

BOUNDLESS™



A GUY'S GUIDE TO MARRYING WELL

MARRYING WELL IS BECOMING A LOST ART

MOST MEN hope to marry some day, but there's no guarantee they will. Increasingly, young men are—as one writer put it—“stumbling on to the altar as if by accident.”

Too many guys make their way into their twenties and thirties without the marriage modeling and insights that were once easy to find from dads, coaches, teachers, mentors and Christian leaders. When they do find advice about relationships, it's often spectacularly bad.

The simple purpose of this booklet is to present a path that is as Biblical as possible

in order to help you marry well. But not just so that you can experience all the happiness, health and wealth that guys who marry well enjoy, but so that your marriage can point to God's glory and His greater purposes.

This guide is based on a few timeless concepts—intentionality, purity, Christian compatibility and community—that we rarely encounter in popular culture but are a proven path to marrying well.

May God bless the time you spend with this booklet and help you apply His design in your life.

Steve Watters
Director of Boundless Webzine,
Focus on the Family

The content of this booklet is excerpted from articles on Boundless Webzine. To read the full version of those articles and to find more material related to marrying well, please visit www.boundless.org/guys



INTENTIONALITY

A Guy's Guide To Marrying Well

MARRIAGE: MORE THAN JUST A LIFESTYLE OPTION



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According to the Bible, marriage is not primarily about our self-esteem and personal fulfillment, nor is it just one lifestyle option among others. The Bible is clear in presenting a picture of marriage that is rooted in the glory of God made evident in creation itself. The man and the woman are made for each other and the institution of marriage is given to humanity as both opportunity and obligation.

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible assumes that marriage is normative for human beings. The responsibilities, duties, and joys of marriage are presented as matters of spiritual significance. From a Christian perspective, marriage must never be seen as

a mere human invention — an option for those who choose such a high level of commitment — for it is an arena in which God’s glory is displayed in the right ordering of the man and the woman, and their

FROM GENESIS TO REVELATION, THE BIBLE ASSUMES THAT MARRIAGE IS NORMATIVE FOR HUMAN BEINGS.

glad reception of all that marriage means, gives, and requires.

Albert Mohler, Jr.

GET MARRIED YOUNG MAN

I’ve known many single guys who think, “I’m a Christian. I love God. I currently don’t have a wife. If God wants me to marry someone, He’ll make that explicitly clear. For me to get proactive in the process is to imply that I don’t trust God to make it happen. And seeking a wife seems less spiritual than taking on another ministry responsibility. After all, I’m single. I really should commit all my time to God, and not be distracted with thinking about girls.”

The problem with this line of thinking is that not every man who has the *status* of singleness is *gifted* for singleness. God requires all singles to be celibate until marriage (to abstain from sexual expression in thought and deed), but because most singles aren’t gifted for lifelong celibacy, most should seek to marry.

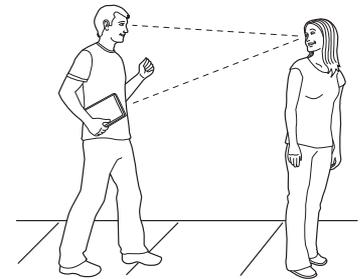
The Scriptures say, “He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord” (Prov. 18:22). So the man is said to “find” a wife, and that a wife is a good

thing. The favor from the Lord part shows that, yes, God is the One who ultimately gives the wife, but it is still our job as men to be proactive in the finding process.

There’s nothing unspiritual about wanting marriage. Marriage is an important, normal, sanctifying, biblical aspect of adulthood. It provides protection from sexual sin, companionship, and the privilege to procreate and give back the gift of life.

Just as it’s not necessarily sinful to be discontent and take action if you’re unemployed or hungry, God has wired most of us with a longing for the sexual and emotional intimacy of marriage.

Yes, our ultimate and primary satisfaction must be in God, and His purposes can shine forth in our lives regardless of our marital state.



Nevertheless, if you’re not gifted for singleness, go ahead and seek a wife. You’ll be more valuable for the Kingdom *continued on page 8*

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of God as a sanctified husband and father than as a single repeatedly getting tripped up with the sexual or emotional struggles common to singleness.

Marriage won't solve all your problems. But your life will generally reflect a deeper maturity and winsomeness that will open doors for relationships and ministry. Know that God's grace will be with you as you step out in faith.

Alex Chediak

ARE YOU CALLED TO CELIBACY?

There is one significant qualification about marriage found in the Scriptures. In 1 Corinthians chapter seven, the Apostle Paul writes specifically about the gift of celibacy, offering a clear teaching for those who are given this special gift in order to be liberated for strategic Gospel service. Paul's point is clear. The obligations that are part and parcel of marriage are a matter of deep spiritual responsibility. A Christian who is married is, under the obligations of that

sacred institution, less free to seize some opportunities for ministry that would be open to one who is unmarried.

Paul celebrates the gift of celibacy for Christian service, but he says nothing about those who simply would choose singleness as a lifestyle option. His concern was to see the Gospel preached throughout the world, even as the moral reputation of the Corinthian congregation was restored on matters of marriage and sexuality.

Furthermore, Paul speaks very specifically about the sexual aspect of marriage and instructs, "it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1 Cor. 7:9, NASB). I appreciate Paul's apostolic candor. He did not condemn sexual desire and sexual passion, but he directed the Corinthians — and us — to marriage as the proper arena for such passion to be expressed.

With all this in view, it would seem that the Bible offers two specific teachings about marriage that should frame our understanding and our engagement in the current debate.

First, marriage is presented as a sacred institution, a covenant made between the man and the woman before their Creator, and an arena in which the glory of God is demonstrated to the watching world through the goodness of the marital relationship, the one-flesh

character of the marital bond, the holiness of marital sex, and the completeness that comes with the gift of children.

Second, the Bible presents celibacy as a gift — apparently a rare gift — that is granted to some believers in order that they would be liberated for special service in Christ's name. Paul's discussion of celibacy indicates that this gift is marked by the absence of lust and sexual desire that would compromise or complicate ministry as an unmarried person. Accordingly, those who have been given the gift of celibacy find in Christ the satisfactions others are given through marriage.

Paul privileges this gift of celibacy, stating that he would have many of the Corinthians demonstrate this gift and "remain even as I" (1 Cor. 7:8). Yet, most

pattern, and is acknowledged by Paul in numerous passages dealing with husbands and wives, parents and children, and qualifications for church leaders. Celibacy is a wonderful gift — a gift the whole church should celebrate — but it is a rare gift.

The extension of a "boy culture" into the 20s and 30s, along with a sense of uncertainty about the true nature of male leadership, has led many young men to focus on career, friends, sports, and any number of other satisfactions when they should be preparing themselves for marriage and taking responsibility to grow up, be the man, and show God's glory as husband and father.

I am not calling for high school students to marry, and I am certainly not suggesting that believers of any age should marry thoughtlessly, carelessly, and

THE BIBLE PRESENTS CELIBACY AS A GIFT — APPARENTLY A RARE GIFT — THAT IS GRANTED TO SOME BELIEVERS IN ORDER THAT THEY WOULD BE LIBERATED FOR SPECIAL SERVICE IN CHRIST'S NAME.

Christians in every age have been married — not celibate. Marriage has represented the norm for adult Christians in every generation since the time of Paul's writing. This is consistent with the purposes of marriage as laid out in the biblical

without sound spiritual judgment. But I am most emphatically arguing that this delay of marriage now presents the church with a critical test: We will either recover a full and comprehensive biblical vision of marriage *continued on page 10*



in all of its glory, or we will soon find believers so accommodated to the culture around us that all we seek in our marriages is to do marginally better than what we see in the world.

Albert Mohler Jr.

MEN INITIATE

Among the different roles assigned to men and women in the Bible, men are assigned the role of leadership. This is true in the church and in the family. This is not a signal of male superiority or of the greater importance of men. It is simply God's design and assignment of equally valuable roles among spiritually equal beings. Men initiate, women respond. Briefly, biblical support for this position is found, among other passages, in the creation order in Genesis 2, in 1 Corinthians 11: 7-9, and Ephesians 5. True, these passages refer to marriage, but it is wise and right to set patterns that will serve you well in marriage, especially if one accepts the premise that the purpose of dating is to find a marriage partner.

What does this actually look like in a budding relationship between



two people?

First, the man should initiate asking the woman out. Whether this means approaching the woman herself or her father or someone filling that role instead of her father, it should be the guy that starts things off. He should not do this until he is "ready" to marry. If you're not ready to marry, you're not ready to date.

As a quick aside, if you are a single man and you would not describe yourself as ready to be married within a year, think about why that is. I mention this for two reasons: (1) Scripture seems not just to encourage, but to assume that part of the growth into biblical manhood is to seek marriage, so this is a biblical goal; and (2) easily the biggest complaint that I and others who advocate this approach get from godly Christian women is

that *men don't initiate*.

If you are floating around staying single because you enjoy social flexibility or having time to yourself or hanging out with the guys or because you have worldly ideas about the perfect woman or how to approach marriage, consider: Are you approaching manhood and marriage biblically? Every male who is out of college should have at least thought this through.

Once he determines he is ready to be married generally, and once he has found a particular woman he is interested in pursuing, our single

INITIATION MEANS INITIATION. IT MEANS THAT YOU AS THE MAN TAKE THE FIRST STEP, RISK AND ALL.



man's next step is to "put some feelers out." He should talk to some of her friends, see if she's been asking about him, have one or two subtly suggestive conversations with her to see if she gives anything away.... NO! This is not initiation. Initiation is not manipulating the situation so that while you're officially "asking her out" there's no actual risk of rejection or embarrassment.

Initiation means initiation. It means that you as the man take the first step, risk and all.

Scott Croft

REAL MEN RISK REJECTION

Many people think that for guys, being a Christian means giving up being a man. Nothing could be further from the truth. God created us as men to lead and take the initiative. *continued on page 12*



And that means taking risks.

But there's no way I'll ever take a real risk as long as my sense of worth is tied up in what others think of me. And that includes a girlfriend, or even a wife. It's only as I put my trust in God and his unconditional acceptance of me through the atoning death of Jesus Christ that I can ever take up God's calling to be a leader. It's only when I'm confident of God's love for me that I can stop manipulating the woman I'm interested in, and instead love and honor her by shouldering the risks of the relationship myself.

Guys, the woman you marry is going to depend on you to lead her. She's going to look to you to sacrifice your own comfort and convenience for the sake of the family. She's going to look to you to back her up when your future teenage children, or the in-laws, come down on her. She's going to look to you to set the pace spiritually. She's going to look to you for leadership when hard decisions about career, or parenting, or aging parents, or any of a host of other issues arise. She's going to look to you to set the example in admitting when you're wrong and asking for forgiveness.

