

Dating (Part 3): A Love Worthy Of Your Life

Dating, Marriage and Love

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Sometimes children have an interesting view of marriage. And, sometimes it is more accurate than we would like to admit. Anita, a nine year old girl, had this to say: "It's better for girls to be single but not for boys. Boys need somebody to clean up after them."

Carolyn, an eight year old girl, had this to say about deciding who to marry: "My mother says to look for a man who is KIND.... That's what I'll do.... I'll find somebody who's KINDA tall and handsome."

Well, young girls certainly have their opinions about marriage from an early age. Guys seem to delay thinking about marriage until it is about to happen. That is part of the problem with marriages today—they just seem to happen without a great deal of thought or wisdom put into them.

Eventually, long-term dating can, and should, lead to marriage. But it should lead to the right marriage at the right time.

It has been substantiated time and again that the point at which most marriages go wrong is during the courtship period that led to the marriage. In the light of the high rate of breakups and divorce, it is very clear that dating customs of this society need to be totally altered!

Marriage counselors have found that there are three negative things that are consistently ignored during the courtship period. If these things were avoided the number of divorces could be drastically reduced.

First, never borrow money excessively. You will never see a happy person who is heavily in debt. Second, never be unforgiving. You will never meet an unforgiving person who is truly happy. Third, never get into premarital sex. It is the worst thing you can do for your future marriage. This is what the experts, and the marriage counselors, have found time and time again.

Is premarital sex sin? It seems so hard for humans to realize that whatever is becoming customary is not necessarily good. But break God's law, and you will pay the penalty. There is always a penalty for sin; again, you know that as well.

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I Thessalonians 4:3 tells us that it is the will of God that we abstain from sexual immorality.

God will forgive the spiritual penalty of eternal death upon genuine repentance and the acceptance of the sacrifice of Christ, but most of the time He allows the physical penalty to be paid in the form of suffering and disease. In the case of sexual sins, a person pays a dear physical penalty by the contraction of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)—of which there are many. From what I understand there are dozens and dozens of them.

These inexorable laws of God are good, not bad. They are the way of good health and happiness. Most people do not believe that His laws are good because of the hostility that runs through most humans beings. The secularly educated and scientific world rejects all knowledge of the invisible but powerful laws of God. It seeks answers by purely physical, experimental, and research methods.

Many research studies have attempted to arrive at the final answer to the question, "Does premarital experience affect later marital happiness, and if so, how?" It does not take much in the way of observation, and opening our eyes, to see that it does dramatically and horribly affect marital happiness later.

Again and again, they have found that those who have indulged in sex relations prior to marriage are less well-adjusted in marriage than those who married without previous experience. But scientifically they found so many complicating factors they sometimes could not arrive at a conclusion. That sounds so typical of the worldly scientists, doctors, and philosophers.

Premarital experience almost always has to be carried on under very unsatisfactory and dark situations, such as environment, need for secrecy, psychological disturbances, fear of pregnancy and/or the likelihood of STDs, and many other impending and negative factors.

All too often, illegitimate children are born. There is a saying in genealogy: "There are no illegitimate children, only illegitimate parents." Nevertheless, it is the child who suffers the most when this sin of sexual immorality is sought after and imbibed in.

An illegitimate birth results in the woman becoming resentful of being a single mother without a husband, and resentment often turns to hatred and disdain for the man who looked "good" under the influence of alcohol, and maybe even looked like a good candidate for marriage. Apparently, he was not! But, a child is conceived, and the

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possibility of a great marriage is reduced to frustration and an underlying bitterness that never goes away.

Both have forever ruined their potential for the perfect marriage. And so, they have to make the best of it always falling short of what could have been, if done God's way.

Once a couple is engaged to be married—then what? What should be their standard of conduct?

Almost everyone, today, assumes that "making out" is completely within the bounds of decency after a definite engagement. But is it according to God's standards?

What about premarital sexual intercourse between engaged couples? Does it help prepare for adjustment in marriage, or does it prevent or make more difficult that adjustment?

The perverted moral standards today have so twisted the thinking and the behavior of the great majority of teenagers and adults, that they have no idea that decency and propriety matter greatly. Sexual activity is so prominent in this society today with regard to dating, and even in casual meetings, that sexual activity is often expected as the "norm" during the engagement period.

