

SINGLEHOOD PART 2 COURTSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT Lesson 1 Controlling Your Love

One of the jobs of the Gospel minister is to raise the moral standard of each successive generation. These lessons on courtship and engagement are designed to do just that—to raise the moral standard of single Christians. These lessons are not easy to hear and are guaranteed to offend some, but they are based on sound Bible doctrine. It is my aim to purge some of our unbiblical Western culture and replace it with God’s standard and the Kingdom’s culture.

- **The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? Jeremiah 17:9 (NIV)**

Wisdom cautions us to enter into every friendship and potentially romantic relationship with the keen awareness that our heart cannot be trusted, and that it is in fact desperately wicked.

Common Lies About Love

One of the greatest lies propagated in Western culture is that you can’t control whom you fall in love. Second to that is the lie, “You can trust your heart.” This sensual and devilish wisdom has become the rationale behind the Church even accepting homosexual lifestyles—after all, “you can’t help whom you fall in love with.” Consider the following cultural lies and what the Bible has to say about them:

Secular Wisdom/Bible Truth:

- *You can trust your heart.* **Proverbs 28:26** says, “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool.”
- *Follow your heart.* **Proverbs 20:9** says, “Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am free from my sin?” **Proverbs 4:23** says, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” NIV
- *Let your conscience be your guide.* **Titus 1:15** states you can have a defiled conscience, and **Hebrews 10:22** reveals you can have an evil conscience.
- *Love at first sight.* **Mark 7:21-23** says, “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these things come from within, and defile the man.
- *You can’t help whom you fall in love with.* This carnal ideology will be debunked in the next section.

Soul Bait

Men and women are designed differently and therefore function differently in the arena of love, romance, and attraction. The following observations are generalities:

- **Men attracted by their eyes.** They are drawn to that which their eyes find appealing (beauty). The emotions are developed later. Once a man's eyes and emotions are in sync for a woman, his heart will become fixed upon that woman.
- **Women are attracted by their emotions.** They are drawn to attention that makes them feel important and desired. The physical attraction is developed later. Once a woman's emotions and eyes are in sync, her heart will become set upon that man.

When we recognize our heart is set upon someone, we call that "being in love." Unfortunately, many naïve believers find themselves "in love" illegally and outside of the will of God. Never forget—your heart is desperately wicked and incurably sick. You must get permission from God to fall in love—when to fall in love and whom to fall in love with.

Men are warned about this spiritual weakness in Proverbs:

- **Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids.** **Proverbs 6:25**

Men: just because she's pretty doesn't mean you have permission to pursue her.

Women are warned of their weakness in Song of Solomon:

- **Awaken not love before the time.** **Song 2:7b NIV**
- **Not to awaken or excite my feelings of love until it is ready.** **Song 2:7b NCV**

Ladies: guard your heart when men start to call on you. Walk with God and look to Him for His approval of any man interested in you. Do not look to your own heart or emotions.

Love is Controllable

The Bible is very clear: we can and must control who and what we love.

- **And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.** **Deuteronomy 6:5**

The first and greatest commandment demands that we love God with all of our heart. This verse also reveals three things to us: 1) love is of the heart, 2) love is controllable, and 3) God will tell us what to do with that love. This is the preeminent example of God telling us what to do with our heart and with our love. If He commands us to love Him with all of our heart, then we are more than capable of doing so.

- **Moreover, because I have set my affection to the house of my God, I have of mine own proper good, of gold and silver, which I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house,**
1 Chronicles 29:3

David indicated where he had set his affection—upon God’s house, not his own. We can control where we set our affection. The New Testament echoes this sentiment in the form of a command:

- **Set your affection [mind] on things above, not on things on the earth.**
Colossians 3:2

God helps us by telling us where to aim our mind and set our affections—on spiritual things.

- **Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty; open thine eyes, and thou shalt be satisfied with bread.**
Proverbs 20:13

The Book of Proverbs commands us to not love sleep. If you love sleep, change your love.

- **Love not [agapao] the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love [agapao] the world, the love of the Father is not in him.**
1 John 2:15

Notice this the Greek word *agape*. *Agape* is not “the God-kind of love.” It’s just the sacrificial type of love that happens to also describe how God loves. It is possible to *agape* and sacrifice for the world. John commands us to not love the world. Many Christians love the world, but this verse indicates we have a choice. We must take our love off the things of this world.

- **For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved [agapao] this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica;**
2 Timothy 4:10

Demas fell out of love with Jesus and fell in love with the world. He had control over his love. He went from sacrificing for the kingdom to sacrificing for the world.