In all of those situations, you're going to feel the fear again. The fear of making a wrong decision. The fear of being exposed. The fear of

being rejected. And then the only way you'll be able to step up and lead as the man God made you to be, is if your trust is in God, not in the outcome of the conversation.

Some of you men are thinking at this point, "Wait a minute. Are you saying that all the risk is mine?" Yes I am. "Doesn't that mean that she can just tell me 'no' and leave me twisting in the wind?" Yes it does. Welcome to leadership. Welcome

GUYS, THE WOMAN YOU MARRY IS GOING TO DEPEND ON YOU TO LEAD HER. SHE'S GOING TO LOOK TO YOU TO SACRIFICE YOUR OWN COMFORT AND CONVENIENCE FOR THE SAKE OF THE FAMILY.

to trusting God. Welcome to being a man. Your cards belong on the table. Your intentions and your feelings--to the extent that you can discern them and it is appropriate for you to share them--should be clear. Part of your role even at this early stage is to protect the woman of your interest from unnecessary risk and vulnerability by providing a safe context in which she can respond.

Michael Lawrence

DON'T STAY STUCK IN A FRIENDSHIP

Intimate friendships between men and women almost always produce confusion and frustration for at least one of the parties involved. Close friendships by their very nature tend to involve extensive time talking and hanging out one-on-one. They tend to involve a deep knowledge of the other person's hopes, desires and personality. They tend to involve the sharing of many aspects of each other's daily lives and routines. In other words, they tend to involve much of the type of intimacy and companionship involved in — and meant for — marriage.

And yet, even with all this deep communication going on, at least one aspect of these friendships inherently involves a mixed message. No matter how clearly one or both of you have defined what's happening as "just friends," your *actions* are constantly saying "I enjoy being with you and interacting with you in a way that suggests marriage (or at least romantic attraction)."

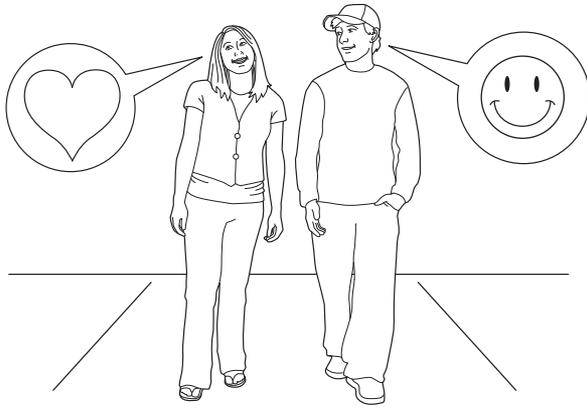
The simple reality (of which most people are aware, whether they admit it or not) is that in the vast majority of these types

of relationships, one of the parties involved either began the "friendship" with romantic feelings for the other person or develops them along the way. Either way, that person is now hanging on to the "friendship" in the hope of getting something more despite the "clear words" from the other person that he or she wants nothing beyond friendship.

To the extent that one person's romantic feelings have been clearly articulated to the other (and were met with an unfavorable response), to continue in some no-man's land of "good friends," is arguably to take selfish advantage of the vulnerable party. Yes, I know, the other person is an adult who is free and responsible to walk away if he or she is so unsatisfied, but like it or not, it tends not to work that way. Hope springs eternal, whether it should or not.

And that's the "clear" scenario. What if one person develops romantic feelings in a friendship in which no "clear words" have been spoken, such that the desires of the other person are a mystery? Especially if it's the woman in this position (as *continued on page 14*

Intentionality



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seems to be the case more often than not), she will likely feel that if she pushes for something more than friendship, she may lose the interaction and companionship she currently has. Still, given her desire for a husband — and perhaps to have *this* man as her husband — the status quo of “just really good friends but nothing more for some odd reason” will leave her unsatisfied, frustrated, and confused. I have seen and heard and read of such frustration and hurt playing out many times over.

Certainly, a man can find himself in a similar position with a woman he’s attracted to, but given his obligation to be clear and intentional with the woman and to initiate the type of relationship he truly desires, he arguably has placed — or at least kept — *himself* in such a position. He simply is not

“between a rock and a hard place” in the same way a woman is.

Finally, there’s one more type of confusion to consider. How do *others* view your “friendship. Guys, has a woman perhaps turned you down over questions about a woman friend you spend lots of time with? Would *you* want to date someone knowing that he or she had a significant, pre-existing, and ongoing emotional bond with another single member of the opposite sex?

Why risk harm to your own heart or to that of a brother or sister in order to have a type of companionship that, outside of marriage, is arguably questionable anyway?

So am I saying that I’m against the idea of relationships growing out of Christian friendship? Am I saying that friendship among single brothers and sisters has

no place? Am I saying that single men and women need to shun one another, speaking only to utter the words “will you date me,” followed by “yes” or “no”? Absolutely not. In fact, I would argue that dating or courting relationships *ideally* grow out of friendship among collaborators in the gospel. The question is what those relationships look like practically.

WOULD YOU WANT TO DATE SOMEONE KNOWING THAT HE OR SHE HAD A SIGNIFICANT, PRE-EXISTING, AND ONGOING EMOTIONAL BOND WITH ANOTHER SINGLE MEMBER OF THE OPPOSITE SEX?

I Timothy 5 describes a relationship among Christian men and women not married to one another as that of brothers and sisters. The Lord has mercifully called us not to live the Christian life alone but as part of a community of believers. Single men and women can and should serve in ministry together, study the word together, and hang out together socially. They should go out together, gather around meals, watch movies. In my view,

however, these activities should be done, for the most part, in groups rather than one-on-one. Men can initiate group get-togethers, and so can women. In fact, single brothers and sisters in Christ, like the rest of Christ’s body, are positively called to care for one another. Men can (and should) give women rides home rather than have them walk alone at night. Men can come over and move couches. Women can cook a meal for a group of guys in danger of developing scurvy from a near total lack of vegetables. Knock yourselves out.

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Friendships grow out of the body of Christ functioning and, in turn, result in interests beyond friendship. To be sure, the friendships that develop in this context are not the same friendships with the same level of intimacy that would develop from spending consistent time alone with someone, but they provide a context from which initiations and relationships can bloom. Remember, the world has *falsely* told us that a high level of intimacy with another person needs to precede any sort of commitment to another person.

Is there a precise formula for whether a friendship or series of interactions is too intimate? If there is, I don’t know it. Hang out in groups; serve together. By all means, chat and be friendly with your *continued on page 16*

brothers and sisters in Christ. Should a friend make the assumption that you're ready to marry her if you initiate a one-on-one conversation at church or at a group dinner? No. Have you blown two tires and gone screaming off into the trees if you ask someone to lunch or coffee once or twice? Maybe not. Depends on what happens from there.

Just be aware that "friendship" is no more a forum to play married than a dating relationship is. If

HAVE YOU BLOWN TWO TIRES AND GONE SCREAMING OFF INTO THE TREES IF YOU ASK SOMEONE TO LUNCH OR COFFEE ONCE OR TWICE? MAYBE NOT.

you find that you are consistently showing one of your opposite-sex Christian friends more one-on-one attention than all the others, whether in conversation or through invitations out, it's probably time for (1) some clarification of intentions and (most likely) a change in the status of the relationship to something more overtly committed, or (2) a change in the way you interact with that person.

Scott Croft

DON'T WAIT FOR A BURNING BUSH

In a world of overwhelming choices, how's a guy supposed to go about discerning whether or not someone is a good match and that it's also God's perfect will for them to be committed to each other?

Commitment always means making a choice to give up other choices. Whatever else it may mean in a particular context, it always means that. And if being committed in life means making a choice to give up other choices, having lots of choices and knowing that makes it difficult for people to actually sit down and make a choice is an increasing dilemma in our culture. It's a problem for Christians because we're affected by our culture of choice and the idea that we should keep hanging on to all of our options in life.

The real spiritual path, however, is not going to be making sure that we hold on to every option. It's going to be being wise and being willing to give up options for the deeper, truer path that God wants

us to be on.

So how does somebody know? Okay, well, it says in Romans that there's a good and perfect will that God has for me. Well, I want to make sure I don't blow this. In fact, I honor God so much that I'm going to take a really long, long-long-long, long time about this one because I don't want to make a mistake. And so I'm going to look for a burning bush.

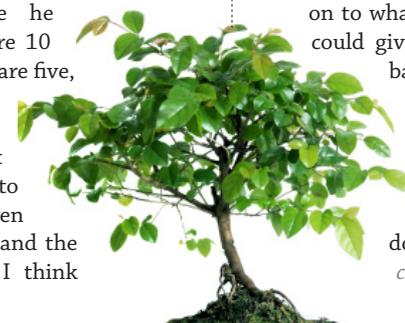
I know God's a "perfect will God," and I'm pretty worried about making a mistake and messing that up. But this approach sounds a whole lot like the person that buried the one coin until the master came back and then dug it back up and said, "Here, you have what you left me with and you've lost nothing." Christ was not real happy about that.

The master didn't say to all three before he left, "Here are 10 talents, here are five, here's one. You know, here's what I want you to do with seven of those 10, and the other three I think



you should put over here in this mutual fund and buy this business. Hey, you, with the five here, you know, here's what I want you to do with these five. You know, two go to this charity over here. In fact that new thing Franklin Graham is doing is so cool, why don't you give two of them there? That's going to give me a good return. These three — well, have one go to church, et cetera, and then the second I want you to start a business and triple it. And so on with the one." He doesn't do that. He says, "Here are 10, here are five, here's one. Have at it, see you in a while."

There ain't no burning bush in that story. What is there is the implication that you better not just sit on it and not do anything. Notice what the one says: "Out of fear of you losing anything, (because I know you have a perfect will), I knew I'd better just hang on to what you gave me so I could give you exactly that back." And Christ is saying, "I want more. I want all of you to be at risk, and I want more." Now, that doesn't mean we're *continued on page 18*



supposed to be stupid.

So back to the burning bush thing. A lot of times we are waiting for the burning bush, but if one is waiting for the burning bush it's not real consistent with something else Paul said that was pretty important. He said "we walk by faith and not by sight." So if that's what it means to really be a deeply committed Christian, then God is usually not going to give us a burning bush. If He is, there's no faith in that. Faith comes from having a pretty good sense of what God cares about and doing our best with the choices and then struggling with what that means.

