

The Single's Scene Seminars **Dating vs. Courtship**

Without understanding God's purpose and plan for marriage, you cannot understand and practice a godly approach to dating and courtship, so we will begin with a brief look at the Biblical commands and precepts concerning marriage

Christian Marriage

Definition. We live in a society in which there are many competing ideas for what marriage is supposed to be.

On the humorous side:

"Marriage occurs when cupidity meets stupidity."

"Marriage is a partnership in which two people agree to change each other's habits."

"Marriage is the world's most expensive way of discovering your faults."

Abraham Lincoln said that *"marriage is neither heaven, nor hell; it is simply purgatory."*

Marriage is like a pair of shears. A man and a woman are *"so joined that they cannot be separated; they are often moving in opposite directions, yet always punishing anyone who comes between them."*

While there is a lot of laughter in a good marriage, marriage itself is not a laughing matter.

On a more serious note, many people define marriage in terms of a legal contractual agreement. Webster's dictionary defines it as man and woman being legally united on a permanent basis. Under this definition, some will drawing up pre-nuptial legal contracts in case the contract is breeched. Others define marriage in business terms. For them it is a partnership in which a man and woman agree to work together for the mutual benefit of each other. Others who hold to one or the other of these ideas but wanting to sound more spiritual will call their partnership a "covenant" because that is a Biblical word and more solemn sounding than "contract." But marriage is much more than a contract, partnership or covenant.

On the perverse side, the Obergerfell opinion by five lawyers in black robes on the SCOTUS, was a travesty of both law, justice and morality - and the quick acquiescence of the States was just as bad. Man can pervert a nation's laws to legalize abominations, but a society does not have the right to redefine marriage by its depravity. Such perversion does not gain God's approval or change His definition of marriage, and ultimately, only God's definition matters, for He is the both the one that created marriage, and He is the one that will judge those who disobey His commands.

What then marriage and God's intention for it? Marriage is to be a monogamous, lifetime relationship between a man and a woman which is bound together by a love that reflects that of Jesus Christ for His church and in which each spouse can fulfill their God given roles to one another, the family and society. God has a plan for marriage that is much better than the dreams most people have when they enter matrimony, and God cares about that marriage more than either spouse does. That is why I can confidently tell people that there is great hope for their marriage regardless of how bad it might be in the present. They just have to quit doing it their way and start living divine style in their marriage. It is the nature and purpose of marriage that defines it.

Its Nature

Marriage is Good. God established marriage on the sixth day of creation and it was included in God's pronouncement that all that He had done was "very good"(Gen. 1:31). Ecclesiastes 9:9 states, "*Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life, and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun.*" Marriage is good.

Many people have a negative view of marriage because they have not understood its nature and God's purpose for it, or they do not follow God's design for other reasons. Many people marry with romantic dreams in mind, but when problems occur, they blame marriage. Most jokes and quips about marriage are from a negative view. Marriage is not the problem. People are sinful and so they will have problems to overcome in any relationship, but marriage is good.

Another source of negative views of marriage come from religious traditions which believe that being single is spiritually superior to being married. As we have just seen in the previous session, Paul does make the case for the advantages of being single in 1 Corinthians 7, however, he does not advocate singleness as spiritually superior. He recognizes that singleness or marriage was according to the gift of God (vs. 7). Part of his concern was the "present distress" that the Corinthians were facing (vs. 26). He also makes it clear that there was no sin in getting married (vs. 28,36) and that giving in marriage was good (vs. 38). Paul makes it clear in other places, such as Ephesians 5, the glorification of God that can occur in marriage. And in 1 Timothy 4:3, Paul declares that those who forbid marriage are paying attention to the doctrine of demons. Marriage is good and is the normal state to which God calls men and women.