- **Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection [passions], evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry;**
Colossians 3:5

Paul exhorts every believer to mortify or kill unrestrained passions and evil desires. Just because we love and desire something doesn’t mean we have God’s permission to do so.

- **Husbands, love [agapao] your wives, even as Christ also love the Church, and gave himself for it;**
Ephesians 5:25

Husbands must be commanded to always love their wives. Why? Because they won't always feel like loving their wives. Love is a command and a choice.

- **That they [elder women] may teach [urge, admonish] the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children,**

Titus 2:4

According to this verse, the act and demonstration of proper biblical love must be taught and admonished. It is not perfectly demonstrated at first manifestation. Proper love must be learned and developed.

Your Heart is Up for Grabs

Your heart is a part of your life that is constantly in flux. Your heart can desire things today but despise them tomorrow. It is for this reason the Bible encourages us to “fix” our heart upon proper things (**Ps. 57:7, 108:1, 112:7**). Without being fixed or established, a heart can easily be stolen away from its proper purpose.

- **And it was so, that when any man came nigh unto him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.**

2 Samuel 15:5-6

Israel was deeply devoted and loved King David dearly until his son, Absalom, conspired to make himself available to them. His motives were wicked and underhanded. Through subtlety and disingenuous means Absalom was able to steal the people's love from their king.

SOLOMON'S BETRAYAL

- **King Solomon fell in love with many foreign women (besides Pharaoh's daughter), including Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites. They came from nations about which the LORD had warned the Israelites, “You must not establish friendly relations with them! If you do, they will surely shift your allegiance to their gods.” But Solomon was irresistibly attracted to them [Solomon clave unto these in love].**

1 Kings 11:1,2, NLT

Solomon fell in love with women he was commanded to not even be friends with. It cost him the kingdom. You must guard your heart!!

SINGLEHOOD PART 2 COURTSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT Lesson 2 The Unequal Yoke

BIBLE STANDARDS

To protect the young and totally naïve, lovelorn believer, the Bible is kind enough to establish some very strict protocol revealing whom he or she has absolutely no permission to be even remotely interested in (much less fall in love with). These protocols are given to keep us safe and keep us in the perfect will of God.

The Unequal Yoke

The Mosaic Law contained many agricultural laws and guidelines. These laws weren't just meant for agrarian success. They also contained symbolic insight into the Kingdom of God, often emphasizing consecration and separation. One of those laws was the forbiddance of mismatching beasts of burden when plowing.

- **Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together. Deut. 22:10**

Biblically speaking, there is nothing wrong with either of these animals. This is not an issue of clean vs. unclean. (Remember, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey.) This is a matter of plowing efficiency and ease of burden on the animals due to the differences in their gait, strength, size, and temperament. Plowing is hard enough when the animals are equal. To yoke these two acceptable but vastly different animals together will produce numerous negative results:

- 1) Frustration for the animals
- 2) Frustration for the driver
- 3) Reduction in output/productivity therefore . . .
- 4) Limited harvest
- 5) Definite injury to one or both animals' necks (symbolic of the soul, see **Deut. 31:27, Proverbs 6:21, 29:1**)
- 6) Mental and physical exhaustion for all involved, man and beast

This law from God is designed to produce maximum efficiency, productivity, joy, and ease for everyone involved. This is the law Paul quotes in his famous passage concerning relationships and the unequal yoke:

- **Do not be bound [unequally yoked] together with unbelievers [*apitis*]; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony [*symphe*sis- agreement, concord] has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever [*infidel*]? Or what agreement [to vote together-hence approval] has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I**

WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. “Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE,” says the Lord. “AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; And I will welcome you. “And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,” Says the Lord Almighty. 2 Cor. 6:14-18 NASB

Consider the words used above to describe whom a Christian must not fall in love with. I have underlined characteristics that can be applied to Christians:

- *Unbeliever*: perfidious-deliberately faithless, unfaithful, without the faith
- *Lawless*: someone who lives apart from or mocks the Law of God
- *Darkness*: (metaph.) someone without respect for divine things; the ungodliness and immorality that accompanies the ignorance of divine things
- *Belial*: Hebrew origin: worthless, good for nothing, base fellow, wicked, a name for Satan
- *Idols*: Images of false gods. You don't bring images of false gods into the Temple of God.