Think about Abraham. God spoke to him in extraordinarily clear ways, especially about the big vision — the stars and the sand and all that kind of stuff. But Abraham still had to do a fair amount of acting — he had to get up and go to this other land. He had to do things to secure a clear place in that land. And then think about how he has his servant go back and find a wife for Isaac. Abraham wasn't apparently told

by God or else he would've told his servant, "Hey, her name is Rebekah; she's at this house; you'll meet her at this well on this day." There was some work and wisdom involved. He knows what the general idea is and where God's trying to go.

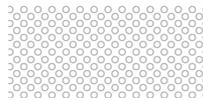
And he knows how important the right wife is going to be and what Isaacs' life needs to be, but he has to arrange the particulars. He has to set in motion the things that will bring that about and behave wisely.

And that's how it is today and how it always is. Very few of us are going to get a burning bush. What we do get if we pay attention in Scripture is the vision of the stars. We know the big picture of what God is trying to do. We know what Christ is trying to do through the Church. And that should guide us in the biggest picture

in terms of the goal and the frame. But God does make us choose the details about whether that 10 talents are going to turn into 5 or 15 or 20 and holds us responsible for acting on that.

Scott Stanley

AND THAT'S HOW IT IS TODAY AND HOW IT ALWAYS IS. VERY FEW OF US ARE GOING TO GET A BURNING BUSH. WHAT WE DO GET IF WE PAY ATTENTION IN SCRIPTURE IS THE VISION OF THE STARS.



EVERYONE MARRIES A STRANGER



the other hand is real life. And it's only in the context of day-in, day-out reality, with the vulnerability and permanence that marriage provides, that we learn what another person is really like. Some of the things we learn about each other aren't easy. But who ever said that love and marriage were supposed to be easy?

Men, the point of marriage is that we learn to love our wives as Christ loved the church. Yes, as Revelation 21 and Ephesians 5 tell us, one day, Christ's bride will be perfectly beautiful, without spot or blemish, altogether lovely and loveable.

But the church is not there yet. First, Christ had to commit himself to us, even to death on a cross. This is the model we're called to follow. It's not an easy model, but it is worth it.

So your goal should not be to date a girl long enough until you're confident marriage won't be hard, but to date her *just* long enough to discern if you're willing to love her sacrificially, and if she's willing to respond to that kind of love.

Michael Lawrence

One of the myths out there is that if you just spend enough time searching, if you can just gather enough information, you'll find a woman with whom marriage will be "easy." The fact is, such a woman doesn't exist, and if she did, she likely wouldn't marry you. And that means that you don't need as much information as you think you do.

No matter how long you've dated, everyone marries a stranger. That's because fundamentally dating is an artificial arrangement in which you're trying to be on your best behavior. Marriage on

PURSUE HER

Have you ever heard the fairytale about the princess in shining armor? You know the story. She crosses an ocean, slays a dragon and rescues the man she loves?

Wait. You've never heard that one? OK, neither have I.

Why? Because fairytales are always the other way around — the man fights for the woman. *He* takes the risks. *He* battles the beast. *He* pursues her.

Now I realize that fairytales are stereotypical, admittedly even a little sexist. But they do contain a measure of truth. These whimsical tales we learn as children mirror a deep-seated longing in the soul of every man and woman.

My point isn't about fairytales. I bring them up only to highlight what I see as a growing problem in the church: young Christian men unable (or unwilling) to actively pursue a potential spouse. Rather than saddling up the proverbial steed, many guys seem to be languishing in the tower, waiting for their princesses to stumble upon them.

If that's you, then I have some no-nonsense advice — it's time to man-up and take the lead in the romance department. And don't

hide behind the whole too-holy-for-love façade. When you meet “the one,” pursuing her with all your heart is the most spiritual thing you can possibly do.

First, our increasingly politically correct culture tells guys that women have equal responsibility when it comes to initiating the relationship. These days women are encouraged to be more aggressive while men risk appearing domineering if they get the ball rolling.

But here's the rub. While such political correctness is peddled in higher education and the media, it usually doesn't apply in the real world, where women still appreciate a man with the gumption and guts to make the first move. A.J. Kiesling writes, “The world may have moved on, become hip and high-tech and politically correct, but old-fashioned values persist in our very make-up.” Part of that make-up is a desire to be pursued.

The second factor is even more pervasive and hazardous to single Christian guys. An exaggerated sense of spiritual propriety can also prevent relationships from forming. I've met a lot of guys who seem to equate romantic passivity with spiritual superiority. In these

cases the thinking goes something like this: If I wait and pray patiently, God will drop a woman right into my lap.

Such guys could use some advice from my 88-year-old grandfather. He might seem like an unlikely source of dating wisdom, but he gave me a talk during my single days that I think every Christian guy needs to hear.

My grandfather is a retired pastor. Most of his time he spends deep in prayer with a huge King James Bible splayed open on his lap. When he broached the topic of women with me, I wasn't sure where he'd go. Would he urge caution? Exhort purity? Instead he pointed to a verse that I knew well, Proverbs 18:22: “He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord.”

His mouth turned up at one edge. “Find,” he pointed out, “is a verb.” Lesson learned.

I believe it's the man's responsibility to initiate the relationship. But that statement comes with some serious qualifiers. Though it is the guy's job to pursue, that does not negate God's role. God is still the best matchmaker. We should never rush into

relationships by running roughshod over the leading of His Spirit. Only after prayer and careful consideration should we proceed.

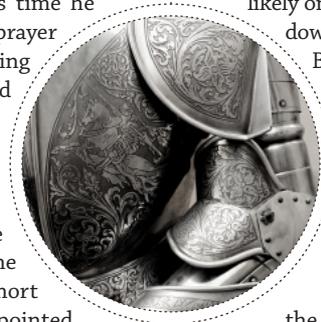
It's equally important that we be sensitive in reading women's signals. Women want us to be proactive, but when the romantic feelings are not mutual, being aggressive is not cool — it's creepy. If your advances receive chilly receptions, do not soldier on. Doing so will likely only fortify — not wear

down — her defenses. Back off and behave like a brother. Once you've made your intentions clear, the ball is in her court. She'll let you know if her feelings change.

But if you're one of the myriad men sitting on the fence too scared or too “spiritual” to pursue a woman, it may be time to man-up and make a move. I know taking risks can be daunting. But often the most rewarding journeys begin with uneasy and faltering steps.

God created you to be a pursuer. So next time God brings a godly woman into your life, don't sit around twiddling your thumbs. The love of your life could be passing you by!

Drew Dyck



PURITY

A Guy's Guide To Marrying Well

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SOLOMON'S LINE ON PREMARITAL SEX



poetic language about the stages of a relationship that start with a glance and eventually lead to the honeymoon, the author charges us three times, “Do not arouse or awaken love until it pleases,” or, as paraphrased by Eugene Peterson in *The Message*, “Don’t excite love, don’t stir it up, until the time is ripe — and you’re ready.”

I often point to this book when people, usually young singles, ask me about relationships and premarital sex. They want to know, where, exactly, does the Bible talk about pre- or extra-marital sex, when neither partner is married. They know about the adultery prohibitions, and they agree — you shouldn’t have sex with someone who is someone else’s spouse. But where does it talk about not having sex if there is no spouse involved? You have two consenting adults, and neither has made any vow to any other person, so it’s not *technically* adultery. What’s wrong with that? Does the Bible speak to those situations?

The first time I read the Song of Songs in the Bible I thought, No. Way. I immediately grabbed a friend’s Bible to see if his featured the same book. “Dude, have you read this?! This is unbelievable!”

“What? What is it?”

“Clusters, man! They’re talking about climbing palm trees and taking hold of clusters! IN THE BIBLE! It’s right here!” I was a teen Christian with active hormones and my grandmother’s prayers were finally being answered because I suddenly developed an intense hunger for the Word.

Over time, of course, I realized that the relationship described in Solomon’s Song, including those face-blushing palm tree and cluster verses, occurred within a specific context. In the midst of beautiful,

I like to start with Solomon’s Song, because it celebrates the whole package of the relationship — initial attraction, exciting emotions, longing, and sexual intimacy — and it connects all of this to the proper context or timing, when “it pleases,” a timing that is marked by public approval of the relationship, highlighted by a wedding (chapter 3). *The whole relationship, including the celebration of the sexual aspects, takes place within the context of community approval — no, more than approval — rejoicing.*

**DON'T
EXCITE LOVE,
DON'T STIR
IT UP, UNTIL
THE TIME IS
RIPE — AND
YOU'RE
READY.**



rejoicing? No, of course not. Why not? The timing is wrong. The context is wrong. A private affair is being forced out into the public and is clouded by shame. You’ve “aroused love before its time.” There will be pain, disappointment and sadness. Compare that to the tone of Solomon’s Song. The couples’ sexual life in the Song of Solomon

takes place within the context of a lifelong commitment of marriage, and the community rejoices. It will produce grandbabies, nieces, nephews, more members of the little platoon of the family. The couples’ sex life is ultimately a social benefit. That, I say to my young single friends, is a picture of sex in the proper context.

John Thomas

THE SEDUCTION OF PORN

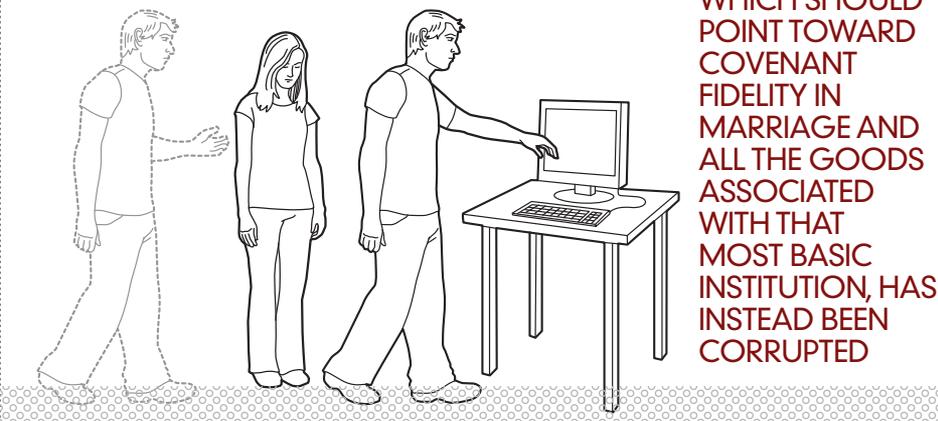
The pervasive plague of pornography represents one of the greatest moral challenges faced by the Christian church in the postmodern age. With eroticism woven into the very heart of the culture, celebrated in its entertainment, and advertised as a commodity, it is virtually impossible to escape the pervasive influence of pornography in our culture and in our lives.

