

**SINGLE-
MINDED
FOR GOD**

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Wisdom on how to be a godly single
in an ungodly world

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Preface

Christ—the Ultimate Single

Good News, September 1980

WE SINGLE FOLK IN THE CHURCH HAVE SOMETHING THAT singles in the world do not have. We have the hope of God's Kingdom. Once a person has this, his perspective changes. It becomes his goal (Matthew 6:33). Everything else is a backdrop to that calling. One should not be preoccupied with one's state in life, but preoccupied in helping to do the Work. Backing up Christ's apostle should be the primary thing.

The champion of singles is Jesus Christ. True, He was married in one sense to Israel. But He has not married in the usual sense of the word. He has not lived in wedlock with a woman. As a human He had to fly solo. Our Messiah learned what being single was about.

Christ experienced everything a single person experiences. So we do not have a High Priest who cannot be touched with our infirmities; He was in all points tempted as we are (Hebrews 4:15). He understands our situation and has compassion on us. That's why He's our Champion.

His cousin John the Baptist was also single. Was John a failure in life? Was he in some way a lesser human being because he never married? Of him Christ said, "Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist" (Matthew 11:11). John was a successful single.

In New Testament times, who was the apostle who labored more fervently than any of the others? It was Paul (1 Corinthians 15:10). Paul may have been married at one time, because there are indications that before conversion he was a member of the Sanhedrin, and you had to be married to be a part of that group. But he was not married during his time as an apostle (1 Corinthians 7:7-8). Did his wife die? Did she leave him?

Anyway, Paul was another successful single.

Thus three of the top men in the New Testament were single. This is not to imply that marriage isn't good. Of course it is. Marriage to the right person at the right time is a wonderful gift from God.

But being single is also a gift from God (1 Corinthians 7:7). Singledom may be a gift you don't want, but God's gifts are good gifts (Matthew 7:11). We should relax and let God give His gifts as He sees fit. He knows us well enough to be able to determine what is best for us.

Christ led a life free from sin. He was our perfect example. He did not marry in the normal sense of the word. Obviously then, it is not wrong not to marry. I realize that there are reasons why Christ did not marry, but maybe there are reasons why you also might not choose to marry just yet.

Take a look at Luke 2 in terms of people who choose to be single. God does give us a choice in life. Notice the lifestyle that the person in Luke 2:36-37 chose. "One Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity." Read the account carefully. She was a widow for about 84 years. That's apparently what she chose. I imagine she may have had ample opportunities for remarriage, but she chose to remain single. It was not a sin. And she was not a failure. But since it is not good for a man or woman to be alone, she undoubtedly built strong friendships with other converted people.

Some of the most serving women I know are single. They are beautiful on the inside and the outside. God appreciates them. They are not failures or in any way lesser human beings. They've either been widowed or haven't met someone who is right for them. And they have the strength to remain single until they do.

They aren't going to be pressurized into marriage. They realize that marriage is too wonderful and important to be foisted

on them by the pressure of friends and relatives. It must come from the inside—from the head and heart as it is guided by God's Spirit and sound counsel. After all, God's will is that we first be godly people aiming for His Kingdom (Matthew 6:33), not first be married. Priorities have to be kept straight.

There are no second-class citizens in God's Church. We are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26). God would not have called us if we didn't have an important part to play in finishing the Work. There is no room for division. Whatever state we are in, our main preoccupation is to put our shoulder to the wheel and push as hard as we can to help God's apostle finish the job of warning this world. That is our calling, and there isn't much time left now.

Chapter 1

The Role of a Single

EMBRACE YOUR ROLE

The God FAMILY Culture

By Joel Hilliker

GOD'S DESIRE FOR US IS CLEAR: "COME OUT OF HER, MY PEOPLE," He tells us, "that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Revelation 18:4).

This world is governed by the devil (2 Corinthians 4:4). God requires His people to utterly renounce the ways of this world and to embrace an entirely different way!

Within His Church of Spirit-begotten saints, God is actively building the groundwork for a millennial utopia that will soon spread to cover the Earth. He is promoting a way of life that exalts His law of love, that builds within us wholehearted love for God and love for fellow man. It emphasizes upbuilding activity; service-minded work; spiritual, mental and physical health; ennobling, inspiring cultural experiences. Above all it is a *family-oriented* life that prepares us for life in His eternal Family!

To the singles in the Church, God presents a grand challenge—and a wonderful opportunity. He wants you to recognize and reject the toxic anti-family thinking of Satan's world. He wants you to distance yourself from the selfish singles attitudes and lifestyles all around you. He wants you to join together in fashioning an altogether *different kind* of singles culture within His Church.

God wants life for His precious singles to be encouraging, helpful, physically enriching and spiritually rewarding. He wants it to be just as *family-oriented*—just as millennial, and just as preparatory to the Kingdom of God—as it is for *everyone* in his Spirit-begotten Family.

Here are six qualities that should characterize and define the family culture of singles in God's Church:

Friendly serving The biggest change we must make in our spiritual conversion is to conquer our selfishness and learn to

serve, with God's power. Family is a powerful tool to accelerate that process. As a single, you can gain untold benefit from throwing yourself into serving your physical and spiritual family (Philippians 2:1-5). God wants His singles to be a real asset to the Body of Christ, taking advantage of their single-mindedness to please God and to care for the God Family (1 Corinthians 7:32-35).

Activity Human nature is prone to stagnate (e.g. Philippians 2:19-21). But spiritual growth requires embracing challenges and breaking out of our comfort zone. God wants life for His singles to be *active!* He wants you dating regularly, spending time with families, attending Church functions, enthusiastically participating in and even helping to organize singles events. He wants you to live the abundant life! (John 10:10).

Masculinity and femininity Satan has savagely attacked the God-given roles of male and female (e.g. Isaiah 3:12). Yet these roles are key to personal happiness and fulfillment, harmony in relationships, and success in forming and strengthening families. Learn all you can about your role and work hard to fulfill it in your thoughts, words, actions and life decisions. You will come to recognize the beauty, elegance and power in God's design, and appreciate His family government far more. God wants His singles to stand out from the world as manly men and womanly women!

Inclusiveness God has placed every member into His Church as it has pleased Him (1 Corinthians 12:18), and He commands us to love each other as He loves us (John 13:34-35; 15:12, 17; Romans 12:10; 1John 4:7, 11-12, 20-21; 5:1). Sadly, those without physical family can easily be, and too often are, overlooked. God wants *everyone* in His Church to be included, respected, cared for, loved. He wants His singles looking out for each other and actively ensuring no one is left on the fringes. That requires dating widely and viewing each other as God does, who is "no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34).

Law-keeping Worldly singles culture tends to be lawless.

God's singles strive to do everything according to God's will, in a way He would be pleased with. That means keeping His laws regarding chastity and purity (e.g. 1 Corinthians 6:13, 18; 1 Thessalonians 5:22; 1 Timothy 5:2; 2 Timothy 2:22). It means not being ruled by emotion or rushing into a relationship. It means seeking and applying counsel from God's ministry. It means always seeking to act out of love, not lust.

You! God's ministry can teach and encourage you to be singles after God's own heart. We can provide opportunities for the right kind of interactions and spiritual growth. But ultimately, the singles culture in God's Church cannot be imposed from on high. *It comes down to what YOU contribute!* The experience of being single in God's Church depends on what ALL OF YOU make it out to be. So do *your part* in keeping worldly attitudes and practices out so it really stands out from the world. Make it something that truly reflects godly standards and that pleases God in every way!

When God's singles embody these characteristics, what do you end up with? When life for singles revolves around FRIENDLY SERVING, ACTIVITY, MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY, INCLUSIVENESS and LAW-KEEPING—enthusiastically championed by each and every one of YOU—then you get God's FAMILY culture! How special is the result—a culture for singles that points to the millennial utopia God is about to create worldwide, and that truly prepares every last person for God's eternal Family!

There Is Nothing Abnormal About Being Single

Good News, September 1980

Many people in God's Church are single. They are the never-married, the divorced and the widowed. They are a cross section of humanity representing every personality type and ability level. Perhaps you are one of them. I am.

There's nothing abnormal about being single. But oftentimes there is a feeling in society that an unmarried person is somehow less of a human being. There is a notion that you graduate from singledom by becoming married. But nowhere does the

Bible tell you to get married as soon as you can. Nowhere does the Bible say a single person is a failure.

Just as there are many reasons for being married, so there are many for being single. We are all individuals. Some singles are creating a secure financial base before they begin to be concerned with marriage. Others may have been hurt by a relationship that didn't work and at least for the time being aren't interested in having anything more than just friendships. Others may have had a mate taken by death and choose not to remarry.

Some, for various reasons, are happy to remain single indefinitely. They might consider marriage if someone really special comes along, but they are in no rush.

Others would like to be married now but selection is the difficulty. Many singles in the Church fall into this category. Especially outside America, area congregations are small and scattered, and transportation is a problem. There may be and often are only a few single people in an area. Perhaps none of them are compatible. What do you do if there is nobody to date? For example, I spent more than two years in a country where there were zero girls to date. So I know whereof I speak.

Learning to Love Your Dandelions I have talked to numerous single members who would love to have a family someday. But in the meantime they have to make the most of their present state. It is like the story of the gardening fanatic who was having trouble with dandelions growing on his prize lawn. Eventually he wrote to the department of agriculture.

"Dear sirs," he began. "During the past few years I have had a prolific outbreak of dandelions all over my bluegrass lawn. I have tried everything. I have cut them, sprayed them and weeded them. I even tried letting my mother loose on them (she likes to make dandelion tea). All of this has been in vain. You are my last hope. Will you please help me?"

In a couple of weeks he received a surprisingly brief reply.

"Dear sir: Seeing as you have tried everything in an attempt to obliterate your dandelions, you have only one alternative left. We suggest that you learn to love them."

We have to learn to love our dandelions. We should learn to be content in whatever state we find ourselves in. The Apostle

Paul did (Philippians 4:11). We can do the same.

If we make the most of whatever we have in this life, one day soon God will give us a lawn without dandelions.

Let's call a spade a spade. Two main problems that singles have to face are a sense of aloneness and unfulfilled sex needs. It's not that single people are the only ones who have to face these problems. Some married folk also have difficulties in these areas. But for singles these trials can be that much more acute.

Righteousness the Goal Eternity is one long stretch of time. And it will be occupied by spirit beings. Spirit beings, like the angels, do not marry (Mark 12:25). For the future eons we will be single. I mean unmarried in the human, physical sense of the word. We will, of course, be married to Jesus Christ. But we will not be married in the usual sense of the word. In that sense, marriage is only for this time.

The top two members of the Godhead never married in the physical sense of the word. So don't ever think that you can't qualify for a top position because you are unmarried. We don't have to be married to be balanced human beings in this life and spirit beings in the next.

Obviously marriage is a wonderful institution and highly desirable. It pictures beautifully the God-plane relationships we will have in the next life. Nothing I am saying is meant to detract from the beauty of a marriage lived in accordance to God's laws. A good marriage is perhaps the nearest thing to complete happiness that a person can find in this world. To be married to the right person at the right time with a right attitude is a tremendous blessing. It is the ideal.

But wedlock is not necessary for salvation. Marriage is not a qualification for God's Kingdom. Righteousness is. That's the point I am making. It doesn't matter what condition we are in, as long as we fully serve God in a righteous state. Whether married or single, we should glorify God in our lives.

After Solomon tried everything (including 700 wives and 300 concubines), he summed it all up in Ecclesiastes 12:13, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."

SUPPORT THE WORK

Be Involved!

Good News, January 1984

Advancing the great commission, preparing for rulership under Christ, getting ready to straighten this world out—this is our calling (Revelation 2:26). Singlehood is no barrier in helping God's Church. As a matter of fact, sometimes it can even be a plus factor.

Surprised?

“He who is unmarried cares for the things that belong to the Lord—how he may please the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:32). Why do singles have this potential? They usually don't believe it, but in general they may have a little more time and money on their hands than the average married person. They usually have fewer binding commitments.

Knowing this, some energetic and dedicated singles zealously volunteer for tasks that free the hands of the married leaders in the congregation.

Newsstand outlets need monitoring; teen activities need chap-erones; set-up and clean-up crews for church socials and services are always appreciated; chorales can always use talented singers; sports events are snappier with competent referees, coaches and officials; even bulletin boards need tending and sound systems sometimes require a lot of lugging and hauling.

Some singles plunge in zealously to help.

After all, singles are every bit as much a part of the Church as deacons and evangelists: “God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34).

Singles, you can help! Get to know the church leaders. Be tactful when you volunteer for a job, and don't crawl back into the woodwork if your offer isn't immediately accepted (Hebrews 10:38). Ask the minister for a visit. Let him know that you'd like to help; you may be surprised at how he'll remember you at a crucial time in the future.

Be a known quantity in your area. Participate. The Church is always in need of capable help (Galatians 6:9).

Launch a Spiritual Offensive

Good News, January 1984

I remember when I was first accepted into the Church of God. I was a young single. It seemed that some of Christ's boldest statements applied directly to my situation:

"And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit everlasting life" (Matthew 19:29).

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26).

The Savior of humanity, the Head of God's Church (Ephesians 1:22), did not marry in the strict physical sense of the word. Yet there was never a more effective, more confident person (John 12:19). He pioneered the abundant life for us. How?

First, by honoring His own parents (Luke 2:51). Then by setting the example and giving a strong lead to His own brothers and sisters. Charity begins at home, after all. We all have some family, however distant, to nurture and cherish. Yet even Jesus, our example, was mistreated by close relations (Mark 3:21).

He knew the pain of rejection, the uneasy feeling of impermanence that many singles feel in the Church today. Yet Christ loved His own fervently, even in their carnality and blindness (John 15:15).

Single Christians sometimes get resentful that their new spiritual family, the Church, doesn't seem to have time for them often enough. Such is often the case because God's Church is still flawed with human weakness (Ecclesiastes 7:20).

What is the answer? The answer is to love others even more fervently, as Christ taught us. Launch a spiritual offensive!

Do members ignore you for invitations to their houses? Invite them to your place! (Romans 12:17). It was Abraham Lincoln who wisely stated, "I can destroy my enemies by making them my friends."

Are families turning inward, weighted down by daily cares? Offer to babysit for free; urge them to get out for a movie or a concert. Serve. Help. Build up, without ulterior motives (Romans 12:10).

Are some Christians negative, aloof, reserved? Overpower them with kindness, heal with hospitality, shower them with thoughtfulness. Be balanced, but let your light shine (Matthew 5:16).

“I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren” (1 John 2:13-14; 3:14).

How true! Rather than selfishly bemoaning your fate, you should actively take the offensive (Philippians 3:14). Don't be overcome by rebuffs or lack of appreciation (Proverbs 24:10). This is the love Jesus had (1 John 4:4), the love that conquers the world.

As a single Christian you have some unique opportunities that others do not have to be a goodwill ambassador, an ambassador of peace (Romans 12:18).

Be wakeful! Be zealous! Be open to your opportunities. None of us, married or single, has yet reached the highest peaks of real Christianity. Why not rise to the occasion?

You'll never regret it (1 Corinthians 15:58).

A Special Way for a Single Woman to Serve God's Church

By Carolyn Coats

Without the responsibility of family, a single woman can more easily plan a meal on short notice and invite people over for extra fellowship, perhaps after services or at other times. She can have lady houseguests stay in her home if her Church area is throwing a special function that weekend, or if a Church member or family is passing through town.

A lot of single women think having guests over is only for families, but from my own experience, you learn a lot as a single being hospitable by serving others in this way. And if you ever become married physically, you will be better able to serve and represent your husband and family in being hospitable because you will already have it down pat.

We're all training to be royalty. Showing hospitality and

treating people the best I can has been a good personal teaching tool for me.

COMBAT LONELINESS

I'm So Lonely!

By Eric Anderson (*True Education*, Winter 2003)

Contact With God Simply stated, we can't, and won't, overcome loneliness unless we are first close to God. As we draw closer to God, we will inevitably be drawing closer to others of like mind. Conversely, if we drift away from God, we will begin to forsake others.

Without regular contact with God and Christ, sure, we may have some friends, but we won't have true, edifying relationships with others. Why? Because we won't know how to become a truly friendly, outgoing, morally upright person that others like to be around. Strong contact with God helps make our contact with each other profitable and lasting. Contact with God—through heartfelt prayer and regular Bible study—can help develop a “magnetic” personality in us that attracts others.

Without contact with God, we won't be able to effectively develop the attributes that we ought to in order to maintain great relationships with others around us. These important attributes include love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

Each of us must recognize our first line of defense against loneliness and every other negative emotion and circumstance: personal, daily contact with God.

Other Solutions Don't withdraw and “hibernate” in your home feeling sorry for yourself and expect the feeling of loneliness to go away. Get out and about. Take a walk. Go outside and enjoy some fresh air, and take in the sights and sounds of nature at a nearby park.

Begin to make new friends and strengthen old friendships! But beware of the mistake of making a few friends and then ceasing to widen your circle. Continue to make new friends regularly. (This doesn't mean giving up old friends, but learning to include new people.)

All too often the lonely shirk effective contact with others. By not showing themselves friendly, they fail to encourage or develop friendships that may otherwise be available to them. Consider the fact that there are many others teens (and adults) who are lonely and that you can be a big help to them by being friendly and giving encouragement.

Think of others first. Gear your mind to this end and discipline yourself in giving your time and service to others.

When you feel especially lonely, strike up a conversation with someone as soon as possible. (If you can't visit with someone in person or over the telephone, send a letter or e-mail.) Ask questions and be interested in finding out about their life.

Be approachable—make it easy for people to communicate with you by showing them attention and being responsive. Get others talking about subjects they're familiar with or in which they are interested. You can help others while you are helping yourself get over feeling lonely!