Marriage is a Blessing according to Proverbs 18:22, "*He who finds a wife finds a good thing, And obtains favor from the Lord.*" Proverbs 19:14 adds, "*House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, But a prudent wife is from the Lord.*" Song of Solomon expresses the blessing of marital love. There are also the examples of good marriages that were obvious blessings such as Ruth & Boaz, Elkanah & Hannah and the marriage described in Proverbs 31 in which she is a blessing and in turn is praised by her husband and children. The jokes about marriage being a curse are many, but that is only because people do not follow God's plan for marriage. God designed marriage to be a blessing.

Marriage has Struggles. To say that marriage is a blessing does not mean that a good marriage is without struggles. People are sinful by nature and practice, and so when they get married there will be problems that will arise because of that sinfulness. Even in Christian marriage this will happen because no believer walks in perfect holiness. All of us will continue in that struggle against sin until we are fully sanctified at Christ's return.

In a Christian marriage, the problems that are faced are used by God as one of the means of making us more holy. Keep in mind that James 1 & Romans 5 both speak about the trials and troubles of life to be a source of joy because the testing of our faith produces endurance, perseverance, and the maturity of proven character. A purpose in marriage is to learn to love unconditionally and sacrificially. The commitment made by the promise to be true and love for better or worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health makes the difference in moving us out of our selfishness and into true love. Marriage is a means by which God matures both the man and the woman into greater Christlikeness.

Marriages do not break apart because of problems and struggles. Problems arise in every relationship. In a godly marriage those struggles will result in a stronger marriage as the couple works through the problems. Marriages break apart when people remain selfish and do not love enough to work through those problems. Divorce occurs when at least one partner refuses to keep the promises they made to their spouse.

Marriage is Optional. None of this means that you must get married. I have already pointed out in the previous session some of the great advantages to being single. Marriage can help, but you do not have to get married to learn to love unconditionally and sacrificially. The vast majority of people will get married because of the way that God has made men and women to be attracted to each other, but God gives no command for all people to get married. From what Jesus states in Matthew 19:11-12, we know God gifts some people remain celibate and unmarried for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Marriage is good, but it is optional. It can and should also be good to be single

The Purpose of Marriage

The Bible gives several reasons for marriage. Genesis 2:7 gives us the first as it reveals the details of the sixth day of Creation. God formed man from the dust of the ground, and then He planted the Garden of Eden and set Adam into the midst of that garden. In verse 18 God said, *“It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.”* God then forms all the animals and has them come before Adam to be named, but none of them were suitable for Adam. In verses 21-22, God forms Eve from one of Adam’s ribs and presents her to him. Adam’s response was, *“This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man.”* Marriage is then established for future mankind in verse 24 in the statement, *“for this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.”*

The first purpose of marriage is companionship. Adam’s singleness was the first “not good” that occurred in creation, and God corrected that before the end of the day. God’s design of a man and a woman is that they correspond to each other. They are to have a symbiotic relationship. Together they can do more than the sum of what they could do individually. Solomon mentions a couple of the advantages of this in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. *“Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm [alone?] And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him.”* Mortality tables show that married people live longer than single people.

The second purpose of marriage is also found in Genesis and is related to them cleaving together and becoming one flesh. After God had made Eve and gave her to Adam, He instructed them in Genesis 1:28 to *“be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”* Mankind could not fulfill God’s intended role of having dominion over the earth unless there were more men and women. He could have continued to keep creating them individually, but God’s chosen method was procreation. Man was to reproduce after his kind in a manner similar to the other forms of life God had created. Children are to be a product of marriage, not just biological activity. That leads to the next purpose of marriage.

In 1 Corinthians 7:1-2, Paul says that though *it is good for a man not to touch a woman*, in the sense of physical intimacy, *because of immoralities, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.*” He summarized this in verse 9 saying, *“it is better to marry than to burn.”* Physical intimacy is another purpose of marriage.

The Bible is clear that physical intimacy between a man and a woman belongs only in marriage. If it occurs before marriage, it is called fornication, and it is an evil which under the Mosaic Law could result in capital punishment (Deut. 22:13-27). If it occurs outside of marriage, it is the sin of adultery (Ex. 20:14), and under Mosaic Law it also could result in execution of the adulterer (Lev. 20:10).