Consider the many words used to describe how God views these friendship interactions:

- *Unequally yoked*: to have fellowship with one who is not an equal
- *Partnership*: a sharing, partaker, participation
- *Fellowship*: association, communion, intimacy, partner, sharer, partaker
- *Harmony*: **symphonesis**- make a symphony, agreement, concord
- *What is shared in common*: what portion, share,
- *Agreement*: to vote together- hence to be approving, to deposit together

Obviously many of the above terms can be directly applied to Christians. In its proper context, the **2 Corinthians 6** passage was written by Paul to help expose the true Christians from the fake Christians in that local church. As one commentary noted concerning this passage: “His plea was for a pure congregation divorced from the sins of society, whether in the lives of pagans about them or in the professing believers in their fellowship.” In other words, this passage wasn't just written to warn us about relationships with pagans, but also about relationships with dirty or questionable Christians.

Beyond the obvious unequal yoke of dating, courting, and loving a total pagan non-believer, there are other forms of uneven yoking that can take place even when marrying a Christian. We must look at these if we are to hear the voice of wisdom crying out (**Prov. 8:1-3**). But first, let's look at the first hurdle of picking a spouse:

- **The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.**
1 Corinthians 7:39

This verse establishes the fact that freewill is involved in the selection of a spouse with the first and greatest rule: they must be a Christian! But this can't and shouldn't be the only criteria you consider when preparing for courtship and marriage. The believer/non-believer is the greatest unequal yolk possible, but other unequal yokes can exist as well.

Other Unequal Yokes

Just because someone is a born-again, church-attending Christian doesn't mean they are "marriage material." Natural wisdom knows to look for "red-lights" when it comes to relationships. In his invaluable book, *101 Questions to Ask Before You Get Engaged*, H. Norman Wright challenges the dreamy-eyed Christian with a reality-check and wake-up call, all in an effort to discover the red-lights of an unequal yoke. In fact, countless volumes on relationships, marriage, and courtship have been written by pastors, counselors, and Christian Psychologists—all in an attempt to draw attention to unequal yokes. Simply put, just because two people are going to heaven doesn't mean they are a "match made in heaven."

The Yoke of Faith/Doctrine

- **Can two walk together, except they be agreed? Amos 3:3**

Doctrine is the set of teachings we live by. If two people are not in agreement in their basic doctrine (say, salvation, or the Gifts of the Spirit, or baptism), this can lead to huge problems down the road. If you're from different denominations, where will you attend church after the wedding? And who is going to compromise their core doctrinal values?

The Yoke of Spiritual Hunger

- **Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Matthew 5:6**

Our lives rise and fall based on our hunger level for God. When we're hungry for God, our lives flourish and are blessed. When we're hungry for the world, our lives suffer. Potential mates should be equally yoked in the area of spiritual hunger. If you want to move to Borneo and evangelize the cannibal pygmies, don't settle for a narcissistic Facebook diva. You'll never get to leave the suburbs. Consequently, if you're hungry to help build the local church and host Bible studies, don't marry a sports fanatic. You'll be serving God alone. Hungry marriages are filled. Satiated marriages are empty.

The Yoke of Emotional/Mental Maturity

- **Be transformed by the renewing of your mind . . . Romans 12:2**
- **Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded. Titus 2:6**

Marriage is a union between two best friends who are willing to serve and submit to each other, recognizing the individually critical role of both the husband and the wife. Therefore, you need to marry someone on your emotional and mental level. Don't marry the man you'll always have to mother or coddle. Likewise, don't marry the needy woman you'll always have to father and babysit. Infants and toddlers eventually grow up because they're designed to and they want to. Adult babies never grow up.

The Yoke of Personality

Much of our personality is part of our God-breathed life. Naturally our personalities must be balanced and polished to remove the world's corruption. Unfortunately, some personalities will simply not work together. Marrying someone in hopes of changing them is a fool's errand. I give my judgment and wisdom here: A woman should always marry a man with a stronger personality than hers. For a woman to have a stronger personality than her spouse is to doom the marriage to a lifetime of plowing in circles. The stronger personality will always dominate, for it is designed to. A woman married to a man with a weaker personality will inevitably live a life defined by frustration and possibly heartache. Women, don't marry someone you have to lead. This isn't biblical.

The Yoke of Ministry Calling

This may be one of the most important yokes to consider. If you perceive you have a fulltime ministry calling upon your life you must be even more careful in your selection of a spouse. The demands of ministry are not easy to bear. Your spouse must be capable of sharing part of that burden and even sharing you with God's people. If you are a female minister, marrying a man with a ministry calling is ideal. I have never seen a female minister in a marriage with a non-minister husband succeed for very long. Only God knows what those private conversations (or arguments) sounded like.

