



READY? GET SET? STOP!

Practical Guidelines for Christian Courtship

Introduction

If you seem to have an interest to know someone of the opposite gender, I have an announcement to make - you are perfectly normal! Do not be surprised or ashamed, but caution is required here as well. Courtship may be defined as a mutual commitment made between a man and a woman to meet regularly for the purpose of knowing each other better and seeking God's will with the aim of marriage one day if it is His divine will. We should include here that there should be a clear understanding that if the courtship does not work out, both persons are to be mature enough to part as friends without resentment and with all due respect for each other's feelings. Let us discuss some practical concerns for a healthy date.

When am I ready for Christian courtship?

It is hard to put an age limit on when to begin Christian courtship. It is useful to follow the following criteria:

- One who is mentally, spiritually and emotionally mature
- who recognize their gift for marriage (I Cor 7:7) or do not have the gift of celibacy,
- who is praying and seeking God's will for marriage
- and is ready about commitment in a serious relationship .

Teenagers in school will be too young to start dating and courtship. In Singapore, the average age for marriage is between 27-30 years old. Hence, someone in his/her mid-teens who start dating will have to expect a long courtship of a decade or more, which may not be healthy. Be patient and wait for the seasons for life to naturally develop as God intends them to be. (Psa 27:14)

Dangers of Worldly Practices of Dating/Courtship

The worldly practices of dating often have the following elements:

- Leads to physical intimacy but not necessarily to marital commitment.
- Often mistakes a physical relationship for love.
- Often isolates a couple from other vital relationships with others.
- In many cases, distracts young adults from their primary responsibility of preparing for the Lord's use in the future.
- Develops a self-centered, feeling-oriented concept of love.
- Teaches people to break off relationships easily, conditioning them more for divorce than marriage.
- Develops an appetite for variety and change in relationships, creating dissatisfaction within marriage.
- Promotes lust and immoral habits, opening the door for sin.
- Creates a false standard of comparison by which mates may be chosen and then rejected later after marriage.
- Lacks the protections and guidance afforded by godly principles from the biblical concept of courtship.
- Devalues the biblical concepts of sex and marriage.
- Embarks too quickly on a romantic path before one is ready to commit to marriage

A vital principle in the Bible is that physical intimacy is a privilege of covenant of love sanctioned by God in marriage. (Heb13:3,4) If you are not in a covenant, then you do not get the privilege of intimacy. The problem is, we are so used to having all the privileges without the responsibilities in this world . Covenant marriage as the Bible defines it, brings many responsibilities with it - a life-long commitment of a marital bond committed to God in the first place .

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Can courting couples kiss, hug or hold hands?

Boundaries for restraint are important and necessary as the commitment in the relationship is not certain yet. Stay out of heavy petting and let things develop progressively with time (e.g. holding hands is fine). Ask yourself objectively, "How long have you been dating and how long will it have to continue?" Stay out of things designed by God only for a husband and his wife! The only way to be sure is to sign the marriage certificate and say "I do!" Until then, wait upon the Lord patiently. If you have given yourself totally to one who is not your spouse, you have a lifetime to regret and you surely do not want that hanging over your mind for the rest of your life.

Here are some practical rules to consider that may be helpful:

- Make a commitment to each other *before* the emotions start rolling. Keep to it. Treat this lady/gentleman the same way you expect someone to treat your spouse!
- If you are in a room alone together, keep the door open!
- Always be in a place where you can be easily interrupted and seen.
- Never be alone in a room behind closed doors or quiet dark obscure corner or park at night with someone of the opposite sex.
- Avoid romantic encounters until you are ready to commit to marriage. Only engage the romance *after* your commitment. You will have the pleasure of learning romance with the one person you love in the Lord whom you will be blessed by it for the rest of your life with him or her!
- Do not accentuate on the physical but build up each other intellectually and spiritually in the Lord.

A Good and Edifying Relationship

A good and edifying relationship is one where you love that person enough to be honest; honest about who you are, honest about what you plan to do and be, and honest about how you feel about him/her and what he/she does and says. Love includes the important ingredient in relationships, which is open and honest communication that is so vital to a healthy marital relationship one day. Literally, say it with love and mean it and edify each other.