At the same time, the problem of human sinfulness is fundamentally unchanged from the time of the Fall until the present. There is no theological basis for assuming that human beings *continued on page 26*

are more lustful, more defenseless before sexual temptation or more susceptible to the corruption of sexual desire than was the case in any previous generation.

Why is pornography such a big business? The answer to that question lies in two fundamental realities. First, the most fundamental answer to the question must be rooted in a biblical understanding of human beings as sinners. We must take into full account the fact that sin has corrupted every good thing in creation, and the effects of sin extend to every dimension of life. The sex drive, which should point toward covenant fidelity in marriage and all the goods associated with that most basic institution, has instead been corrupted to devastating effects. Rather than directed toward fidelity, covenantal commitment, procreation and the wonder of a one-flesh relationship, the sex drive has been degraded into a passion that robs God of His glory, celebrating the sensual at the expense of the spiritual, and setting what God had intended for good on a path that leads to destruction in the name of personal fulfillment.

The most important answer we can give to pornography's rise in popularity is rooted in the Christian doctrine of sin. As



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sinners, we corrupt what God has perfectly designed for the good of His creatures and we have turned sex into a carnival of orgiastic pleasures. Not only have we severed sex from marriage, but as a society, we now look at marriage as an imposition, chastity as an embarrassment and sexual restraint as a psychological hang-up. The doctrine of sin explains why we have exchanged the glory of God for Sigmund Freud's concept of polymorphous perversity.

In addition to this, we must recognize that a capitalist free-market economy rewards those who produce a product that is both attractive and appetitive. The purveyors of pornography know that they succeed by directing their

product to the lowest common denominator of humanity — a depraved sexual mind. Without the legal restraints common in previous generations, pornographers are now free to sell their goods virtually without restriction. Beyond this, they base their marketing plan on the assumption that an individual can be seduced into the use of pornography and then will be “hooked” into a pattern of dependence upon pornographic images and the need for ever-more explicit sexual material as a means toward sexual arousal.

The bottom line is that, in our sinfulness, men are drawn toward pornography and a frighteningly large percentage of men develop a dependence upon pornographic

images for their own sexual arousal and for their concept of the good life, sexual fulfillment and even meaning in life. Medical research can document the increased flow of endorphins — hormones that create pleasure in the brain — when sexual images are viewed. Given the law of reduced effect, greater stimulation is needed to keep a constant flow of endorphins to the brain's pleasure centers. Without conscious awareness of what is happening, men are drawn into a pattern of deeper and deeper sin, more and more explicit pornography and never-ending rationalizing, and all this started when the eye first began its perusal of the pornographic image and sexual arousal was its product.

Pornography represents one of the most insidious attacks upon the sanctity of marriage and the goodness of sex within the one-flesh relationship. The celebration of debauchery rather than purity, the elevation of genital pleasure over all other considerations and the corruption of sexual energy through an inversion of the self, corrupts the idea of marriage, leads to incalculable harm and subverts marriage and the marital bond.

The Christian worldview must direct all consideration of sexuality to the institution of marriage. Marriage is *continued on page 28*

not merely the arena for sexual activity, it is presented in Scripture as the divinely-designed arena for the display of God's glory on earth as a man and a wife come together in a one-flesh relationship within the marriage covenant. Rightly understood and rightly ordered, marriage is a picture of God's own covenantal faithfulness. Marriage is to display God's glory, reveal God's good gifts to His creatures, and protect human beings from the inevitable disaster that follows

that God has demonstrated His glory in both the sameness and the differences that mark men and women, male and female. Alike made in the image of God, men and women are literally made for each other. The physicality of the male and female bodies cries out for fulfillment in the other. The sex drive calls both men and women out of themselves and toward a covenantal relationship which is consummated in a one-flesh union.

By definition, sex within marriage

marriage bed. As the Apostle Paul states, the husband and wife no longer own their own bodies, but each now belongs to the other. At the same time, Paul instructed men to love their wives even as Christ has loved the church. Even as wives are commanded to submit to the authority of their husbands, the husband is called to a far higher standard of Christ-like love and devotion toward the wife.

Therefore, when I say that a husband must regularly "earn" privileged access to the marital bed, I mean that a husband owes his wife the confidence, affection and emotional support that would lead her to freely give herself to her husband in the act of sex.

God's gift of sexuality is inherently designed to pull us out of ourselves and toward our spouse. For men, this means that marriage calls us out of our self-focused concern for genital pleasure and toward the totality of the sex act within the marital relationship.

Put most bluntly, I believe that God means for a man to be civilized, directed and stimulated toward marital faithfulness by the fact that his wife will freely give herself to him sexually only when he presents himself as worthy of her attention and desire.

In the end, a man's decision about pornography is a decision

about his soul, a decision about his marriage, a decision about his wife and a decision about God.

Pornography is a slander against the goodness of God's creation and a corruption of this good gift God has given his creatures out of his own self-giving love. To abuse this gift is to weaken, not only the institution of marriage, but the fabric of civilization itself. To choose lust over love is to debase humanity and to worship the false god Priapus in the most brazen form of modern idolatry.

The deliberate use of pornography is nothing less than the willful invitation of illicit lovers and objectified sex objects and forbidden knowledge into a man's heart, mind and soul. The damage to the man's heart is beyond measure, and the cost in human misery will only be made clear on the Day of Judgment. From the moment a boy reaches puberty until the day he is lowered into the ground, every man will struggle with lust. Let us follow the biblical example and scriptural command that we make a covenant with our eyes lest we sin. In this society, we are called to be nothing less than a corps of the mutually accountable amidst a world that lives as if it will never be called to account.

Albert Mohler, Jr.¹

IN THE END, A MAN'S DECISION ABOUT PORNOGRAPHY IS A DECISION ABOUT HIS SOUL, A DECISION ABOUT HIS MARRIAGE, A DECISION ABOUT HIS WIFE AND A DECISION ABOUT GOD.



when sexual passions are divorced from their rightful place.

Many individuals — especially young men — hold a false expectation of what sex represents within the marriage relationship. Since the male sex drive is largely directed toward genital pleasure, men often assume that women are just the same. While physical pleasure is certainly an essential part of the female experience of sex, it is not as focused on the solitary goal of genital fulfillment as is the case with many men.

A biblical worldview understands

is not merely the accomplishment of sexual fulfillment on the part of two individuals who happen to share the same bed. Rather, it is the mutual self-giving that reaches pleasures both physical and spiritual. The emotional aspect of sex cannot be divorced from the physical dimension of the sex act. Though men are often tempted to forget this, women possess more and less gentle means of making that need clear.

Consider the fact that a woman has every right to expect that her husband will earn access to the

THREE REASONS NOT TO HAVE PHYSICAL INTIMACY OUTSIDE OF MARRIAGE

Let me give you three reasons why physical intimacy with a woman — at any level — to whom one is not married is potentially fraudulent, dangerous, and just as unacceptable for a man prior to marriage as it is after marriage.

As Paul writes:

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. (1 Cor. 6:15-20, NIV)

Now to the male reader who says, “Lying with a prostitute is a black-and-white issue, and of course I would never do that,” allow me to reply: You are missing the point.

1 WE ARE MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

First, we are made in the image of God, and everything we are and do images, or represents, God. Therefore, we should be careful in what we do with our bodies. This is particularly true for the Christian, who has been united to Christ who is the perfect image of God.



Being bought at a price by God should compel you to honor him with everything you have and with everything you are, including your body. You are an image-bearer. And if you are a Christian, you are a name-bearer. Are you bearing well the image and name of a holy God by the way you conduct your relationships with the opposite sex?

2 WE ARE CALLED TO PROTECT, NOT TAKE ADVANTAGE OF, OUR SISTERS IN CHRIST

Second, Christian men are called to protect their sisters in Christ, not take advantage of them. Consider 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6 (NIV):

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.

Where the NIV says, “no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him,” the NASB says, “no one should defraud.” Defraud means “to deprive of something by deception or

fraud.”

What do I mean by defrauding in this context? Simply put, a man defrauds a woman when, by his words or actions, he promises the benefits of marriage to a woman he either has no intention of marrying or if he does, has no way of finally knowing that he will. Brothers in Christ in our churches are defrauding (taking advantage of) sisters in Christ, and as the apostle James says, “My brothers, these things ought not to be so” (James 3:10).

Executives from the corporate giants Enron and WorldCom were recently on trial for fraud. They had painted a picture of business health, growth, and prosperity when in fact it was all false. The single men in our churches must be encouraged to ask themselves, “in your relationships with single women, are you painting a false picture and committing fraud?” What may be considered innocent — holding hands, putting an arm around her in the pew, some “light” kissing, long talks over Starbucks coffee — all send the message to a sister that reads, “You’re mine.” Single men must be careful here. A Christian woman is first and foremost *continued on page 32*



a sister in the Lord. I trust none of us would do anything inappropriate with our own flesh- and-blood sisters. How much more a sister in the Lord! She may or may not become the man's wife. But she will always be a sister. Her heart, the "wellspring of life" (Proverbs 4:23, NIV), must be guarded as if it were the man's own!

IN SHORT, SINGLE MEN MUST KNOW NOW THAT WHAT THEY DO PRIOR TO MARRIAGE IS NOT INCONSEQUENTIAL TO WHAT HAPPENS IN MARRIAGE. THEY WILL REAP WHAT THEY SOW.

NO PARKING

Statistically speaking, a single man should recognize that any single woman with whom he speaks will probably be someone's wife, and he will probably be someone's husband — maybe each other's, maybe not. So there should be no difference in standards of physical intimacy between the single man's conduct with a single woman and my standards as an already married man. Single men must conduct themselves in a way that will not result in embarrassment or shame in the future.

3 WE NEED TO GUARD OUR EYES AND HEARTS AND BODIES FOR MARRIAGE

Third, single men need to guard their eyes and hearts and bodies for marriage. "For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life" (1 Thess. 4:7, NIV). A person will not fully know how critical this is until marriage, but trust us old married guys and know that what is done with the eyes, heart, and body before marriage matters. Too many times we have seen a Christian man and woman fall in love, get engaged, and then discover, during pre-marriage counseling, that their past relationships are no small factor. Too often, past physical relationships become impediments in the marriage bed.

We do not want a brother standing at the altar on his wedding day looking at his beautiful bride only to imagine behind her the boys and men who took advantage of her and robbed her of the trust and confidence that she now needs for her husband. We do not want a sister standing at the altar on her wedding day looking at her handsome groom only to imagine behind him a string of relationships with girls and women he failed to honor, and knowing that images in his head from pornography use and past flings may stick with him for a long time.