Marriage is to last a lifetime. Don't settle for an unequal yoke no matter how pretty, handsome, or sweet the candidate may be. Take time to find God's will. He designed you and He knows who He has in store for you. Amen!

SINGLEHOOD 2
COURTSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT
Lesson 3
Divine Timing, Pursuing, and Accountability

The purpose behind these teachings is to develop and present a safe and honorable pattern for modern Christians to follow as they cautiously journey down the tricky road of love and marriage.

The Final Hurdle of Wisdom

We have previously looked at the necessity of controlling your heart and watching out for potentially uneven yokes, but there is one final hurdle of wisdom that must be considered before a potential courting relationship should move forward: proper timing. (See also our podscool.org curriculum “Staying Current with the Holy Spirit”).

- **Awaken not love before the time.** **Song 2:7b NIV**

- **Not to awaken or excite my feelings of love until it is ready.** **Song 2:7b NCV**

- **Also, that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good; and he that hasteth with his feet sinneth.** **Proverbs 19:2**

- **To every thing there is a season [appointed time], and a time to every purpose [delight] under the heaven.** **Ecclesiastes 3:1**

- **Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants?** **2 Kings 5:26b**

God is not against us receiving any kind of clean and proper gift, but according to the words of the prophet Elisha timing is critical. Gehazi got the timing wrong and it caused leprosy to come upon him. So let us ask the question, “Is it a time to get married?”

*****The right thing at the wrong time is still the wrong thing.*****

Proper timing isn’t based on your neediness, loneliness, sexual lust, or insecurities. Proper timing is different for each believer. There are no scriptures indicating when it is time for a believer to pursue, court, and wed. This is something only the Holy Spirit can pinpoint. However, there are a few natural maturity questions that can be used to help narrow down when that time might be upon you:

- Are you content single? No? When will you get there?

- Are you doing all you can do as a single person for the Lord? Single people can do a lot because they're single. No? When will you begin to be a living sacrifice?
- Are you stable mentally, emotionally, and financially? No? When will this work be complete?
- Are submissive and sacrificial? No? When will this be learned?
- Are you defined by selfishness? Yes? It's not time for you to get married.
- Are you serving God faithfully in the Kingdom/local church? No? When will you start?
- Would you be able to do more for Jesus if you were married?

This isn't a complete list of questions that could be asked, but it is a good start. Please be honest with yourself and don't try to make marriage happen before God's time. The stakes are too great!

Biblical Precedents

Two interesting biblical patterns emerge from the book of Genesis involving three of the first four marriages in the Bible:

1. The season of marriage was perceived by the authority of the single person in each of these events.
2. The man or authority sought out the woman, not vice versa.

Adam and Eve: God determined when Adam was ready to have a wife (**Gen. 2:18-25**). God made Adam, trained Adam, and fellowshiped with Adam. God even gave Adam his first job. Then, after a season of laboring and showing himself faithful to God, God determined Adam was ready for a wife. Eve was brought forth.

Isaac and Rebekah: Abraham could perceive when it was time for Isaac to find a wife (**Gen. 24:1-67**). He sent his servant back to his home country in Mesopotamia to find a wife for him. The Providence of God led him to Rebekah.

Jacob and Leah: Isaac and Rebekah were very displeased and troubled by Jacob's twin, Esau, marrying two Hittite girls (**Gen. 27:46-28:5; 29:1-35**). He married at 40. Because her daughters-in-law wearied Rebekah's life, and knowing that it was time for Jacob to marry, Isaac commanded Jacob to go back to Mesopotamia to find a better quality of woman. He found Leah and Rachel.

The Man Must Pursue

Let me be very clear, it is not biblical for the woman to pursue the man.

- **Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtainteth favour of the LORD.**
Proverbs 18:22

- **An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels.**
Proverbs 31:10 NASB

Both of these verses indicate that it is the man's job to go looking for that woman. Ladies, if the man you have an eye for lacks the gumption or drive to pursue you that may be a red flag.

- **Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man.**
1 Corinthians 11:9

Furthermore, the woman was created for the man; therefore, you must go and find the woman that God created to help you fulfill your calling in Christ. She is designed to be the helpmeet you need to plow straight fields in the garden of God.

At some point, the pursuit must begin and intentions must be declared. Let us assume you have controlled your love, searched out any and all red flags and warning lights, and having discerned there are no unequal yokes in this potential future covenant, we will finally move on to the pursuit of the woman, or, if you're the woman, waiting to be won.

Accountability and Oversight

Keeping in mind that marriage, and more specifically who you marry, is the second biggest decision of your life, it is only wisdom to surround yourself with accountability partners and submit to spiritual oversight through this season and process.

