

## THE RULES FOR DATING/COURTING: PART I

I do not pretend to have all the answers. We have two daughters and two sons. In less than one week our youngest child will be married. I am so blessed to have not only seen these kids grow up, but to be the pastor who had the privilege to perform the ceremony for all four of our children. As we look back there are some things we would do differently, but for the most part I feel very satisfied that Mrs. Pope and I honored God in the baby years, child years, adolescent years and finally young adulthood of our children's lives. I write this especially for the couples in our church preparing to face the incredible challenge of guiding your child through the courtship years. Here are some principles to keep in mind:

### I. Set a course for purity.

The Lord clearly warns us to stay away from the wrong crowd and to keep ourselves pure, "... *neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure*" (I Timothy 5:22). God told the children of Israel to teach the commands of Scripture to their children by keeping the Word ever before them, "*And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates*" (Deuteronomy 6:9). I was surrounded by Scripture Mom placed strategically in our house while growing up. By far the most visible display was a sign that read, "Keep thyself pure." That sign is indelibly sketched on my mind and when tempted to do wrong it flashes like a neon sign. The temptations now are stronger than ever. The world our children live in, the very air they breathe is a sensual environment that encourages our kids to engage in sexual activity. A key to follow is found in I Thessalonians 5:22, "*Abstain from all appearance of evil.*" Here are three guidelines:

#### A. Hands Off

*"Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman"* (I Corinthians 7:1). Before you panic saying, what? I can't touch a woman! The word "touch" implies the embrace, the move toward intimacy, not a mere handshake. Keep in mind the next verse tells us when we may step into the arena where we are permitted to become physically involved. "*Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband*" (I Corinthians 7:2). This verse tells us two truths: 1) Physical involvement can more easily lead one into fornication. The Bible says, "*...it is better to marry than to burn*" (I Corinthians 7:9). Petting, making-out or whatever slang is used to describe this activity is wrong. It is like lighting a candle in a room full of dynamite. 2) When you are married you are permitted with God's blessing with a clear, clean conscience to become physical. "*Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge*" (Hebrews 13:4).

## B. Hands On

Here we are referring to the Word of God. *“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word”* (Psalm 119:9). Read and memorize the Word of God for your edification but also to build up your spiritual immunity against sin. *“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word”* (Psalm 119:9). Just recently I was listening to a Christian radio program that was interviewing people who had delved into deepest immorality and were now, through God’s power, recovering. All interviewed said that Bible memory was imperative for the strength needed to resist evil. My word to all is, why wait for moral failure before you get into Scripture? Do the preventative action now! The same Word that gets you out of sin is the same Word that delivers you from sin.

## C. Eyes Fixed

Take your eyes off the temptation. Jesus said, *“...whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart”* (Matthew 5:28). God said of Job, *“...there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil”* (Job 1:8). *How did the best man in the world at that time handle sexual temptation? Job said, “I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?”* (Job 31:1). *This godly man did not trust himself to even look toward that which would bring him down. In this pornographic world in which we live, we must know that we are people who have covenant with God; therefore let us have eyes disciplined that reflect this relationship to our Lord. “I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me”* (Psalm 101:3). *Our Lord, knowing the area of temptation is so strong, clearly instructed through the apostle: “In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety...”* (1 Timothy 2:9). *God is telling men, don’t look and he is telling the women, help them by adorning yourselves in such a way that does not entice a man to do so.*

Dealing with the negative is not enough; we need the positive impact of taking our eyes off this present world and looking beyond to Jesus. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus! *“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God”* (Hebrews 12:2). This naturally leads us to the second important rule for courtship.

## II. Have a strong personal devotional life.

Years ago, I met a young man by the name of John Walton. I was preaching a revival meeting at his church when he made some life-changing decisions. The last I heard, he is now serving the Lord full time. At the close of the meeting before he went back to finish his year at Harvard University, he stopped by our motel room and left me a note telling me what he was forsaking to follow the Lord. The note said, “I don’t look at this as

something I am delivered from, but rather what I have been guided to.” I would like to specify - it goes even deeper - it was “to Whom” John had been guided that made the difference.

If someone does not have a deep abiding relationship with Christ, they have no business seeking someone else with whom to spend the rest of their life. The demand requires decisive action: *“And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment”* (Mark 12:30). The command to love God is so demanding that it requires that no one comes close to competing with our heart’s affection. Jesus enunciated it like this: *“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple”* (Luke 14:26).

Dr. Robert G. Lee began to feel strongly about the young lady he was to later marry. He told us, “I told my wife right from the first, you will always play second fiddle to Jesus in my life.” Barbara and I were visiting him in his home on Stonewall Street in Memphis, Tennessee when he was reminiscing on his and Lady Lee’s (as he affectionately referred to her) life together. He said, “I don’t believe a man ever loved a woman so deeply as I loved her, neither was there a woman that ever loved a man so deeply as she did me.” What a great love they had! Why? It was rooted and grounded in Jesus! Observe the comparison, *“And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first...”* (Luke 9:59). The problem came not in the activity this man was planning as much as his priorities. Jesus said, *“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you”* (Matthew 6:33). Dr. Vance Havner when commenting on these verses said, “Jesus never comes next.” How true! Young people who put Jesus first, far above anyone else, are rewarded with an even greater love to the person they marry. The self-centered life never reaches the acme of blessing the total dedicated life does.

Next week I shall continue this study on *The Rules for Dating/Courtship*.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in black ink and features a large, stylized initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

2003

Christian Courtship Part I – February 16, 2003

Christian Courtship Part II – February 23, 2003

Christian Courtship Part III – Court With The Parents' Blessing in Mind – March 2, 2003

Christian Courtship Part IV – What Constitutes a Godly Courtship – March 9, 2003

2008

The Rules for Dating/Courting: Part I – May 18, 2008

The Rules For Dating/Courting: Part II – May 25, 2008

The Rules For Dating/Courting: Part III – June 1, 2008

The Rules For Dating/Courting: Part IV – June 8, 2008

The Rules For Dating/Courting: Part V – June 15, 2008