How in the world can a permanently tainted marriage be worth it? There is no way that it can.

Ecclesiastes 11:9 "Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all these God will bring you into judgment."

So, even before a person is converted and baptized, God is saying right here, that all the way down into your youth God will judge you for what we have done, and for what I have done. Of course, we are forgiven of that upon repentance, baptism, overcoming, and change.

Dating should be an enjoyable experience. God wants us to enjoy life. Even so, we are all held accountable for what we do.

In I Thessalonians 4, God gives a principle that relates to dating. It should be conducted

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in an honorable way which reflects holiness.

I Thessalonians 4:3-8 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit

God tells us here, through the apostle Paul, that if we involve ourselves in sexual immorality, we are harming the other person by taking advantage of him or her. Those who defraud people through sexual immorality—'Beware!' God will avenge the harmed person.

So, where does that leave the sexually immoral person? It puts him under a curse! We can deduce from this that sexual immorality, that is, sex outside of marriage (including sex during the engagement period) begins the following marriage under a curse.

Read verse 6 again, "no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such." (Of course, brother and sister here is our neighbor and those close to us.)

You girls—stay pure for marriage. Keep your standards high, do not sell out, keep yourself pure and your parents will praise God for answering their prayers, and yours. Your true friends will congratulate you and you guys will step into the most blessed physical relationship that humans can have. If you do it right, it will be the most blessed.

But if you compromise, if you do it wrong, you have committed yourself to something far inferior. Who wants an inferior marriage, when you can have one that is superior over all others on earth? And you may very well find that there is, if you go the wrong way, hell on earth.

It is no wonder many think marriage is a dull meal with dessert first, when they imbibe in sexual immorality. Any marriage, based upon the unstable ideas of the romance of the western world, will probably turn out to be exactly like that inferior philosophy—unstable, unbalanced, and unhappy.

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Why do some people stay in a bad relationship, whether in dating, or in marriage? Do not marry someone who has characteristics that you feel are intolerable.

You may plan to change your potential life partner in the future, but that change probably will not happen. Behavior runs in deep channels that were cut during early childhood, and it is very difficult to alter them. I have talked with people about their marriages, people who have called in and asked for advice, who have complained about their husband or their wife, and how they just cannot get them to change. I have told them that in the thirty or forty years that you have been married to them, has there been any change in them in anything that you have tried to change in them. They say, "Well, no." I tell them that they are going to have to accept them for the way that they are, because you are going to have to continue to live with what you have already chosen.

In order to break a bad habit, it helps to replace it with a good one. It is hard enough to change yourself, much less to change someone else, which is rarely successful over the long term. Therefore, if you cannot live with a characteristic that shows up during courtship, it may plague you for the rest of your life.

Solomon alluded to something men cannot live with.

Proverbs 21:9 It is better to dwell in a corner of a housetop, than in a house shared with a contentious woman.

Proverbs 27:15 A continual dripping on a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike;

Here, contentious means argumentative, nagging, and touchy.

Solomon alluded to something women cannot live with.

Proverbs 6:9-11 How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep—so shall your poverty come on you like a prowler, and your need like an armed man.

Proverbs 19:15 Slothfulness [laziness] casts one into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger.

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It is a very common complaint of wives, especially with the more recent generations.

II Thessalonians 3:10 If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.

Women get very annoyed with men who are lazy, and they get very frustrated to the point of just throwing up their hands and having to walk away.

There are a variety of reasons a person might stay in an unhappy dating relationship, but by far, the most common is this: Even a bad relationship can bring a feeling of security. No matter how false it actually is, the feeling of being "involved" brings assurance.

People in these kinds of relationships usually will not admit it, but like a familiar pair of worn-out shoes, their relationship provides a sense of comfort they cannot seem to live without—no matter how bad the relationship is.

The human compulsion for security is stronger than a magnet. It can play tricks on our senses. And since we often do not like the anxiety that comes from making waves, we do not rock the boat. We sit quietly in our relationship, going nowhere, drifting aimlessly, when we should be making some tough decisions on how to solve the problem.