- **Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.**
Proverbs 11:14
- **Plans succeed through good counsel; don't go to war without wise advice.**
Proverbs 20:18 NLT
- **For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety.**
Proverbs 24:6
- **So don't go to war without wise guidance; victory depends on having many advisers.**
Proverbs 24:6 NLT

Wise counsel will help you see any other possible red lights or warning signs you may have missed. Be willing to be honest about what could be a "deal breaker." When dealing with the affairs of the heart and love, you *must* surround yourself with someone you can trust more than yourself—someone who loves you and will help you judge the blossoming relationship.

- **Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit.**

Hebrews 13:17 NLT

Wise counsel can come from parents, disciplers, mentors, elders, and even friends. The key is to be open to hearing what others can see. Spiritual leadership should be part of wise counsel, but it is also in addition to it. Spiritual leaders (pastors, elders, ministers) have a supernatural gift from God to watch over the souls of their congregation much like a shepherd can see over the sheep of his flock. These individuals don't have to live with the person you're hoping to marry. Their only concern is what's best for you. To discredit their genuine concerns is to pursue pain and potential heartache.

****Never isolate yourself when you're in love. Bad things will happen.****

Procedural Review

The purpose behind this entire teaching is to develop and present a safe and honorable pattern for modern Christians to follow as they cautiously journey down the tricky road of love and marriage. Here is a loose outline of how a God-honoring courtship might evolve:

1. After prayer, discipleship, and fruitful growth, a Christian single person honestly evaluates their life and determines they are mature enough to begin entertaining the idea of marriage. It is also determined that the season is in God's timing.
2. For the man, earnest prayer begins for the woman God has for him. This is usually coupled with sudden, keen awareness of available godly women.
3. Eventually the man is drawn to an available godly woman and acts on that attraction by beginning a friendship or becoming closer friends. This is the stage where accountability and oversight needs to begin. It is also where red flags must be further searched out.
4. As the two qualified single Christians begin to reciprocate interest in each other, courtship begins. This is a season where intentions are declared, not just to each other, but also to their families, their church, their friends, etc. Courtship is more than dating, but it's not engagement. Courtship declares "we like each other, we're attracted to each other, and we want to see if marriage is the will of God for our lives." The heart behind courtship is to honorably declare exclusivity in a dating relationship that is seeking the will of God concerning marriage.
5. After courtship, the next stage is engagement. This will be covered in our next lesson.

Find the proper timing, find some accountability, and get to pursuing! Godspeed!

SINGLEHOOD 2 COURTSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT Lesson 4 Getting Engaged

Once again, the purpose behind this entire teaching is to develop and present a safe and honorable pattern for modern Christians to follow as they cautiously journey down the tricky road of love and marriage.

The Ingredient of Honor

It must be mentioned that at any point along the path to marriage, up until you say “I do,” you can still walk away if you determine the relationship to be outside the perfect will of God. The Bible does not specifically give the name of one’s future spouse, so we must patiently walk out this part of our life with as much fear, trembling, and prayer as possible. Every step of your friendship, courtship, and engagement must be defined by honor.

- Honor for God. Put God first in your relationship. Do not abandon the House of God, your spiritual responsibilities, or your walk with God now that you have a significant other. If courting causes you to wane in your spiritual zeal and Christian-walk, you are not ready for the burden of an intimate relationship.
- Honor your families. (**Eph. 6:2**) When dating/courting, you don’t just need to win the heart of your partner, you must also win the heart of their family. You are going to separate a mother and father from their grown child. This is not easy for parents. These parents have sacrificed and suffered to raise your significant other to be the person you’ve fallen in love with. You owe the parents a tremendous amount of honor and gratitude. Make sure they don’t feel like you are stealing their child from them. Mom and dad want to be convinced that you will do an even better job than they when it comes to providing, protecting, and caring for their son or daughter.
- Honor for brother or sister in Christ. Remember, until you are married, you are only brother and sister in Christ. You have no authority over each other or your bodies. It is the leading about of a sister in marriage that makes her a wife (**1 Cor. 9:5**). Keep your hands to yourself:
 - **Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity. 1 Timothy 5:1b-2 NIV**

Courtship and engagement is a time to further get to know your partner’s heart and mind—not their body. When purity is the testimony of your relationship, should you ever need to call it off, there will be no shame or embarrassment. You will be able to part ways as friends and brethren in Christ. You will part ways honorably.

Engagement

Engagement is the term Westerners use to describe the act of betrothal or espousal. This is a very established biblical rite.