If I have just described you, you

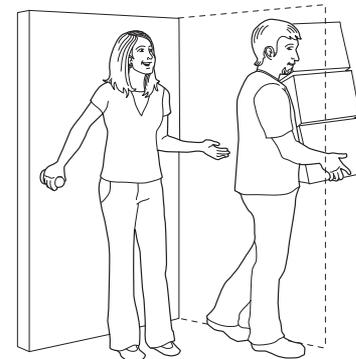
may have a painful road ahead of you, but our God is a great deliverer. The grace of God displayed in the shed blood of Christ on Calvary is more than sufficient not only to forgive you of past sins but to fit you for offering the comfort you have received to others, whether you eventually marry or not. If you have failed or are failing in this area, then remember your calling and resolve to stop now and prepare yourself for marriage. Guard your eyes and heart and body.

In short, single men must know now that what they do prior to marriage is not inconsequential to what happens in marriage. They will reap what they sow. So they must decide now to sow well. The short-term pleasure of physical intimacy outside of marriage must not be allowed to damage the prospects for long-term joy inside marriage.

Matt Schmucker²

NOT GETTING STUCK

Demographic trends show that a growing number of guys are choosing to live with their



girlfriends before considering marriage. One reason guys often resist marriage and move in with a girlfriend is so they can retain the option of easily leaving the relationship should it not work out. Interestingly, new research in the *Journal of Family Psychology* shows that couples taking this path are more likely to get stuck in poor marriages. Why's that?

Dr. Scott Stanley calls it the inertia theory. He points out that there are two elements of commitment in a relationship -- wanting to stick together and being stuck together. The desire to stick together grows out of attraction and loyalty to someone you love and want to be with. On the other hand, things like a shared mortgage or rent, shared furniture, shared phone numbers and other arrangements keep people stuck together. When they fight, such *continued on page 34*

practical arrangements make it harder to just walk away.

In marriage, those kinds of limits have helped a lot of couples stay together during tough times long enough to cool down and re-appreciate their marriage. Among those living together outside of marriage, however, such arrangements often cause someone who has identified significant relationship problems to have a much tougher time walking away.

The arrangements keeping a couple together even when they may have doubts about each other often create enough inertia that the couple eventually decides to get married. Surveyed later, these couples consistently report lower satisfaction in their marriage.

Any man who desires a meaningful connection should honestly consider the growing evidence that living together before marriage keeps him from having clarity about his relationship and future. Furthermore, men who have committed their lives to Christ should seek to honor Him by not trying to enjoy the benefits of marriage (such as sex, living with a woman, etc.) without also taking

on the responsibilities that come with the marriage commitment.

Steve Watters

DON'T LET THE POT BOIL

If the physical relationship becomes the defining feature of a relationship — and at certain stages it virtually always does— what happens is that you're going to see things more positively than they are. When you're totally in love and the hormones are really rolling, you're going to miss things that you should have been able to pick up on.

I was making breakfast for my boys one morning and my son Kyle likes smoky links. So I was boiling some water and I threw some smoky links in the pot. And here's this really hot bubbling, pot of boiling water with a few smoky links in it for Kyle. And as it's about to boil over, I notice it's all white and foamy. And I'm thinking, if

I didn't know what was in that pan, I definitely couldn't tell when it's this hot and bubbling over. If you're cooking and you want to know what's in the pot, and it's bubbling too much or boiling over, you don't see what's in there unless you remove some of the heat. You have to cool it off a bit and pull it back down or else you don't see really clearly what's in there. Now, I happened to know what was in there because I put it in there.

But when we're falling in love with somebody that we don't know and there's a lot of heat; it's bubbling but we don't see so clearly what's in the pot. That could be a really great meal. That could be like the meal for the rest of our lives in terms of what God asks for us, or it could be like the worst possible thing that we could eat. I mean it could be disastrous and we're not going to see clearly if we don't get the heat back down. This is a danger to us because we can over interpret our love right now, and its degree of sustainability, and what it really means in terms of depth of what's possible in life.

The way to regulate the temperature, just like with the stove, to turn it down in a dating relationship means you have to remove some of the heat. And that could mean several things. That could mean reducing some

of the amount of contact. You know, if you're just falling in with somebody, it's so easy; it's almost so expected; that you're with each other almost every spare minute, but that's really like having the full heat on all the time.

When no one is around, there's no accountability. There's total intensity and that's total heat all the time. So cooling it down a bit would include things like deciding not to see each other everyday; seeing each other when other people are around in groups; intentionally doing things that reduces the heat by adding reasonable structure to the relationship.

Scott Stanley

THE PROBLEM WITH "HOW FAR CAN WE GO?"

The problem with asking "How far can we go?" is that if we want to *positively pursue godliness*, it's simply the wrong question. What that *continued on page 36*

www. SEE "WHY NOT TAKE HER FOR A TEST DRIVE?" AT WWW.BOUNDLESS.ORG/2001/DEPARTMENTS/BEYOND_BUDDIES/A0000498.HTML AND "THE COHABITATION TRAP-WHY MARRIAGE MATTERS" AT WWW.ALBERTMOHLER.COM/COMMENTARY_READ.PHP?CDATE=2005-08-16

COMMUNITY

A Guy's Guide To Marrying Well

question really asks is “How close to the line (sexual sin) can I get without crossing it?” The problem is that Scripture explicitly tells us not to try to “approach” the line at all, but to turn and run from it.

“Flee from sexual immorality” (1 Cor. 6:18).

The Greek word for “flee” in this passage is an exaggerated form of the word “repent” that means (roughly) to turn and run from something. I once played golf on a course in Florida that was home to many large alligators (don’t get distracted — my lack of judgment is not the point here). Every hole had big blue and white signs on it that said (I’m paraphrasing): “DANGER: ALLIGATORS PRESENT. DO NOT FEED OR APPROACH ALLIGATORS. IF YOU ENCOUNTER AN ALLIGATOR, FLEE IMMEDIATELY.”

Now, we could quibble about exactly what “flee” means here. It might mean “run in the other direction.” It might mean “walk in the other direction.” What it certainly *does not* mean is “attempt to carefully indulge your interest in alligators by taking your 5-iron, walking up to the alligator, and seeing how many times you can poke it without becoming its mid-afternoon snack.”

Scripture is replete with statements that sexual immorality leads to death,

that it is idolatry, and that those who are characterized by it will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Check out 1 Cor. 6:12 and following, among many others). In addition to 1 Cor. 6, other passages explicitly tell us that sexual immorality is not something to flirt with. Romans 13 (right after speaking positively of how and why to selflessly love one another) admonishes us not even to “*think* about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” Ephesians 5 tells us that there must not be “even a *hint* of sexual immorality” among the followers of Christ. If you want to think through this idea well, take your concordance and look at what the Bible has to say collectively about sexual sin of all types. It’s intensely sobering.

The question is not “How far can I go in indulging my desires for sexual gratification or intimacy without getting too close to this thing the Bible utterly rejects?” The question we should all ask — in any area of our lives — is “How can I best *pursue* that to which God in His Word has *positively* called me?” He has called us *all* to pursue holiness and purity in our personal lives. That leaves little room for intentional flirtation with any sin, sexual or otherwise.

Scott Croft



ACCOUNTABILITY IS KEY

Let me advocate the initiating of a relationship under some accountability structure. Until the second half of the 20th century, that meant men approaching the father of women. The idea was to protect the woman from potential hurt or awkwardness, to aid her in evaluating a man whom she might not have known well at the time of his initiation, and to help ensure that the relationship was carried out honorably.

Certainly, this norm spread beyond the believing community and became more of a cultural phenomenon, but it still gels well

with attempts to carry out a godly dating relationship — especially among those believers who hold a complementarian view of biblical gender roles.

In this day and age, however, the hard fact is that many single Christian women today have fathers who are not involved in their lives at all, are not believers, or are indifferent to or unaware of the notion of protecting and shepherding their daughters and potential suitors in a dating context.

Where that is the case, a natural alternative might be some married individual or couple within

the woman's (or man's) church community. You should at least insist that the two of you begin to meet with others who know one or both of you well so that there will be consistent accountability and an outside perspective on how the relationship is going. Humble openness to accountability is essential to a godly relationship.

Scott Croft

DON'T ACT MARRIED UNTIL YOU ARE

The modern, secular idea of dating relationships is to test the waters of marriage by acting as much like you are married as



possible until you both (in the very heat of that temporary emotion and passion) decide what you want and either get married, or until one of you decides it's not a good fit and you go through something like a divorce (at least emotionally, if not physically — though that's pretty common too).

The biblical idea of marriage holds that such a level of relating to one another begins when you *are* married. It's one of the things that makes marriage unique.

For that reason, you shouldn't pursue deep emotional intimacy in the early stages of a relationship.

It's not that you're being dishonest or cold, it's simply being cautious about living out a deeper commitment than truly exists between you. Song of Songs 2:7 tells us not to awaken love before it pleases: Do not start what you cannot — without sin — finish.

Your goal should be prayerfully to decide whether the person you're dating *continued on page 40*



should be the one you marry without having to go through a de facto divorce if the answer's no.

Will there still be disappointment and sadness and emotional pain if a "biblical" dating relationship doesn't work out? Of course. There's no perfect way to do this. I assure you, though, that the pain will be lessened by the honest, mutual, spiritual concern for one another that results when two people treat one another like brothers and sisters in Christ first, and potential spouses second. This is for the protection of the people involved (especially the woman), for the witness of the church, and for the glory of God.

Scott Croft

STOP TEST-DRIVING YOUR GIRLFRIEND

Too often in dating relationships we think and act like consumers rather than servants. And not very good consumers at that. After all, no one would ever go down to his local car dealership, take a car out for an extended test



WE THINK AND ACT LIKE CONSUMERS RATHER THAN SERVANTS. AND NOT VERY GOOD CONSUMERS AT THAT.

drive, park it in his garage, drive it back and forth to work for several weeks, maybe take it on vacation, having put lots of miles on it, and then take it back to the dealer and say, "I'm just not ready to buy a new car."

But so often, that's exactly the way men treat the women they're dating. Endlessly "test driving" the relationship, without any real regard for the spiritual and emotional wear and tear they're putting her through, all the while keeping their eyes out for a better model.

The Scriptures are clear. We are not to take advantage of one another in this way. Instead, as

drive, park it in his garage, drive it back and forth to work for several weeks, maybe take it on vacation, having put lots of miles on it, and then take it back to the dealer and say, "I'm just not ready to buy a new car."

Paul says in Romans 13:10, "Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."