Sincerely compliment people by noting their accomplishments and successes. Notice little things such as nice hair, a new outfit, an uplifting example. Be a good listener. Listen with attention, interest and respect. Don't focus the conversation on yourself—try to get other people talking about themselves.

Look for ways to help others, and do something—anything—of benefit for them. If you are good at writing prose or poetry, write something for a friend. If you're good at handicrafts, make a gift. If you use your talents to do something for someone else, you will both enjoy the gift much more. You will be learning to live God's way of give.

Loneliness causes you to be a negative person. In order to fight it, you must replace it with the positive action of giving—and having outgoing concern for others.

Overcoming lonely feelings is part of you learning to take control of your life and your emotions. Conquering loneliness is part of developing an attractive personality, and becoming a leader instead of a follower.

CONQUER SELFISHNESS

The Void in You

By Joel Hilliker

Being a happy single requires being content with your state. Like the Apostle Paul, we all need to learn “in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (Philippians 4:11).

In another important way, however, your true happiness depends on your recognition of a very important truth: that of and by yourself, **YOU ARE INCOMPLETE**.

This isn't true of just you. It's true of me, too—and every human being.

God made us out of *dust*. We are clay models out of which God can shape us spiritually into His character image. Our potential is to one day be born of spirit! But we're not there yet.

Herbert W. Armstrong explained: “[W]hat God created in the first Adam was **NOT YET COMPLETE**. Man was made carnal, material—but he was made to **NEED THE SPIRIT OF GOD**. Without this spiritual life from God, man experiences a sense of **EMPTINESS, HUNGER and THIRST** for that which will satisfy” (*Plain Truth*, August 1962; emphasis added throughout).

God created man to *need* a relationship with Him! Man had to *go to God* to become complete.

Think on this: *Every person on Earth* is incomplete. *You* are incomplete without the Holy Spirit! You are like a car without gasoline—you're not going anywhere.

A Sense of Emptiness Everyone feels this need. We all experience “a sense of *emptiness, hunger and thirst*” for something to fill it, Mr. Armstrong wrote. So people look everywhere, trying this thing and that, searching and searching for what will satisfy that need. But “[t]he only thing that will impart to him this sense of satisfaction, completeness, abundance, is God's Spirit—God's nature—God's **FULLNESS**,” he wrote (*ibid*).

“Yet his carnal mind does not recognize that fact,” Mr. Armstrong continued. “Being incomplete, lacking in the spiritual

waters and heavenly food—God’s Word—that would FILL him to satisfaction, he has a GNAWING SOUL-HUNGER that leaves him miserable, empty, discontented. He seeks to quench his thirst and satisfy his soul-hunger in the interests and pursuits and pleasures of this world.”

You see this everywhere: People *chasing something*. Many people try to fill that void with education, travel, work, entertainment, sports, music, drugs, pornography, or any number of other physical things. Not all of those things are bad, but *none will ever fill the void that can only be filled by God’s Spirit!*

You definitely see this happening in the world’s single scene. People think they just need *that relationship*—or maybe merely sex—so they hop around from one person to another. *That didn’t fill it*, they think. *I must need someone else—another relationship—another encounter.*

Another *person* cannot satisfy this need. Still, it is common for two spiritually incomplete people to grab hold of one another, hoping and believing that the other will make them complete. It never works. That relationship will only be great if each is first *going to God* for completeness.

How well do *you* recognize this void within you? Do you ever seek to fill it with something other than God’s Spirit?

“This very lack within him—this spiritual NEED—gives him an innate INFERIORITY COMPLEX,” Mr. Armstrong wrote. “He senses his inferiority, as compared to God—his lack of what he was made to need; but, not understanding what it is, he seeks to quell the painful sense of inferiority by conceit, and blowing up the ego—the *self*—with vanity and self-exaltation. This VANITY, then, is a substitute for God and His Spirit—another god before the true God.” That is profound psychological insight.

To make progress spiritually—and to be truly happy and fulfilled in your life—you have to first recognize this inferiority complex and gnawing hunger. You must acknowledge that you are incomplete—and then *seek God* for wholeness! That is the foundation for true repentance. The recognition of this need undergirds a successful relationship with God: *I can’t do anything—I need you, God.* That is where conversion begins.

How clear is this spiritual reality in your mind?

There have been times when a baptized single has been interested in an unbaptized single. Some have even entered

into a relationship, putting that person *above God*. Did that baptized person really understand this reality? Did he or she recognize that we are *incomplete* without the Holy Spirit? Was that individual using and being led by that Spirit?

Human Nature Let's look at the origin of human nature.

When Satan tempted Eve in the garden of Eden, Eve didn't have human nature at that point. But she was obviously *incomplete*.

“And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:4-5). Satan crafted this message to appeal to Eve's innate inferiority complex. And she did not comprehend that the void in her could only be filled by God's Spirit.

After Adam and Eve sinned, they had a *mind change*. They hid from God (verses 7-8). The spirit of vanity and rebellion had entered them.

“After Adam sinned, he and all his children after him were now receptive to the sway of Satan. Satan, who is a spirit, began to work in the minds of Adam and Eve even as God would have worked in their minds had they taken of the tree of life. As a result, Satan imparted to both their minds the attitudes of vanity, of selfishness, of ‘get,’ of resentment of authority. *Those characteristics we call ‘human nature’—the carnal mind . . . come from Satan the devil himself!*” (Herbert W. Armstrong College Bible Correspondence Course, Lesson 18).

That is where human nature comes from: Satan the devil. We need to understand this nature so we can confront it and reject it.

In order to better understand “human” nature, which is really *Satan's* nature, let's first look at its EXACT OPPOSITE: *God's* nature, which is the LOVE OF GOD.

God's Nature The love of God is a way of life. That love is what God wants to teach us—what He, in fact, wants us to *become*.

The Apostle Paul expounds on this love in 1 Corinthians 13. Note the point he makes in setting up this subject in the first four verses: If you don't have the love of God—which comes from the Holy Spirit—then you can produce nothing. You are *incomplete!*

You could be a great speaker, understand prophecy, donate everything you have to the poor, even become a martyr! Yes, you can do some quite awesome-looking feats on your own, with just your *human will*. But none of that will fill the *void* within you. None of it has any spiritual value (Isaiah 64:6). It is all *worthless* if you lack the love of God, which comes from the Spirit (Romans 5:5). This means that you need to be able to discern the difference between what you're producing and what actually *comes from God*.

1 Corinthians 13 lists 15 wonderful qualities of God's love (verses 4-8). It is a passage worth regularly reading, studying and meditating on. Again—this is *God's nature*, which we take on as we allow God to *complete us* and fill our inner void with His Holy Spirit.

We need the Holy Spirit that can give us this nature! This is the *opposite* of human nature. It *smashes* human nature!

Satan's Nature That is God's nature. What is *Satan's* nature? It is *vanity*—exalting the self.

God pins Satan to the wall in Ezekiel 28:17: "Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness." This is actually *where sin started* (verse 15)—when Lucifer, whom God had created *perfect*, changed his attitude. He went from loving God to **LOVING THE SELF**. He got absorbed in his own brightness, obsessed with his own beauty. He became *self-centered*. *Self-impressed*. **VAIN**.

THAT is Satan's nature!

"Lucifer was like a speck in all of God's creation, but he selfishly focused on himself," Gerald Flurry wrote about this passage. "In his own eyes, he became more important than God and all His creation. *Can we become that vain about beauty? Or about things? Can vanity corrupt our wisdom? Certainly. Oftentimes, human beings become self-absorbed—wrapped up in our own beauty or looks or things*" (*John's Gospel: The Love of God*).

That is our human nature! Do you really see **HOW MUCH** you *love your self*? How much *self-love* you have?

As Mr. Armstrong said in a sermon in 1982, "**SELF-LOVE IS THE VERY ESSENCE OF SIN.**" God's way of life is always outflowing—it is give. *Anything* other than that is *sin*—it is a result of loving our *self* more than God, or more than the other guy.

“God’s law is, simply, LOVE!” Mr. Armstrong wrote. “It is the perfect way of life. Every particle of human suffering, unhappiness, misery and death has come solely from its transgression!” (*The Plain Truth About Healing*). Whenever there is a problem—conflict, discouragement, unhappiness—*sin* is the cause, which means that *self-love* is in there somewhere! Every particle of unhappiness is caused by *sin*, and *self-love* is the ESSENCE of *sin*.

Are you unhappy as a single? Then examine yourself for *self-love*. You are trying to satiate that gnawing inner hunger with something other than God. To some degree, most probably, you are combating your inferiority complex with conceit, *self* and VANITY!

This Satan-inspired human nature makes us miserable. *Sin* makes us miserable. *Self-love* makes us miserable! Yet, so often, in specific situations, we put ourselves first because we think that is going to make us *happier*. We are certain that *putting the other person first* is going to make us miserable! We prioritize *our own* desires. We focus on *how we* want to be treated. Our service and sacrifice are required somewhere—someone needs us—but we are into what we’re doing, so we insist that we’re too busy, or we pretend like we don’t hear or don’t see the problem.

We do these things ALL THE TIME—and we may even feel *justified* in doing so. But the reality is that SELF-LOVE IS SIN! It is *not* the way God thinks! It is not His *nature* to do that. It is not His love.

A Call to Action How much is your human nature affecting the way you live as a single in God’s Church?

How much is your *self-love* impacting your interactions with other singles and Church members? How much is it interfering with your *relationship with God*? How much are you allowing your *vanity* to be a substitute for the Holy Spirit flowing in your life? How much does your human nature *prevent* God from using you to serve His Family? How much is *vanity* directing your choices—your dating—your marriage preparation? How much is *self-love* driving your thoughts—your motivations—your emotions?

Ask God to help you answer these questions honestly. Ask Him to help you see your human nature. Ask Him to show you that *void* within—to help you see how *incomplete* you are without Him!

Look for specific ways that Satan's attitude of vanity and self-love is manifesting itself in your life as a single in God's Church.

Human nature is tough, deeply rooted, pernicious and extraordinarily resilient. If you are not fighting it ferociously every day, then it is almost certainly influencing your thinking and your life more than you realize.

The better you understand human nature, the more you will want to *destroy it!* Recognizing it will help tremendously in your battle to purge Satan's nature—and to grow more and more in exhibiting the beautiful love of God.

Respect Your Fellow Singles

Good News, January 1984

What about that other single you dream about as Mister or Miss Right? Stop and think: He or she is first and foremost a brother or sister in Christ, called to advance God's great commission in this age (1 Corinthians 15:58), qualifying for a key role in the government of God.

This is bedrock! This should be your operating premise in dealing with all members of Christ's Body, but especially other singles (Colossians 3:12-15).

Why? Because some of the cruelest comments and barbs surface from the criticisms and evaluations single Christians make about each other (Galatians 5:15).

Girls decry the slovenliness, laziness and selfishness of the fellows: "They don't date. They're rude. Unmannered." Sometimes, alas, this is all too true, but discord can be sown by tactlessly telling the raw truth as well as by relating falsehood (Proverbs 6:16, 19). Some of the same girls refuse dates with "undesirables" among the bachelors. That is their prerogative, but be careful of violating the principle of Hebrews 2:11!

Bachelors sit around in too many bull sessions discussing the girls and how they rate. Every attribute is considered fair game, it seems. Some fellows become obnoxious minor prophets, confident that it's their ordained role in life to set the single girls straight on doctrine, example and personal conduct.

God thunders, "Who are you to judge another's servant?" (Romans 14:4). Let's all remember the slogan: "Don't be too

hard on me; God isn't finished with me yet."

We can be thankful that God's Spirit predominates in His Church (2 Timothy 1:6). When appealed to, most singles quite quickly shelve their hang-ups and grudges and get down to the tough core of real Christianity—loving all men as brothers (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10).

AVOID THE TEMPTATIONS OF SATAN'S WORLD

Our 'Anything Goes' Society

Good News, September 1980

Very few teenagers, even in this age vaunting its "frankness" on such matters, are taught the really essential knowledge they **MUST** have on the subject of sex! Much of what they learn is from the traditional "gutter," meaning from others as ignorant as themselves.

In the clinical atmosphere of classes on anatomy and biology, they learn much of the purely physiological aspect of sex.

But they are not taught the deep emotional, psychological and spiritual truths about sex. They are not taught this by their parents, their ministers or their teachers.

Let's face the truth! The sum total of "sex knowledge" possessed by most teenagers came from other teens, from movies, television, books and magazines—many of them bordering on pornography!

It's no wonder, then, that millions of young girls have given in to modern trends, and decided chastity is "old-fashioned," and "unpopular." The insistent voice of church, home and society has finally convinced young people.

They are eager listeners to the "anything goes—so long as you're not caught" philosophy of many a modern philosopher. The only trouble is, when they tell their stories of tragedy at about age 30, it seems like the hard knocks of life really do "catch" them in their promiscuity.

Whether we admit it or not, or like it or not, fornication is the goal—the objective—in MUCH of modern dating.

Even where actual attempts toward premarital intimacies are absent, the basic desires in dating: what to wear, where to go, what to do, and when to get home, are motivated by sex consciousness. Many a girl somehow wants to APPEAR as “sexy” to others—even though she may be pristine in character. Many a fellow brags about his “exploits” when in actuality he is shy around girls, and still a virgin.

Admit to yourself that teen songs, teen customs, teen dating habits are largely SEX ORIENTED.

Something is hideously wrong with vast percentages of our marriages. It follows that wrong dating practices produced wrong mating—and wrong mating produces unhappiness, wretchedness, distorted and rejected children, and a plethora of other social evils.

Times HAVE changed. People have changed, too. Human nature is the same, but the traditional barriers to licentious, permissive behavior—the home, the school and the church—have sidestepped their responsibilities. They have failed our youth, which is the most precious natural resource of any nation.

Today’s teen HABITS are worse, even though individual teenagers are still the same kind of human beings they always were.

Yes, like it or not, today’s teens are, in a comparative sense “worse” than their elders were. They’re not any more basically evil; no more humanly worse—but the combined forces of permissive society, lax churches, double-standard parents, and a frightening world have produced an environment in which the same human nature is manifesting itself in more harmful ways! And teens, unfortunately, are suffering most of the harm.

Flee Fornication Sex is not just a problem for single folk, but also for many married people. The principles here apply to us all.

Sex is a raw physical drive. It is also an emotional and psychological want. So, if you were Satan, what would you use to lure single brethren in God’s Church? What would you use to try to entice them into the world where you could finish them off? You guessed it—sex with a capital S. You’d have it thrust at people from all quarters. You’d display it on every

street corner. You'd saturate society with every form of cheap and perverted sex—anything but wholesome sex. Well, Satan has done the same.

Make no mistake, Satan is at war with us. Probably the only more intense emotion than the devil's hatred of us is God's love for us. Satan knows what you could accomplish in God's Kingdom and he despises you for it. He will use every dirty trick in the book—and some that aren't in the book—to drag us down.

Just look at how our enemy tried to get Joseph through Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39:7-20). But he failed. Joseph was man enough not to cave in. To stand up for what's right—to demonstrate character—takes backbone, not wishbone.

God gives simple instructions. There's a simple formula for staying out of this kind of trouble. Everyone, whether married or single, should memorize it. It's not long. Just two words. "Flee fornication" (1 Corinthians 6:18). Notice God does not say to get as close as you can but don't take part in it. God says to flee—as fast as your little legs will move you. If faced with temptation, retreat at the speed of light.

Fleeing fornication means staying away from singles bars.

Fleeing fornication means avoiding red-light districts.

Fleeing fornication means not being alone with members of the opposite sex whom you know are promiscuous. Avoid compromising situations. Choose carefully the people you spend time with (Proverbs 13:20).

Fleeing fornication means being careful about what you watch on the movie or television screen. Think about what letting your mind dwell on it may lead to. Be the prudent man who foresees evil and hides himself (Proverbs 22:3).

Fleeing fornication means that you women reading this article should not be naive. Understand the way some men think. Don't dress to provoke them. And don't be deceived by what some men say to you. It is natural for a woman to want to be cherished, but frankly, face the facts. Many men in the world will be loving and gentle, but their hidden motive is to wear down a woman's principles so they can experience her body. Don't be one of those seduced by smooth words (Ephesians 5:5-6).

Illicit sex is habit forming. It's best not to get the hook in your mouth. A fish has to put up a fierce fight to break from a hook. Of course, it can be done, but it's far better not to take

the bait in the first place. The more the body is fed, the more gratification is required. And whoremongers, unless they repent, will not be in God's Kingdom (1 Corinthians 6:9)—and such were some of you (verse 11), but you were washed clean. Your sins were thrown to the other side of the universe. But you must be determined not to sin again.

Playing a Winning Game With God's help we can beat Satan at his own game. We can turn it all to our advantage. How? If we want to build physical muscle we need some resistance—for example, a heavy weight to lift against. Then when it hurts, muscle is built. The same is true spiritually. Suffering is the origin of growth. Fighting against the pulls of the world will help us build character. And it is character, not our physical comfort, with which God is most concerned.

A single person who can control his sex drive is a person who can control every major area of his life. Singledom is a chance to develop character. Hot fires can burn and consume or give energy for growth. The same furnace can make or break you. Which will it be?

Obedience to God is largely a matter of habit. If one leads a full, giving and sharing life there is not much time for idle daydreams that can lead to disaster. But to bring every thought into captivity (2 Corinthians 10:5) is not easy. It requires persistence and courage. We may have a hard time of it now (Acts 14:22), but when we look back from the perspective of being in God's Kingdom then it will all be worth it (Romans 8:18).

Harmless to Singles?

