteria for making wise judgments. One who has limited dating experience may after marriage be plagued by the thoughts, "What would someone else be like?" "Would I have had a better marriage with another type of mate?" Those questions may come to many couples, especially when there is trouble in the marriage. But, the individual who looks back on a well-rounded social life before marriage is better equipped to answer the question. What could be more difficult than finding someone with whom we can live with in harmony and fulfillment for the next fifty years?

Do not blindly believe the old adage that "opposites attract." That is not necessarily true, opposites more often than not repel, especially in religion. That is why couples can be so attracted before marriage and so disillusioned afterwards.

The reality is that the more similar we are, the fewer conflicts we will have. Similarity is especially important when it comes to the important issues of life, such as values, religion, morals, whether or not to have children and how many, and vocational goals. Dating provides the context for exploring answers to these questions and determining our suitability for marriage.

Ladies, marry a man of virtue! Being single is tough. The loneliness can often seem unbearable. But, a marriage to a bad person does not assuage the loneliness of being single.

What is worse than wanting to be married and being single? It is to be lonely in a marriage, and have no hope, because you married a person on their accoutrements, and not on their character.

Faith and hope, though distinct, are essentially united. They come from the same source, are sustained by the same evidence, and are exercised by the same works. Faith is the perceiving, and hope the anticipation.

It takes faith to patiently wait for God to provide a person of character. Just because you have not met a suitable person in your area, does not mean there is not anyone at all. If you are in God's church, and you are obedient to God, He has in mind somebody perfect for you.

Look at the example of Elijah—he thought he was the only one left who was faithful to God. However, God said He had reserved 7,000 others who were faithful. A lack of singles in your area does not mean there are no other singles anywhere.

What are you doing to meet new people? Assuming you have already tried to get to know all the church singles in your area, are you branching out to the surrounding state or even country? Have you looked beyond your immediate area? I know some of you have been very diligent about this.

This is the works part of your faith. Faith without works is dead. Prayer is the works part of faith, your communication with God. In addition, Bible Study, obedience, overcoming sin are all works parts of faith.

You singles—do not just sit and do nothing: expand your interests, improve your skills, and increase your knowledge while maintaining your personal relationship with God through prayer and Bible Study. If you are doing this, leave the rest up to God. Be patient while God prepares you and your future mate for marriage, and more importantly, for a place in His Kingdom.

James 2:17-20 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

It is not enough to just have a belief in God; you have to actively pursue your relationship with Him and if He is intimately in contact with you, then the intimate relationship that you are looking for will be provided. I know that I have made it sound very simple, and really, it is, but you also have a lot of work to do.

Do you have the right attitude—the right state of mind—a positive outlook? Do you believe God, when He says He will never forsake you? When you complain about not having someone to date, or when you complain about not being married yet, who is it are you blaming? You are blaming God, and you do not want to do that. I know you do not realize that you are blaming God.

Hebrews 13:5 Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

We have heard many times in various sermons, "*never*" is stated about five times. "*I will never, never, never, never, never leave you nor forsake you.*"

In general, faith is the persuasion of the mind that a certain statement is true. Its primary idea is trust. A thing is true, and therefore worthy of trust. It has many degrees up to full assurance of faith, in accordance with the evidence on which it rests. God Himself is worthy of trust above

all others. Our faith in Him should be without reservation.

Faith is the result of teaching. Knowledge is an essential element in all faith, and is sometimes spoken of as an equivalent to faith. Yet the two are distinguished in this respect: faith includes in it agreement, which is an act of the will, in addition to the act of the understanding. It means that you agree with what God is planning to do, whatever it is. It means that you agree with God's will.

Agreement on the truth is essential to faith. The ultimate ground on which our agreement to any revealed truth rests is on the genuineness of God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Faith is not a work that God graciously accepts instead of perfect obedience, but is only the hand by which we take hold of the helping hand of God. Faith is based on the Word of God, not the reasonableness of what God says, but the simple fact that He says it.

By faith, we understand the will of God. All of the scriptures I have given are very familiar to everyone, and they are very meaningful, very powerful, and they are absolute.

Hebrews 11:1-3 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

The writer of Hebrews 11 goes on to offer a long list of the heroes and heroines of faith, but even he runs out of time to list them all. The lives of these men and women show that faith is an unshakable belief that God will do everything He has promised to do even before there is visible evidence to that effect. In short, faith is being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see, because we know we have a relationship with God. We are praying to God, and keeping that relationship alive, and we are studying His word to know what His will is. We know that God created man and woman to marry, and that is what He wants.

To those of you singles with whom God is working, you who are reverent and obedient to Him, (hopefully that is all of you), God is working in your lives in a more intimate way than you can see. He is preparing you and your future mate for His Kingdom first. That is His priority! Then, His concern is for your happiness in marriage. Many singles get the cart before the horse, and try to get married and then convert the person. When in reality, the proper order is to be in the proper relationship with God, and become a baptized member of His church, and then what God wants secondarily for us is marriage. It will all work out.

You can bypass God and do it your way, or, if you are wise, you will patiently wait for God's will to be done according to His pleasure and within His time frame. God gives you that choice—the way of hard knocks or the way of peace and abundant spiritual blessings.

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Do you singles believe God? Do you really believe Him?

Even in small doses, genuine faith is a potent tool because it taps into the power of the Awesome God of the Universe in whom faith is placed. Jesus tells His disciples that if they have faith the size of a mustard seed they will be able to move mountains. Without a doubt, nothing is impossible for a faithful single.

Next time I speak on this subject, I will cover such things as: time, cultivation, and restraint in dating, and how you can develop hope. I am also going to answer some of the questions that some of you have asked me that are of a more detailed nature.