

How Does One Find a Godly Spouse?

Rev. Joseph Keller

Christ Covenant Church (OPC)

July 13, 2008

In Gen. 2:18 God declared *"It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."* (NIV throughout) And in verse 22 we read: *"Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man."* God instituted and arranged the very first marriage. But there are supernatural events in this first marriage. How does a believer find a godly spouse today? In Prov. 18:22 God tells us: *"He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD."* This verse assures us that marriage is a good thing. And it tells us that God is still active in bringing a man and a woman together for marriage. But it also implies that we must actively seek in order to find the spouse that God has prepared for us.

And the question for us is "What is the manner in which God would have us go about seeking the spouse that he has prepared for us?"

I wish to begin to examine this subject by suggesting to you that the method which society commonly uses today is not an appropriate method for the Christian to seek a spouse for himself.

I. Dating

That method is called dating. To be more descriptive we might refer to it as Romantic Dating or Recreational Dating, because that expressing the purposes of dating.

Let us examine dating by seeking to defining the most common and notable aspects of it. Recreational dating occurs when two people choose to spend time together in an attempt to get to know each other and thereby decide if they should marry each other.

The Bible does not tell us that dating is wrong. In fact it doesn't say anything about dating. The reason is that dating is a modern invention. It has been around for less than 100 years. In the 1920s young people did not just introduce themselves to each other, go off together, lightly engage in physical contact, and at some time decide to marry or not to marry. Modern dating is responsible for uninformed choices in marriage, for an increase in date rape, which is now constant on university campuses, for ill-advised marriages, and for bitterness and guilt dogging couples who have had sex prior to marriage.

There are three serious issues for the Christian with Recreational Dating. The first is that there are no safeguards to protect purity. The couple is allowed and even encouraged to spend much time alone. With teenage hormones running high, this time alone typically allows lust to take over and lead gradually down the path to kissing, caressing and perhaps even sex before marriage. Many Christian young ladies have given in to the pressure to have sex, and to the lie that if they have sexual relations with the young man, then he will marry them. When they do so, they often find that he has gotten what he wants and then he drops them. Then the young lady is tempted to even greater sins, like the sin of abortion to cover up her other sins. Even where Christian young people do get married, sex before marriage creates all kinds of problems. Bitterness and guilt oppress the couple throughout their lives.

A second serious issue with dating is that the choice of who to date is based on the feelings of the two individuals, not on the wise counsel of anyone else. Prov. 11:14 says: "... in the multitude of counselors there is safety." (NKJV) In the examples in Scripture we find parents very much involved in guiding their children in the selection of a spouse. But in dating parental counsel is generally ignored. In the movie "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner", the parents abdicate their role in helping their children to find a godly spouse. The parent says: "Where John made his mistake, I think, is in attaching so much importance to what we think, because in the final analysis, it doesn't matter what we think. The only thing that matters is what they feel and how much they feel for each other." This describes well the attitude in dating. Wise counsel and advice is replaced by the feelings of those involved. And with the couple involved emotionally and physically, their ability to think clearly and biblically has been short-circuited.

A third serious issue with dating is that it does not include any intention to marry. The goal is to have a good time, not to seek marriage. I Thessalonians 4:3-6 says: *"It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you."* A very common occurrence in dating is that a young man or woman becomes convinced that the person they are dating is the one for them and they do not guard their heart. One person in the relationship "falls in love," so to speak, and he or she becomes emotionally involved, gives their heart away and starts planning for marriage. But they do all of this only to discover that the other person was only seeking a good time and has no interest in marrying them. The result is the misery of a broken heart. And when this happens repeatedly in dating relationships the individual's heart becomes scared. Each time they give their heart away, only to have their hopes destroyed. Dating becomes a series of broken relationships. and instead of preparing a person for marriage, dating prepares people to break up relationships. This falls under the warning in I Thess. 4:6 to not wrong or defraud a fellow believer in these matters. A person wrongs or defrauds a believer in these areas when they cause them to think that they are interested in marriage when in fact they are not.

II. Courtship

Having examined some serious issues with dating, let us consider an alternate way of seeking a spouse. Courtship is different from dating in that it strongly discourages the couple to spend time alone, it involves parental approval before spending time together, and each relationship has marriage as its goal.

Let me begin by saying that courtship is not an arranged marriage. No one is arguing that parents should choose the spouse for their son or daughter without the consent of the young person.

What is being argued is that the Bible counsels fathers to supervise and advise their sons in these matters and to supervise and protect their daughter in these matters. He is to train his children to be godly and he is to protect his children from ungodliness. Where there is no father in the home, the responsibility falls to the mother or other guardian. I Cor. 7:36-38 says: *"But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin [that is, his daughter], if she is past the flower of her youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes; he does not sin; let them marry. Nevertheless he who stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his own will, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well. So then he who gives her in marriage does well, but he who does not give her in marriage does better."* (NKJV)

These verses show us that God has given to parents, and particularly to fathers, the authority and responsibility to oversee the marriage of their daughters. This verse explains the marriage custom of the father giving the bride away during the ceremony. God's Word teaches that young men are to seek permission to court and marry a young woman from her father.

The practice of courtship involves parental approval before allowing a young man to enter the home and get to spend time in the home with the daughter. Daughters that are approached by a young man should tell them that they need to talk to their father first in order to get permission to see them.