By Ryan Malone (*Trumpet*, November 2004)

“Cyberporn is not just breaking up marriages,” writes Lynn Sherr. “It can have another, even more insidious effect: keeping young people from even forming relationships” (ABCNEWS.com, Aug. 27, 2004). In one sense, pornography essentially eliminates the need for a dating life, for marriage and for family. If someone is getting his or her sexual fulfillment and “intimacy” from a computer screen, what incentive is there to find that special someone and settle down?

The Almighty God created sex to strengthen love within the FAMILY. He did NOT intend for unrestrained use of it to *eliminate the need for family*.

Consider the “pop porn,” or the sexual content so prevalent in TV programming today, and the effect it is having on our teenagers. “Teenagers who watch a lot of television with sexual content *are twice as likely to engage in intercourse* than those who watch few such programs,” according to a study of nearly 1,800 12-to-17-year-olds (Reuters, Sept. 7, 2004).

Suggestive movies and television inflame a strong pull in people—especially teens, as this study shows. How much more does pornography?

Porn destroys human relations even on a non-sexual level, by reducing one’s capacity to love, says Dr. Cline. “[I]t results in a marked dissociation of sex from friendship, affection, caring and other normal healthy emotions and traits which help marital relationships” (op. cit.).

Pornography affects any mind—married or unmarried—old, and especially young. It is from the mind of the devil! He broadcasts his messages through pornography—that humans are slaves to their sexual urges and that marriage and family are obstacles to sexual fulfillment.

As Mr. Armstrong eloquently explained in *Mystery of the Ages*, “Satan has seized on this sin to make it far more universal than is generally realized. Satan, himself, has no sex. He is resentful of the fact God has endowed humans with sex. Therefore, Satan sways humanity into making sexual sins *one of the most universal and destructive*.”

Beware Infatuation

Modern Dating: Key to Success or Failure in Marriage

Believe it or not, it is utterly impossible to fall in love. A “fall” is an accident. And love should most definitely NOT be accidental!

It would require several chapters to begin to survey the avalanche of false propaganda which has been foisted upon many an unsuspecting generation about “falling in love.” So many dozens of our songs, our motion pictures, our novels and magazine articles, and a tremendous amount of our conversation

involving the whole situation between the sexes, dating, and romance involve the idea of “falling in love.”

It’s supposed to be an indefinable something like “being twitterpated.” You will, you are sagely assured, “know at a glance” when you “fall in love.”

The kind of “love” into which most people “fall” is not love, but lust. It is desire for intimacies and sexual experience with one another; a desire to be seen in each other’s company, to “have” or “possess” the other person—but that most assuredly IS NOT LOVE!

Infatuation Is Powerful That doesn’t mean romantic “love,” infatuation, lust—or whatever you like to call it—isn’t powerful. It does attract.

This adolescent infatuation is a powerful, heady wine to youngsters. It’s status to “have a girlfriend” in the tenderest years, even before junior high school, these days.

And oh, the emotional trauma! The hot cheeks, pounding heart, mooning daydreams—the penciled doodle-marks during study hall, and the secreted little notes across the room—the sly glances, and the wink. The sheer idiocy of tender teenage sex consciousness has destroyed many a promising career by launching a girl-struck young boy on a floating cloud of juvenile imagination.

And all this is good? Millions of parents would argue so. The fact that it does as much to dull the mind, and destroy the education as almost anything; plus the heightened possibility of the habit of autoeroticism (masturbation), does not occur to these hopelessly naive ones.

But it SHOULD BE KNOWN. The direct connection between the mentally and physically DAMAGING habit of masturbation and early teenage “romance” should be exposed and made PLAIN to parents who are not afraid of the truth. Today, as a further mark of the hideous proportions of the “new morality,” some libertine doctors have said autoeroticism is not harmful.

But it is directly CONDEMNED in the Bible—and listed as a SIN! Those who are “abusers of themselves” are lumped together with other deviates, fornicators, and sinners of every stripe.

Yes, sadly, too few parents take an active interest in the really tremendous drives and compulsions placed upon their chil-

dren in early school years. They just don't TALK to their children about their school lives. They don't make it their business to FIND OUT about their desires, hopes, dreams, or emotional entanglements.

And so the teenagers are left to fend for themselves.

Struggling to act like adults when they are neither physically or mentally adult, many teenagers develop habits, personality traits, and even postures which mark them for the rest of their lives.

A self-conscious kid with pimples can grow into a hunchback as his normal height develops, simply from his continual attempts to shrink into the woodwork to keep from being noticed. And a struggling teen who earnestly desires approval and admiration from others will compromise himself in almost ANYTHING—morals included—to gain that approval!

He'll shoplift, and hand gifts to others, just to be thought as "tough" and "experienced." He'll lie, make cutting remarks against his parents and teachers, and seem to "reject" society, if he thinks it will make him accepted by others.

Further, he'll indulge in petty infatuations, girl-conscious daydreams, and attempt to "have a girlfriend" because others are doing it! It becomes STATUS. Others do it—so why shouldn't he?

Believe it or not—if youthful "romance" were NOT the generally accepted standard, and if dating at early teenage, including "going steady" were NOT BEING DONE by the majority—many others would not do it.

They would play together; enjoy the company and companionship of members of the opposite sex without the undue emphasis on SEX CONSCIOUSNESS that is FORCE-FED them from society!

Many a young fellow has literally felt FORCED to "date," and "have a girl friend" when he would rather be concentrating on basketball, or football, or his studies.

Chapter 2

Godly Dating

RELATE TO THE OPPOSITE SEX

Invaluable Advice From the Creator of Sex

By Joel Hilliker

DO YOU HAVE TROUBLE UNDERSTANDING WOMEN? DO MEN SEEM mysterious? God designed men and women to be different. This makes it so the two can work together as a perfect team. The strengths of one complement the strengths of the other.

At the same time, however, those differences can mean there is a certain amount of frustration almost built in to relationships between men and women! That is true whether you're single or married.

Of course, for singles, those frustrations can be magnified, as you encounter more varied situations with members of the opposite sex, and perhaps you fear behaving in ways the other person might misinterpret. Uncomplicated friendships can be difficult. There may even be times when those complications get in the way of what actually could develop into a deeper relationship—and a happy marriage!

But God has given us some ground rules for smoothing out our relationships with those of the opposite sex. He knows exactly what makes men and women tick. In His Word He gives us insight into how to avoid the pitfalls that can sink a friendship or a marriage—and also, how to satisfy the needs of those of the opposite sex.

A Problem That Affects Us All We are all naturally selfish. And selfishness is the number-one obstacle to having meaningful relationships—especially with people of the opposite sex. It is a common trap to look at those relationships—whether friend or spouse—primarily in terms of what we *get* from them, and when the other person doesn't fulfill our needs and expectations, we can get very impatient. All those beautiful, God-designed differences become sources of irritation and frustration.

Here is some great advice on correcting this problem: “Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4, Revised Standard Version).

Why do you suppose Paul wrote this to the church in Philippi? Because there was a lot of selfishness and conceit—a lot of people looking after only their own interests—esteeming themselves first! We’re all prone to do that. In verses 19-21, Paul said his assistant Timothy was the *only one* serving and caring for others!

How easy is it to have a fundamentally selfish approach toward the opposite sex? To look at other singles in terms of who can best fulfill your needs?

How to Kill a Friendship Here are some ways our selfishness can manifest itself. See if you spot yourself in any of these descriptions.

You can be so preoccupied with your own interests—or your own problems—that you are oblivious to other people’s needs, desires and feelings. Or you can be so absorbed in your own insecurities and doubts—so aware of your own imperfections and deficiencies—that you stay cloistered up and don’t really give of yourself to others.

You can try too hard to project a certain image in order to impress others, and not be sincere and genuine. Or you can fail to open yourself up to others because you don’t want to be vulnerable to getting hurt, so you never really draw close to anyone.

As a single, you can consistently shut people of the opposite sex down because you interpret any sign of friendliness as proof positive that they want to marry you. Or, you can deliberately lead someone on because you like the attention, even though you have no intention of ever pursuing a closer relationship with that person.

You can have overly sensitive feelings, and pull away or get pouty whenever your feelings are bruised. You can hold on to past grievances, even for years, and tend to give a person the cold shoulder in order to punish them.

You can be very picky and negative about what you perceive as another person’s faults. You can have unrealistic expecta-

tions of how that other person should treat you, and find yourself constantly disappointed.

You can have a firm idea of how an ideal person of the opposite sex should act, and be judgmental of someone who fails to live up to that standard. You can be so attached to a personal idea of what kind of mate would be best suited for you—maybe a certain physical ideal or specific personality trait—that you prematurely judge and reject someone, limiting a friendship.

These manifestations of selfishness are friendship killers and marriage wreckers. The tricky thing is, in many of those cases, we can feel justified in holding on to our selfishness.

But here is the beautiful truth: If you want to overcome your own selfishness, building quality friendships with those of the opposite sex is a fantastic way to do it! The selfishness that hurts those relationships can be knocked down to size if you step out and put a priority on building good, close friendships—if you commit to conquering those barriers created by selfishness whenever they crop up.

Men Need to Love—Women Need to Be Loved The Bible's instruction on marriage is not only extremely deep, it is also very practical in how to relate to the other sex—even for singles.

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Ephesians 5:25). Look at this from a woman's point of view. God equipped women mentally, physically, emotionally, temperamentally to need—even crave—a man who demonstrates sacrificial concern for her. She wants a man who keeps her on his mind and watches out for her as she makes her way in the world. Someone who values her.

Men: A woman loves it when you make her feel special and treat her with respect. Look for ways to express honor for her. Show her that you notice her and are concerned about her feelings. Uphold her dignity. Even as a single man, you should get in the habit of treating single women with respect—noticing them—giving them the loving concern they need.

God also made men mentally, physically, emotionally, temperamentally to feel fulfilled in *providing* this love to a woman. He made us to want to protect her, provide for her, look out for her. A man feels deep satisfaction when he sees the look

of appreciation in a woman's eyes for some kindness he has shown her.

Women: Realize that men are flattered when you call on them for help. We like to be the hero. So call him! Don't abuse him—don't expect him to up-end his life because you happen to need some help. But don't be too bashful about asking him if you need an escort, or in fixing something, or moving heavy objects, or you just need a shoulder to cry on. Don't "drop hints," being sly and coy and expecting that, if he's a real man, he's going to "get it."

Women need this love—and men need to give this love. This is the way God designed us to function and thrive. If we live according to that divine order, our relationships will work!

Men Need to Lead—Women Need to Help "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22). God made men to be the leader in the relationship. He equipped men mentally, physically, emotionally, temperamentally to fulfill that role. A man feels fulfilled when he's being a leader, taking charge and making things happen.

At the same time, God made the woman mentally, physically, emotionally, temperamentally to yield to that leadership and to be a helper. He designed her to want the man to take charge, to want to see him being decisive and strong, and to want to follow those decisions.

Women: You have found the way to a man's heart when you understand true submissiveness. This doesn't mean being his slave. It means being willing, even eager, to help him and see him succeed. Take an interest in his goals and ambitions. Show that you love your role and you love it when he embraces his.

The problem is, society today is so hostile to that divinely inspired order, that we as men and women may find ourselves resisting it. Some men think, *I don't really want to be the leader. Why does it always have to be me?* And some women think, *I've had some bad experiences, and I'd just as soon take charge myself. These "men" don't really know how to lead anyway, and someone's got to do it.*

But here is the truth of the matter: This is how God designed men and women, and anytime we step outside that divine order, there will be problems. Our relationships won't be as fulfilling. There will likely be friction. There will be hurt

feelings, frustrations, anxiety and discontent. If we break this spiritual law, then curses will result.

Women: Realize how truly beautiful and feminine you are when you show inner charm, refinement and culture. Our culture favors loud, boisterous women. But godly men love femininity, charm and grace. Gentleness of speech. A woman who is kind-spoken, courteous, concerned about others. This is an outward reflection of your having embraced God's role for you.

Practice these principles even in simple conversation. Men: Women do admire you when you try to lead in conversation. It's difficult, but it's important to learn how to do so naturally. Try to have a few subjects to fall back on in case of an awkward silence. Ask good, open-ended questions to draw her out—but don't get too personal. Make sure there's a give-and-take, and neither of you is dominating the conversation. And women: Make it easier for the man to communicate by showing an interest and being responsive. Realize too that men actually appreciate a difference of opinion from time to time. If you disagree, however, don't be argumentative—be feminine in how you present your point.

Men Need Respect—Women Need to Respect “Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband” (Ephesians 5:33). In summarizing this passage, Paul adds an additional dimension to his command to the woman. The word *reverence* means to venerate, to treat with deference or reverential obedience. That is God's requirement of wives.

But women: *All men secretly crave your respect*. God hard-wired us to really want that veneration, deference and reverence. So in your relationships with men, if you give that to them, the relationship will go much further. It will have far less frustration and friction.

Nowhere in Scripture does it say women need to be obedient to all men—only wives to their husbands, children to their parents, servants to their masters, and church members to the ministry. But if you want to improve your relations with any man, here is how: Show him respect. Show him that you value his opinions and appreciate his ideas.

If you criticize him or focus on his weaknesses, be assured that will break down the relationship. Instead, focus on the

positive—try to make him feel like royalty. The more you respect a man, the better that relationship will be.

Notice: God's ground rules for improving these relationships are all about the WAY OF GIVE. A man must be willing and able to GIVE love to a woman. A woman must be willing and able to GIVE reverence and submission to a man.

In addition, a man must be willing and able to GIVE godly leadership to a woman—leadership that earns her respect and that is a joy to submit to. And a woman must be willing and able to be a LOVABLE woman, and prepare herself to recognize and encourage and to receive a man's love.

Love Is Difficult—So Start Practicing! The people around you should be some of the highest priorities in your life. These are the people God has given you to learn how to love!

If you're practicing politics when you should be practicing love, then you will have a hard time making a marriage work!

A single person who believes everything will work out once he finds "the right one" is kidding himself. Selfishness doesn't just vanish in a marriage—it comes roaring out in many ways. And it kills marriages just as readily as it kills friendships. It must be conquered, and the time to start conquering it is yesterday.

Right now, you have the opportunity to learn how to conquer your selfishness. Even as a single, you can overcome obstacles that will allow your relationships to blossom. Take advantage of that opportunity! Give.

Avoid These Eight Relationship-Killers

By Joel Hilliker

Here is the Bible's best description of how to overcome selfishness and how to get along with members of the opposite sex: "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7; Revised Standard Version).

These verses list eight problems that can easily creep into our relationships that should alert us that selfishness is getting in the way and love is being pushed out.

First is JEALOUSY. This can refer to being jealous of another's abilities or blessings, not rejoicing in their successes. The main way this shows itself is being *selfishly possessive*—not wanting to share the person. This is a common trap in relationships between the sexes.

Do you find yourself getting in a bad attitude toward others because they're getting "too much attention" from someone? Maybe you think they're being flirty, or just throwing themselves at some guy. Such thoughts can kill your friendship both with the person of the opposite sex and the one of your sex! God's love is never jealous in that way!

The second red flag Paul mentioned is BOASTING—making a parade of yourself, trumpeting your accomplishments.

The third is ARROGANCE. This is a big turnoff to people of both sexes. It will destroy your relationships.

Fourth is RUDENESS. That is a lack of courtesy and manners—not really caring how you present yourself around people of the opposite sex.

Consider the simple act of asking someone out for a date. Men: Don't be an oaf about it. "What are you doing tonight?" "I don't have anything else to do—wanna go out?" "So-and-so backed out on me and I need a date." Instead, approach the woman privately and leave her the option of declining gracefully. And women: Realize how hard it is for a man to ask for a date. Most of all, he doesn't want rejection. If you have to turn him down, be gentle.

Fifth is INSISTING ON YOUR OWN WAY. You must learn how to give and take, how to work as a team with the other person. God's love never seeks its own. It is always looking out for the other person.

Men: Being a leader doesn't mean being macho or domineering. It means being responsible, mature and caring. If you throw your weight around to try to show her who's boss, you are sure to turn her off.

Sixth is IRRITABILITY. Life throws us curveballs. Sometimes we can be moody. Really strive not to allow yourself to be moody and irritable around others. God's love is never irritated.

Women: Try to be consistent and predictable in your reactions and day-to-day disposition. Your moods can wreak havoc on a man. Make a strong effort to be sunny and cheerful. Level out the peaks and valleys in your day-to-day reactions. At the same time, men, don't misinterpret a woman's emotional highs and lows or changing moods. She is not intentionally directing them at you. It's easy to take any fluctuation in emotion personally. But there may be a number of reasons why she may be friendly one day and distant the next: stress—a lack of sleep—hormones—a personal problem with someone else.

Seventh is RESENTMENT. Don't keep track of other people's sins and wrongs. Be quick to let things go. For friendships to flourish, you can't let bad feelings stew. Be patient. Be tolerant. Be forgiving. Don't focus on yourself and your own needs; focus on the other person's needs and on helping that person to grow.

Men: Understand that women can be terribly sensitive and easily crushed. Sarcasm, cynicism, negative comments—these don't go over well. She wants you to be pleased with her, so rejection and ridicule can really hurt.

Women: Realize how easy it is to wound a man's self-respect. Don't compare him to other men. Don't ignore him, or cut him down in front of others. If you want to be treated like a lady, then protect his self-respect.

The eighth and final red flag Paul lists is REJOICING AT WRONG—being glad when you see someone make a mistake or take a fall. This feeling is the basis of most *gossip*. Gossip is the opposite of love, and it is a relationship killer.

Women: Realize how hard it is for a man to measure up to the ideal standard of a leader. Confidence as a leader takes time to develop, and many men lack it. Give them room to grow. Don't compare younger guys with older men who have years of experience. Compliment his successes, and help him save face if he fails.

