

**The Path to Marriage – Courtship vs. Dating**  
*Trinity Baptist Church Discipleship Training*  
(October, 2013)

**Introduction:**

The suggested topic for this Discipleship Training study is “How to Have a Godly Courtship.” In 2010 I preached a two part sermon (available on Sermon Audio) dealing more broadly with the path a young person should follow on the course towards marriage. This study will be a summary of those sermons.

In our generation there is a dangerous tendency for Christians to become infatuated by various narrow concepts like the modern house church movement or the hyper-family movement that develop into fixed cultures that tend to look down upon any who don't hold to their narrow beliefs.

Courtship is one of those areas that have suffered a lot of imbalance. In this study we will cut through some of the hype that has been attached to the idea of courtship and approach it from the much broader perspective of how we guide our children along the path to marriage.

- I. First, we have to look at marriage itself:
  - A. Marriage is a wonderful gift from God
    1. God has ordained marriage for the union of a man and woman that together they might be an instrument to display the glory of God
    2. God has ordained marriage for the procreation of children and the establishment of Godly families.
    3. Marriage is the path for the great majority of human beings, but not all  
Upon the creation of Adam God declared:  
**Genesis 2:18 NAU** - "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."
    4. In the discussion of courtship we must not presume that every person will enter into marriage nor must we presume that every courtship will end in marriage.
  - B. Some have been appointed to the course of singleness
    1. Singleness must be recognized as a gift from God but few are appointed to it.
    2. When I speak of the gift of singleness I'm not talking about those who delay marriage for the promotion of their worldly interests.  
I'm talking about those God has gifted to devote their lives exclusively to serving Him.
    3. There is nothing shameful in singleness. We must resist the tendency of looking down upon those who are single. Sometimes single people can feel alienated from family oriented churches

- C. Singleness can offer greater freedom
1. Greater time to spend in spiritual pursuits
  2. Greater freedom to set your own schedule.
  3. Singleness can offer great and unique opportunities for service to Christ  
Where marriage is good, honorable, and excellent so can singleness be used to the honor of God
- D. God has ordained that most will follow the course of marriage
1. We should receive marriage as a gift  
The goal must be to establish long and fruitful marriages blessed of God and to raise up Godly children unto the next generation
  2. God must be trusted in this pursuit
  3. The rebellious one who insists on doing things their own way will pay the consequences with a miserable life
    - a. To the young lady - it is better to remain single than to marry a young man void of spiritual understanding. You will have to submit to him but he will know nothing of God's demand of sacrificial love and of spiritual leadership.
    - b. To the young man - God says it is far better to remain single than to marry a wicked woman  
**Proverbs 21:19 NAU** - "It is better to live in a desert land Than with a contentious and vexing woman."  
Better to spend your life as a lonely hermit than to marry poorly
- E. Our counsel to young single people:
1. Be thankful for the opportunities of singleness – to focus on Christ
  2. Don't become preoccupied in looking for a mate – rather, look to Christ
  3. This doesn't mean you segregate yourself. It's good to meet new people. And it's not wrong to be introduced to people.  
It also doesn't mean that we should disregard the need for a young person to make themselves look more "attractive."
  4. But you must trust God. If God has purposed you to be married He will send you your mate in due time. Christians sometimes make poor choices instead of waiting upon God.
- F. We must cast out the modern teaching of love and romance
1. Hollywood and romance novels are preaching a lie where love is a momentary infatuation designed to satisfy our selfish and carnal lusts – where our wants and desires are of the greatest importance
  2. Love is merely not a feeling but a lifetime of commitment and sacrificial service where a person gives of himself for the benefit of another to the glory of God
  3. We must also reject the notion of some hyper-courtship proponents that seem to dismiss any idea of affectionate romance.

- II. Because of the importance of marriage we must begin teaching our children early the demands of adulthood
- A. Parents, especially fathers have a high duty to train up their children - Paul wrote what this care looks like
- Ephesians 6:4** – “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”
1. “provoke not your children to wrath”  
Balanced discipline. We provoke them when we are either too harsh or too lenient or inconsistent. We provoke them to wrath when our training is void of the Gospel or imbalanced between the Law and Gospel.
  2. “bring them up” - ἐκτρέφω  
This refers to nourishment – both physical and spiritual
  3. “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”  
This refers to the complete training and discipline of the child
  4. This means that great importance must be place upon raising our children  
They must be taught of God’s demands upon their lives  
They must be taught of the importance of life
  5. You ask, “What does this have to do with marriage?” Everything!! We have to prepare our children to be adults.
- B. Few today place the importance upon the training of children as did previous generations.
1. It is interesting to read about the work ethic of the Puritans.  
For the Puritans the first 5-6 years of a child’s life were relatively carefree but a course of labor followed.  
*Puritan Family* by Edmund S. Morgan – “Probably most children were set to some kind of useful work before they reached seven” (page 66).  
Benjamin Wadsworth said, “Time for lawful recreation now and then is not altogether to be denied them . . . Yet for such to do little or nothing else but play in the streets, especially when almost able to earn their living is a great sin and shame” (ibid. p. 67).
    - a. For girls 6-7 years old training began at once in household duties
    - b. Boys began their apprenticeship at 12-14 years of age. This meant they moved in with their master. If their parents lived nearby visitation was usually allowed on the Lord’s Day. Masters could recover damages from over-fond parents who detained their child from his work.
    - c. No parent saw their chief role as merely spending time with their children that is so prevalent today. Our fascination with sports would have been abominable in previous generations.
  2. Parents must recognize the importance of moving their children towards adulthood
    - a. Children must be given increasing responsibility
    - b. By the time children become 10, 11, 12 years old greater and greater focus must be placed upon the future.