Not that it is a security issue but, what about interracial or intercultural dating and marriage? I have received several questions on this from different countries as well as the United States.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that, as of June 12, 1967, interracial marriages were no longer illegal in any state. Prior to that time interracially married people received jail sentences, or were run out of the state in Virginia, Alabama, and other states. The issue, up until forty years ago, was a very hot one in this country. But since then, interracial dating and marriage has increased dramatically between all races. It has become a very common way to enter into marriage.

What does God say, or not say, about it? God, nowhere in the Bible states His displeasure of a marriage on the basis of race. Therefore, it is not a sin. He does, in several places, express His displeasure of marriage on the basis of ethnicity, culture, and religion. Whether those falling under that prohibition are of a different race is never addressed.

Deuteronomy 7:1-6 When the Lord your God brings you into the land which

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you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than you, "and when the Lord your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them. "Nor shall you make marriages with them. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. "For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the Lord will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly. "But thus you shall deal with them: you shall destroy their altars, and break down their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images, and burn their carved images with fire. "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth.

The application for the church today is on the spiritual level, it means that we are to keep spiritually pure.

The children of ancient Israel were God's holy people, a special treasure; they were a foreshadow—a 'type' of God's spiritual church. His command here in Deuteronomy 7 was given to warn His holy people against putting themselves in a situation that would lead them away from following Him. His concern targeted their religious beliefs and customs in verse 5, not their race.

Later on, the descendants of Judah committed spiritual adultery.

Malachi 2:10-11 Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another by profaning the covenant of the fathers? Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem, For Judah has profaned the Lord's holy institution which He loves: He has married the daughter of a foreign god.

There again, it is the religion, not the race, that is being spoken of there.

According to Maimonides, the Jews have a saying, "He that marries a pagan woman is as if he made himself son-in-law to an idol." As a result he came into close relationship with idols and evil spirits.

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Quite a number of the Old Testament biblical heroes married and had children across racial lines:

- Abraham married Hagar (an Egyptian descendant from Ham).
- Ham was the father of the black and brown races.
- Judah married Tamar (a Canaanite descendant of Ham).
- Tamar, of the black or brown race, was a direct ancestor of Jesus Christ through her son Pharez.
- Joseph married Asenath (an Egyptian) from whom Manasseh and Ephraim were born. We know that many of the descendants, if not most of the descendants, of Ephraim and Manasseh settled in Britain, the United States, and the English speaking peoples of Australia, Canada, and South Africa and so on.
- Moses married an Ethiopian woman (also a descendant of Ham). In Numbers 12, God defended this interracial marriage under the verbal attack of Miriam and Aaron by cursing Miriam with leprosy. Following their repentance she was healed.

God banned the Israelites from marrying and entering into other kinds of covenants with Moabites because of their pagan religious and cultural practices. Moabites were Semitic, which means they were of the white race. Again, we see that God's concern is regarding beliefs and customs that will potentially draw His holy people away from obeying Him.

Even though Ruth was a Moabite, God quickly lifted the ban against her when it was apparent she was converted to God's way of life. She became David's ancestor.

There is no indication that there were any changes in this doctrine in the New Testament. Paul's only comment found in I Corinthians 7 is that Christians must marry "in the Lord." That is, they are not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For baptized members of God's church, it means both the bride and the groom must be baptized, that is, converted.

Regardless of race, every individual has the same potential destiny to become part of God's own family. This is a spiritual issue that involves the religious and cultural mindset of the individuals.

Galatians 3:28-29 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

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And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

It is recorded in Genesis 24 that Abraham was deeply concerned that his son Isaac should find a wife among his own people rather than from among the Canaanites, who were a religiously and culturally different people.

In turn, Genesis 28 describes how Isaac instructed his son Jacob to go back to their ancestral home to find a wife. What was it that he was so concerned about? It was not the racial aspect, but the religious and cultural differences of other peoples that was his concern. This is not to say that he did not personally prefer his children to marry within his own race. He may very well have. Nothing is said one way or another.

Although God does not forbid inter-racial marriage, at the very least it is unwise for several reasons. I will only mention seven. This is as a result of a lot of research that I did. I went onto interracial support websites to find out the pros and the cons and the positives and the negatives of interracial marriage. This is just a summary of what I found.

1. According to a 1998 government report: Marital break-up rates for interracial couples are somewhat higher, but not hugely so—about 10% higher. This is a small negative, but a negative nonetheless.

