

Courtship & Marriage article 9

Dear Young People,

By this time, you have probably read Chapters 1 & 2 of *Leaving Father and Mother*. I have been following the general outline of this book and it is time to move on to Chapter 3. Please read it; in a way, it is the most important chapter in the book for you to read at this stage of your life. I will probably be saying some of the same things you find in the book, but they are worth repeating.

The time before marriage, which we call “courtship” or “dating” is, from many different viewpoints a very happy time. At least, it can be, if it is done in the fear of God and for the purposes of finding the spouse that God has intended for us. It is a happy time because dating couples are still young and want to enjoy some of the fun that belongs to youth. But it is also a happy time because the heavy responsibilities of marriage and family have not yet fallen on us. We are only anticipating them, but need not carry them as yet.

And so this time of our life can be a time for fun and much personal enjoyment. I urge young people to make it that way as well. I am not sure what activities are available to young people in Singapore; I sometimes get the impression that there are not all that many activities in which a Christian couple can participate. When my wife and I were dating, we had many activities from which to choose. Basketball games were regular events during the school year of the Christian School we attended. These were games of the basketball team of our Christian high school and were always fun. If I remember correctly, the first date I had with my wife was to a basketball game in which our school played another school.

There were many programs that we could attend: singspirations sponsored by the young people, Bible study meetings held every week, choral society in which to join with our fellow saints in singing spiritual songs, speeches, young people’s outings in which all the young people of the surrounding churches in the area would gather in a park for games and singing. In fact, looking back, it seems to me we were busy every night of the week, although I did not see my girlfriend every night. Monday night was Catechism class; Tuesday night was Young Men’s Bible Study (the young men and the young women met separately, although the young women also met every week); Wednesday night was Choral Society or Radio Choir; Thursday night was Sunday School teacher’s meeting. Friday night was “date night”. And so the church pulled the young people together four nights of the week. This is very much more difficult in Singapore.

You may very well ask: When did you get time to study? We did, for many of us were going to college and had tons of studying for classes; but we managed to find time for all these other activities as well.

This all changed radically when we were married. We were the last wedding in First Protestant Reformed Church before the split in 1953, when we lost possession of the church building. We were married in May and the split took place in First Church in June. Before the split we, as a couple, went around with about ten different dating couples. Although all ten did not always all go to an event to which we went, we hardly ever went alone. But after the split, all the couples with whom we were close friends left the churches, with the exception of one.

I tell you all this, because I do want you to see that our dating years were centered in church activities and we rarely went on dates with just the two of us. I think these things also are important. I know that in Singapore many of these activities that occupied us are not available to

you, but some are. Your Bible Study Groups meet quite frequently. And there is no reason why young couples cannot enjoy the company of other young couples from the church. It is far easier to remain sexually pure when you are dating with another couple or other couples.

Dating and courtship is a time to come to know each other. Those who consider dating a game, or those who date with a view to acquire sexual experiences never get to know each other, for to them, to be together has only one goal: the satisfaction of sexual lusts. But a godly young man and young woman want to know each other as well as possible, for they are going to be living together the rest of their lives.

They want to know the personality and character of the one they are dating. What kind of a person is this girl or this boy? What are his likes and dislikes? Is he outgoing and interested in the welfare of others? Is he/she introspective and inclined to quietness? Is she a fun-loving girl who can also be serious when the occasion requires it? or is she always flippant, always out for nothing but a good time? Is he/she "money-mad"? or is contentment a part of his or her life?

But, above all, spiritual characteristics show themselves when a young couple are dating. What is this young woman's interest in spiritual things? Does she like to go to church? Does she enjoy studying God's Word? Is she one who sets a high priority on the welfare of the church of which she is a part? Does this boy whom I am dating want to have a place in the church where he can devote himself to the service of the church? And therefore, to the service of Christ?

I do not mean that we can come to a full knowledge of those whom we are dating. There is always more to a person than we know, even after several years of acquaintance. My wife still surprises me from time to time with actions that had seemed to me uncharacteristic of her. But this adds to the excitement of a life-long commitment.

If a young couple makes an honest effort to know each other, they will also learn of each other that both are sinners. And it is important to learn that too. Marriage is not between two sinless people; it is between two people who have the potential to be very wicked and do very wicked things. It is really a wonder that so many marriages survive when one learns what husband and wife are up against when they find their spouses to be sinful. We will never find a sinless mate, for there is none in all God's world. What is important then is that a couple learn each other's attitude towards sin. Are they ready to see their sin and confess it? Are they open to instruction and admonition when their sins are pointed out? I am not talking now about a husband admonishing a wife or a wife admonishing a husband – although that is certainly included. A wife may and should tell her husband, "You are spending altogether too much time in front of that TV, and I and the children are being neglected." A husband may have to tell his wife: "You are dressing immodestly and your appearance is not compatible with that of a godly woman. You spend too much time on ornaments, and worry more about what others think of you than of what God thinks of you." But I am thinking of submitting to the admonitions of Scripture brought to us by our preacher. Are we willing to humble ourselves before God's throne in confession of sin?

Yes, between husband and wife there is great need for forbearance, for understanding, for willingness to forgive and forget. That willingness can be seen in a person before marriage. We must always remember that though we have to live with a sinful wife or husband, he or she has to live with us – usually something far more difficult.

Some other important questions to me are these. What is the relation between the one I'm dating and his/her family? Does he/she respect his/her parents, seek the good of his/her

siblings, strive in his/her own way to see that the home is a happy and safe refuge to which to flee from the cruelties of life? It has been said that if a man wants to know what his wife will be like when she is 50 or 60 years old, look at her mother. I do not know whether this is true, and I wonder whether the same can be said of a husband: If you want to know what your husband will be like at 50 or 60 years old, look at his father. I do know that children carry on the personalities, looks, habits, attitudes and moral standards of their parents. This is especially true when we remember the fact that God uses covenant instruction as the means to continue His covenant in the line of generation.

I want to continue this subject of dating a bit longer, but we shall wait with that till the next letter.

With love in Christ our Lord,

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