The myth of adolescence is a lie. This is the modern myth that children can enter a period of play and irresponsibility extending well into adulthood.

- c. We must see our teenagers as young adults, not big children.
- d. Marriage and having children today is being delayed more and more because few understand the responsibility of adulthood. In an interview on CNN Albert Mohler expressed his concern on the increasing delay in adults getting married and the increasing degree of chosen childlessness.

“Nothing more than a disturbing commitment to perpetual adolescence. Raising children is part of becoming an adult”

- 3. Don't think your 16 year old child will suddenly see the seriousness of life and suddenly embrace the concept of courtship if you haven't made it a priority in their lives. Don't think you can give them a book to read or a CD to listen to and they will suddenly embrace courtship.

C. Being properly prepared

- 1. A young person unprepared for marriage should not consider courtship
- 2. Many modern young people want to date and interact emotionally with people of the opposite sex when they are totally unprepared for marriage.
- 3. Being prepared for marriage means being prepared to be a Biblical husband or wife.
  - a. Is the young man prepared to lead and care for a wife, provide for a home, be a father, etc.?  
A young man needs to begin considering these things early in his teenage years. He is preparing for marriage and fatherhood.
  - b. Is the young woman prepared to follow a husband, care for a home, enter motherhood? A young woman needs to be considering these things early in her life.

III. So what does a Godly courtship look like?

- A. It is a courtship under the authority of the parents and in the context of Biblical leadership
  - 1. There is a Biblical principle of masculine headship that runs throughout the Bible. The man is the leader of his home. The wife submits to his leadership. He bears ultimate accountability over his children.
  - 2. We often see the authority of the father over his daughter in the Bible.
    - a. See Laban and Rachel and Leah - Gen. 29:15-21
    - b. See Caleb and Achsah - Judges 1:12-13
    - c. We can see this uniquely in **1 Corinthians 7:36** – The NASB renders it well. I don't think the ESV is accurate here.  
**1 Corinthians 7:36-38 NAU** – “But if any man thinks that he is acting unbecomingly toward his virgin *daughter*, if she is past her youth, and if it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let her marry. <sup>37</sup> But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, but has authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart, to

keep his own virgin *daughter*, he will do well. <sup>38</sup> So then both he who gives his own virgin *daughter* in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better.”

**Verse 36** - the word translated "virgin" is παρθένος – a virgin, a marriageable maiden, a woman who has never had sexual intercourse with a man, one's marriageable daughter

3. Children remain under the authority of their parents, but particularly the daughter is under the authority of her father
  4. Calvin – “This passage (i.e. 1 Cor. 7:36-38) helps to strengthen the authority of the father, which must be regarded as unassailable, since it owes its origin to the universal law of nature.”
  5. This has also been the custom in Western culture - a young man asks the father of his bride for her hand in marriage.  
At the ceremony the father gives away the bride
  6. The father also aids his son in selecting a bride
    - a. See Abraham - Gen. 24:1-4
    - b. A beautiful picture of this is found in Christ and the church.  
God has chosen a bride for His Son - she is remaining pure and chaste until the wedding
  7. This principle should be kept in mind when a young man desires to court a young woman
    - a. He should begin by meeting her parents
    - b. He should recognize the headship of the father over his daughter
    - c. If the courtship advances to a proposal for marriage he should ask permission from the young lady's father  
If the courtship ends in marriage the father will give away his daughter to the young man transferring his headship
  8. We must guard against extremes
    1. Courtship is not an “arranged” marriage. The young person has much to say in the selection of their mate
    2. We must not deny friends of the opposite sex - we cannot shut our children up in a closet
    3. We must allow our children to be involved in situations to meet other young people – We must focus upon Christian young people however – not mere church goers or religious young people.
- B. Courtship is a relationship with a purpose
1. If you are not equipped and prepared for marriage you should not consider a courtship.  
Courtship has an eye towards marriage. Even if the courtship doesn't end in marriage it establishes a pattern of commitment.
  2. If either party is uninterested in the pursuing marriage the courtship shouldn't begin—or should end if this becomes the situation.
  3. Lengthy courtships should be the exception. The courtship shouldn't begin if both are not interested in pursuing marriage. Lengthy courtships invite lust.

