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Rules For Dating/Courtship, Part V

The final three points I wish to give you today will be the finish (for now) of *The Rules for Dating*.

VI. Like the person you court/date.

One minister said to his friend, "I love you, brother." With that his fellow minister said, "I like you!" His friend replied, "Well, if you can't love me, I guess I'll settle for 'like'." Then the brother who used the term 'like', said, "Like is good; I am under the command of Christ to love even my enemies. Not only do I love you, I like you, too." You know there is some good sound wisdom there.

I was counseling a couple who had been married several years when they candidly admitted, "We have been sweethearts, lovers and fellow parents all our married life, but we have never really been friends." After getting to know the couple better, I was convinced as marriage partners, this is no way to live. Rather than creating a strong bond in relationship, they, at best, had a tenuous link that connected them together. I really felt for them as their kids grew up and left the nest. They literally (unless things changed) had nothing to look forward to in their latter years. In the thirty-eight years I have been performing weddings, the best marriages are those when the couple were great friends along with being sweethearts. Friendship will keep you going when romance wanes, health deteriorates and the kids have married and gone.

If you are courting/dating someone you don't get along with, please take heed to the warning: it will probably only get worse when you marry. Most all of us, during courtship, are on our best behavior. When we marry, we no longer have to put on "airs." We inevitably revert to being the person we really are. If you are having minor disagreements, then chances are almost certain, your problems will escalate. If you are willing to acquiesce and go the second mile to be a blessing, when you marry the chances are strong you will become even closer. So my pastoral advice is: if you are fighting all the time, arguing for the sake of arguing and just don't see eye to eye, for the good of both of you, break up! Better to endure a little pain now, than a lifetime of misery. I don't want your prayer to be, "*Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies...*" (Psalm 23:5). Marry a friend! It's not enough to love; like them! "*A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity*" (Proverbs 17:17).

VII. Give God veto power.

If you are getting serious with the person you are dating/courting, are you willing to break up, if God spoke to your heart about doing so? The requirement for discipleship is given by Jesus, "*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). God will never take second place in our relationships. He commanded Abraham to take Isaac up to Mount Moriah and offer him there to God. The story has a good ending; he did not have to sacrifice his son. God stopped him. But to be the friend of God, we have to be willing to place anything and everyone up for sacrifice. Are you willing to give God your girlfriend or boyfriend? The Bible says, "*Thou shalt have no other gods before me*" (Exodus 20:3).

A healthy relationship is when God is number one and everyone else is subservient to Him. Giving God veto power is key to inheriting the blessings of God.

VIII. Proceed in faith when God gives you the blessing.

If after prayer, seeking God's face, obtaining parental approval and receiving peace from God to proceed, than by all means, marry. Three things to keep in mind:

A. Avoid long engagements.

Wise counselors have often mentioned this. Sometimes the tiring efforts of marriage planning become the end, rather than the means to an end. Pomp and ceremony is fine, but not when it gets in the way of the person you love.

B. Don't wait for things to be perfect.

Sometimes we believe everything has to be just right before we proceed with marriage. It would be wrong to rush into marriage ignoring some degree of financial responsibility, emotional maturity and even more importantly, spiritual accountability. It would also be wrong to procrastinate the wedding until you have enough but are waiting to become independently wealthy. Don't feel badly because you are not as emotionally mature as your middle-aged parents. As they would tell you as well, they were once kids too and marriage grows us up as nothing else can do. Who has ever felt spiritual enough to do anything for God? Jesus said, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 5:3). It has been said that this means, "Happy is the person who doesn't have all the answers!" The person who knows they don't have life's answers will be driven to He who has all the answers: "*Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth*" (Matthew 5:5). It is not wise for a person who is out of touch with God to get married, but do not needlessly lament not being perfect. The fact that you are concerned is commendable. It means you are open to grace. Be married and grow in grace together.

C. Don't try to re-invent each other.

When you love someone, you should have a lot in common. But also remember as a rule, opposites attract. If you cannot love them for what you see they are – this should be interpreted as more than a red flag, it time to reconsider the proposal. Do not be afraid of your potential spouse being un-like you. Someone once said, "If both of you are just alike in everything, one of you is unnecessary." Variety is the spice of life! Some of the most beautiful music in the world is harmony, which takes place when opposites come together to make music.

We marry for better or for worse. We marry the other person just like they are. And one of the marriage blessings is no one stays just like they are. You become one flesh and become a completely same, but different entity. This is hard to explain, but it happens. God is into doing new things! He says as much in the Scripture, "*Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert*" (Isaiah 43:19). Although the prophecy is when the Kingdom of God comes on earth, in a real sense the closest thing that we will have until that happens is in the formation and continuation of the Christian home. Every new home is God's signature - a kiss of the Kingdom yet to come.

Enjoy your dating/courtship experience. Talk to the Lord and talk to the Lord's people as you consider your life with someone else and don't forget to ask God for wisdom: "*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him*" (James 1:5).

- Pastor Pope -

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