We do well to ask what should influence the father's decision whether to allow a young man to court his daughter or not? I Cor. 7:39 gives us the first qualification. It states that a believer must only marry a believer. This shows the foolishness and sinfulness of Christians dating an unbeliever. Dating an unbeliever in the hopes that he or she will become a Christian has tragically led to a vast number of marriages of Christians to non-Christians. The first qualification to be allowed to court a Christian daughter is whether the young man is a believer. And here the father should get to know the young man well enough to see evidence of conversion. He should not base his decision merely on the young man's statement that he is a believer. If there is not clear evidence in the man's life to show that he is a Christian who is living for the glory of God, then he should not assume that he is.

Secondly, the father should know what his daughter's wishes are in the matter. If she is not interested in the young man, then the father should stop it right there.

Thirdly, the father and mother should have the wisdom to discern whether this is a godly young man who will be able to meet his biblical responsibilities to a wife and children. The father should speak directly to the young man about his walk with the Lord, about his purity, about his beliefs, views on child-rearing, financial habits, debts, job and his ability to financially provide for a family? These are very important areas. Is the young man ready to support a family? If either the young man or young woman are planning to go to college, they are really not ready to begin courting. If they are not ready not ready to be married within a year, then it is unwise for them to begin courting. Daughters that are approached by suitors during this time can simply tell them that they are not ready to pursue marriage.

A second important area of courtship is that it provides safeguards for purity. The pattern for courtship is to have an open door at home. The young man and woman should be invited to spend lots of time in the homes of both families. This provides the needed supervision to protect against sexual sin and guilt. This also allows them to engage in lots of conversation and to get to know each other very well, so that they can make a very informed decision about whether to marry. This also allows them to see the way that the other person treats their father and mother and brothers and sisters. It is important to see this, for this reveals how they will treat their spouse and their children. All of this will be very valuable in helping to make an informed and wise decision about whether to marry this person.

Thirdly, courtship begins with a commitment to pursue marriage. Fathers use to ask suitors the question: "Are your intentions honorable?" By this, they meant, are you pursuing marriage with my daughter, not merely a time of recreation? But courtship should not be confused with engagement. Engagement should be taken seriously as a bond to get married. Courtship is not the same. Unlike in dating, a person enters into courtship with the interest in marrying this person, but events along the way may change the person's interest in marrying this person or may make it clear that they should not marry this person. If it becomes clear that they do not desire to marry this person or that they should not marry this person, the young person or the parents should immediately end the courtship.

But if the courtship reveals that this marriage would glorify God, that the parents approve of the marriage, and that the young people desire this marriage, then they should go forward knowing that they have a very solid foundation for their marriage, and that God's blessings will assuredly rest on their marriage.

III. Answering Objections

Let us now briefly consider common objections to courtship, since you are likely to hear many if not all of these.

Objection One: This removes the romance. Answer: You need to recognize that a physical relationship is a hindrance to getting to know the other person. It short-circuits your objectivity and decision-making ability. The decision on who to marry should not be complicated by lust.

Objection two: This makes it impossible to communicate deeply. Answer: Rather, it guarantees communication on a broad range of topics. Areas of intimate conversation do not have a place in courtship. Intimate contact and conversation belongs only in marriage, not prior to it.

Objection three: You don't trust me. Answer: You are right. I do not trust you. I do not even trust myself in these areas. Song of Solomon 8:4, 6-7 says: "*Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires. . . . for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away.*" (Song of Solomon 8:4, 6-7) And Col. 3:5-6 says: "*Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.*" Young people do not understand the dangers of spending time alone. And this danger doesn't go away for a person who has been married and is now single. If anything, people who

have previously been married and are now single and are dating in an unsupervised manner are even more likely to fall into sexual sin. A supervised, safe environment, is needed for all those who are pursuing marriage.

Objection four: We can double date. Answer: One couple often pulls another down. In the musical the *Pirates of Penzance*, this is expressed when the one couple says: “*Let us turn our eyes and talk about the weather. Let them make hay while the sunshine shines.*”

Objection five: I will be away at college and can't do this. Answer: A good church can provide a family to invite you into their home and provide accountability and supervision.

Objection six: My child refuses to do this and threatens to leave home. Answer: Is there really a difference between having them leave home and having them live at home while they go out on unsupervised dates? The only difference is that you are providing for them and making it easy for them to fail to meet their responsibilities to the Lord and to their parents. Do not back down. Do not be blackmailed.

In summary, the modern practice of dating is not honoring to God, for it rejects parental counsel and wisdom, it spurns all oversight and supervision, it leaves the door open to an increasing amount of physical involvement and sexual sin, and it short-circuits wise decision-making by the introduction of lust. In these areas it is not a godly way for the Christian to seek to find a spouse. And the sins that have resulted from dating are many and serious.

Courtship is the seeking of a spouse in accordance with God's commandments. It calls parents to fulfill their responsibilities to supervise their children in order to provide a safe environment to get to know one another. It includes parental wisdom in the decision of who to marry. It calls young men and women to not defraud others by dating those that they have no interest in marrying. It enables them to get to know all about the other person and make a wise, informed decision as to whether to marry this person. It helps the person to both become the kind of godly mate that God would have them to be and to find the godly mate that God has prepared for them.

Next to confessing Christ as your Lord and Savior, the one thing you will do in life that will have the greatest influence on your life is the decision of whom you will marry. This is why it is so important that you pursue marriage in a manner that is honoring to God and that will aid in finding a godly spouse.

We should remember that God instituted marriage to picture the loving relationship that Jesus Christ has with his bride, the church, and to raise children to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. How you seek a spouse and who you marry will have a very large effect on whether you will be able to fulfill God's purposes for your marriage.

Copyright © 2008, Joseph A. Keller