2. Interracial marriage is often entered into for selfish reasons. Several sources mention this reason. According to a University of Pennsylvania website in a research paper by Stefanie Saia:

Individuals, who find themselves stepping outside of their race when looking for a relationship, rate themselves as being more independent and assertive than those who do not accept interracial relationships. These same individuals, regardless of their own race, described themselves as 'able to get their own way.'

I think that is very eye-opening in a lot of ways, in that they were partly raised that way, or allowed to be that way while they were being raised. And, again, this is only one of the negatives that was mentioned.

3. Sexual curiosity has been cited as a reason for some interracial marriages. For

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example, I worked with a divorced man 20 years ago who told me the only reason he married his black ex-wife was purely out of lust for a black woman. He was divorced by the time I knew him, and he had a daughter. There was a constant battle the entire time, because she was traded back and forth, weekend after weekend, between he and his ex-wife. There was always an antagonistic battle.

4. Those involved in interracial dating and marriage sometimes receive harsh stares and negative comments. This was a fairly large complaint on one of the interracial help websites. A person in this type of relationship must have an extra thick skin. People who are very much bothered by criticism do not do well in interracial marriages, especially when their children are the victims of rejection and ridicule.

You can extend many of these to marrying not only in other races, but also in other cultures and so on.

5. In my research of the pros and cons to interracial dating and marriage I found that one of the most negative results was the deep disappointment of the parents that their child had not chosen to marry within their own race. Often, the reason was not racism, but a sense of family unity derived from a value of their ancestry.

Children should always ask their parents opinion of their choice of a potential mate. It has often been said, "You do not just marry the individual, but the whole family."

6. According to some psychologists and researchers, the biggest problem facing bi-racial children is identity crisis. The sense of self is derived from identity from one's parents. The way a child perceives himself depends upon how the parents perceive the child. Does he look more White, Black, Hispanic or Asian? Which racial qualities are the most dominant? The parents must be unified, or the child has a higher risk of mental and personality problems. Meaning, if one parent thinks that the child should be raised Black, and the other one thinks that he should be raised White or Asian or whatever, then the child grows up confused and this can cause serious problems later.

According to an article titled "Interracial Marriages and the Effects on Children" by Nancy Aloiuise of the University of Dayton School of Law, in which is quoted the findings of the authors Vladimir Piskacek and Marlene Golub:

The authors note that there are basically three stages when a bi-racial child's identity can be negatively affected. The first point in this timeline is when one parent tells the child he/she is White and the other parent tells the child he/she is Black. The second clash of identity arises between the child's

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choice of identification whether it is Black or White, and the negative parental feedback from such a choice. The last point of negative effect imposed on a bi-racial child's identity, is when the child and the parent agree regarding the child's identity, but society does not agree with them.

We saw that more years ago when children were called "half breeds", when the Indians and the White man were marrying. It is not something that is as serious today, but it is still around and still affects children today, just at a lesser degree.

7. Advice from interracial dating and marriage support websites tell people involved in interracial dating to be very aware of the cultural differences. Often, they are huge differences that affect everything from religious background influences to food, to music, to dress, to language, to sexual tendencies, to family traditions, and the list is endless. The interracial support groups warn "Remember it is NOT easy!" This was in the support group's emphasis, those who were primarily authored by people in interracial marriages. They say, again, "Remember it is NOT easy!"

I wanted to give you those points, because although God allows it, it is a tough row to hoe.

Taking into consideration these problems, at the very least interracial dating and marriage is unwise. So, as in all aspects of dating and marriage, use wisdom.

Proverbs 3:13 Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding.

Proverbs 4:7 Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding.

Proverbs 8:11 For wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things one may desire cannot be compared with her.

So, the point is, in dating and marriage, wisdom is absolutely essential.

People were meant to marry others who are compatible in culture, character, religious beliefs, and outlook on life. Disregarding these principles is likely to result in problems and hardships for the couple and sadly, for the children. The question of 'who to marry' has to do with making wise decisions for one's future and one's children's future as well.

What love is not:

In Ecclesiastes, wise King Solomon wrote this:

Ecclesiastes 9:1 For I considered all this in my heart, so that I could declare it all: that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God. People know neither love nor hatred by anything they see before them.