God’s design is that human sexuality is to be expressed only within the marriage relationship, and that within that marriage relationship, it is a wonderful and holy expression of love. Proverbs 5 contrasts the evil of adultery with the blessing of marital love. Song of Solomon extols the physical relationship within marriage as virtuous. This is a purpose of marriage which can be enjoyed, but it is an activity that is not to be engaged in by those who are single.

Our society has largely rejected God’s design for human sexuality to its own detriment demonstrated in epidemic levels of STDs, sex trafficking, sexual abuse, abortion, high divorce rates, and increasingly perverse sexual activity accompanied by their own diseases. Hebrews 13:4 warns, *“Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.”* Paul warned in 1 Corinthians 6:18 concerning sexual immorality to flee it because *“every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.”* If you are single, then heed Paul’s warning to Timothy and *“flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love [and] peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart”* (2 Tim. 2:22).

The fourth purpose of marriage is the glorification of God. Paul explains the role of the husband and the wife in Ephesians 5 and then he quotes from Genesis 2:24 and makes this comment in verses 31-32 *“For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.”* Marriage is to be a picture of the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ for the church and the church’s love for Him. That is why there are specific roles God gives to the husband and to the wife. Only in fulfilling those roles can this picture of Christ and the church be demonstrated in the marriage.

I have spoken in detail about the roles of husbands and wives many times, so I will not be doing that again here. Download the sermons on either Ephesians 5:22-33 or Colossians 3:18-19. I will only say here that the roles are not optional for the Christian, and they are still God’s design and best option for the non-Christian. The husband is to love his wife in the same self-sacrificial manner as Christ. He is to be seeking her best interest at all times. The husband is to seek to understand his wife and lead her into holiness. The wife is to voluntarily follow that leadership while returning his love with respect and care. Study Ephesians 5:22-33, 1 Peter 3:1-7, 1 Corinthians 11:1-12, 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, Proverbs 31:10-31 and Psalm 15 for a greater understanding of God’s roles for husbands and wives.

Finding a Spouse

After explaining all of this about marriage, we can now come to what those who are single should do if they want to get married. Understanding God’s design and purpose of marriage as well as the roles within it will help know what to look for in a potential spouse.

There are no specific Biblical commands to Christians concerning who to marry other than Christians are to marry “*in the Lord*” (1 Cor. 7:39). The examples of finding a spouse vary ranging from the extremes of marriages arranged by the parents (Gen. 24) to a man taking a wife from among the women captured in a war because she was beautiful (Deut. 21:10,11). The kind of marriages that resulted vary a lot too. Most marriages mentioned in Scripture were arranged and ranged from good to bad (Solomon’s political marriages were not good). The few that can be described as a desire and pursuit (such as Samson), did not end well.

Our society, including the Christian subculture, has come to accept “dating” as the normal method of finding marriage partners. Dating is an American invention that has been done a lot here for since the early 1900's. It is partially a result of a multi-cultural, multi-class society that mixes quite freely. The American independent spirit and easy transportation are also factors. In prior centuries the primary method was courtship. The two are very different from each other in their fundamental assumptions, and therefore practice too.

Dating. The fundamental assumption in dating is that the man and woman involved will be able to decide by themselves who would make a good spouse with little to no input from others, especially the parents. In our society, that decision will largely revolve around the romantic interest that is generated between the couple. Some initial spark, often a physical attraction, will begin the relationship, and then that flame of interest is built upon by doing enjoyable activities together. Enjoyment is a foundational aspect of dating. The most common date tends to be a meal and some form of entertainment. A guy can get a girl to go out with him if he invites her to a dinner and a show, but very few women will respond to an invitation to come help him fix his car, do chores or clean his bathroom.

Dating couples tend to define love in terms of positive feelings of affection toward each other. Since such feelings are increased by doing fun things together, a very serious relationship can develop quickly. That can easily lead to immorality problems because strong emotions are leading the relationship instead of thoughtfulness. Even if immorality is avoided, a quick engagement and wedding often result in severe conflicts later when compatibility issues that should have been dealt with prior to marriage come to the surface.