Michael Lawrence

STOP DATING THE CHURCH

There's nothing in Scripture that imagines a Christian that is not pursuing community with other Christians in the local church. It's not an option like, "Well, you know, some of you may like to do the church thing, but others of you might have a different plan." No. It always describes our new life in Christ, drawing us together with other Christians. And it's in our relationships with others where the reality of what Christ has done in us, the new life that He's given to us, is worked out and is proven in many ways.

And so it's the way that we love others that others see Christ in us. And it's our love

for others that gives us an assurance. First John talks about our assurance of belonging to God and knowing that He's truly changed us. Because we love people that, frankly, we would not have loved apart from being Christians.

And so that's where in the local church -- with all its bumps and its warts, and annoying people, and people that you wouldn't want to have a relationship with -- you suddenly start to see the beauty of God's plan. That it's in that context with fellow sinners who are saved by grace that you work out your

IT'S THE WAY THAT WE LOVE OTHERS THAT OTHERS SEE CHRIST IN US

salvation with fear and trembling, and you care for people, and you love people and you receive from them and give to them. And God glorifies Himself through that.

Joshua Harris



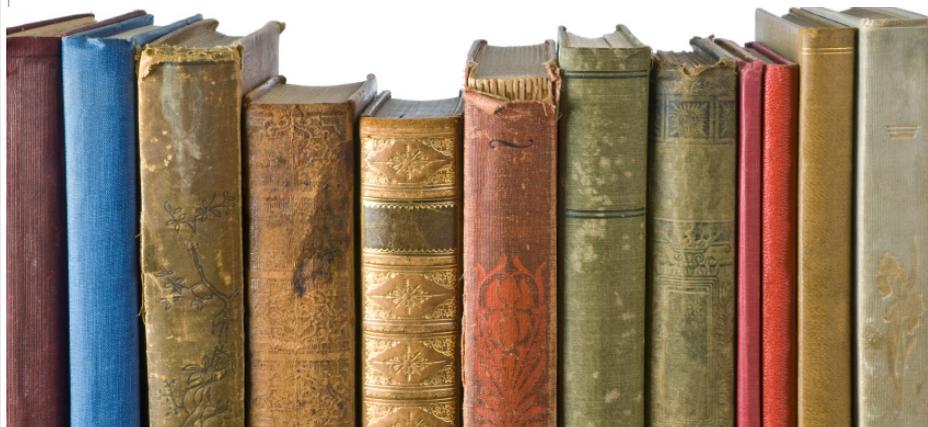
COMMITMENT TO A CHURCH SPEAKS VOLUMES TO A POTENTIAL WIFE

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When you see a man who's willing to commit to a local church in a generation that commits to nothing, that doesn't even really want to commit to marriage, you're seeing somebody who has said, "All right. There's something that is greater than myself; there's a community that is greater than myself." And you're also seeing a man who's willing to submit himself to other men in terms of authority. I always

counsel the women around me, when they're considering somebody they might marry, to ask themselves if this is a man who is himself accountable. If women are to practice the biblical commands to submit to and to honor and to respect our husbands, one of the greatest safeties that we will encounter is knowing that this man is himself submitted to other men.

Carolyn McCulley



CHRISTIAN COMPATIBILITY

A Guy's Guide To Marrying Well

THE GIRL NEXT DOOR?



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Young men (and I was one once) tend to think of a universe of all the potential females on the planet, and that's not the way we should think. That's not realistic. That's not helpful. What's helpful is to think about the fact that I am in a setting where, almost assuredly, a young woman I should marry would be found here, and in a circle of friends, in a church, in an employment situation, on a college campus, there are an awful lot of wonderful young women here who would be eligible to be my wife. So then look to the Scripture and say 'What kind of criteriology should we use?'

So let's say (number 1) she has to be a believer, ok, so #1, you cut out half of humanity because you are

seeking a woman, so we have that clear. And then they're supposed to be a believer, because you're not supposed to be unequally yoked for very good Gospel reasons and now you've really cut the population down.

And then you think, well, God's sovereign and I'm here, and it's meaningful that I'm here. It's likely that she's here. In other words, God does not say "Get on a tramp steamer, and buy a one-way ticket to a foreign continent and try to find a bride." That's just not what we would expect. We would expect that she's probably here...very close by.

So you think about - who are you attracted to? And I would certainly hope you are attracted. In our fallenness we learn not to trust our attractions, but we also learn that our attractions can be informative. We should pray that the Lord would lead us to be attracted to just the right one.

I like to use the metaphor of climbing up a mountain. At some point a young man is climbing up a mountain trying to amass enough data to corroborate the fact that this is the woman he ought to marry. But at some very strategic

point, and this is where a lot of our young men are missing the point, at some strategic point that burden has been met and he needs to start going downhill and actually go toward getting married. He has to take some initiative and do some things in order to make it happen.

The question then becomes "why would you not want to marry this woman?" Look, she is perfectly suited to be your wife. She is Biblically qualified to be your wife. You are attracted to her for all the right reasons. You can foresee her being your wife for a lifetime. You can foresee her as the mother of your children. You have a worldview compatibility. The people who love you the most, your closest friends, think she's good for you. The people who love her believe that you are good for her.

A YOUNG MAN IS CLIMBING UP A MOUNTAIN TRYING TO AMASS ENOUGH DATA TO CORROBORATE THE FACT THAT THIS IS THE WOMAN HE OUGHT TO MARRY.

There is no Biblical reason why you should be disqualified from getting married, and the people who know you and love you the best think

you would be wonderful together, then why not today? That's the real question. In other words, what are you now waiting for?

I think this generation of young men has been scared off by the question of who to marry by a theology suggesting that something clearly supernatural is to happen for us to know we are to get married to a specific woman - when actually, it ought be the culmination of a process of just being obedient and watchful and hopeful and prayerful, and the right thing should fall into place.

Albert Mohler, Jr.

THE ONE?

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Instead of asking if a girl you know is the one, you should ask yourself, "Am I the sort of man a godly woman would want to marry?" If you're not, then you'd be better off spending less time evaluating the women around you, and more time developing the character of a disciple. Start by considering the characteristics of an elder that Paul lays out in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, and work toward those.

Then you should ask another question: "What sort of qualities should I be looking for in a wife so that my *continued on page 46*

marriage will be a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church?" If you're not sure what those characteristics are, then spend some time reading Proverbs 31, Titus 2:3-5, 1 Peter 3:1-7 and Ephesians 5:22-33.

Michael Lawrence

BROTHER, YOU'RE LIKE A SIX

Once counseled a Christian brother in his dating relationship with a great woman. She was godly, caring, and bright. She was attractive, but not a supermodel. For weeks I listened to this brother agonize over his refusal to commit and propose to this woman. He said they were able to talk well about a lot of things, but there were a few topics he

was interested in that she couldn't really engage with, and sometimes the conversation "dragged."

He also said that, while he found her basically attractive, there was one feature of hers that he "just pictured differently" on the woman he would marry. I would ask about her godliness and character and faith, and he said all those things were stellar (and he was right). Finally, he said, "I guess I'm looking for a 'ten'."

I could hold back no longer. Without really thinking, I responded, "You're looking for a 'ten'? But, brother, look at yourself. You're like a 'six.' If you ever find the woman you're looking for, and

PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS (AS DEFINED BY THE WORLD) FADES IN 100 PERCENT OF PEOPLE, INCLUDING YOU.



she has your attitude, what makes you think she would have you?"

Here's something else the world won't tell you. Even if you find your "perfect ten" — however you define "ten" — marriage is still hard. When you search for a spouse, you are looking for someone (a sinner, like you) who you will be serving God and living the Christian life with until Christ returns or one of you dies.

In that context, even a really good sense of humor will only get you so far. *Physical attractiveness (as defined by the world) fades in 100 percent of people, including you.* "Chemistry" as the world defines it ebbs and flows in any relationship. Your spouse can be as fun-loving as she can possibly be and there will still be many moments that aren't fun. Your spouse can have the best personality you've ever seen and she will still drive you absolutely batty sometimes if you live with her for the rest of your life. You can marry someone who appears to be an omniscient genius, and there will still be times that neither of you knows what to do next. Knowing that is part of maturing as a person and as a believer, and

believe it or not, it's part of what makes marriage wonderful and special.

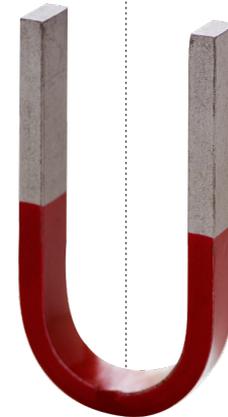
As you seek someone with whom to serve God in marriage, build on something more than what might make for a few fun dates or an impressive "catch" in the world's eyes.

DOES ATTRACTION MATTER?

In God's kindness to us, He doesn't just nourish us, He has provided an infinite variety of foods that not only keep us alive, but that also taste good to us. In the same way, God has graciously given us physical attraction, chemistry, and pleasure to make marriage and its unique intimacy that much sweeter to us. That's good and right.

Enjoy those things, but don't be a slave to them. Desire them, but have a realistic idea of what those words

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mean in a fallen world, and the limited role they should play in one of the most important decisions of your Christian life. Remember, “the movies” aren’t real, and they aren’t the standard. It’s not that attraction makes *no* difference, but it shouldn’t make *the* difference.

What should make the difference? Well, the Bible talks about the characteristics of godly men and women. These are the things that the Lord Himself considers to be good attributes, or, to use a different word, “attractive.”

Is your potential spouse clearly a believer in Jesus (2 Cor. 6:14)? Does she exhibit the fruit of the Spirit — love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5)? Does she show clear regard and care for others? Does she show evident love for God in how she spends time and money, how she interacts with others?

Men, do you believe this woman will care for you well and be a good mother and discipler to your children? Is she growing in the characteristics of biblical womanhood and what the Bible calls “true beauty” (Proverbs 31, 1 Peter 3, Titus 2)? Do you envision her being supportive of you in whatever ministry God may call you to?

Scott Croft

MARRY TRUE BEAUTY WHEN YOU FIND IT



The Scriptures call us to develop an attraction to true beauty. 1 Peter 3:3-6 describes the beautiful wife as a woman who has a gentle and quiet spirit, born out of her faith and hope in God, and displayed in her trusting submission to her husband. Men, is the presence of this kind of beauty the driving force for your sense of attraction to your girlfriend? Or have you made romantic attraction and “chemistry” the deciding issue?