Seven Things That Make Friendships Flourish

By Joel Hilliker

1 Corinthians 13 also lists seven things that *should* be in our relationships with the opposite sex—things that will make

them work beautifully.

First is **PATIENCE**. We're all human. Be willing to overlook another person's imperfections.

Men: Women would rather you encourage, console and comfort them than lecture or preach. If a woman comes to you with a problem, don't criticize or immediately offer solutions. Just listen.

The second quality is **KINDNESS**. This is talking about doing nice things for people. Treating them tactfully and respectfully—not offending them—showing concern and compassion.

Men: A woman really appreciates it when you are observant and aware of her physical comfort and well-being. Don't expect her to run half a block to a restaurant in high heels. Don't leave a car window down if it means her hair is going to blow all over. Also, she is impressed when you're original or creative when planning a date. This shows that she has been on your mind and you consider her worth the extra effort.

Women: Don't feel guilty if a man spends money on you. In most cases, he's not trying to *get* anything from you—he's just trying to be kind. Show gratitude, acknowledging the sacrifice he made with a follow-up note, phone call or some other gesture.

Third is **REJOICING AT THE RIGHT**. Being encouraged when you see growth in another person.

Men: Realize how important a sincere compliment is to a woman. Look for things to compliment. This is definitely a skill you can develop as a single that will carry over well into a marriage.

Fourth is "**BEARING ALL THINGS**." This means being slow to expose another person's sin, and never bringing up those things that are past. Don't throw it in someone's face when they make a mistake, and be willing to let past mistakes go.

Women: Be flexible and self-controlled when plans fall apart or there is a crisis. The way you react in difficult circumstances tells a man a lot about your own level of maturity. Life has its challenges. Don't throw a fit.

Fifth is "**BELIEVING ALL THINGS**." That means seeing people for their strengths. Believing the best also means giving the person the benefit of the doubt—not assuming the worst motives, but erring on the side of assuming the best.

Single women, especially: Don't be preoccupied with wondering, *Where is this relationship going?* Such thoughts put a lot of pressure on a friendship. Be careful of assuming what's

on the other person's mind and killing a friendship that could be great! You can have strong, close friendships with those of the opposite sex that are not romantic at all. In fact, that is pretty much prerequisite to ever having a good marriage! Learn how to relate comfortably and naturally with others—to speak freely on a variety of subjects. That's what marriage is!

Sixth is “HOPING ALL THINGS.” This means having a generally positive outlook and being optimistic—a ray of sunshine rather than a little black cloud.

Women: Men highly respect women who are up-front, genuinely honest and don't play games. Be yourself. Don't try to impress. Don't lead him on. Don't just give him the cold shoulder if you're upset about something. Tell him—tactfully, in love. Don't keep him guessing.

Seventh is “ENDURING ALL THINGS.” God's love makes it through the hard times. Trials are the test of your friendship. That includes being there when your friend makes a mistake.

How *dependable* are you as a friend? Do you cut loose if something goes wrong, or do you weather the storm and stick with the person? Are you in the habit of turning against someone when he fails? Friendship demands trust—knowing a person will be there even during the tough times. God's love endures all things.

Use this list to measure the quality of what you can offer those of the opposite sex. The less of those negative qualities and the more of the positives, the less frustration you will have, the smoother things will go, the stronger those relationships will be.

A CLEAN SLATE— REMOVING PREJUDICE AND PRECONCEIVED IDEAS

Is Your Attitude Toward Marriage Right?

By Joel Hilliker

I want to propose just *one area* that you examine yourself in to see whether you are thinking like God, or whether you have

picked up some of this world's distorted ideas. It's an area that Satan hammers particularly hard, and about which we must fight to acquire and maintain a godly mindset.

It is your *attitude toward marriage*.

Wow, is this world confused about marriage! Several terrible misconceptions surround it. Let's talk about two of them.

On one hand is the ridiculous, over-romanticized view. This says marriage is a fairy tale in which two "soul mates" ride off into the sunset for a life of endless candlelit dinners, enriching communion and lovemaking. You know this is fiction. Nevertheless, wisps of this fantasy can still influence us. One of the most obvious ways is for us—not just singles but even marrieds—to be unfairly dissatisfied with reality. Many singles survey the dating pool and grow discouraged because they simply don't see that "soul mate" that, on some level, they are convinced they deserve, and must have. They rule out viable options for a mate because of a too-romantic view of what that mate should be—perhaps in terms of physical appearance, sense of humor, brilliant personality, or some magical "spark."

On the other hand is a much uglier view: that marriage is, practically speaking, nearly impossible. The potential for friction, arguing, misunderstanding is too high. The likelihood of failure, of emotional turmoil, of separation, of divorce, of messiness, is too great. Marriage is just a mountain of hassle. It's too much work. It's not worth it.

This is an area I challenge you to examine yourself in.

God wants the singles in His Church to have a thoroughly POSITIVE attitude toward marriage and family. Not an over-romanticized view, but a realistic and fundamentally *optimistic* view.

Here are some wonderful realities to meditate on. We are the Kingdom of God in embryo—which is the Family of God! God intends us to be the vanguard of a revolution that sets this world's mixed-up families *right-side up!* We are preparing to be part of the *marriage of all marriages*, the marriage that will set the example for families all over the world. This is right at the heart of our calling! This is our reason for being here.

Our lives today should reflect our orientation around preparing for that future, even if you're not married at present. God's Church should be full of people who study, meditate on, understand and really LOVE *God's design in the family*. God

really wants us to be *ambitious* for family. Yes—even *physical* family! He wants us to be excited about godly marriages, families and children.

God wants YOU to have your mind oriented *in a right way* toward PREPARING FOR MARRIAGE. Because that is our future!

The singles in God's Church really should be *different* from the singles in the world. Your attitudes should be different. Your communication with other singles should be different. Your dating should be *very* different! Your interaction with families and children should be different.

If you have picked up that crusty pessimism, chip it away—break it off. Never allow yourself to hold on to Satan's crabby, curmudgeonly, discouraging attitudes about marriage and family. If you find those, work to drive them out. Be a positive single!

Obviously I'm not saying that all of you will marry in this life. But I *am* asking you to keep your mind open about it. Have a positive attitude toward it. Safeguard that natural desire in your mind for it. And *prepare yourself for it*.

Here is an extraordinary truth. If you work to make yourself more marriageable in this life—anything from working toward a better career, improving your homemaking skills, improving your personality, becoming more emotionally and spiritually mature, to pursuing more dating opportunities—you *will be preparing yourself for your marriage to Christ!* You will be getting ready for your life in God's Family forever!

'What a Large Blemish You Have'

By Joel Hilliker

Being overly sensitive and taking offense is all too easy. We feel entitled to certain treatment. We uphold certain expectations about the way others should look, act and speak. We can be judgmental. We can fixate on others' mistakes and flaws.

It's human, isn't it? Someone might have a lovely face, but all we can see is the big wart on the end of the nose.

It *is* human. But remember: God is trying to shape us into something more than merely human.

1 Corinthians 13 gives us a glorious, under-the-microscope view of God's magnificent love. These are the qualities that

make God's Family so harmonious and functional and joyous and wonderful. The attributes of God that *we need to develop* if we want to be part of that eternal Family.

Among these traits is the fact that God's love is *longsuffering*, very *kind*, NEVER IRRITATED, never *resentful*, always eager to *believe the best*, always *hopeful* and always patient.

THAT IS WHAT GOD IS. That's the way He is toward you—and thank God that He is! That is what *God's love* is.

In many of the conversations I've had with singles in God's Church, I have noticed a tendency to take offense and/or to lose interest in somebody over some pretty piddly issues. Oh, let's just name a few. *His laugh is obnoxious. She makes noise with her jaw when she chews. He asked me on a date by texting me. She was interested in someone else a while back. He's too serious; I need someone with a sense of humor. She's a little feministic for my tastes. He's not assertive enough. I'm looking for a woman who's more into sports. He doesn't make enough money. She's too quiet. He's too opinionated. She's too tall. He's just not attractive to me. Sorry, but I just can't see past that wart.*

If you are like most singles, you have a list. You probably haven't written it down—it's just up in your mind, maybe tucked away in the shadowy part in the back. It has the names of other singles in the Church—singles that you have mentally "crossed off." For one reason or another, you've decided that things couldn't possibly work out between you and these people.

So, to be honest, you treat them differently. You don't give them the same level of attention or respect.

Let me make a suggestion: Throw away that list.

Many of you are surveying the singles scene and thinking, *Wow—there are some really quirky singles in this Church.* And you're right. But guess what? There are also a lot of pretty quirky *married* people as well—HAPPILY married quirky people. Someone, at some point, decided that there were enough lovable qualities in them that it was worth overlooking the peculiarities.

The fact is, we all have quirks. Yes, even you. There are things about you that other people could easily find irritating or obnoxious if they chose to.

No single would ever admit—even to himself—that he was looking for perfection in a mate, but the fact is that *many* singles are disappointed or discontented with anybody who

doesn't come pretty cotton-pickin' close.

As a result, many are OVERLOOKING people who could actually make good, close friends—or even a *wonderful* spouse!

Some of our singles are quite good friends with someone of the opposite sex: They enjoy each other's company, they have quite a lot in common, they have good communication. But because of an idealized view of what a spouse will look like, they simply never view that person as anything more than a buddy.

I really believe that some of you have someone in your life—someone whom God would be delighted to see you marry—that you have disregarded because of what, in the big picture, is really a minor offense or surface-level issue.

Regardless of whether you fit that description, you would do well to take this advice to heart: *Throw away that list*. And then, consciously make an effort to *stop* looking at people in terms of whether they fulfill the idea in your mind of what you deserve in a spouse.

Instead, start actively trying to see them *as God does*. That is, AS PEOPLE HE IS INVITING TO MARRY HIS SON.

God sees something special in *every single person in His Church*. He selected each one out of around 1.5 million people! When you look at someone, if you only see irritants and quirks and awkwardness, *then you simply don't see what God sees*. Or—let me state that in more positive terms: You don't see it YET.

Obviously God sees their warts. He knows their problems and flaws far better than anybody. And He still sees enough potential—enough substance to work with, enough capacity to get excited about, enough beauty in their attitude and in their heart—that He has chosen that person as AN ETERNAL HELPMEET FOR JESUS CHRIST!

That should tell you something. There is *real spiritual treasure* within every single individual God has handpicked to be in His Church (1 Corinthians 12:18). It takes the mind of God to see beyond the physical—not just the blemishes, the unusual mannerisms, eccentricities or habits, but even the beauty, which also can be a distraction—and to *look on the heart* (1 Samuel 16:7).

We can all agree that Jesus Christ is going to make a *perfect Husband*, right? Well, guess what: The Pharisees were offended by Him! God actually calls Him “a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence” (1 Peter 2:8).

Learning to see people as God does takes effort. It takes friendliness, kindness, patience, some sacrifice, big-heartedness. Sometimes, it takes not getting worked up over some kind of fault. Not getting irritated or resentful. Letting things go. Being quick to forgive. Being positive and hopeful. Being always eager to *believe the best*.

Evaluate yourself for that tendency to size people up primarily for their marriageability. And just ask yourself: If God the Father considers someone “marriage material” and you don’t, is it possible you’re using flawed criteria?

Overcoming this tendency can open you up to unanticipated riches of friendship. And beyond that, I suspect that in some cases, it could open you up to even more.

The Danger of Pairing Off Too Soon

Good News, January 1984

Don’t fall for the quasimarrried state of going steady or pairing off too early. Often the steady-dating rut leads many young people to settle for a second-best life partner out of sheer habit and familiarity. Their personality, character and social experience are stunted at an early age.

There are so many alternatives in our day and age.

Travel. Study. Solidify a career. Sharpen your talents. Date widely. While dating, strive to build friendships or boost others who need a lift. This is the wisest use of your single years. It is the way of give. You’ll be surprised how Mister or Miss Right has a way of turning up when least expected (Acts 20:35).

Going Steady

Modern Dating: Key to Success or Failure in Marriage

Going steady may be “convenient” because the boy can always *expect* a date, and not have to ask for one. It may be easier, because he can dress and act more casually than he might in trying to impress a new girl. It may be the custom—and it may be defended by the majority who do it.

But to either a fellow or a girl who truly wants to learn the

RIGHT KIND of dating, for the RIGHT purpose, with wholesome and *good* results, it will become obvious that going steady is NOT GOOD. It's merely another example of modern permissiveness—and a type of society-sanctioned pre-engagement betrothal—a kind of accepted living together, where, like as not, the couple actually see more of each other through the week than do their own parents.

IS DATING FOR YOU?

Selfish Dating vs. Serving Dating

By Joel Hilliker

In today's world, dating truly is a lost art. Real *dating* has largely been replaced by “hanging out,” doing various mindless or even destructive activities.

Look at the dating scene in this world, and you will see a tremendous amount of confusion. People's focus is entirely *selfish*. Their motives are self-centered. They don't care about the other person beyond *what that person will do for them*.

The ironic thing is, many—perhaps most—of the people who engage in this type of “dating” still hope that somehow, at some point, they will “click” with one of the people they are hooking up with and end up settling into a wonderful, meaningful, long-term relationship.

They need to get real!

You can't build a healthy relationship on that kind of self-oriented foundation any more than you can grow a healthy plant in a tub of poison.

A relationship between two people who care only about what the other person can do for them is a ship with two captains and no rudder, heading into a storm and destined to fail. Unless and until their focus changes.

It is infinitely better—far likelier to lead to lasting success—to build a relationship *from the start* on a foundation of unselfishness.

Isn't that what you would like to do? Then it has to start *right now*—in the way that you date!

That's right: If you want to build an enduring, fulfilling relationship, you need to start right now by dating in a way that is entirely different from the selfish approach unwittingly followed by the great majority of singles!

When I say that dating is a lost art today, essentially I'm talking about the fact that unselfish dating is rarely practiced.

The singles in God's Church are not dating to have casual sex. However, *the attitudes and practices of singles in the world* can still rub off on us more than we may realize.

Sadly, many singles in God's Church have a fundamentally selfish approach to dating.

For example, some singles simply *don't* date because, basically, they don't feel like it. Their only concern is whether it's convenient for *themselves*, or what *they* get out of it. They may convince themselves of excuses—*I don't have time; I can't afford it; there's no one to date*—all things that can be overcome. They may deem someone as “not marriageable” and thus have no interest in dating them. (Obviously there are *legitimate* reasons where it would not be appropriate to date someone.) All these hindrances typically boil down to one thing: They are thinking too selfishly to want to extend themselves.

Other people date, but do so with selfish motives. Some singles believe the sole purpose of dating is to *find a mate*. This is selfish and leads to many problems. Anyone who is on a date primarily to assess someone's ability to fulfill duties as a husband or wife is going to behave awkwardly and inappropriately.

If you have a selfish approach to a date, the person you are with will know it. A date should never feel like a job interview!

In congregations where there are many dating opportunities, some singles go through the motions of “dating widely”—a man invites a woman to sit with him at services or accompany him to a social function, for example—but fail to demonstrate any real interest in the other person. This selfish approach can make that person end up feeling like little more than an ornament.

Dating—like everything else we do as we learn and practice God's way of life—should be an act of give. Your mind should be on *servicing* the other person, trying to *give* him or her a positive, even spiritually and mentally uplifting, experience.

When a man and woman both have that focus, they will have a wonderful date!

Dating for Teenagers?

By Garner Ted Armstrong (*Modern Dating: Key to Success or Failure in Marriage*)

Most people today simply do not date for the right reasons. They have no conception of what dating is supposed to accomplish.

Trouble is, dating has degenerated into a state of merely “being together” for most teenagers—the simple practice of *spending time with each other*. What they DO, and how they do it—where they go, and with whom—and WHY they go there—all have become totally secondary to the mere expediency of BEING TOGETHER.

Dating leads to marriage. But marriage is NOT for children.

Young people ought to have free access to other people their same age. But that access should be for wholesome, broadening social purposes and for upbuilding, constructive, educational, recreational and enjoyable purposes that are STILL FUN next month, and next year!

As “old-fashioned” as it may sound to many young teenagers whose parents have already abandoned them into the subculture of teens—there is NEVER a need for two young people to be in an automobile on a “date” AWAY from others, from their parents, or from members of a group!

But there is a definite *need* for a wide variety of social contacts for *every* person as he grows toward maturity. To become a truly balanced and outgoing personality—a much wider variety, not only of social contacts, but of the right kind of activities, should be encouraged for teenagers.

Seven Purposes for Dating

The Notebook of Richard Rice, Chapter 34

1. Building friendships True and meaningful friendships contribute to a happy, abundant life. One purpose of dating is to help build these long-lasting relationships. Friendship grows when we show concern for the feelings and interests of others. “A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly”

(Proverbs 18:24). So, in your dating, concentrate on giving and building friendships.

Date widely. This gives you experience in relating to a broad range of different people. You'll find yourself learning how to interface with almost anyone and becoming, as Paul admonished, "all things to all men" (1 Corinthians 9:22).

Avoid pairing off in a premature romance. This is a poor foundation for any lasting relationship and damages the potential for becoming true friends. Instead, build strong bonds of brotherly love. These endure forever.

2. Understanding the opposite sex What makes men tick? Why do women act the way they do? Men and women have unique differences. The way they view life—their feelings, reactions and ways of doing things—are in some instances almost opposite.

Date a wide variety of people—and date as often as your schedule will allow. If you limit yourself to a narrow range, or rarely date at all, you probably won't gain a good understanding of the opposite sex. Accept the challenge to venture out and date. The perspective you gain will benefit you throughout your life—especially in your future marriage.

You'll also come to appreciate how our Creator made men and women to complement one another.