This is one of the greatest problems in dating, and people go by their emotional seeing, rather than using wisdom.

Love is not a matter of desiring what we see. In today's vernacular, the word 'love' has almost no end to its meanings and usage. We hear such terms as:

- 'Love affair' or 'Lover' (which in this society usually refers to an adulterous relationship).
- 'Love is blind' (which means that one has no clue of how to make wise decisions).
- 'Lovemaking' or 'making love' (which more often than not refers to the totally self-centered sin of sexual immorality).
- 'Love machine' (which refers to a person without self-control in sexual activity).
- 'Lover's lane' (which refers to the place people go to commit sexual immorality).
- 'Love child' (which is defined by *Webster's Dictionary* as 'an illegitimate child').
- 'Love at first sight' (according to a dictionary of love terms: 'Love at first sight' is what occurs when two extremely lustful, but not entirely choosy people meet).

Every one of these worldly applications of the word 'love' refers to a motivation and acts of lovelessness, that is, hatred toward others, because every one of these terms describes harmful actions against the other person. Sometimes the damage does not become noticeable until a lot later in life, and usually it is during the marriage.

What a contrast between how this society views "love" and how God defines it.

I John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And

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His commandments are not burdensome.

II John 6 This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.

Let us look at some other things that love is not!

Love is not found in an abusive relationship.

Here are some common early warning signs that the person you are dating will become abusive:

Extreme jealousy, controlling behavior, quick involvement, and unpredictable mood swings, alcohol or drug abuse, explosive anger, isolates you from friends and family, uses force during an argument, shows hypersensitivity, blames others for his problems or feelings, cruel to children or animals, verbally abusive, or threatens violence.

That was just a partial list that was made up by several marriage counselors.

According to one survey of 13 to 18 year olds, nearly one in three teenage girls in dating relationships say they have feared being physically hurt by a partner. Almost one in five admit being hit, slapped, or shoved by a boyfriend.

Nevertheless, in the same online poll conducted by Teenage Research Unlimited marketing firm, many young people not only accept such behaviors, but consider them normal and exciting. How perverse. Nearly half admitted doing something that conflicted with their personal values or beliefs to please a boyfriend or girlfriend. Some said that they would "do almost anything" to hold onto a relationship, even an abusive one.

Almost 60 percent of teens in relationships acknowledged their partner made them feel bad or embarrassed about themselves. The study was commissioned by Liz Claiborne Inc., as part of its ongoing "Love is Not Abuse" campaign to stop domestic violence.

A red flag should go up when someone makes you feel that whatever you are is not enough. Of course, I am speaking about dating relationships.

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Love is not "falling in love." It is not an accident. Believe it or not, it is utterly impossible to fall in love. A "fall" is an accident, and love should most definitely not be accidental.

We live in a perverse and ignorant society with hundreds of songs, movies, novels, and magazine articles about "falling in love." A tremendous amount of conversation today revolves around dating and romance and the idea of "falling in love."

It is supposed to be an indefinable feeling—a tingling up and down your spine—as you glance across a crowded room at someone who could become a partner in sex. We are falsely told by the songs of our day that we will know at a glance when we "fall in love."

However, the kind of "love" into which most people "fall," is not true love, but lust. It is desire for intimacies and sexual experience with one another; a yearning to be seen in each other's company, to own and have power over the other person—but that certainly is not true love! This kind of "love" is from the self-centeredness of the person.

In this society, love is described as "feelings" that people are assured of experiencing in which their hearts flutter and beat faster. Love is presented as an exciting plethora of pulsating, powerful sensations. It is like a disease with symptoms such as: loss of appetite, dizziness, double or blurred vision, breathlessness, and dozens of other subtle physical and psychological phenomena. That is not love!

But we have been purposely led to believe that it is love by all the songs we sing, the movies we watch, and the magazines and novels that we read. That is infatuation, desire, lust, curiosity, excitement, and physical attraction that they are describing. But, it is not love.

Single women today say the idea of two people going out on a real date has ceased to exist in the 21st century. Instead, the dating scene involves "going out, meeting someone, going home with them, and then...well, you know what the rest of the story is.