Now don’t get me wrong. You should be physically attracted to the woman you marry. This is one of the ways marriage serves as a protection against sexual immorality (1 Cor. 7:3-5). But we get in trouble, both in dating and in marriage, when we make physical beauty and “chemistry”

YOU HAVE CHRIST’S PROMISE THAT HE IS COMMITTED TO MAKING HER MORE AND MORE BEAUTIFUL, SPIRITUALLY BEAUTIFUL, WITH EVERY PASSING DAY



the threshold issue in the decision to commit (or remain committed) to marriage. Physical beauty in a fallen world is fading and transient. What’s more, the world narrowly defines beauty as the body of a teenager, and scorns the beauty of motherhood and maturity. But in which “body” is your wife going to spend most of her years with you? Personalities also change and mature, and what seems like “chemistry” when you’re 22 might feel like superficial immaturity 10 years later. Even over the course of a long courtship and engagement in the prime of your youth, physical attraction and chemistry are sure to go through ups and downs. We must resist the

temptation to value the wrong kind of beauty.

No one lives in a perpetual state of “being in love.” But in marriage, our love is called to “always protect, always trust, always hope, always persevere” (1 Cor. 13:7). If mere worldly, physical beauty is the main thing attracting our love, then our love will prove as ephemeral as that beauty. But if we have developed an attraction to true beauty, then we have nothing to fear. Marry a vibrant growing Christian woman, and you have Christ’s promise that he is committed to making her more and more beautiful, spiritually beautiful, with every passing day (Rom. 8:28; Phil. 1:6).

Michael Lawrence

DON’T WAIT FOR A SOUL MATE

Our culture has embraced a rather absurd notion that there is just one person who can, in the words immortalized by Tom Cruise in Jerry Maguire, “complete us.” This is a disastrous mindset with which *continued on page 50*

to approach a lifelong marital decision.

The notion of a “soul mate” is actually pretty ancient. Well over two thousand years ago, the Greek philosopher Plato surmised that a perfect human being was tragically split in two, resulting in a race of creatures sentenced to spend the rest of their lives searching for that missing other who can complete them.

Despite such bizarre philosophical musing, the notion of a soul mate has deeply rooted itself in our culture, inspiring countless movies, novels, and top-40 songs. One Rutgers University study found that 94 percent of people in their twenties say that the first requirement in a spouse is someone who qualifies as a soul mate. Just as surprising, 87 percent think they’ll actually find that person “when they are ready.” A culture suspicious of God nevertheless has brazenly embraced some sort of forceful and intelligent destiny that brings two lovelorn souls together!

The real danger in this line of thinking is that many people

mistake a storm of emotion as the identifying mark of their soul mate. How else can you identify “destiny”? Such individuals marry on an infatuation binge without seriously considering character, compatibility, life goals, family desires, spiritual health, and other important concerns. Then when the music fades and the

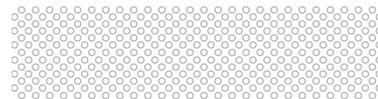
relationship requires work, one or both partners suddenly discover that they were “mistaken”: this person must not be their soul mate after all! Otherwise, it wouldn’t be so much work.

Next they panic. Their soul mate must still be out there! Such people can’t get to divorce court fast enough, lest someone steal their “one true soul mate” meant only for them. When we get married for trivial reasons, we tend to seek divorce for trivial reasons.

In a biblical view, there is not “one right choice” for marriage, but rather good and bad choices. We are encouraged to use wisdom, not destiny, as our guide when choosing a marital partner. There is no indication that God creates



THERE IS NOT “ONE RIGHT CHOICE” FOR MARRIAGE, BUT RATHER GOOD AND BAD CHOICES. WE ARE ENCOURAGED TO USE WISDOM, NOT DESTINY, AS OUR GUIDE



“one” person for us to marry.

I can speak from experience: nothing compares to being married to a godly woman. Nothing! But there is also nothing more tedious and exhausting than being married to a narcissist, or a selfish woman. Marriage is 98 percent living and 2 percent looking — so learn to value character over appearance.

MAKE A GOOD CHOICE

The reason it is so crucial to adopt the Bible’s view of “good and bad choices” over your destiny of finding “the one” is that the former attitude allows you to objectively consider the person you marry. There is no objective measurement of “destiny.” Powerful emotions can blind us to all sorts of clues; when we adopt the biblical attitude of making a “wise” choice, we can use all that God has given us to arrive at a solid decision that should be based on a number of factors:

» **Scriptural mandates**

Is the person a believer who fears God (Proverbs 31:30) and who is biblically eligible for marriage (Mark 10:11-12)?

» **Wisdom**

How do they handle their money? (Proverbs 31:16, 18)

Is this person a hard worker?

(Proverbs 13:4; 26:13-15)

Do they live an upright life?

(Proverbs 13:6, 20; 25:28)

Does this person wound people

with their words, or are they an

encourager? (Proverbs 12:18; 18:21)

Are they peaceful, or quarrelsome?

(Proverbs 17:19; 29:8)

» **Parental, pastoral, and wise advice**

Your parents know you better than

you may realize, and even if they

aren’t believers, they generally

want the best for you. Also talk

to your pastor and people you

respect for their counsel: “Does

this relationship seem like a ‘fit’

to you? Are there any areas you’re

concerned about?” If the people

I most respected had serious

reservations about a relationship,

I would assume I had lost my

objectivity due to infatuation and

put all marriage plans on hold.

» **Prayer**

Rejecting the notion that God

creates one person just for us

doesn’t discount the reality that

God can lead *continued on page 52*



us toward someone, and help us make a wise choice when we seek him in prayer.

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LOOK FOR A 'SOLE MATE'

We mustn't enter into a marriage expecting more than another human can give. If my wife looks to me to be God for her — to love her like only God can love her — I'll fail every time and on every count. I'm trying, but I fall short every day. Tragically, I see too many young people wanting to get married in order to find this God-acceptance and God-love. Infatuation can initially feel like it approaches this God-love, but eventually it fades, disillusionment sets in, and the once "fabulous" relationship soon becomes an excruciating prison.

Can I suggest a more biblical pattern? Instead of following Plato in a wild pursuit of our soul mate, we should seek to find a biblical

"sole mate." A sole mate is someone who walks with us as together we apply biblical love. The most accurate definition of true love is found in John 15:13 (NASB): "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."

This love is not based on feelings, but on sacrifice. The Bible calls men to act like martyrs toward their wives, laying down their own lives on their wives' behalf (Ephesians 5:25). Love is not an emotion; it's a policy and a commitment that we choose to keep. Such a love is not based on the worthiness of the person being loved — none of us deserve Christ's sacrifice! — but on the worthiness of the One who calls us to love: "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

A "sole mate" appreciates that marriage is a school of character. Clement of Alexandria, an early church father (ca. 150-215), captures this thinking marvelously when he writes, "The prize in the contest of men is shown by him who has trained himself by the discharge of the duties of marriage; by him, I say, who in the midst of his solicitude for his family shows himself inseparable from the love of God."

Clement asks, who wins the prize? Not the couple displaying the most emotion, with the biggest

smiles on their faces, or who can't keep their hands off each other; but rather, the women or men who, through the duties and sacrifice of marriage, have trained themselves to love with God's love. They live out the gospel on a daily basis, forgiving, serving, and putting others first in the most ordinary issues of life in such a way that they see themselves in training for godliness.

As Christ's follower — as a true sole mate — I'm called to take his example and his definition of love and apply it to my spouse. It really doesn't matter whether my spouse is a "soul mate," as much as it matters that I choose to love her with Christ's love. That means a sacrificial mindset marked by generosity, kindness, and mercy — for she certainly is my sole mate, my precious sister in Christ.

A biblical sole mate who walks in this truth, who daily travels God's journey of sacrificial love, and who willingly goes "into training" for godliness is a far more stable foundation upon which to build a lifelong partnership than the philosophy of Plato. "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." This may not sound like the most exciting or emotional love, but it is certainly the truest love.

Gary Thomas

SHOULD YOU SETTLE?

I can't begin to tell you how many single believers I have spoken to and counseled who are trying to avoid settling, worried that they are settling, think it's "wrong" to settle, etc. Let's use the following as our working definition of "settling": a willingness to date or marry someone who clearly fails to meet all the major criteria on your "list" to the extent you dreamed about when picturing your spouse, and/or doesn't appear to be your "soul mate." Good relationships have gone down the tubes or never gotten off the ground because of this issue. The question for us is whether that approach to dating and marriage gels with the biblical approach to life and love.

It doesn't, for at least three reasons.

1 A SELFISH PREMISE

The first is that worries about settling reveal a selfish approach to marriage that misunderstands the Bible's idea of love. "Holding out for true love" means demanding a person to *continued on page 54*

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whom I am completely attracted in the secular sense, somebody who meets all the qualifications on my “list,” and whom I believe is the “best I can do.” In the minds of many Christians anything short of finding that perfect match created in one’s mind falls short of “true love” and constitutes the sad and unwise act of “settling.” Such an approach to love and marriage fundamentally misunderstands the Bible’s idea of both.

I don’t mean that such an approach [looking for a spouse based primarily on my own “list” and attraction] involves malice or the intent to hurt anyone. I simply mean that such an approach is self-centered. It conceives of finding a spouse from the standpoint of what will be most enjoyable for me based on my tastes and desires. What will I receive from marriage to this or that person?

In Scripture, love is described not as a mere emotion based on personal desire (i.e., “attraction”), but as an act of the will that leads to selfless actions toward others. According to Jesus Himself, the second-greatest commandment (after loving God) is to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31). He also said “greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Jesus’ love for us did not result from our inherent loveliness or our wonderful treatment of Him. He didn’t go to the cross as a spontaneous response triggered by mere emotion. His perfect love of us was a choice, an act undertaken despite our lack of attractiveness — and it led to both sacrifice and joy.

The apostle Paul agrees. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul describes the biblical definition of love in detail, and he lets us know that love isn’t just felt; it does something — something selfless.

In the world’s version of attraction, I’m a consumer, not a servant. I respond to attributes of yours that I like because of their potential to please me. Again, this is not malicious or evil — it’s just not how we’re primarily called to treat one another in Scripture. It’s not the Bible’s idea of love.

According to scripture, marriage is a beautiful (if distant) analogy of

the way that Christ has perfectly loved and sacrificed for the church, and the way the church, His bride, responds to her Lord.

Marriage is incredibly fun; it’s also incredibly hard. For most people it is the greatest act of ministry and service to another person that they will ever undertake. Husbands are literally called to “give themselves up for” their wives. Wives are called to submit to, respect, and

your idea of attraction — whatever that is — dominates your pursuit of a spouse, consider this: Is your approach biblical?