3. Growing in confidence Confidence in relating to others—along with friendliness and outgoing concern—is an important quality of leadership. Dating is one of the most effective means of developing this attribute. Confidence involves poise, self-assurance, ease in dealing with people and skill in handling different situations. This comes through practice and experience. Dating provides that experience. If you feel ill at ease on dates, don't let this stop you from trying! The more you date, the more relaxed you will be. Nervousness will decrease and confidence will grow.

Try group dating also. This reduces the anxiety that sometimes occurs with one-on-one dates. Concentrate on giving the other person an enjoyable time. This principle can change what might be a dull date into an interesting and successful one. Having many successful dates will greatly increase your confidence.

4. Learning the art of communication Dating gives practical experience in learning the art of communication in everyday settings. It takes practice to tactfully express yourself and communicate well with different types of people. Socializing with others will help you gain this practice. Learn how to say the right thing at the right time. “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver” (Proverbs 25:11). Express yourself and your thoughts with enthusiasm and color. Expand your vocabulary by learning and using new words. Become an active listener. This involves giving others a chance to express themselves and showing sincere interest in what they have to say.

5. Having fun and fellowship Keep in mind that having fun and enjoying fellowship does not mean involving or emphasizing romantic interests. These dates should be for the purpose of breaking the routine, relaxing and just enjoying life to the full. Have fun! And strive to give others a good time.

6. Giving and serving Dating is giving. Education, growth and fun are all important purposes of dating, but one of the primary goals should be giving to the other person.

Be thoughtful and considerate. Look out for the needs and interests of your date and concentrate on making the occasion relaxed and enjoyable. Be open in sharing your thoughts and ideas and express genuine interest in those of your date.

Notice the individual who may be shy or a newcomer who hasn't yet made a lot of friends. Men, take the initiative to ask this type of girl for a date. On group outings, ladies, include the fellow who is having a hard time breaking in. Give of yourself! Think of others first!

Maintain a friendly outlook towards everyone. Don't be a respecter of persons. Dating gives opportunities to practice the spiritual law of love that governs every human relationship. Apply God's Word to your dating experiences and you'll be amazed at the results!

7. Preparing for the future One of the ultimate purposes for dating is to lay a foundation for marriage. Out of the friendships you build may eventually emerge that “special person” who will fit into your life. At that point your dating can become

more serious, but keep in mind, this could take several years.

In the meantime, if you're wise, you won't rush into romance or become emotionally involved with a person after the third or fourth date. Nor will you limit yourself only to a few, select people. You'll date widely in order to mature and experience a broad variety of personalities. Then, when it's time to consider marriage, you'll have laid a proper foundation and gained the wisdom to choose the right mate.

Keep your priorities in view. Pray to God for help and guidance so that you'll not stray from His paths. Exercise restraint and seek His will. Remember that God is the ideal matchmaker.

Get to Know Your Fellow Singles!

By Joel Hilliker

The singles in the Philadelphia Church of God are quite scattered. And it's difficult not to get pessimistic about your chances of meeting someone when you don't even *see* anyone.

However, as it turns out, the PCG has a *lot* of singles. You make up about 30 percent of the membership of the Church! God's Church has a lot of singles you don't know very well—and probably many you haven't even met.

I want to encourage you to get to know more of your fellow PCG singles.

The ideal would be if there were a *lot* of healthy interaction and dating within our singles community. It's up to *you* to make it happen.

Some of you are not particularly sold on the idea that dating is important. I realize that as you get older, circumstances and priorities change. Many of you have already had a family and aren't interested in doing that again. That is understandable.

Nevertheless, I am convinced that *anyone* who applies this advice—no matter your age or station in life—will benefit. Our human nature always wants to consider ourselves the exception—to think that something doesn't really apply to us. There may be some exceptions, but if those exceptions make up 2 or 5 percent of the people, there will likely still be 50 percent or more considering themselves the exception!

This is an area where the vast majority of you, of every age,

would benefit from looking more closely at the way God has set things up at Herbert W. Armstrong College and doing what you can to emulate that model.

Do You Uphold God’s Dating Standard? The *Armstrong College Handbook* says, “At God’s college, dating widely is critical to your overall development of the whole man—and thus, a vitally important part of your education.” This is a *vitally important* part of the education of the students at God’s college.

Do you view dating as vitally important to *your* education?

You may think that is only true for younger singles. I disagree. Many of the older singles in the Church never even had the *opportunity* to date God’s way—because they came into the Church later in life, or perhaps were already married. And unless you’ve had that opportunity, you probably have more worldly ideas about dating than you realize! (That being the case, it’s understandable that many of you are turned off by the whole idea of dating. Dating that excludes God is destructive.)

Dating God’s way is a critical component of the AC education. It serves a vital purpose in developing the whole man—and woman—if done the right way, in accordance with God’s standards. And that is true for *any* single who does it!

“For this reason, the administration has taken significant steps to ensure that you have many valuable dating experiences while here—and with as many different people as possible,” the handbook continues, and then describes some of those opportunities.

That’s fine and wonderful for those at the college. But the reality is that outside of headquarters, there simply aren’t as many opportunities to date as would be ideal. The ideal situation is where you’re in close proximity to many other singles that you can date and get to know face-to-face.

So how can you increase your opportunities? Get creative.

Today, you have this wonderful tool called the Internet. Video conferencing—through free tools like Facetime, Skype, Oovoo or Google Hangouts—even allows you to *see* who you’re talking with “face to face”! Yes, you need an Internet connection, but other than that, it’s *free*. There are no additional long-distance costs. And what do you do on a date anyway? You have conversation and share experiences. You can do that to

an amazing degree online.

Using technology opens up possibilities for interacting *regularly* with singles from all over! It gives you the means to use dating for giving and serving, learning to be a source of encouragement and inspiration to others, and strengthening the Body of Christ.

Singles, we really would like to create an environment in God's Church where there is *a lot* of regular positive, upbuilding, wholesome interaction occurring among you, just as there is among our AC students. For you in the field, this simply will not happen without extra effort.

The challenge lies before you: *Do what YOU can to build that positive environment.* Step out and create those interactions. Not just between you and your two or three friends, but regular fellowship among a variety of people.

I really encourage you to use *video conferencing*. Seeing who you're speaking with is ideal. If video conferencing isn't available, a phone call is still useful. (E-mails and chatting are far less personal and can't really be considered "dating.")

Generally, *schedule* your dates rather than just calling out of the blue.

Whether this succeeds or fails depends in large part on you *men*. God designed you to be the leaders. He wants you to initiate most of the dating, setting the pace, leading the way, serving your sisters in the Church. You have a responsibility in this area. Be proactive!

And women, do what you can to *encourage* the men who do step out. Don't interpret an e-mail invitation for an online date as a marriage proposal and freak out. Have some fellowship with a brother, and let him know his efforts are appreciated.

How *often* should you date? There's no single correct answer, but look at the college as a model. Between dates for Sabbath services and Bible studies, formal college events and other activities, students typically date *eight or more times per month*. Eight dates per month might be unrealistic for many single men in the field. But *set goals*—challenge yourself to have two, three or four per month, or one or two per week—and *follow through*.

Anyone who strives to make this part of your regular life is sure to find great reward in it.

Look to create other opportunities besides just online dates. Travel when you can. See if your congregation or region can host a singles event. For a special occasion, you might fly someone out. If there's a church activity like a campout, rally other singles and turn it into a singles activity. Work to create experiences.

Pray about it, asking God to open doors for you. If you expend the effort, God will bless and amplify that.

Most of this responsibility falls on you men, but women can also participate in planning. Get creative! At the college, we have Turnabout Weekend, where the women do the asking. The AC handbook says, "Turnabout Weekend happens once a semester and gives AC women the opportunity to take on the responsibility of planning for and asking AC men on dates." It wouldn't be out of the question to do that occasionally. "Outside of Turnabout Weekend, generally speaking, women should not ask men out on dates at AC. Unless it is a special, off-campus occasion or a turnabout date, women should allow the men to ask for dates" (ibid).

Date Widely What do we mean when we encourage you to "date widely"? The AC handbook says, "[M]ale students should not request an additional date with a female student until he has dated all of the eligible female students." That is quite a standard! For many of our students, that's 25 people or more!

I challenge you men, if possible, to cycle through a list of 10 or 20 people or more before you come back around to dating someone a second time. The urge is always to "pair off" quickly. But that undermines what we're trying to accomplish and often leads to problems. Use technology to increase your experience at dating widely first. Treat all the women as sisters—and women, treat the men as brothers—not as romantic encounters.

AC students are not permitted to pair off or to consider marriage until the end of the first semester of their senior year. "Until then, all students must date widely and put all thought of marriage out of mind," the handbook says.

Remember, these aren't just the *college* standards—THESE ARE GOD'S STANDARDS!

When should you involve the ministry? If your mind starts entertaining more serious interest in a particular person, it is never *too early* to involve the ministry.

Be sure that, as at God's college, you date within your race—even online dating. In most cases this is obvious, but sometimes it isn't. If you have any doubts, please talk with your minister before you do any one-on-one dating—although *group dating*, with three or more people of different races, is encouraged.

We also encourage you to generally date people your own age, perhaps within five to 10 years—*younger and older*. (Many men seem to want to date women far *younger* than themselves but show *no* interest in anyone older. Typically that reveals a selfish attitude.) The age difference is not quite as important as you get older, but it is still a good idea generally to date people with life experience similar to your own.

How to Be Happy! Christ instructed the disciples, “Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet” (John 13:13-14).

This world is completely selfish. We *all* tend to get into very selfish thinking. Christ is trying to draw us out of that and get us into His giving, serving, loving, outflowing way of life. Christ wants His Bride to learn how to be a genuine source of encouragement and inspiration to others!

Christ commands us to love one another as He loves us (verse 34). You can't love someone as Christ loves you *in a half-hearted way*. Every one of us can do more to live up to His example.

“For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. ... If ye know these things, *happy* are ye if ye do them” (verses 15, 17).

This world tells you that *selfishness* makes you happy. That's a lie!

Christ is telling us, *I realize that this involves sacrifice—giving up something you'd rather be doing and putting someone else's needs ahead of your own. In fact, it involves getting down on your knees, handling someone else's dirty feet, and helping that person! But guess what? If you do that—you're actually going to be happy!*

Carnally, we think sacrificing for another means we have to give up what makes us happy—but the truth is, *giving to others is what makes you happy!*

This is a faith issue. There is a way that seems right to this world, and a way that seems right to you—but *God has a differ-*

ent way! If we step out in faith and do it God's way, good things will happen!

A Different Way to Date! God's way of dating is radically different from this world's way of dating.

Consider the purposes of dating and why it is important (and I am speaking here particularly about casual dating, versus dating one individual seriously in preparation for marriage). In the Worldwide Church of God under Herbert W. Armstrong, one minister gave these nine purposes and reasons for dating:

1. To have fun and enjoyment
2. To develop a well-rounded personality
3. To expand socially and culturally
4. To broaden your education
5. To develop the art of conversation
6. To overcome self-centeredness
7. To experience a wide range of personalities
8. To build confidence
9. To prepare for courtship and marriage

Casual dating, this minister wrote, is an opportunity to accomplish "two grand goals": 1) To develop into a colorful and dynamic personality; and 2) to be a source of genuine encouragement and inspiration to others.

That last point really is a "grand goal"! In fact, it's a wonderful *vision* of how God's Church should conduct itself. For you singles, godly dating is a special way for you to be a source of *genuine encouragement and inspiration* to others.

Many singles in this Church could really use genuine encouragement and inspiration. Living in Satan's world—working to qualify to marry Christ—is tough! We need each other!

You might think, *I'm doing fine. I don't really need encouragement.* Maybe you need it more than you think, but the point is, *other people* need that encouragement from you!

Are You Using Excuses?

By Joel Hilliker

It's probably the most common dating advice from the Church:

Date widely. This can be mighty difficult to do, considering how spread out so many of you are. For the majority of singles in God's Church, the options for dating are so limited, "date widely" is almost a punchline: *Who's "widely"? Where is he/she? I'll gladly date him/her if (s)he's around!*

This is a genuine, bona fide obstacle, no question about it. I understand that your dating options are probably limited. But I have a question for you: *Are you really taking full advantage of the options you do have?*

For many of you, the answer is no.

In recent conversations with singles, several have given me reasons why they are *not* dating widely. Some have said they're "too old for that." They're not interested. Some have said they're too poor. Some have said that they came from the world and just think differently—like it's *impossible* to change from a worldly view of dating. Some have said they don't want to ask a woman on a date who they're not interested in, for fear of leading her on. Some have said that because of personal issues like health problems or a handicap, they wouldn't want to burden someone else, so they don't date.

Now, there may be circumstances where a minister counsels you to refrain from dating for a particular reason. Follow that counsel.

Otherwise, let me be blunt: Those are excuses. Flawed thinking, pure and simple.

Here's the reality: *Date widely* does not apply only to the students at Herbert W. Armstrong College. It doesn't apply only to young singles, or only to rich singles, or only to Caucasian singles, or only to second-generation singles. It is not exclusively for people who have never been married before, or singles with no children, or singles in perfect health.

Believe it or not, *date widely* is top-shelf advice that will benefit any single who will strive to apply it!

The Invisible Singles

By Joel Hilliker

God's Church has *a lot* of single people. More than you realize. You make up a *sizable percentage* of the people God has

specially called to support this Work!

And many of you—as you survey the scene for “datable” people, hoping that special someone will walk around the corner with a special glow around him or her—are actually *overlooking* other singles without realizing it.

It seems, in fact, that many people in God’s Church have become “invisible singles.”

I have heard many troubling stories of people who are being slighted, neglected, or even wholly *ignored*. People with “complicating” issues like having children in the picture, or being in ill health or overweight, who simply aren’t considered as “available.” People who dread attending singles events because of insensitive things others have said. Men who have been turned down for more dates than they’ve been accepted for. Women who have been single in the Church for 20 years and *never once* been asked on a date!

Such rejection and neglect exacts a painful emotional toll, often causing the person to withdraw and become even harder to relate to.

“I used to attend the singles functions when I could, but was always pretty much ignored, so I don’t bother with that anymore,” said one single woman, in a theme that has come up with several people. “It seems that the guys feel that if they’re seen talking to someone, then people will think they’re interested in that person, so that basically put an invisible force-field around me that no one would challenge, not even to say hello, for fear someone would get the impression they were interested in me. Those were always pretty much just exercises in humiliation for me, so I don’t even go anymore.”

Wouldn’t you agree that this shouldn’t be the case in God’s Church? Wouldn’t you agree that *everyone* should feel included, nurtured, respected, cared for? Wouldn’t you agree that “invisible people” shouldn’t exist?

As Christ said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have *love one to another*” (John 13:35). The active, outflowing exercise of the love of God among ourselves is what should distinguish us as the Body of Christ!

This is one reason why *date widely* is such important, valuable advice!

Think about it. If all the singles in God’s Church were tak-

ing *whatever steps they could* to date as widely as possible, this would have several wonderful effects. It would draw *many* people away from the periphery and more deeply into the Family of God. It would involve many more people in rewarding, up-building activity. It would contribute to individual growth and character enrichment. It would strengthen our congregations and the Church as a whole.

Dating widely is not just about finding a spouse. It's about expressing and filling the Church with the love of God.

Is it possible there are some "invisible singles" in your congregation, in a nearby area, at a combined service on a holy day, at a Church activity, or at the Feast site you attend? Could you be the individual who begins to help turn that person's experience around?

Practically speaking, this takes effort. "Dating widely" involves spending actual time in conversation and activity with people you don't immediately click with, or with whom fellowship might be more labored. It requires stepping outside your comfort zone, risking the possibility of having a less-than-fascinating evening or being rejected in some way. It may even involve spending money (though not all dating does).

Nevertheless, that is what the Church recommends. Don't consider yourself the exception without counseling about it. Apply the advice and see what happens!

How Singles Can Become Invisible Men, let me tell you a secret. Many of the single women in God's Church feel you are overlooking or ignoring them. Did you realize that the only "attention" some of them are getting from men is coming from men *in the world*? If *you* aren't paying attention to them, you can be sure that the devil is going to bring worldly fellas along to try to convince them that some guy from the world will provide all her needs! That is a very sad truth. Some women have *left the Church* because they were too weak to resist this temptation. But perhaps if the single men were supplying the proper supportive companionship, it wouldn't have even *been* a temptation.

Think about the man who reasons, *I don't want to ask that woman out, because I don't want to convey the mistaken impression that I'm interested in her. It would be insensitive for me to*

lead her on that way. I'll spare her feelings by being sure to avoid appearing overly friendly.

This man has probably convinced himself he is thinking unselfishly. But this "unselfish" thinking is *precisely* what creates "invisible singles"! If *everyone* takes this approach, then this woman becomes isolated and neglected because everyone is so busy "sparing her feelings"!

Quite simply, this is a worldly approach. Dating is about serving, and you don't need to be romantically attracted to someone to serve her! Only dating someone you consider an eligible marriage candidate is selfish.

Besides that, the idea that you would know, just by looking at someone, whether you're "interested"—whether they'd make a good mate for you—is Hollywood fantasy. And it is putting far too much emphasis on *physical looks*, which is an important trap to avoid.

If you're concerned about sending the "wrong message" to someone by asking her out or accepting a date from him, here is the solution: *Don't worry about it.*

If you're still worried, *pray about it.*

Then go out and date widely.

Change Starts With One Person Listen to this, from a single mother. She said, "I wasn't sure if I wanted to meet any one at that point. But I never turned down an invitation to go out. I had been encouraged by the ministry to participate. At the time I didn't fully understand. I did it because I was counseled to. I get it now. I am glad I heeded the ministry. Date to make friends. Make a lot of friends. This is service. God wants us to serve one another. I never looked at dating as meeting a potential husband but rather making a new friend or getting to know an old friend better."