- **Betrothal:** to arrange for the marriage of: affiance (to pledge by promise of marriage), to promise to marry
- **Espouse:** to make one's own, to marry, to give in marriage
- **Engage:** to bind, as by pledge, promise, contract, or oath, to betroth

- **Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. **Matthew 1:18****

Mary was engaged to Joseph, but not married yet. They were legally bound to each other through betrothal, but not officially married, nor had they consummated the marriage. That is why her pregnancy had to be explained to Joseph by an angel.

- Espouse (*mnestesuo*): *to seek in marriage with the idea of a successful courtship leading to engagement; to woo her and ask her hand in marriage; to give a souvenir (engagement gift)*

Under Jewish law and tradition, betrothal (engagement) was considered preparation for marriage, but it was legally binding. The man and his wife (fiancé) lived apart until the day of their wedding. The time apart was spent preparing to receive his wife into his home. Compare that to today when the engagement period is spent only planning a wedding.

Engagement, Accountability, and Honor

For the man: When the time finally comes for proposing and asking her hand in marriage, as general rule of thumb, the only person who should be somewhat surprised is your fiancé. If you're accountable and submitted, those over you in the Lord will already know. If you're honorable to her family, you will have received their blessing and they will know. And if you have been open and communicative with her, she knows it's coming—just not when. This should be a time for everyone to rejoice! Anyone outside "the loop" should be able to say, "Yeah, I saw that coming. Praise God!"

The Dowry, Bride Price, and Engagement Rings

Every culture around the world has some form of dowry, bride price, or engagement gift meant to signify the value of the woman whose hand is being sought in marriage. In the west, the engagement ring has slowly taken its place as a sort of dowry or bride price.

- **Dowry:** a gift given to the groom by the bride upon their marriage
- **Dower:** property settled upon for the bride upon marriage that bride may be cared for in case of widowhood, typically given by the groom or his family

- **Bride Price:** the price paid by the groom to the bride's family for her hand in marriage. In some cultures, the bride price can take the man months and even years to acquire—but if he wants her, he'll be willing to pay the price. Compare that to today's meet-and-marry culture.

Bride Prices (often mislabeled as “dowry”) accomplish many things:

1. They demonstrate the value of the bride.
2. When paid, they reveal the groom's desire, love, and determination to wed the bride.
3. They test the groom's patience because he must work to save up the bride price. This allows for a season of maturing for both parties.
4. They demonstrate to the bride's family that the groom has the ability and drive to work and provide for their daughter.

Bride Prices of the Bible

Bride prices are biblical and help provide and interesting insight into courtship and engagement.

Rachel's Bride Price

- **And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter. [...] And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.**

Genesis 29:18, 20

Jacob negotiated Rachel's bride price—seven years labor. As of 2017, the average American's personal income was about \$27,000.00. Rachel's bride price would be \$189,000.00 in today's money. The seven years also demonstrated Jacob's patience and commitment to Rachel. Laban tricked Jacob, gave him Leah instead, then doubled Rachel's bride price—seven more year, or another \$189,000.00 (totaling \$378,000.00).

Michal's Bride Price

- **And David sent messengers to Ishbosheth Saul's son, saying, Deliver me my wife Michal (your sister), which I espoused to me for an hundred foreskins of the Philistines.**

2 Samuel 3:14

David's first wife, Saul's daughter Michal, cost him 100 Philistine foreskins (or we should say it cost 100 Philistines their foreskins). This price was a set-up meant to kill David. So perhaps it could be said, Michal was worth the value of David's life (**1 Samuel 18:25**). That's an expensive bride price.

The Virgin's Bride Price

The Law implies that there was a bride price or dowry that was allotted to virgins (**Exodus 22:16-17 NIV**), though the actual amount is not stated. Marrying a virgin was ideal, and her dowry was therefore worth more. If you had sex with your fiancé before you married

her, you still had to pay her virginal dowry. If the father discovered you had taken her virginity, he had the right to forbid the marriage, but you still had to pay him the bride price for his daughter's virginity. These numerous dowry and betrothal laws indicate how precious and valuable women are. Today, women fail to see their value and too often end up sleeping with anybody and everybody.

The Holy Spirit as a Type of Engagement Gift

The New Testament refers to the Holy Spirit as our "down payment," "guarantee," or "first installment" on our espousal to Him. Though not specifically a dowry, the imagery is the same.