Another danger of dating is that if the feelings of affection diminish for any reason, the relationship can end because there was not a solid foundation for the relationship. One social observer put it well in saying that dating teaches you more about how to break up than how to stay together.

Personally, I am against dating because I can find so little of positive value in it. Dating is not good preparation for marriage. An acronym for DATE: **D**eceptive **A**traction **T**oo **E**motional

Dangers of Dating - DATE - **D**eceptive **A**traction **T**oo **E**motional

Physical dangers - Going “too far” romantically - who determines what is “too far”

STD's; infertility; Pregnancy; abortion; single motherhood

Mental dangers - developing a wrong understanding of the opposite sex - and the individual

Dating is artificial - it concentrates on fun activities and few or none of the more

unpleasant and service activities of real life such as: cleaning their house / church / yard, doing laundry, shoveling snow, etc.

People present their best sides and try to hide the flaws.

Conflicts are avoided if possible. Serious issues are also often avoided for this reason

Emotional dangers - emotional commitment \ dependence prior to wisdom being applied.

When reality finally does push its way in, then the break-up becomes a heartache.

Spiritual dangers - unbelievers led farther from God, immature believers forsake pursuit of godliness in the pursuit of the date / romantic interest. Sin speeds the decline

Social dangers - “pairing off” changes the group dynamics; introduces competition / rivalry between previous friends for affections of a sought after date; removes from the group those who could have been helpful; isolates people from the group after a break-up.

There are much better ways to find a spouse. There are also better ways to learn about and develop friendships with the opposite sex. Be a different kind of fruit, instead of being a date, try being a f.i.g.

Fig is an acronym for **F**riend **I**n **G**od. A big problem with being a date is that by its very nature there is a romantic pressure, especially in our sensual society. That is as true for young teenagers as it is for collegians and working singles. In dating, people try to impress each other, and in doing so they present a false image of who they really are and what they are really like. If you are simply being a godly friend, then there is no romantic pressure and you can be yourself. A F.I.G. develops relationships based in reality of daily life instead of just those things that are enjoyable. A date is an exclusive relationship in which jealousies can easily arise while a F.I.G. welcomes new people into the circle of friends. A date asks if you will go with him to an activity. A f.i.g. asks if you will join them on an activity. A date is self centered being concerned with whether they are liked or not and where the relationship is heading. A good F.I.G. is concerned about being a godly influence on their friend regardless of what they may personally gain from the relationship. Being a F.I.G. is a great foundation for a future marriage relationship.

Courtship. If a godly friendship develops a more serious interest, then the next step would be courtship. A fundamental assumption in courtship is that godly decisions are made with multiple wise counsel. Proverbs 1:5 says, *“A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel.”* Proverbs 12:15 adds, *“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But a wise man is he who listens to counsel.”* This is the fundamental difference between dating and courtship.

A brief description of the concept of courtship is as follows. Courtship cannot begin until a man has placed himself in a position in which he can reasonably expect to support a wife in the present time or near future. Until he is in that position, he has other priorities to be occupied with. The next step is for him to prayerfully consider whether he should get married. If so, then he needs to carefully and prayerfully consider the single Christian women he knows as to their godliness and compatibility with his personality and goals. If he does not know such a woman, he continues with his other priorities while developing more godly friendships. He might even ask godly friends for suggestions of a woman they think might be compatible with him. I should add here that godly friendships are primarily developed in group settings and in ministry.

What does the woman do during this period of waiting for a man to take notice of her? She develops her character and ministry skills so that she is better prepared for whatever the Lord has for her future. I will add here that a woman can attract men by many methods, but only a godly woman will exhibit a character that will attract a godly man, and if you want a godly marriage, you will need to attract a godly man. A woman that uses sensual methods to attract a man will get a man of low character.