This woman described one man in the Church who dated widely. "I watched him turn many singles around by actually dating to serve. Sometimes that date was simply a Sabbath date. He told me that he learned a lot about individuals just by sitting through services with them and having conversations before and after services. Many singles in the area started doing this in his area and discovered something amazing: They can be friends. The singles in his congregation are closer now"

That change started with *one person!* Extraordinary.

Maybe *you* could be that person in your area.

Whatever the case, step out in faith and apply God's counsel: *Date widely*. Do your part to make sure that there isn't even one "invisible single" left in the Church! God will bless your efforts in ways you probably can't anticipate!

Surviving the Blizzard

Good News, September 1980

The best way to find a friend is to be one. When you are a friend others will seek you out. Putting it another way, the best way to mitigate feelings of aloneness is to take aloneness away from somebody else. You'll find that a person caught up in acts of giving will not be so aware of his own problems.

Giving friendship is like the story of the two men who trudged a long distance through the blizzard. Exhausted, they had only one mile to go when they came across an injured man lying in the snow. One of the travelers refused to help and pressed on. The other stopped, put the hurt man over his shoulder and staggered forward. Half a mile later they found the man who refused to help. He was lying in the snow, dead from the cold.

The traveler who stopped to help, by taking on an additional load, had raised his body temperature. It kept both him and the man he was carrying alive. They made it to the shelter. But if one hadn't stopped to help the other they would have both been overcome by the cold. It was the giving that kept the rescuer going. It can be the same for you.

You Are Dating Future Gods!

By Gary Restall

The first purpose of godly dating is to have fun and enjoyment. So get started, and have fun and enjoy meeting the Family. You'll meet lovely people whom God personally selected and invited into His Family, and who will have incredible positions with you for all eternity. People will share not only themselves, but photos of their homes and surroundings and oth-

ers as well. They will share their goals and expectations and sometimes their deep thoughts with you. It will heighten your understanding of God in areas you didn't think "dating" (we older seniors call it "communicating") could.

Remember, each of those you communicate with will be part of the future universe rulership with Jesus Christ. Maybe involved with a certain planet or galaxy—or several of them. You will be able to say, *I know that Being!* Or, knowing them better, you might be able to help them—and they you—in all of those future endeavors.

Don't hold back. Go for it. And enjoy your Family.

How to Overcome Fear and Self-Consciousness

Women's Club: 1980

Most incoming freshmen (and even sophomores, juniors and some seniors) are concerned with how they "come across" and whether they will be "accepted" by their peers. Many people are afraid of rejection by others! With some, the fear of people and their opinions is morbid and unhealthy.

Fear must be dealt with. Uncontrolled, it can frustrate you and paralyze your achievements. It can literally wreck your life. You will not be able to do what's necessary to gain the respect of others. It will stifle your service to those around you.

Tonight we will discuss how to overcome fear. I want to offer SEVEN practical points which will help you to achieve the goals you desire.

The Bible shows that the KEY to overcoming fear is love! "There is no fear in love; but *perfect love casteth out fear*: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love ..." (1 John 4:18).

This love is not just a sentiment—it is ACTION! It is realizing that if you stay in your little hemmed-in corner, never reaching out to others, you will not rise to higher plateaus.

Your life is like a small rosebud growing in the garden where God has set it. But, as long as it's closed tightly upon itself, no one will ever see the radiant, beautiful flower that's hidden. Only when the rose unfurls itself—reaches out—can others enjoy its beauty, fragrance and richness.

As you allow God to work in your life—to give you love for others—only then will you lose your fear of others.

1. Set a goal to overcome fear and self-consciousness Make this one of your priorities. Determine to put forth the effort. Take initiative. Push yourselves. This will result in productive growth.

Resolve to participate in Club. Most fears involve a feeling of a lack of “self-worth” or “self-achievement.” Taking an active part in Club can help you with fears that may not even be directly related to Club. Even if you stand up to answer a question with only “Yes” or “No”—that’s an accomplishment, and a beginning step.

Let love and service be the motivation. And, the very things you desire most you will begin to attain—confidence, acceptance, usefulness and the ability to edify.

2. Pray to God for help and guidance Consider exactly what you are afraid of. Analyze yourself. Get down to the “nitty gritty.” Ask God to show you what you may have overlooked. Pray for the courage and strength to overcome your fears. Remember that the proper fear of God in our lives will dispel the fear of men.

3. Face your fears Your fears can grip and hold you down—they will enslave you. Until you face your fears, you will remain their prisoner. Confront your fears, whether they are fear of people, fear of rejection, fear that people won’t like you, fear that you will expose your ignorance or fear of inadequacy. Don’t let them hold you back from participating. It will enrich your life.

4. Remember that you determine your growth Did you realize that each of us determines the degree of success we achieve? However, to reach higher levels of accomplishment requires effort. The Bible sums it up this way: “He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully” (2 Corinthians 9:6)

Similarly, the greater the effort on your part, the more will be accomplished.

5. Take the initiative Learn to be outgoing. Smile and greet people. This helps you break down fear barriers in yourself—and it encourages other people to be outgoing themselves! It generates feelings of self-worth and acceptance, both in you and others.

Take advantage of smaller group discussions. This will give you confidence for larger groups. Progress step by step.

6. Don't be concerned about 'failure' Any so-called “failure” is really a stepping stone to ultimate success. We learn by our mistakes. The very fact that you may have “failed” in some small way shows that you have TRIED—you put forth effort toward reaching your goal! So what if you don't measure up with your first attempts? You are learning lessons. Remember that you can fail many times, but you are not a failure until you give up.

So, keep trying and putting forth effort—and you will literally “fail” your way to success! Again, think long range. Envision the poised and confident person you want to be and you will eventually become that person. Ask God to give you courage and motivation to that end. You'll need His strength and help.

7. Forget yourself! Many fears come from being self-centered, being worried of how you come across, and whether others will like you. Begin thinking in terms of others, helping them, serving them, encouraging them to achieve their best—and you'll find that this effort will help erase self-consciousness from your life. Forget self, and give to others.

The key to overcoming fears, then, is to think in terms of truly helping others. Ask yourself: How can I help and edify them? That is what LOVE is—active, genuine service.

Using these principles will change your outlook, your thought processes—your very life!

They will help you “perfect” your love and erase fear. You will learn to admire others for their qualities and accomplishments. Your mind will not be constantly on yourself.

As you put these principles to work in your life, you can actually infuse confidence and courage in others.

So, don't let fears hold you back. They only stifle your growth and accomplishment. You can overcome them. The way is before you. Perfect the LOVE which casts out fear!

How Godly Dating Protects You

By Joel Hilliker

Some singles dislike dating widely the way God's Church promotes. They think it's a hassle. They want to date only those they are pretty sure they want to marry. They consider it a waste of time to date someone they have no intention of marrying.

But in truth, God's way of dating PROTECTS US in some wonderful and valuable ways. If you do it God's way, you can navigate the tricky waters of dating—even serious dating and courtship—and lay the groundwork for a successful, happy marriage.

When we enter into a relationship, even a friendship, we make ourselves vulnerable. The more intimate the relationship, the greater the opportunity for both joy and pain. The more of yourself you invest in a relationship, the more you have at stake. And once you are in a one-on-one relationship, you're either going to marry or you're going to break up. Marrying is very serious. Breaking up is very painful.

Read Psalm 73 in the context of being single. The psalmist speaks of being jealous of the world (verse 3). Some singles in God's Church want so badly to be in a relationship that they *leave the Church* to make it happen! You might see the “fun” that worldly singles are having and think they are getting away with it (verses 11-12). You might feel that keeping yourself pure and unspotted is getting you nowhere (verse 13). You can focus on all that you have to *give up* for God. Intellectually, you can understand that this thinking is wrong. But sometimes, if we allow it, our emotions get the better of us.

This psalmist got into that self-pitying attitude. But then he recognized he was off, and corrected it. He thought about the end results of the way of sin (verses 16-17).

When you look at the world's singles' scene, it doesn't take much vision to see where it is leading. Look at the way people date, and even marry. They get into and out of relationships casually and quickly—usually with sex. As they do that, they are *deadening their lives*, and *handicapping* their ability to TRULY CONNECT with someone!

Though many people in the world want to pretend this isn't the case, *whenever* a close relationship falls apart or is severed, you pay a price. Emotionally it can be devastating. Depending

on the circumstances, it can cause you to grow more defensive around people. You lose some of your trust and innocence. You build more protective barriers between you and other people. Those individuals who float in and out of one relationship after another learn to keep those protective barriers up *even while in a relationship!* They simply don't draw close to *anyone*—in order to protect themselves from the pain that comes from separation!

Even in God's Church, if you have been single for a long time, you probably understand this. If you have had a relationship that you hoped would lead to marriage and it fell apart, you know how painful that can be. And the older you become, the likelier it is that you have had experiences that have erected these emotional and mental barriers. In a sense, it *has to be this way*—or else the chances for greater pain, hurt, frustration, disappointment, disillusionment, grow.

THIS IS WHY God's Church—and *really*, GOD—advocates the type of dating we do. God wants to *preserve our innocence*, our *trust*, in our relationships with one another.

God Comes First Asaph repented of his attitude of being envious of the world (Psalm 73:21-22). He realized that he needed to trust God to guide his life; he needed to keep his eyes on the ultimate prize: the glory awaiting us (verses 23-24). We are going to marry Jesus Christ and be His Bride forever!

God has to know that He comes first in your life. Would you ever put a potential mate above God? So many people have. That shows just how strong our human nature can be, and how easy it is for our emotions to short-circuit this process. How many people have left God's Church over this exact issue? Odds are, you personally have known someone who has done this.

God must be confident that you would never prioritize a person—a relationship, a potential marriage or an actual marriage—over your relationship with Him (verse 25). God is all we need! There should be nothing or no one we put before God (Matthew 10:37). If you have to give up everything and everyone in order to follow God, you will be OK! He supplies everything you need (Psalm 73:26). Draw near to Him—put your trust in Him—be content in Him (verses 27-28). Build a strong desire for God!

Can you put your dating in that context? If so, you will be far less susceptible to getting hurt. You're putting yourself in a position to receive far more joy in your dating, in courtship and in marriage.

Calling All Singles to Online Dating

By Antonius Hallmark

I have experienced some of the frustrations associated with dating in God's Church. Meeting new people, finding topics of discussion, keeping relationships alive with interest and excitement is hard work—particularly given the fact that we in God's Church are so scattered. Online dating can present many challenges.

Those challenges, however, *do not* outweigh the benefits reaped by serving one another in God's Church. I'm here to tell you, if you put forth the effort, you will get so much out of it and find that you are the happier for it.

Sacrifice With online dating, the sacrifice is relatively small. It comes from two individuals who want to take time out of their busy schedules and make the effort to converse. They should both realize that although they may prefer to speak in person, it may not be feasible; so they accept that using the online tools is the next best thing. They should make the best of the technology the Most High has blessed us with! That is easier said than done at times. But as the Nike slogan says, *just do it*.

Be Creative Once you've established the likes and dislikes of an individual through conversation, *act on them*. For instance, if you are both interested in going out on a dinner date, then go to dinner online. If you were doing it in person, you would drive up, get out of the car, knock on the door and say, "Let's go get something to eat!" This is no different. You call up, they answer, you ask, "Are you hungry?" and you both get something to eat and come back and share with each other.

My point is, bring the things you would normally do in person that you most enjoy or just have to do, to a virtual world that you both can see and share and have a good laugh over.

Make these experiences work for you. Have a breakfast, lunch or dinner date. Whatever time zone you and your friend live in, make the most of it.

Chapter 3

Preparing for Marriage

SPIRITUAL PREPARATION FOR PHYSICAL MARRIAGE

Perspective on Marriage

Plain Truth, July/August 1984

How to Put It in God's Hands There is one thing I can tell those of you who are single and who do faithfully and patiently wait for the great Creator God to direct you toward the proper marriage. When you are happily married to the right person, it will soon make any or all of those single years seem like ancient history.

There is a marvelous mechanism God must have built in us. After a few months of a happy marriage, we begin to forget what it was like to be single. After a few years we almost totally forget the previous frustrations of the single years. And frankly it doesn't matter if one is 22, 32, 42 or 52 when first married. Believe me, a few happy years with the proper mate are far better than any number of miserable years with the wrong one.

The same thing happens after children are born into a family. When you have a child, or more than one, you will have a hard time remembering what it was like around the house before the children came.

Marriage and children become an integral part of life.

But the wrong marriage to the wrong person? There is no greater turmoil and unhappiness. Far better it is to endure the sometimes frustrating pangs of the single life than to end up trapped in a miserable marriage.

Seven Keys to Godly Decision-Making

The Notebook of Richard Rice, Chapter 8

Unwise decisions can cause a great deal of unhappiness and frustration. They can sometimes take years to straighten out. To make right choices and wise decisions is not a matter of luck or chance. It is a matter of knowing and applying the keys that God has revealed. Unless God is a partner in every

facet of your life, you will surely go wrong in the end. Solomon admonished: "Trust in the Lord with ALL THINE HEART; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In ALL THY WAYS ACKNOWLEDGE HIM and He shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

By contrast, however, "The Lord is with you while ye be with Him; and if ye seek Him He will be found of you; BUT IF YE FORSAKE HIM, HE WILL FORSAKE YOU" (2 Chronicles 15:2).

How vital it is to keep God at the center and seek His divine guidance in the whole of your life.

1. Link every decision in your daily life to the Kingdom of God.

Keep your eye on the day of Christ's coming the day of the glorious resurrection. Weigh the value of every decision against the backdrop of the judgment. Ask yourself, "Will this decision help me to grow, overcome and build character?" Will it add to the quality of my spiritual life or detract from it? Make sure every decision leads you in the direction of God's Kingdom.

2. Continually walk with God and keep in tune with His Spirit.

When God is in all your thoughts and you are tuned into His wavelength, your chances of making a right decision increase a hundredfold. You have the benefit of God's intervention leading you to see the right answer. God's Spirit will inspire your mind with clarity of thought and understanding (Ephesians 1:16-19).

3. Fill your mind with the total Word of God.

The Bible is a complete book touching on every facet of human life and conduct. It contains truths and principles that answer any problem you may encounter. The more of God's Word you have mastered, the more apt you will make the right decision. The key is to so fill your mind with God's Word that when called on to make a decision, the appropriate scriptures will leap into your mind (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

4. Make 'Thy will, not mine, be done' a constant way of life.

In truly seeking God's will in all your undertakings, you stir His heart to guide and direct you. Your chances of succeeding are multiplied many fold when you earnestly look to Him to show you what is right. "Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee THE DESIRES OF THINE HEART. Commit thy way

unto the LORD; trust also in him; and HE SHALL BRING IT TO PASS” (Psalm 37:4-5).

5. Have the courage to accept God’s answer. God doesn’t always answer immediately or give you what you want. He sees a bigger picture in your life than you do and knows what’s best in the end. Be patient and content in your circumstances until all the pieces fall into place. A temporary “no” from God may be compared to a plane sitting on a runway awaiting takeoff. God is the traffic controller in the tower who sees the dangers all around not visible to the pilot in the plane. Only when it is clear and safe for takeoff will God give approval. Don’t be discouraged with the “holding patterns” you may encounter in life—be confident that God is imminently in charge! (Proverbs 16:3).

6. Realize that God requires you to make decisions in order to grow and build character. Learning how to think by using the Bible and incorporating God’s mind is essential to spiritual maturity. God has endowed you with the power to choose. He requires you to use it, but according to His will. Realize that decision-making and its consequences ultimately rests with you. Don’t expect someone to tell you what to do as when you were a child. Be willing to face your problems and decisions squarely.

7. Trust in God with all your heart and He will bless you in the end. If you lean on Him in perfect faith, He will prevent you from making a fatal mistake. He will in most cases make a wrong decision turn out right. The key is to pray and wait patiently until you’re confident of His will. Don’t carnally convince yourself you’re right—prepare, pray and persevere. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28)

How to Become a Lovable Person

The Notebook of Richard Rice, Chapter 26

Pray for an attractive personality and a likable disposition. Realize that the desire and ability to transform your life must

come from God. He will grant the motivation and power if you wholeheartedly seek His help. Earnestly strive to develop a positive, joyful and peace-loving outlook. Request that the fruits of His Holy Spirit will truly become apparent in your life. Remember that it is God's mind and nature in you that will make you lovable.

Ask your closest friends to help you see your shortcomings. Really mean it when you ask for their input and counsel. Don't justify or make excuses when they tell you the truth or share their honest feelings. Be open-minded and thankful—take their suggestions to heart. Seek to know if you are any of the following: negative, critical, whiny, coarse, crude, unrefined, immature and demanding. Come to see yourself as others see you and desire to make genuine changes in your life.

Embark on a crash program of overcoming. Set your mind to change and to really achieve breakthroughs with long-standing problems. Visualize the transformed person you want to be and the benefits that you will gain as a result. Work on the repulsive and scratchy elements first—the things that turn people off. Make yourself vividly aware of how ugly selfishness is. Set deadlines to conquer your most obnoxious habits. Get tough on yourself and start today.

Practice humility and grow in Christ's likeness. First, realize that every blessing you possess has come from God—your brain, talents, abilities, resources, etc. Secondly, recognize that others have contributed greatly to your present success. Remember that you're only dust, like everyone else. Therefore, don't think too highly of yourself or take sole credit for your accomplishments. Determine to remove every trace of pride, arrogance and vanity from your life. Keep Christ's example of humility in the forefront of your mind.