It is important that one develops in this area of honest and godly communication (Eph 4:29). We tend to be shallow in our relationships i.e. comfortable talking about hobbies and the weather, but rarely talking about our struggles, dreams, feelings, spiritual and moral values and beliefs, vulnerabilities and insecurities. This is unhelpful. Remember to deepen relationships by purposeful and edifying interactions.

If one is preparing for marriage and not able to communicate with your partner with transparency and vulnerability, then you need to be careful! Communication is a crucial foundation to every marriage. Open and God honouring communication (Jas 1:19) is necessary in order to understand what is truly motivating each other when you have differing points of view (Col 4:2).

There are two key relationships you should establish with the one you are seriously dating with a view to marry; that of a spiritual mentor and an accountability partner to each other. A mentor is someone who guides, leads and shares with you along life's way with Christian principles. He should be someone you respect and who holds similar views and religious convictions as you in vital areas of your life. An accountability partner is a trustworthy friend you are responsible to and will be answerable to all the time. The closer you get to Christ, the closer you get to each other. Consider this prayerfully. Have a godly companion who will one day influence your children when you are married. (Mal 2:14, Psa 17:1)

These relationships will not only help to prepare you for marriage one day but they will also serve you to keep your marriage well established and growing healthily. God is a witness of your marriage and relationship with your spouse-to-be (Mal 2:14).

In the context of courtship, there are two things that we should note; the heart condition and a clear conscience (Acts 24:16). Keeping his/her best interests at heart would affect areas such as saving your emotional purity for him/her, developing your character and preparing resources for a stable marriage. Having a good and clear conscience before God and man is important for your future as husband and wife.

Unless you are already married, you should treat every friend as though they will be someone else's spouse one day. Treat that person as a brother or sister-in-Christ, not defrauding their emotions or their purity but investing in them without motive for selfish gain. Do wait upon the Lord for His blessings and it will be worth it all (Isa 40:31).

How should we conduct ourselves in Christian courtship?

Consider the following practical tips.

A. Things to DO

1. Be willing and teachable; seek parental guidance and advice from your church leaders (i.e. pastors, elders and deacons). Freely interact with godly married couples and observe their Christian marriage lifestyle and family life.

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2. Ask good questions about each other's convictions, values, aspirations and other pertinent matters to prepare yourselves for marriage.
3. Learn more of each other in areas of communication, spiritual convictions, working life, church ministry and family background.
4. Pray often together for loved ones and the church. Consider going on organized mission trips to grow and serve together in the Lord's work.
5. Have regular Bible study together. Share what you have learnt from the Lord in your personal devotions, reading of Christian books or Sunday sermons.
6. Learn to understand each other's personal likes, differences and preferences. Be clear about the character and interests of him/her.
7. Serve God together in church (e.g. choir, fellowship groups, home-based Bible study groups, Vacation Bible School, etc.) in preparation to serve God as a married couple one day. Learn to complement each other as a ministry team.
8. Equip yourselves with adequate understanding of Christian courtship & marriage through reading the Bible and other wholesome Christian literature.
9. Be willing to relate and fellowship with others in group setting; bearing in mind that you are to set a positive example as a Christian courting couple.
10. Exercise self-control (Gal 5:22, 23) in your passion towards each other; be determined to keep yourselves pure for marriage (Heb 13:4).
11. Meet the siblings and parents of the other side in due time and have a strong and vibrant relationship with them as well.
12. Read these verse together and pray together always:
 - A. I Cor 6:19&20 (your bodies is the temple of God)
 - B. Rom 12:1 &2 (be transformed by your renewed mind, an example to others)
 - C. Jer 17:7&10 (you will reap what you sow)