Sadly, meaningful relationships have been replaced by meaningless physical encounters. If I am painting a very negative view of dating in this world, I very much mean to. Dating in this world is nothing like dating should be for singles in the church. If we throw the idea of worldly dating right on out the window, and forget about it, and use God's principles, we will fare much better.

The single generation today is full of people whose parents have flooded their lives with scheduling, pressure to succeed, and extracurricular activities; so much so, that they never took the time to instill good moral standards within their children. These singles

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have been programmed to not see any benefit to taking the time to woo a potential mate.

Instead, they "hook up." Hook-ups do initially seem to satisfy biology, but the emotional detachment does not satisfy the heart and mind. So the result of only "hooking up" is long-term misery.

Children of illegitimate conceptions are the tragic losers from their parents' lack of self-control.

Single people today still desire to be valued and cared for by someone special and, ultimately, to have a committed, lasting relationship. Commitment is important and everyone wants someone to be committed and faithful to them. We all want to be loved, and to be able to trust someone. We cannot feel fulfilled if we do not feel loved. God has designed us that way. Love must be built on a strong foundation of commitment.

But one look around, at the married people and their problems, and we realize that marriage does not automatically bring lasting satisfaction. It takes something more than a wedding to do that.

I think many single men are involved in their work, and do not feel an overwhelming desire to marry, with the potential of trading one set of problems for another. Nevertheless, there is a desire (often way too faint) for a single man to open his life to someone. But, he resists settling down when he looks around at married people and their problems, and there are many.

Single men often feel that if they open their hearts to a woman, but the relationship does not go anywhere or breaks apart, they have been betrayed. They have given out personal information about themselves, but the other person walked away from it, not wanting to know more about them. They feel rejected again. At times, they are afraid they might never find someone to love and that nobody would ever love them.

Of course, most single adults want to develop an intimate relationship that will not fail or break up. Nearly half of all marriages end in divorce today—who wants to become part of that statistic? So, we can see the natural tendency of many singles to be somewhat negative toward marriage. In fact, the average age of marriage is going up and up all of the time. I think it was around 24 years of age when I was married, now it is something like 27 years of age.

Most singles at one time or another, possibly often, sit at home alone, feeling unloved

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and unlovable, convinced that they are incapable of any type of significant relationship.

Marriage can be difficult even when two people think they are passionately "in love" with one another, but it is a firestorm when they do not even have that foundation to build on. Therefore, it is essentially important to build a significant relationship on the right things.

A marriage counselor wisely advised: "Do not marry the person you think you can live with. Marry the one you cannot live without."

Usually people get married at the height of their physical beauty. That guy will have gotten himself as good looking as he can get. That woman has been getting ready all day and she is looking wonderful. They will be on time. And everything from that moment on is down hill physically. So, if you have built your marriage on physical attributes, and what is worse, if you built it on passion, you are in a heap of trouble.

What should you look for in a mate? Most people never give any thought to this. They just fall into marriage and often wake up the next morning regretting the mistake they made.

You singles of any age must realize that your selection of a mate involves the quality of the education of the whole person, the development of character, the forming of willpower, the rounding out of the whole personality, and the development of moral strength, of honesty, and integrity. So now that there is no one in the world that matches that, what do we do?

Most importantly, the success of your selection of a mate depends on yours and your potential mate's personal relationship with your Creator and Savior—God the Father and Jesus Christ.

There are hidden, unseen spiritual laws which, if they are obeyed, are going to produce tremendous dividends and blessings.

Does your "love-interest" love God and his neighbor? That is one of the first questions you should ask when dating.

Luke 10:27 So he answered and said, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'"

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The problem of wanting to, or knowing how to, love our neighbor, is spiritual, not physical. God's law is spiritual. Humans do not perceive spiritual truth—God must reveal it. Therefore we see, throughout human history, conflict between man and his neighbor, and between husband and wife.

Have you considered that whatever we do to another human being shows how we treat God? According to Matthew 25:31-46, whatever we do to our neighbor, we are actually doing to God. This knowledge should have a powerful impact when we consider our relationship with our neighbor! In addition God says:

I John 4:20-21 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

The same holds true for the person you are interested in dating or marrying. How does he or she treat others? How does he or she treat you?