Be friendly and make people feel comfortable in your presence. Be cheerful, enthusiastic and expressive when you interact with others. Help people to relax and save face if they make an embarrassing mistake. Don't show favoritism, or be a respecter of persons. Treat everyone with care and respect: the shy, the handicapped, the young, the elderly, the quiet, the backward, etc. Develop a good sense of humor and learn to laugh at yourself. Smile and radiate warmth as an ongoing way of life. Be responsive and approachable.

Develop an interest in people and the qualities that make them unique. This takes courage and effort, but the friendships you gain will be well worth it. Getting to know people and what makes them tick is an adventure in learning. A vast education awaits you if you'll step out and make new acquaintances. You'll also win the admiration of people you befriend because you will have brightened their lives.

Pray for love and the knowledge of how to creatively apply it. The love that God imparts is creative. It enlightens the mind to thousands of ways in which to help others succeed and be happy. Think about the needs and wellbeing of everyone with whom you come in contact. Look for opportunities to help carry the burdens of others and to lighten their load. Be thoughtful in word and in deed: encourage, edify, commend, give, aid, share. Recognize the desire for attention that people crave. Every human has a need of love—seek for ways to give it.

Always be honest, truthful and sincere. Be upright and true at all costs and in every circumstance. Reflect integrity. Be completely reliable and strive to be the kind of person others can always trust. Keep your promises and make your word good. Manifest a child-like innocence in mind, attitude and character. Keep private information confidential—make this an absolute must. Be conscientious like Christ, inside and out.

Be polite and courteous to everyone you meet. Practice being kind and gracious. Realize that these qualities represent refined godly love. They say to others, "You count—you're important and worth something as an individual." This kind of love is an outward manifestation of God's Spirit at work.

Learn the art of being tactful and sensitive to others' feelings. Put your mind in gear before you open your mouth. Choose your words carefully so as not to intimidate, humiliate or irritate people. Avoid put-downs and sarcasm, and watch the tone of your voice. Words and actions can have just as painful an effect on people's self-esteem as a whip across their backs.

Be an attentive and interested listener. Look at people when they're speaking to you. Train yourself to pay attention and show respect. Be responsive with a nod, smile and verbal feed-

back. People appreciate these gestures and will be endeared to you. Being a good listener is a small price to pay in your quest to become lovable.

Be aware of the lasting impact your example can have on others. You have either a positive or negative influence on every life you touch. If you manifest the qualities of good breeding, culture, kindness and love, people will long remember you. However, if you're pessimistic, negative, selfish and carnal, you'll leave a legacy of distaste in their memories. Becoming a lovable person is tantamount to being a true Christian. Therefore, commit yourself to this lofty challenge and you'll grow in favor with God and man.

Be Not Afraid

By Joel Hilliker

You could be dating toward marriage, but you're not.

You have paid close attention to all the sermons and Bible studies about taking marriage extremely seriously as a God-plane relationship. You agree that marriage will affect your entire life *and* your future in God's Kingdom. You agree that nothing is better than a good marriage, and nothing is worse than a bad marriage. You know that wrong decisions about marriage have created conflict and have even pulled some people out of the Church. You know that getting married is not a matter of "falling" in love, but it's a lot of hard work, and people who rush into it based on emotion are making a mistake. You fathom the magnitude of this important, life-changing decision.

So you have put it off.

Perhaps you avoid dating toward marriage. Perhaps you even avoid dating. Perhaps your general maturity, your finances and even much of your spiritual maturity is at a level where you *could* be dating toward marriage. But you aren't.

Especially among men, this can be common. When you recognize the weight of this decision, it can feel overwhelming—so much so that you *don't make the decision*.

If you are intimidated by messages on the magnitude of marriage, biblical manhood, being a Christ-like husband or

a Church-like wife or a Father-like father, I have some words of encouragement for you: FEAR NOT. It's actually not *that* hard.

Yes, marriage is a big responsibility, *but you don't have to be good at it before you get married.*

The way God designed marriage, you don't have to be an expert from the beginning. GOD MADE MARRIAGE FOR THE AMATEUR—the person who does it just for the *love* of it!

YOU LEARN IT BY DOING IT. It's a wonderful process that leads you step by step into the world of the God Family!

The prerequisites for a good marriage are simple: a man submitting himself to God's will and a woman submitting herself to God's will. This relationship was designed by God to help two novices to grow and to overcome. He designed it to easily withstand the trials that arise from lack of expertise.

You start with just one woman—a woman whom you *love*, and who *loves you* and wants to revolve her life around you and be the best helper she can be. You're a newbie, and so is she. You are a Christian trying your best to live up to the biblical marriage role that you have been taught. So is she. You make mistakes and must learn by experience. So does she. You're in this wonderful relationship *together.*

And it unfolds just one day at a time.

You make a financial mistake. Don't despair! She will support you all the more. You struggle trying to be more decisive the way you know you should. Don't give up! The person who will encourage you the most will be *her!* You battle with some other shortcoming. Don't lose hope. Your wife is in your corner—for life.

And maybe after a period of growing into that relationship, children come. Even when they first arrive, their needs are simple and grow gradually, just as you do. You don't have to deal with a teenager until you've had 13 years' parenting experience!

The point is, *you're going to do fine!* Why? Because God is with you, the Creator of marriage, and the Creator of your mind. Look to Him, and He will lead you into and through a fantastic marriage, one day at a time.

The institution of marriage reaches up to the God plane and out into eternity, yes. But God carefully tailored it to reach right down to where you are right now. He made it for the inexperienced. He made it for you!

PHYSICAL PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE

What Is the Best Age for Marriage?

By Herbert W. Armstrong (*Youth 84*, October/November 1984)

When is one ready for marriage? Marriage is in itself a career. One is not ready to enter upon any profession or career until after full preparation. This preparation may be divided, roughly, into three stages. First, that of infancy, preparing the child for school. Second, elementary and preparatory schooling prior to, thirdly, more advanced education and specialized training for the adult life's work.

There are really three stages, roughly, of mental development that parallel these stages of preparation. First, the change from babyhood to boy- or girl-hood around age 6. Then the mind as a rule has absorbed enough elementary and semimature knowledge by age 16 to begin more mature thinking and learning. Age 16 is a crucial year in mental development.

But the mind does not really mature, on the average, until age 25. At age 25 a more definite adulthood of mind, attitude, interests, is reached. The mind becomes more set in its ways.

The years between ages 16 and 25 are the vitally important years of adult preparation for life's work. These are the crucial years of PREPARATION. During these years the mind is capable of acquiring faster than at any other stage of life the advanced knowledge needed before beginning one's adult career—whether it be business, profession, occupation or marriage. Before age 16 the mind has not acquired the basic elementary knowledge needed as a foundation for entering more advanced study and the mind has not developed in serious comprehension to the level of advanced knowledge. After age 25, the mind that has stagnated since age 16 finds it difficult to enter upon more mature study.

Before age 16 the mind simply is not mature. At age 16 it is merely prepared to begin acquiring the more mature preparation for either career, business or marriage.

It should be borne in mind I am speaking of average ages.

There are, of course, exceptions to all rules—but in my experience about 99 in 100 follow this pattern.

Another stage of maturity seems to be reached at about age 30. I have noticed that, although most young people reach a certain mental maturity at age 25, a far more complete maturity of mind, personality, performance and influence on others is reached at age 30.

By age 30 the man or woman has added five years of practical experience, in addition to further study, to the preparatory knowledge and final reaching of mental maturity attained at 25. Prior to 25, the young man is often called just that—“young man”—by older men.

Somehow, the vanity in a young man of 18 and older makes him want to be considered mature—as a completely adult, fully experienced MAN. He wants to be considered older than he is. But as soon as young women are past 20 to 25, female vanity usually causes them to want to be considered younger than they are!

The Right Age for Marriage The fact that man attains a more complete maturity of personality, leadership and influence by age 30 seems fully recognized by the Eternal God. In ancient Israel the Levites were ordained to full priesthood at age 30—although they were put into physical service at age 20.

Jesus Christ, the example of the Christian world, did not begin His active ministry until age 30. All years prior to that were years of learning and preparation.

Apparently the Bible has not given specific and direct instruction or command as to the proper age for marriage. God did not even count people in the census, as adults, until age 20. While there appears to be no punishable prohibition against marriage prior to age 20, there is every indication that on God's instruction juveniles were considered children until 20. At 20 they were considered of age. This by no means implies they were expected to marry by age 20! Rather that they were expected not to marry until at least 20—OR MORE!

Based on actual experience, my judgment—and I think it is sound judgment—is that until out of the teens a boy or girl is too young to marry! And it is also my judgment—based on lifelong experience counseling on marriage problems of hun-

dreds of people—that even 20 is too young to be the best age for marriage.

And the best age for a girl to marry is between 23 and 25, when she has utilized those top aptitude years for preparation, and is prepared to assume the duties of wifehood and motherhood—the responsibilities of planning, decorating, arranging a home, keeping it and being a help and inspiration to her husband.

Mrs. Loma Armstrong and I were married when we were both 25.

We were mature enough to assume the responsibilities. Our marriage was happy, and blessed beyond words to describe. In fact it was happier after age 70 than ever before, because it had grown constantly more and more happy. **WHAT A BLESSING!**

Wouldn't you like yours to be equally so? Then heed! Use wisdom!

Prepare Yourself for Marriage

Plain Truth, July/August 1984

What if you are among those singles who really do want to obey God's laws, but have not found a compatible mate to share the remainder of your natural life with? It is not always an easy task to find both physical and spiritual compatibility. Yet both are important ingredients to a happy and successful marriage.

The best answer to this problem anyone has ever found is to recognize one fact: The one person you can prepare for marriage is **YOU!**

While you wait for the right person, there are a number of things you can do. First, pray fervently about it. There is a God in heaven who knows your every need. He wants you to express those needs to him in prayer. If you trust in faith, in the course of time, when God knows it is right, he will direct you in finding the right person.

If you are a well-adjusted, outgoing and happy single, the chances are you will make someone a wonderful life partner. If you have developed the ability to converse, and have a warm concerned desire to serve and help, when you marry, you have a much better chance for adjustment—provided it is with the proper person.

On the other hand, frustrated and selfish individuals who marry out of desperation do not make suitable mates.

Take Advantage of the Single Years To diversify your skills and develop a greater capacity for a happy marriage, get the best possible education for your interests and abilities. Take the time to pursue further education or obtain special job training. Take advantage of the single years. The chances are, with a mate and, later, children, it will be hard to find time for such pursuits.

Another broadening experience is travel. If as a single person you can afford an international trip (or for that matter travel within your home country) you will find this can add to your perspective of life. It will help you better understand the world you live in and give you a greater sense of confidence.

The most logical way a person in the Western world becomes acquainted with a member of the opposite sex is through dating.

Use Your Preparatory Years

By Steve Hercus

Many singles have a checklist of qualities they want in a spouse. Sadly, fewer of them think as much about whether they are making themselves ready to be a quality spouse for someone else.

Herbert W. Armstrong explains in *The Missing Dimension in Sex* that “the years between ages 16 and 25 are the vitally important years of adult preparation for life’s work.” Even if this window has elapsed for you, everyone must work to improve his or her station in life.

Here are four areas that are vital in preparing not only for our life’s work, but also for marriage. Consider all of them in terms of what your efforts today will bring to your future marriage.

Health Next to our relationship with God, we ought to give high consideration to our health. Without good health it is difficult to serve God and others. As a single it is easy to neglect nutrition and exercise. During those “preparatory years” and

soon after, we are in our physical prime, so it is all-too-easy to batter our bodies with insufficient sleep, infrequent exercise and compromised nutrition. This age of “invincibility,” however, is short-lived. When we break physical health laws, we *will* suffer the penalties.

By being proactive, the extra time and income you have as a single can be used effectively to establish excellent healthful habits for life. If you are already in poor health, seize the opportunity to set yourself on course for a healthy life. The pay-off will be tremendous—for you, your spouse and your children.

There is a balance required. For some, focusing on their own health and bodies can become an obsession. It can also be entirely selfish, inflating vanity while looking at the self in the mirror.

Instead, have an *unselfish* motivation. Care for your body to show God you’re a good steward of His gifts, and to make yourself a more effective tool for His Work. Build your health and strength in order to help those who have little strength. Fortify your godly character by working hard, using your muscles, getting your hands dirty, building something, and maintaining and improving your environment.

If you are motivated out of love, you will uphold God’s health laws and avoid bringing inevitable penalties upon yourself *and your future family*. You’ll value your health in order to have more energy and vibrancy to offer your future spouse.

Living Environment As singles venture out of their parents’ home, many become slovenly. An abode of sloppy singles can quickly turn into a pigsty. For many singles, male *and* female, cleaning is something only their Mom did.

Sure, your standard of living probably won’t be as high as what you enjoyed under your parents’ roof, but God is concerned about *how you maintain what you have*.

Aside from the obvious health risks, a dirty environment is not good for the mind. Nor is it good for the prospect of getting married. Single women should practice the skills of a capable homemaker. And men should understand what it takes to maintain a clean home by keeping a clean home; they ought not look for a wife merely to take Mom’s place in cleaning up after them.

Here’s a simple rule of thumb: *You will get what you are*. If

you're clean and tidy, you will likely find and marry someone who is clean and tidy. The opposite is also true.

If you live with other singles who make life difficult in this regard, work hard to raise and uphold the standards in your own life. You can positively influence others and help them prepare for life ahead as well.

Finances In ancient Egypt, Pharaoh had two troubling dreams. Joseph gave him God's interpretation: They portended seven abundant years followed by seven years of famine. Joseph recommended that Egypt rigorously save surplus produce during the fat years in order to tide the nation over during the hard times to follow (Genesis 41).

While marriage is obviously not a financial famine, we ought not waste the surplus income of our single years.

Sure, saving is hard—it really is. In this faithless world, credit is easy, and keeping-up-with-Joneses materialism is rampant. Both of these conditions can cripple the advantage we should gain in our single years. Look back on all the years you have worked hard and not saved. We have to think long-term. Our ability to save and make wise financial decisions will have a massive impact on our children and theirs.

To get headed in the right direction, get help. Solid advice on how to run your life financially is critical. Many people are simply destroyed financially because of a lack of financial knowledge. If you haven't been taught how to handle money, you have to find out how. *Both men and women* need this information in order to establish good financial habits that will carry over into later years.

There is plenty of good advice available in this information age. Get yourself a thorough education: Do a complete class that will help you organize your everyday finances and your financial future. We recommend Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace University DVD Home Study Kit. It is used in both Herbert W. Armstrong College and Imperial Academy finance classes.

Being responsible doesn't require that you become Scrooge McDuck. You should explore the world. You should buy quality, within your means. You should responsibly share the abundance of your singlehood with others. Just keep the long-term picture in mind.

Education and Career God needs singles who think big. He needs singles who will invest time and energy into advancing their career. Doing so helps advance families, and that advances His Work.

A younger single has entered a time for “advanced education and specialized training for the adult life’s work. ... One is not ready to enter upon any profession or career until after full preparation” (*The Missing Dimension in Sex*). Don’t settle for mediocrity. Don’t think you have all the time in the world. Don’t get sidetracked by an urge to get married before you’re ready. Keep your focus on what you must accomplish in this important season of your life. The time you invest in higher education or other training will pay dividends for the rest of your life.

This doesn’t mean racking up mountains of college debt on a misguided degree. There are other means to educate yourself for a career. Some countries have strong apprenticeship systems where you learn on the job and get paid as you go. Mr. Armstrong set a tremendous example of educating himself. Some have stepped out and started their own business and have grown along with it. God’s college is an institution that teaches people how to be highly productive and employable people.

Bring God on board with your education and career. Be motivated to support His Work, your congregation and a future family. Work hard where you are right now. Seek more challenges within your current occupation. If you do these things, God will bless you and help you advance your career.

Women will look at this subject quite differently than men, which is appropriate. However, it is easy for single women to be short-sighted about education and career. They can think marriage is just around the corner, or that further education would be of no benefit in marriage. But who knows how long you will be single? Use your time—don’t fritter it. Just don’t buy into the world’s thinking that puts material concerns above family.

Remember, as Mr. Armstrong said, marriage is in itself a career. Thus, it too requires education. Marriage is a career you have to prepare for.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A POTENTIAL MATE

How Does Emotion Affect Your Dating?

By Joel Hilliker

In his autobiography, Herbert W. Armstrong wrote of his concerns about the mysterious danger of “falling” for a girl: “Once this happened, so I surmised, the poor victim lost his mental equilibrium. He was ‘hooked’ and unable to help himself, or if the girl be the wrong one, to recognize that fact. I was, in other words, afraid I might be caught off guard and helplessly plunged into a binding lifelong marriage with the wrong girl. I had heard that love was blind. If I should fall in love with the wrong girl, I would probably be totally blinded to the fact she was the wrong one. My life would be ruined!”

So he developed a system in his dating. He would only date girls that appeared marriageable, just in case he lost his head. (Note: This “system” isn’t the Church’s teaching.)

He continued: “Next, on my first date, one thing was always uppermost in my mind—to coldly analyze that girl from the point of view of what kind of a wife and mother she would make, if I lost my head over her. If she definitely didn’t measure up, I firmly avoided any second date with her. If I were not quite sure one way or the other, I would allow myself a second date—if she appeared sufficiently interesting. If a girl passed my analytical test, then immediately I put all thought of marriage out of mind, but she remained on the list of girls who were eligible for dates—if I desired them. . . . If a girl was unable to carry on her part of such an ‘intellectual’ conversation, or was lacking in any mental depth and brilliancy, she didn’t interest me enough for another date.”

Though we don’t use this dating “system” (and discourage anyone from “coldly analyzing” your date), Mr. Armstrong got something right: *He didn’t allow EMOTION to govern his relationships with the opposite sex.* He sought to avoid becoming emotionally entangled with someone and later regretting it. And guess what? It worked! The first person he gave his heart to

was the woman he married. And they had a wonderful marriage of more than 50 years.