- **For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.**
2 Corinthians 11:2
- Earnest (*arrabon*): *money which in purchases are given as a pledge or down payment that the full amount will subsequently be paid; a pledge, security*
- **(He has) given us the earnest [down payment] of the Spirit in our hearts.**
2 Corinthians 1:22b
- **...who also hath given unto us the earnest [first installment] of the Spirit.**
2 Corinthians 5:5b
- **...ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance [a guarantee of our purchase] until the redemption**
Ephesians 1:13b-14a

The Holy Spirit is the gift the Lord Jesus gave the Church when He promised, "I go to prepare a place, that where I am, there you may be also. I go, but I come again," (**John 14:2, 3**). It's the Lord's way of saying, "You are mine, and I am coming for you again."

Engagement Rings

Western culture has moved away from dowries and bride prices and has fully embraced the engagement ring. Different western cultures do rings differently. In some cultures, both the man and woman get a ring upon engagement. In other cultures, wedding bands are worn on the right hand or even on the middle finger. Regardless, the heart and the purpose of an engagement ring can be traced back to the Bible and should therefore be understood and at the very least acknowledged, if not heeded.

An engagement ring is how the western man's heart declares many things:

1. Love, devotion, and commitment. In our culture, the engagement ring signifies the biblical concept of betrothal. The ring is a token of fidelity to the woman he loves,

claiming her as his responsibility while he makes preparation to receive her and join their lives together.

2. Supreme exclusivity. The Western man uses the engagement ring as a token of exclusivity. The ring indicates she is “taken” at the highest order, second only to marriage. To violate the engagement is a horrific offence. Western women understand this “betrothal” and display their engagement rings with pride and honor, even using the ring to rebuff other men’s advances.
3. Worth. A Western engagement ring has replaced the practice of dowries and bride prices. But truth be told, engagement rings are much cheaper than the dowries of other cultures. It is no coincidence that only precious gemstones are used in the traditional engagement ring. What you spend on the engagement ring is up to you, but knowing the purpose, tradition, and heart behind an engagement ring will greatly affect what you decide to spend.

Courtship and engagement should be a season of honor and maturation. Don’t lustfully or impatiently “whiz-bang” through this season of your life. It’s the launchpad for your marriage. A miscalculation in this stage could set you up for years of hurt or possibly divorce. Don’t settle. Take your time and prove all things. God wants the absolute best for you. Amen!

SINGLEHOOD 2 COURTSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT Lesson 5 Words of Wisdom

Once again, the purpose behind this entire teaching is to develop and present a safe and honorable pattern for modern Christians to follow as they cautiously journey down the tricky road of love and marriage.

Wisdom, Patience, and Honor

I give my judgment concerning the three most necessary ingredients to a successful courtship and engagement: wisdom, patience, and honor. If the single believer will constantly judge their blossoming relationship by these three biblical criteria, God will be glorified and hurt will be avoided.

Wisdom

Love makes people dumb. Oh so dumb. Therefore, biblical wisdom must be your guardrails down the twisty, windy, emotional road of falling in love.

- **Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.** **Proverbs 4:7**

When you begin to court or fall in love, treat it like falling out of an airplane. You need wisdom like you need a parachute.

- **Wisdom shouts in the street, She lifts her voice in the square; At the head of the noisy streets she cries out; At the entrance of the gates in the city she utters her sayings: "How long, O naïve ones, will you love being simple-minded? And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing And fools hate knowledge?"** **Proverbs 1:20-22 NASB**
- **Does not wisdom call [cry out], And understanding lift up her voice? On top of the heights beside the way, Where the paths meet, she takes her stand; Beside the gates, at the opening to the city, At the entrance of the doors, she cries out: "To you, O men, I call, And my voice is to the sons of men."** **Proverbs 8:1-4 NASB**

Wisdom sits at all the crossroads of life, "where the paths meet," to give people the help they need to make the right decisions. Wisdom is loud and obvious, not silent and subtle. Wisdom will be there every step of your developing relationship to help you make the right decisions.

Wise Questions To Ask and Personal Thoughts

1. Am I mature enough (mentally, emotionally, spiritually) and responsible enough (financially, spiritually) to take on the burden of a romantic relationship?
2. Is the one I'm interested in equally mature and responsible?
3. If we date/court/pursue each other, will we be a boost to each other or a burden to each other?
4. Are we strong enough to swim together, or are we two nearly drowning souls clinging to each other desperately not wanting to drown?
5. Does my significant other try to pull me away from my established relationships and responsibilities, or do they encourage me to honor them?
6. Don't isolate yourself during your courtship and engagement.