At whatever point he believe he has found a godly woman that seems compatible, he should talk to her about his intentions to develop the relationship. If she has a good relationship with her father, then the man should also seek the permission of the girl's father to court her. This is primarily a protection for her. Dad can turn the boy away without her having to give any excuses. They then will spend time getting to know each other better primarily in the context of their families and friends. This allows both of them to receive very valuable advice from those who know them best about their relationship. This differs from dating in which the time is spent primarily alone as a couple. At whatever point the man and woman believe they are ready for marriage under the counsel of their families and friends, they get engaged and plan their wedding.

Again, the primary difference between dating and courtship is the wise counsel that is available and sought in courtship. The second major difference is that courtship does not begin until the man and woman are in a position of life in which they could get married. Until then, they just work at being good F.I.G.s by developing their own character and godly relationships with others. Courtship avoids the pitfalls and heartaches of dating while better preparing people for a great marriage.

General description - no paring off until a definite & reasonable interest in possible marriage.

Male / female friendships are kept within the larger group of friends. Activities in the group.

Male does not pursue a female until he is in a position to be able to support a wife

Male does not pursue a female until he has already developed a relationship over a long enough period and wide enough range of experiences to have a fairly good idea if she has the character traits and abilities that will enable him to pursue his life goals and therefore is a reasonable choice as a possible life partner.

Male seeks advice of friends **before** giving indication to the woman of his desires / intentions

Male seeks permission of the woman's father **before** entering a courtship relationship (he will talk to her about it first - and she would tell her dad what her desires are and why - but they do not court without parent's permission (there could be exceptions).

Courtship occurs largely in context of friends and family. The courting couple would not be left alone in situations that could facilitate compromise and stumbling into sin.

The decision to marry is made with the advice of family and friends.

Benefits of Courtship instead of Dating

- 1) Until man is in (near) position to support a wife, he should not seek to "pair off" / court
 - A) Helps prevents feeding desires within himself that he cannot properly fulfill (Flee lust)
 - B) Is a greater act of selflessness and love - he keeps from putting the woman in the position of having to wait for him - which would be a source of frustration and may or may not be in her best interest. (Jim & Elizabeth Elliot example)
 - C) Keeps him from distraction while he is preparing himself to take on all the responsibilities of life and having a family
 - D) Since dating focuses the attention on one friend, this by necessity delays "pairing off" and so enables him to have more friendships by which he will better understand *women in general, *his own strengths and weaknesses *what he actually does want to pursue in life * the qualities he would need in a wife in order to reach his goals (a missionary cannot marry someone who will not leave her hometown)

- 2) Prevents pursuit of infatuation and promotes development of true love
- 3) Facilitates a larger group of friends (and deeper friendships) out which a potential spouse will come A FIG - Friend In God - makes a better spouse than a DATE - Deceptive Attraction Too Emotional
- 4) Female is protected from predatory males by family and friends (males protected too).
- 5) Gives a more thoughtful and serious aspect to the relationship since it has a stated goal
- 6) Greater prevention against stumbling into sin due to greater accountability and avoidance of compromising situations.
- 7) Facilitates better advice from family and friends due to greater observation and better interaction with the couple.
- 8) Lays a foundation for a stronger marriage since it facilitates an environment which the fruit of the spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness & self-control - can be developed.

Characteristics of an Excellent Wife - Proverbs 31:10-31

Characteristics of a Godly Husband: Psalm 15

Resources:

https://gracebibleny.org/holy_free_7_dating_courtship_marriage

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Nature of Marriage

Marriage is Good - Genesis 1:31; Ecclesiastes 9:9

Negative Views:

Marriage is a Blessing - Proverbs 18:22; 19:14, 31:1-31

Marriage has Struggles

Marriage is Optional

The Purpose of Marriage

Companionship - Genesis 2; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Procreation - Genesis 1:28;

Physical Intimacy - 1 Corinthians 7:1-2, 9; Proverbs 5:15-19; Song of Solomon

Warnings about Sex outside of Marriage: Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 20:10; Deut. 22:13-27;
Hebrews 13:4; 1 Corinthians 6:18

Glorification of God - Ephesians 5:22-33

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Fig (Friend In God.)

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