The Bible calls us to reject the world’s approach to love and marriage. That may require a pretty radical rethinking of your own approach. If it does, join the club. If you can manage that rethinking (with the Lord’s help), it will drain much of the angst from any discussion about “settling.”

IN THE WORLD’S VERSION OF ATTRACTION, I’M A CONSUMER, NOT A SERVANT. I RESPOND TO ATTRIBUTES OF YOURS THAT I LIKE BECAUSE OF THEIR POTENTIAL TO PLEASE ME.

serve their husbands “as to the Lord.” Though husbands and wives receive countless blessings from a biblical marriage, the very idea of biblical marriage describes an act — many acts — of love, service, sacrifice, and ministry toward a sinful human being. According to Scripture, marriage is anything but a selfish endeavor. It is a ministry.

What sense does it make to undertake that ministry based primarily on a list of self-centered (and often petty) preferences? If

2 EVERYBODY SETTLES

Another problem with the usual discussion on settling is that it usually reflects two unbiblical beliefs: (1) we can strategize our way around the effects of sin in human relationships and the reality that marriage is hard work, and (2) we can hope to be perfectly, ultimately fulfilled by marriage — or any other earthly relationship.

If you have a biblical understanding of human nature, then you will realize that in one sense, everybody settles — even the people who think they are refusing to. Every person who decides to marry makes the decision to marry a sinner. That means you will marry someone who is at some level selfish, who has insecurities and an ego, who has annoying tendencies that you will only discover after marriage because they *continued on page 56*

will only be revealed in that intimate context. And don't forget, your spouse will have married the same type of person. As sinners, we all "settle" for marriage to a person who will not always meet our sinful, individualized, selfish whims, who will not be the spouse we "dreamed of" every day, and who likely entered the bargain with some level of expectation that you were going to be the one for them.

It's also true that anyone who enters marriage expecting it to serve as a substitute for Christ in the ultimate fulfillment of his or her own desires for companionship, love, intimacy, security or anything else will indeed be disillusioned – quickly. It's a fallen world, and we are sinners. We cannot gain in any earthly relationship what the world tells us to seek from "romance" and marriage. We all settle.

3 NOBODY SETTLES

Finally, deep worry about settling for less than one desires or deserves in marriage fails to acknowledge two fundamental biblical truths that apply to all

areas of the Christian life – not just dating and marriage: (1) as sinners, what we deserve is condemnation from God; and (2) we have been given greater gifts than we could possibly deserve or attain on our own. In other words, compared to what our lives should be before a just and holy God, no believer in

Christ ever settles – in marriage or in anything else.

To get at this, we have to talk about sin again, so forgive me for being a little stark for a minute. The Bible teaches that we have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. It teaches that what we all "deserve" is instant condemnation at the hands of a righteous and holy God. We deserve hell. But the Lord hasn't given that to you, has

he? For God's people, he has given salvation in Christ, eternal life, sonship in God's kingdom, and glimpses of heaven on earth – one of which is marriage. I know, I know – we're talking about settling here. Still, in any discussion of earthly circumstances or relationships, when we are tempted to pursue and think we're entitled to an idealized, easy, hassle-free life, it's

GOD'S PEOPLE DON'T SETTLE; THE "BEST WE COULD DO" APART FROM CHRIST IS A HORRIBLE TRAGEDY COMPARED TO THE LIVES WE HAVE WITH HIM.



no bad thing to think about the truth of what we deserve, and the blessings God has given us instead. God's people don't settle; the "best we could do" apart from Christ is a horrible tragedy compared to the lives we have with him.

What's more, nobody really "settles" in a biblical marriage because God has designed marriage as a wonderful gift that gets better with age. This is what people worried about settling don't seem to get. They think joy in marriage is all about the original choice one makes about whom to marry, rather than how to nurture and build their marriage. Again, this misses the picture of biblical marriage.

Read Song of Songs. Look at the implied deepening of a marriage that has to take place if Ephesians 5:22-33 is to be lived out. Sure, it takes hard work. But if two people are truly faithful as spouses, growing in God's word, studying one another deeply and attentively with an eye toward uniquely ministering to and serving each other, both will find that 10 years in they are known and loved and cared for better and more deeply than when they were newly married. That doesn't hinder passion, people. It builds it. Bottom line, the real danger for God's people in pursuing a spouse is

that we will "settle" for the world's vision of self, love, marriage and even romance, rather than a vision of those things steeped in scripture and rooted in the love of Christ. Biblical love and marriage ask more of us than the world's selfish pursuit of non-existent perfection. But the rewards are infinitely richer. "Keep your eyes on the prize"? Sure. Just make sure it's the right one.

Scott Croft

HOW DO YOU DECIDE TO MARRY THE WOMAN YOU'RE DATING?

ASK YOURSELF A FEW QUESTIONS:

- Generally speaking, will you be able to serve God better together than apart?
- Do you desire to fulfill the biblical role of *continued on page 58*



solid and God-glorifying?

If you can't answer the questions at all, then you may need to spend some more time getting to know each other. But if you can answer them (and others like them) either positively or negatively, then it's time to stop test-driving the relationship and either commit to marriage or let someone else have the opportunity.

Michael Lawrence

DON'T KEEP YOUR OPTIONS OPEN—COMMIT

a husband outlined in Ephesians 5:22-33 with this specific woman? Do you want to love her sacrificially?

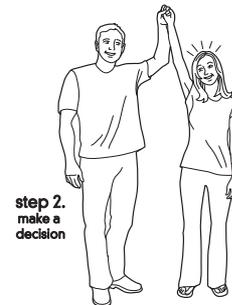
» Does this relationship spur you on in your Christian discipleship, or does it dull and distract your interest in the Lord and his people? Are you more or less eager to study God's word, and pray, and give yourself in service as a result of time spent together?

» Do you think she will make a good discipler of your children?

» What do other mature Christian friends and family members say about your relationship? Do they see a relationship that is spiritually

Should you just "settle" for the first Christian woman who comes along? No, not at all. You should be making this decision in light of the qualities held out in Scripture for a godly wife, and you should marry the godliest, most fruitful, most spiritually beautiful woman you can convince to have you.

But you also need to be aware that you live in a culture that says the ultimate good in life is to always keep your options open, and



that any commitment is inevitably "settling" for less than you could have tomorrow. You must reject that kind of thinking for the worldly garbage that it is. Did Jesus Christ settle for the church? No, he loved the church, and gave his life as a ransom for her (Mark 10:45).

Marriage is fundamentally a means to glorify and serve God, not by finding someone who will meet our needs and desires, but by giving ourselves to another for their good. So if you find yourself hesitating about committing to a godly, biblically-qualified woman, then ask yourself, "Are my reasons biblical, or am I just afraid that if I commit, someone better will walk around the corner after it's too late?" Consumers are always on the lookout for something better. Christ calls us to trust Him that in finding a wife, we *have found* "what is good and receive favor from the Lord" (Prov. 18:22).

Michael Lawrence

A PRAYER FOR MEN WHO HOPE TO MARRY WELL

Father in Heaven,
You are the merciful, loving God of the universe. You are the Giver of all good gifts. I praise you and thank you for saving me in Christ. Father, please make me a man who lives by your word and cares well for my sisters in Christ. By your spirit, help me to treat my sisters with absolute purity in friendship, in courtship and - for the one I trust you have given me - in marriage. Help me to honor all women today. Help me to move toward marriage with humility, care, courage, and purpose. Prepare me to love my wife, as Christ loves the church, tomorrow. All for your glory.

In Christ's name, Amen.

CONTRIBUTORS

ALEX CHEDIAK

Alex Chediak is an Apprentice at The Bethlehem Institute under the leadership of Pastors John Piper and Tom Steller of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis (2005-2007). He is the author of *With One Voice: Singleness, Dating, and Marriage to the Glory of God* (Christian Focus, 2006) and the general editor of *Five Paths to the Love of Your Life* (NavPress, 2005), for which he contributed two chapters. He and his wife Marni have one daughter, Karis Joy.

SCOTT CROFT

Scott Croft is an elder at Capitol Hill Baptist Church, where he wrote and teaches the Courtship & Dating CORE Seminar. Scott, his wife Rachel and their son William live in the Washington, D.C. area, where he is also a practicing attorney.

DREW DYCK

Drew Dyck is editor of newmanmag.com. He lives in Lake Mary with Grace, a beautiful woman whom he pursued and, amazingly, convinced to marry him.

JOSH HARRIS

Joshua Harris serves as senior pastor of Covenant Life Church in Gaithersburg, Maryland. He is also the founder of the New Attitude conference for singles of all ages and young married couples, and the author of several best-selling books, including *Stop Dating the Church* (Multnomah).

MICHAEL LAWRENCE

A Duke graduate, Michael received a Master of Divinity degree from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and a doctorate in Church History at Cambridge University. He and his wife, Adrienne, have four children: Michael, Christian, Samuel, and Sarah. He currently serves as an Associate Pastor at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C.
www.capitolhillbaptist.org

ALBERT MOHLER JR.

R. Albert Mohler, Jr. is president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. For more articles and resources by Dr. Mohler, and for information on The Albert Mohler Program, a daily national radio program broadcast on the Salem Radio Network, visit www.albertmohler.com.

GARY THOMAS

Gary Thomas is the founder and director of the Center for Evangelical Spirituality, a writing and speaking ministry that integrates Scripture, church history, and the Christian classics. A teacher and author, Thomas' work includes the excellent book, *Sacred Marriage: What If God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More Than to Make Us Happy* (Zondervan, 2000).

MATT SCHMUCKER

Matt Schmucker serves in a dual capacity as the Director of 9Marks and as an elder at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. He has spent more than 10 years in non-profit work and church administration.

SCOTT STANLEY

Scott M. Stanley, Ph.D. is Co-Director of the Center for Marital and Family Studies and a research professor of psychology at the University of Denver. He has authored numerous research articles on relationships and is an expert on marital commitment. Dr. Stanley co-authored the books *Fighting for Your Marriage and A Lasting Promise*, and authored *The Heart of Commitment and The Power of Commitment*.

JOHN THOMAS

John has provided marriage and engagement counseling for over a decade. Whatever good advice he has is credit to Alfie, his wife of 12 years. Whatever bad advice is his alone. They live in Little Rock, Arkansas with their two children, Jake and Audrey

STEVE WATTERS

Steve is the director of young adults at Focus on the Family. He and his wife, Candice launched Boundless in 1998, shortly after earning their Masters Degrees from Regent University. Steve is the author of *Real Solutions for Overcoming Internet Addictions* and *Start Your Family*. Steve and Candice live in Colorado Springs with their four children.

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