4. Young people must guard their hearts. It is easy to become infatuated with someone unqualified to become a suitable mate.
5. Look for Biblical qualities in a prospective suitor.
  - love for Christ and a passion for serving Him
  - a man who can lead you as your head. A man who can provide materially, emotionally

**Titus 2:1 NAS** - "Likewise urge the young men to be sensible; <sup>7</sup> in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, *with* purity in doctrine, dignified, <sup>8</sup> sound *in* speech which is beyond reproach, in order that the opponent may be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us."

  - a woman you can give yourself to in love, protection, and provision.
  - a woman who can adequately care for the home.

**Titus 2:1 NAS** - "Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, <sup>4</sup> that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, <sup>5</sup> *to be* sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored."

  - someone you can trust to raise your children

C. Courtship is a carefully guarded relationship

1. Great caution should be exercised when the couple is together.
2. Modern practices of dating usually results in promiscuity. Many children become sexually active as young teenagers.
3. We should help protect our children. This is a time when hormones are at their highest pitch.
  - a. Young ladies need to be mindful of how they dress. They need to understand the effect they are having upon the young men around them. They must be sensitive not to enflame the lusts of the young men.
  - b. Young men need to give regard to what they watch on TV and what kind of movies they attend. Particular caution must be given with regard to exposure to pornography. They need to guard their hearts and eyes around young ladies.
  - c. Recent World Magazine article:  
87% of men are regularly looking at pornography. A young woman should ask questions of perspective mates.
4. Extremes are often pressed here. Some have denied any physical contact, even holding hands. Protecting against lusts and promiscuity does not bar absolute physical contact.

D. Selecting a church – this is an important aspect that cannot be ignored.

1. The ideal is if the couple has grown up in the same church. They are already committed to the same church.
2. But what if they attend two separate churches?
  - a. During the courtship they continue to faithfully serve in the church they are committed to.

- b. This should be encouraged by both sets of parents. It reflects their high view of the church and of commitment to one's local church
- 3. Eventually, however, a decision must be made concerning who will leave their church
- 4. This demands a pattern that follows the process of decision
  - a. Both visit the church of their prospective mate
  - b. They meet with the elders of each other's churches seeking their approval of their mates and their counsel concerning their choice of a mutual church home.
  - c. The value of wise counsel in this process cannot be underestimated. This is one of the purposes of our elders.
  - d. A refusal to heed the counsel of the wise elders led to the ultimate destruction of Israel

**2 Chronicles 10:6-8** – “Then King Rehoboam consulted with the elders who had served his father Solomon while he was still alive, saying, “How do you counsel *me* to answer this people?”<sup>7</sup> They spoke to him, saying, “If you will be kind to this people and please them and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever.”<sup>8</sup> But he forsook the counsel of the elders which they had given him, and consulted with the young men who grew up with him and served him.”

**Proverbs 11:14** – “Where no counsel *is*, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors *there is safety.*”

#### IV. Final considerations

- A. Does courtship also apply to unbelieving children?
  - 1. First, if your child is an unbeliever all of the energy of your family must be directed toward them seeking Christ. Not dating! Not entertainment! Not their so called friendships! Christ! Forget about the fantasies of romance – of self-gratification.
  - 2. Great caution must be exercised with even our lost children courting an unbeliever.
  - 3. Great caution here. It is permissible for our lost children to marry unbelievers. God blesses marriage among both believers and unbelievers. Careful consideration must be given to compatibility.
- B. What about courtship involving young people with unbelieving or uninvolved parents.
  - 1. They should still seek to follow the principles of courtship
  - 2. Much counsel and input should be sought from the pastors and other mature Christians in the congregation
- C. What about the many arguments against courtship?
  - 1. How will your children ever find a mate with such limitations?  
As Christians we must trust God's Providence. If God has determined your child to wed He has chosen their mate.

2. The argument is often set forth in support of church youth groups. Shouldn't we be motivated to place our child in a youth group to meet other young people.  
As Christian parents we need to be careful about who and what our children are exposed to. Many Christian parents think their teenage children have to be a part of a youth group. They believe this is where they will be exposed to the Gospel and this is where they will find a mate. We need to step back and examine our actions.  
First, parents need to bare responsibility for their own children. Your children need to be exposed to the Gospel from you—and you will bear the ultimate accountability.  
Second, you need to make sure your children are sitting under the preaching of *their* pastors. Sometimes teenagers become less and less connected with their own church while attending a youth group at another church.  
Third, while our children should be encouraged to meet other young people, often in the typical “youth group” the young people are just as worldly as those outside the church. This situation should give parents little comfort and great concern.
3. Isn't it important that we allow our children to date several young people before deciding on one to be their mate?  
All this does is establish patterns of broken relationships, of non-commitment
4. Won't your children rebel if you place too many restrictions?  
Children *may* ultimately choose to disregard our instruction. Human beings do not like restrictions and your children will eventually become old enough to make their own decisions. Hopefully they will embrace your godly instruction. Our duty as parents and our obedience to God must never be determined by a fear that our children may not obey.