Patience

Patience proves all things. Patience is so vital to life, it's actually a fruit of the Spirit. The closer humanity draws to the end of time, the more impatient mankind becomes. Yet, the Bible still demands patience. Courtship and engagement must be walked out with patience.

- **In your patience possess ye your souls.** **Luke 21:19**

The impatient soul (mind, will, emotions) can devise some pretty foolish actions to get what it wants. Rein in your soul through patience. Don't let desires and dreams possess you.

- **For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.** **Hebrews 10:36**

Doing the will of God doesn't mean you will instantly have the promise. Likewise, just because you meet the "will of God" doesn't mean you need to get married in a month. Be patient.

- **Desire without knowledge is not good—how much more will hasty feet miss the way!** **Proverbs 19:2 NIV**

Desires must be balanced and proven with sound biblical knowledge. Don't get in a hurry to chase your desires. You'll miss the will of God.

- **Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.** **Isaiah 28:16**

Faith does not get in a hurry. Courtship and engagement are acts of faith—faith that your relationship is the perfect will of God. If your relationship is the will of God, it will still be the will of God five years later.

- **And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance [self-control]; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.**
2 Peter 1:5-7

Notice that self-control, patience, and godliness are lumped together and godliness is built upon self-control and patience. Don't let your desire and drive to get married undermine your godliness.

Wise Questions to Ask and Personal Thoughts

1. What's the big hurry? Sex? Loneliness? Insecurity? Money?
2. Are you impatient with money? Debt? Do you have a "see-it-buy-it" mindset? This needs to be resolved. Financial stress is one of the biggest causes of divorce.
3. For the man: Are you patient and diligent enough to save up and buy her a decent engagement ring (our modern bride price)?
4. For the woman: Can you wait for him to prepare a place for the two of you to live? Can he provide for you, or will you be providing for him?
5. Are you in a hurry to move to this next phase of life, or are you content and patient to finalize and maximize your singlehood? How you leave one place is how you'll start at another.
6. The right thing at the wrong time can produce a lot of pain. Be patient.

Honor

Honor can be summarized as demonstrating that something or someone is valuable to you. To some degree, being honorable means you put other people's wants and needs before your own. The value of being honorable in your courtship and engagement cannot be overemphasized. You must aspire to be as honorable as possible.

- **[. . .] for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.**
1 Samuel 2:30b

God made marriage. He made you and the one you love. Your future will fail and you will suffer unnecessary pain if you forget to honor your Creator in this process.

- **Jesus answered, If I honour myself, my honour is nothing: it is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God: John 8:54**

Your decision-making during courtship and engagement cannot be self-honoring. It must be God-honoring, mate-honoring, and family-honoring. Self-honor is also called selfishness.

- **Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up.**
Romans 15:2 NIV
- **No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.**
1 Corinthians 10:24 NIV

Honor is demonstrated by the preferential treatment of others. An honorable person is concerned about what's best for their loved one. They are concerned about their reputation, the appearance of evil, their spiritual health, and their divine destiny.

- For the man: Your intention must be to lead her in paths of righteousness all of your lives.
- For the woman: Your desire must be to make his life easier so that he can be known in the city gates (**Prov. 31:23**).

Part of loving each other is desiring the absolute best for the other, no matter what they may look like. Biblical love is not self-seeking.

**Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;)
Ephesians 6:2**

The fifth of the Ten Commandments is about honor. The Fifth Commandment does not command obedience, but rather honor. Honor is not always obedience; and one can obey without being honorable. All parents involved in the impending union must be honored, and their concerns, wishes, or input must at least be heard. This does not necessarily mean that all of their wishes or wants must be obeyed, but they must be honored. In the most extreme situations, it may be all that you can do to honor your parents is to pray for them. Please keep in mind you are not just getting a spouse, but you are also getting in-laws.

Wise Questions to Ask and Personal Thoughts

1. Are you aspiring to be honorable in this season of your life? Withdrawing from the family and the Body of Christ is not honorable.
2. Late night visits can produce an appearance of evil. Don't destroy your good reputations. This is dishonorable.
3. Do the future in-laws feel included? Remember, you are marrying the son or daughter they raised and financed for at least 18 years. Don't reject them or overlook them unless they are absolutely unreasonable pagans. (Some people can never be pleased.)
4. The in-laws shouldn't feel like you're stealing their child from them.
5. Has your courtship/engagement pulled you away from God, your church, your friends, and/or your parents? This is not a good sign. This is very dishonorable. A healthy marriage will succeed with the inclusion of God, your church, your friends, and your family.

You will never go wrong walking in wisdom, patience, and honor. These three ingredients will cause any area of your life to flourish. Godspeed!