Our neighbors—each and every one of them—are made in God's likeness and are eventually to become part of God's Kingdom. It is at this point that we begin to see the importance God places on relationships between human beings made in His likeness.

Every human being is a potential member of the God Family, and we must not do anything to deter our neighbor from fulfilling God's purpose in his life. This must be the underlying premise upon which we base our every thought and action toward our neighbor—toward a potential life partner.

Can you see your *love-interest's* desire to love you by the way he loves God and his neighbor? If not, you are making a huge mistake that will cause you misery, if you pursue one who loves not his neighbor.

Love is not frenzied. It is not emotional in that sense, though emotion is certainly connected with it. True love is unselfish, loyal, and benevolent concern for the good of another. It is deep admiration and genuine respect for the qualities of character in the other individual. It is a desire to give to and share with the one being loved. Love is selfless.

But lust, infatuation, physical attraction, romantic emotional desire—that is all self-centered. Love is something that has to be produced over time.

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To truly love—a person must want to share: to share life's experiences, thrills, and joys; to share sorrow and trouble, to share success or failure, to share sickness and health.

All of us have had times in our lives when we have seen a wonderful sunset, or experienced a sensational thrill, or observed wildlife or something in our environment such as a breathtaking view, and wished we had someone who could thoroughly understand and share the moment with us!

We have all had times when we have yearned for someone to deeply understand our innermost longings and desires. When irritated over a political, social, or religious situation we have desperately desired to express our concern to someone—someone with whom we can share our own personal feelings—and who is willing to listen. If we base our marriages on what God teaches and His wisdom, then our strong desire will be to be able to discuss God's way of life, and His principles, statutes, and His laws together, with our husband or wife.

Selfless love requires work along with wisdom, willpower, and determination. It is an uphill push because human nature is not naturally selfless and outgoing.

Wisdom is the right application of knowledge and it is an absolute necessity in learning to exercise true love. It takes wisdom to discern God's will in dating and marriage. Wisdom is needed to correctly guide our efforts. It is needed in the way we continue our efforts in spite of all adversity.

James 1:5-6 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting.

So, if you are a single and are in a dating situation, or *when* you are in a dating situation, remember to ask God for wisdom and the right way to go through with that dating and courtship

There are three things that are needed to successfully survive every trial, and they are faith, hope, and love. Dating and marriage can certainly be an ongoing trial, especially if done unwisely. In faith, we stand unwaveringly on our trust and conviction. In hope, we guide our action expecting to receive the desire we have set our heart on. This hope adds spiritual motivation to go forward. In love, we act with selflessness, with initiative, and genuine concern for everyone. This helps take the focus off ourselves. All three ingredients are important, but the most important, and the one that takes the most effort,

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is love.

This is what dating and marriage and life is all about. How we handle these challenges has a huge impact on our eternal reward. This arena of dating, and marriage, and physical life is our opportunity to show God that we are willing trainees and learning to be profitable servants for His eternal Family.

Firstly, the process of our membership in God's church, and secondarily the process of marriage and family are the two major ways that God is creating godly character in us to complete His plan of creating godly children for His spiritual family. It is His doing, but we also have our part.

Besides our willpower and determination, it takes resourcefulness, perseverance, and drive. It requires breaking old habits—habits of thinking and acting selfishly. It then requires building new habits—habits of thinking and acting in selfless love. The old selfish habits are deeply ingrained, just as the new habits must become deeply ingrained if they are to become part of us.

To build a habit we must do a thing over and over until it becomes automatic behavior. It has been said that we are what we habitually are, and we become Godlike when we become habitually and consistently Godlike.

God is the epitome of love and He acts habitually and consistently in selfless love. That is what we are learning to do with the help of His Holy Spirit.

The basic laws of God are laws of love as I John 4:8 tells us and are given for the purpose of developing Godly love and goodwill.

I Corinthians 13 makes it clear what true love is and is not. It is called the greatest gift here in my caption.

I Corinthians 13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

The Greek word translated "love" in the *New King James Version* and "charity" in the *King James Version* is *agape*, not *phileo*, which is more commonly used to denote emotional love. *Agape* and *phileo* have similar meanings, but *phileo* comes primarily from the heart, while *agape* comes from the head.