B. Things not to do

1. Be not exclusive in relating only with each other all the time (Heb 10:24-26, Eph 5:3, Gal 5:16, 19-21) and neglect others.
2. Do not plan to isolate yourselves (during your date) in dark or solitary places where you can be easily tempted and fall into sin.
3. Do not give in to your passions and be involved in unhealthy activities like heavy petting and pre-marital sex (Gal 5:6, 19-21).
4. Do not deceive yourselves that it is alright to do this or that since "we love each other and are already committed to be married anyway." (I Cor 7:9, Prov 6:27-28)
5. Avoid unedifying movies, videos, worldly magazines or unwholesome jokes or books that will stumble each other (2Tim 2:22).
6. Dress modestly for the date (1 Pet 3:3, 4). Do not wear plunging necklines, mini- skirts and tempting/sensuous attires that will not be edifying but rather hinder healthy relationships.
7. As for overseas holidays, go in a group and not just the two of you only. Do not be a bad testimony to each other and others or even cause the other to fall into sin. (1 Cor 8:9)
8. When visiting each other's home, ensure someone is at home. Keep your rooms open so that you will not be in absolute privacy.
9. Be not involved in the worldly environment of revelry and pleasure such as movies, pubs, alcohol consumption and dancing.
10. Prepare and plan to have a reasonable courtship of at least 2-3 years (it is difficult to know someone well in a short time e.g. 6 months). Do not be influenced by the worldly system of infidelity and a one-night-stand syndrome. (I Tim 6:6-10, 2 Tim 2:22, Gal 5:19-21,) That which grows slowly, endures.

Love and Commitment

Some people wonder about a relationship where there is 'no physical involvement before marriage' and the possibility if a couple could get married and then to find out they have no sexual or romantic feelings for each other. The advice is one should not be physically involved until after the *commitment* to marriage. This

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is the only way of ensuring that you only romance *one* partner in your lifetime. If you allow the physical romance to dominate before the commitment and if it does not work out, then there is the possibility of several romances, with all the pain and emotional baggage that it entails.

There can be exciting and edifying activities in a God-honouring relationship before the marriage/wedding ceremony! There is a time for everything. Be actively involved together in ministries of corporate prayer, Bible study, church/youth camps, fellowship groups, choir and weekly Sabbath worship.

Romance is a subjective feeling. Be warned that when rough times come in the relationship (and it will), romantic feelings will not be the only thing that will keep you together. Instead, it will be your commitment to God and to each other that will overcome the vicissitudes of life. "Love and be committed to the one you marry" (Eph 5:28, 33) and "marry the one you love and commit." Both equally are important.

One of the first things people are affected by in a relationship is external attraction for each other. This is important only to some extent and should not be the sole primary consideration. The growing feelings of

romance and love should not depend on the external countenance only as the basis of marriage (although you should like the looks of each other.) The other aspects of spiritual, intellectual and social developments need to be considered as well. Above all, relationships and marriage must have the approval of God first before it can be blessed by Him. As Christians, we should desire this divine approval from heaven that we may "glorify God and enjoy Him forever." The Lord desires His best for us. (Eph 5:15, 16). Remember that though marriage is made in heaven, courtship and maintenance is done on earth.

Conclusion

Looking back, on a personal note, we praise and thank God for almost 7 years of meaningful courtship and 15 years of fulfilling marriage. Together, we have learnt from the Lord and each other to be a God honouring helpmeet, an encouraging confidante and serving in unison in the ministry for the Lord in Maranatha BPC and beyond. It has certainly been worth it all waiting upon the Lord. You can experience it too in your lives when you honour and put God first in your courtship and marriage. Nothing is impossible with God.

Jack and Angelina Sin
Maranatha BPC

B i b l e T r i v i a

Who Said this?

1. I have need to be baptised of thee, and comest thou to me?
2. I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.
3. We are all one man's sons; we are true men; thy servants are no spies.
4. Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him; I will therefore chastise him and let him go.
5. Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived.

6. I go the way of the earth; let be thou strong therefore and show thyself a man.
7. Speak for thy servant heareth.
8. Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? Hath he not spoken also by us?
9. I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me.
10. Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king.

Answers:

1. John the Baptist (Matt 3:14); 2. Jacob (Gen 32:26); 3. Joseph's brothers (Gen 42:11); 4. Pilate (Luke 23:22); 5. Job (Job 3:3); 6. David (1 Kings 2:2); 7. Samuel (1 Sam 3:10); 8. Miriam and Aaron (Num 12:2); 9. Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:5); 10. Ahasuerus's servants (Esther 2:2)

Announcement

The Primary Department will be having its Promotional Sunday on Lord's Day 27 February.

The Editorial team wishes all our Chinese readers a very Blessed Lunar New Year.

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