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This Christian *agape* type love has God for its primary object, and expresses itself first of all in implicit obedience to His commandments. It means to think and act toward others with genuine concern and tenderness. It means having goodwill—feeling it deeply but intelligently.

While either word can be translated "love," here in I Corinthians 13, *agape* is intelligent, heartfelt concern as distinguished from *phileo*, which is the kind of emotion that the word love conveys to the average person. *Agape* is a very special love, and it is the love that is used for the love of God. *Phileo* more closely represents 'tender affection' and is never used in a command for humans to love God. *Agape* is used for that—and that is what is used here.

I Corinthians 13:2-7 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love is never negative. God's love endures all things, trials and pleasant experiences, differences of opinion, and misunderstandings. It does not lose friends over things that they do to us, and love never gives up. Love never fails, and when everything else has failed, true love, genuine benevolence and selfless concern for others will still be going strong.

I Corinthians 13:8 Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.

I Corinthians 13:13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

I have used verse 13 as the pattern for my three sermons on dating because in it is found the keys needed to survive this severe dilemma and trial that you singles in the church are going through. My first sermon emphasized faith, my second sermon

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emphasized hope, and this third sermon has emphasized love.

Singles take note:

Could it be that God may not give you a life partner to love, and be loved by, until you have learned to love others in your life in a way that pleases God?

Is God waiting for you to prove to Him that you can treat others with loving-kindness, before He will bless you with someone to love you intimately?

This is not to say that everyone who is married showed God beforehand that he or she was capable of love. Many marriages have proven that that was not the case. Neither is it to say that everyone who is not married has shown God that he or she is not capable of love.

But I point this out to help you understand that each and every single person has a responsibility to see that his or her own house is in order before expecting God to provide someone for them. Maybe in your individual case God wants certain qualities developed in you first—one of which may be love of Him or a love of others.

Maybe those who go out into the world to seek a mate are bypassing the premarital development God has in mind for them. And, they are actually shorting themselves on important godly character. I do not know, but it is a good question to ask. May God's will be done, not ours, whatever the case may be.

You singles must understand that the will of God is to abundantly bless you, not necessarily with material things, but more likely with spiritual blessings. If you are baptized you must agree with God's will for you and your future mate. That means contentment with God's decision whatever it might be. And often His decision is for us to wait, and sometimes it is a flat out "no"!

These three "dating sermons" have been given to those of you singles, who God is working with, and hopefully that is all of you. That is, if you are respectful and obedient to Him. 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.

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 His time-frame. God gives you that choice—the way of hard-knocks or the way of peace, and abundant spiritual blessings.

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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.

For many of you singles, your tribulation is in not being able to find someone suitable for marriage. But, the apostle Paul tells us that as you persevere you develop a more perfect character. And, as you develop character it produces hope. Therefore during your ordeal you should be becoming a better person, and that is your responsibility

This principle involving hope applies to all aspects of life, but for a baptized member of God's church, who has the help of the Holy Spirit, there is never any disappointment in this Spirit motivated hope.

Romans 5:5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which was given to us.

True hope fills us with zeal and purpose. It makes us feel alive with spiritual energy. It drives us to keep overcoming and growing no matter what negative factors and influences are at work to discourage and frustrate our progress toward marriage and God's Kingdom.

If we live a life of sin—disobedient to God's commands—we are abandoning any hope He may provide. If the target of our hope is in being like Jesus Christ, we will be committed to keeping ourselves from sin. Our aim is to be like Him in perseverance and righteous character.

True hope means looking forward confidently with faith to the fulfillment of God's glorious plan for us as individuals. Part of that plan is the marriage covenant which he desires the vast majority of people to enjoy and grow within with the right person.

I Corinthians 13:13 "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

The original word translated "abide" in I Corinthians 13:13 means that faith, hope, and love will always remain and continue there for you. It is used to emphasize permanency. So, when it comes to dating and marriage, faith, hope, and love are the things to draw on.

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Faith, hope, and love remain when all else that Paul had mentioned ceases; that is, these three will survive and be valuable above all spiritual fruits, and therefore should be sought; and of these the greatest and most important is love.

And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

You singles must recognize true love by realizing that God the Father and Jesus Christ first loved you; and if you reflect Their love in your own lives, then God will send the 'love of your life' to you!

The choice is yours!