SINGLES IN THIS WORLD ALLOW EMOTION TO DRIVE THEIR ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS. They mistake a bit of electricity between two people as love.

God's way of dating protects us from the pain of dysfunctional relationships. How? First, it teaches you to BUILD FRIENDSHIPS. Get to know as many as you can. Focus on *giving* as you date widely—treat dating as serving. Develop your personality and social skills as you date. Then, it teaches that as you get closer to marriage, you mustn't be RULED BY YOUR EMOTIONS—BUT RATHER RULED BY GOD! Trust in him with all your heart. Don't let your *foolish heart* direct your paths; let GOD direct your paths! (Proverbs 3:5-8).

True Love? Perhaps you've met someone and had a little jolt of emotional electricity. That's OK, but don't think that there's any *wisdom* in that. Don't mistake it as a sign from God. It's fine if that motivates you to have a second conversation. But realize, if you start nurturing emotions like that, *those emotions* will start driving the process *rather than God!* If you start building on the foundation of emotion, you are destined for a fall. You have to get that emotion under control.

One of the easiest mistakes to make with those of the opposite sex is to confuse the feeling you get when you're around them with your feeling *for them*. You might love the feeling of being with a certain person, and think you actually *love* that person!

Do you really know what it means to love someone? When someone says, "I love cookies," you know he doesn't mean that he wants to devote his life to cookies, to care for and provide for cookies. He means that he likes the *taste* of cookies—the feeling he gets when he eats them! He's saying, *Cookies give me pleasure*. He's *saying* he LOVES cookies, but really, his focus is on *himself*.

The same thing can happen in a relationship with someone: You might love the *feeling* you get from him or her, but do you really LOVE *him or her?* On the flip side, if someone tells you "I love you," don't you want to know *what kind of love* he or she means?

Mr. Armstrong defined love in *The Missing Dimension in Sex*: "Love is an unselfish outgoing concern for the good and welfare of the one loved. Love is primarily on the giving, serving,

sharing side of the fence—not on the getting, taking, factional, striving side. It is not selfish . . . Love is unselfish. It is not an emotion, though it may be expressed with an emotional content. True love combines the rational aspect of outgoing concern—desire to help, serve, give or share—along with sincere concerned affectionate feeling.”

It is one thing to recognize this intellectually. It is altogether another thing to measure your *own* thinking, feeling and reasoning against this definition. If you really LOVE a person, you *want what is good for that person*. If, on the other hand, you love how you *feel* when you're around that person, you are really just loving *yourself*.

Infatuation or Love? Is the relationship you want to pursue well founded? Are you going the right direction, following God's lead? How can you be sure that this is the right one? Well, first you must know the difference between infatuation and love.

1. Infatuation is selfish. Love is outflowing.
2. Infatuation is effortless. Love takes work.
3. Infatuation focuses on image and appearance. Love focuses on character.
4. Infatuation is based on imagination and fantasy. Love is grounded in reality.
5. Infatuation is short-lived. Love never fails.

If you're wondering whether someone is a good mate for you, try this simple test. Make a list of the qualities you're drawn to or impressed by. If there isn't much substance to your list, watch out. If it includes a lot of assumptions, conjecture and wishful thinking based on minimal information, be cautious. If it basically consists of things like her cute laugh and comely figure, or his sense of humor and mesmerizing eyes, hit the brakes.

You might also make a list of possible areas of concern you've noticed about this individual, weaknesses, issues that could pose or problem. If you “just can't think of a single thing!” then your head is in the clouds. At the very least, you need to get to know him or her much better before you can make a wise decision. Before committing yourself to someone, you must be able to consider the negatives honestly, with open eyes.

Obviously, you want the relationship you choose to endure. Interestingly, it seems infatuation actually tends to have

a measurable shelf-life! “Psychologist Dorothy Tennov measured the duration of romantic love, from the moment infatuation hit to when a ‘feeling of neutrality’ for one’s love object began. She concluded, ‘The most frequent interval, as well as the average, is between approximately 18 months and three years’” (Helen Fisher, *The Anatomy of Love*). Guess what: The end of that infatuation period correlates with *when most couples divorce*. “Divorce generally occurs early in marriage—peaking in or around the fourth year after the wedding—followed by a gradual decline in divorce as more years of marriage go by.”

Being in God’s Church comes with many advantages for a single, starting with the fact that we date within the Church. We really strive to uphold God’s laws in our dating. We are *far* less likely to get involved with someone who has totally different values and moral standards. But let’s not kid ourselves and think that we can’t be swayed by emotion and infatuation as we date and seek out a potential mate!

Are Your Emotions Helping or Hurting You? It can be *embarrassingly easy* to convince yourself that you are putting something in God’s hands, when really YOU ARE TRYING TO FORCE YOUR OWN WILL ON GOD! The heart is deceitful above all things (Jeremiah 17:9). You can say, *Oh yes, I’m trusting in God. I’m praying; I’m fasting; I’m counseling. I’m doing everything by the book!* You can check all the boxes—and *still* be following your own heart and trusting yourself! You really have to be HONEST with yourself in order to follow God’s will.

EMOTION is one of the biggest factors that *interferes* with our ability to keep God in the picture.

Used correctly, emotion is a wonderful blessing. The emotional yearning to be in a devoted relationship with someone of the opposite sex can be very strong—and a good measure of that yearning is placed there by God, the Author of sex, marriage and family. His instruction regarding dating, courtship, marriage and sexuality is meant to help us *direct* and *channel* that yearning in a way that will lead to us building strong families.

However, in matters of the heart, emotion can *easily* become a PROBLEM.

To reason with God, you have to keep a clear head throughout the process of choosing a mate. That means you have to

keep control of your emotions so they are *serving that process*, rather than *taking it over*.

When courting is done right, your feelings toward your mate grow throughout courtship *at the right pace*, and they peak *at the right time* with the wedding and wedding night. However, if you're not careful and keeping God involved throughout that process, your feelings surge and swell way too early and create a lot of problems.

Emotion can tend to short-circuit and undermine your already limited human judgment. It can draw you to someone who is totally wrong for you and blind you to that fact. You can get caught up in illusions and lose touch with reality about this person that you might well end up spending the rest of your life with.

Why is it so easy to lose touch with reality, to get distracted by things that aren't important, and to get caught up in the emotion of a relationship? It's because of human nature—your selfishness—your self-love.

If you fail to master your emotions, you are not really running your own life. You are susceptible to emotional manipulation from all directions. "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls" (Proverbs 25:28). This can lead to serious consequences in many aspects of life—not only in your relationships, but also your diet, your health, your productivity, your overall wellbeing.

All the way through your dating and courtship, even your engagement, you still must keep a clear head. You must keep your wits about you. This is very important, and it's a godly principle. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and *he that ruleth his spirit* than he that taketh a city" (Proverbs 16:32).

This might sound very strange to you, but UNTIL YOU SAY "I DO," *you cannot afford* to COMPLETELY *commit your heart* to this relationship and WHOLLY "LET GO." You *must* maintain a certain level of emotional control and objectivity in order to keep God in the picture.

The beautiful thing is, the REAL LOVE between a man and a woman develops AFTER THEY MARRY. The bond developed during dating and courtship is just a *fraction* of what later develops. *True love takes time*. And a couple that has developed and demonstrated emotional control in their dating will have a tremendous foundation for a strong marriage, within which they can

continually cultivate and express wholehearted affection, and deeper and deeper love!

What Is Love?

Modern Dating: Key to Success or Failure in Marriage

Love is an outgoing attitude of concern for the one being loved.

Love is giving; it is sharing; it is a feeling of ADMIRATION and RESPECT for the qualities of character in the other individual, and not just hot-cheeked lust while clutching hands in a darkened motion picture theater!

Love is something which must be grown into.

To truly LOVE—a person needs to want to share: to share life's experiences, thrills and joys—to share sorrow and trouble, to share success or failure, to share sickness and health. How many times in your life have you seen a completely wonderful sunset, or experienced a sensational thrill, or made a deep observation concerning wildlife or something in your environment, and wished you had someone who could thoroughly understand and SHARE the moment with you?

How many times have you yearned for someone to deeply understand your innermost longings and desires? How many times have you been irritated over a particular political, social, racial or religious situation and desperately desired to get your point across to someone—someone with whom you could SHARE your own personal feelings?

When you find such a person who is completely compatible, who is a balancing factor who helps you not only appraise your own actions and ideas, but complements and helps balance those actions and ideas by added actions and ideas of his or her own—then you may be, if all other factors, are equal, headed toward a feeling of genuine LOVE.

Seven Keys to Consider

Modern Dating: Key to Success or Failure in Marriage

Eventually, dating can and should lead to marriage. But it should lead to the right marriage at the right time.

Here are seven major keys to right dating. When of college age, and when marriage is a definite possibility in the very few years ahead—each of these vital principles should be carefully considered.

First Law: Physical Health What's going to happen to your prospective mate in 15 years? Is the wife going to become horribly fat, sloppy and unattractive? You'd better look at her mother.

Is your husband going to end up as a little, wizened, dry, country philosopher? Take a good, long look at his father.

What are his ideas about foods? What about diet, health and exercise? Does he like sports? What about his weight? Does he or she take an interest in learning about the **RIGHT KINDS** of foods? Not a food fanatic—and there are those—but one who is soundly concerned about what he pops into his mouth and gulps down.

That cute teenager who drinks soda pop, eats french fries, hamburgers—who maybe doesn't like vegetables, milk, fruit and good lean meat—is going to have health problems and maybe even a fatal disease if she continues.

What is your prospective wife going to feed you? Are you going to live on tv dinners and coffee? If so, it's going to affect your health. Does she have enough get-up-and-go to learn about diet, shop judiciously and take the time to cook wholesome meals?

Second Law: Mental Health There's only one way. Take your time. Don't rush into marriage. Be sure you get to know this person. See him or her in all conceivable types of situations. That means over a **LONG SPAN** of time, so that you've had opportunity to thoroughly discuss all types of subjects.

What are their attitudes toward their parents? Are they secretive? Does this young man hate his father? Does he or she have some **WEIRD IDEAS** about religion, diet? Is the person going to be too much of an introvert to even find a job?

Find out about your friends. Come to know their mind—their likes and dislikes and how they react to trying situations.

Third Law: Heredity and Environment Think about it men! Do you want to marry a woman who is more intelligent than you? How about you women? Suppose you have the potential to be a college graduate. But your future husband would flunk

out as a freshman. Will you be able to look up to him, respect him, rely on him for making important decisions?

These heredity hurdles can be overcome if one truly loves the other with a deep, outgoing concern. But if the problem isn't there, you don't have to worry about overcoming it.

You need to consider race, color, height, shape, weight, stature. Get to know the parents!

What stock do they come from? What have they accomplished? Are they ignorant? Do they hate education? Are they heavy drinkers? Is there hereditary weakness? Does your family have the SAME weakness?

Think about the education, travel, experience, religion, politics, and the social and cultural level of your prospective mate. Analyze these things. Keep both eyes wide open. Don't be swayed by "romance" before you have opportunity to think about these essential points!

What kind of language does he or she use? Can he hold down a job? Is she educated to be a homemaker? What kind of environment will both of you live in? Does he want to live in a crowded downtown flat? Maybe he doesn't. But will he ever afford anything better?

There are other things to consider such as voice, accent, part of the country from which the individual came, his relatives, tastes, dress, etc. The point is be sure of the background and breeding of the individual you plan to marry. Be sure you are COMPATIBLE socially, culturally, mentally, and personality wise.

Think of size, weight, height, race, color and language. Be sure there are no hereditary diseases that may crop up in your children.

Fourth Law: Personality Perhaps the best way to know if you are of a compatible personality with another is to know if you can COMMUNICATE with each other.

In a book called *How to Marry Someone You Can Live With All Your Life*, Dr. Leland Glover said, "Intimate, friendly, and prolonged communication between a husband and a wife tends to weld them together whereas a decided decline in this type of communication tends to break up existing attachments.

"Partners who are going steady can, and should assess their ability to COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY. Studies reveal that couples

who communicate well during courtship generally continue this wholesome pattern in marriage, while those who communicate poorly but get married anyway continue this negative relationship after the wedding.”

An individual marries the wrong person. Then he tries to RE-MAKE that person into an image of what he thinks he wants. Or some marry people to satisfy some deep emotional need of their OWN, without considering whether the personality makeup of the individual they are marrying would complement them.

As a result, they cannot communicate as a married couple. This inability of two people to communicate is one of the biggest single problems in marriage.

But communication has to do with personality. If both the parties' interests, goals, desires, are the same then they CAN communicate. If they are complemented intellectually, if they understand each other, have things in common—then they should be able to communicate.

Ask yourself: “Can I marry this person as he is—*without* trying to change his personality? Do I really have no reservations about the way he is? His or her habits don't bother me? Or hobbies, interests, values, goals generally do not vary?” No one is perfect. But everyone should be able to feel he has married just the PERFECT mate for HIM!

One important principle: The man ought to have a stronger, more dominant (not domineering) personality than the woman. If not, she is going to have a difficult time learning to respect his judgment and leadership.

Fifth Law: Religion Maybe the person you're planning to marry has some strange or odd ideas about things. Maybe he's riddled with superstitions. What does he think about the “immortal soul” or heaven or hell—or anything?

Maybe you're religious—you come from the “Bible belt.” But your mate couldn't care less. In what religion does your future husband or wife insist on training the children?

What about your prospective mate's moral standards? Does he or she believe in God or the Bible?

Sixth Law: Romantic Attraction What is true love? True love is outgoing concern.

It is not necessarily wholly outgoing, devoid of a normal and right feeling of desire. She must be physically attractive—but without being sensually arousing. Pure love involves respect, admiration, an unselfish concern for HER happiness and welfare, COMBINED with complete compatibility mentally, socially, culturally, and complete physical desirability. The girl is attractive, altogether LOVELY and physically desirable in that normal way that is NOT sensuous and does not bring on thoughts of sex as such.

He cares for her in a way he does not for any other. He wants to be with her—in her company. She is the ONE he wants to talk things over with, to share his problems as well as his successes and triumphs. And he is so concerned for her welfare and happiness that he wants to protect her, provide for her, be always kind and gentle to her and considerate of her. He feels LOVE for her, not lust. He wants to share with her his struggles, his interests, his life. And SHE is the one he wants to be the mother of his children.

THAT is the LOVE that ought to be marital love.

The same thing applies to girls—but from their vantage point. A girl should want the man she really loves to hold her in his arms. He certainly should be attractive to her. But idle immature, romantic ideas that here is some perfect prince charming that is going to make every moment of her life one great ride on a fluffy cloud does NOT constitute true love.

Real life simply isn't that way!

Seventh Law: Seek Counsel Remember that marriage was designed and created by the ever-living, all-wise God.

The Eternal God is working out His greatest and grandest purpose here below. That purpose is symbolized by the human family. It shows us what God is—a spirit family. It is the model on which society is based.

Real marital love is the type of Christ's LOVE for His Church, and our love for Christ.

God Almighty is the source of LIFE, and of LOVE. Human love and sexual expression in marriage are the symbols and physical counterparts of the real source of physical life and marital love.

These are holy, righteous and sacred things.

The marriage and family relationships are GOD-PLANE relationships, which God shares with humans, and humans only!

The wisest counsel you can possibly seek is the counsel of a great spirit being who does exist. You have direct access to Him. You should CERTAINLY PRAY about the choice of your marriage partner!

Pray about your dating habits, that they will be done according to the laws of God. Remember these keys. Follow them. Don't slip up. Be sure you are dating the right persons—in the right attitude. Trust God to lead you to the right one.

Probably, you've already made some mistakes in your dating habits. Maybe even some fairly serious ones. But it's not too late to CORRECT those mistakes. God is a FORGIVING God when we repent. He's a MERCIFUL Heavenly Father who wants our happiness and success!

It's not too late for you! Whether you are a parent, or younger teenager looking toward the finest years of your life—it's not too late to begin living the RIGHT WAY. The way that will bring you the greatest happiness and joy, and result in the smallest amount of embarrassment, pain, and frustration!

And remember, too. Finding the right mate is only a PART of life. HOW TO LIVE with that mate in marriage is the next major step.

Viva La Difference

By Joel Hilliker

Hollywood movies often portray the “match made in heaven.” Society tends to depict the ideal relationship as a union of “soul mates” where everything clicks, and the two go together like hand and glove, music and lyrics, peanut butter and chocolate.

I'm sure such relationships do exist. Some couples work together in amazing ways: Their interests and talents converge; they naturally tend to form a dynamic team. They help disadvantaged youths as principal and teacher at an inner city school. He runs a gourmet restaurant and she is the pastry chef. He writes songs that she sings. Those kinds of couples.

That is wonderful—but guess what? It's not the norm. I want to give you a different perspective. Based on my experience.

My wife and I are pretty different from each other. I didn't realize this when we first got married. After more than 15

years of marriage, I *now* realize far better how different we are than I did when we were courting. I *thought* we had more in common than we do. We went through marriage counseling, and I learned a lot from it, but I realize now that there are many things you simply *don't know* about your potential mate until you are actually in a relationship and building a life together. Aspects of personality and temperament don't emerge until experiences begin to accumulate.

I could give you a lot of examples of my wife's and my differences. Over time, we have learned to accept certain dissimilarities. In fact, we have come to *appreciate* some of them, even to *enjoy* them. We do complement each other—her strengths shore up my weaknesses, and vice versa. We balance each other out in ways that we wouldn't if we were a lot more similar. And if nothing else, some of our differences give us source material for good in-jokes and high family comedy.

My wife and I have had our rocky times—problems we've had to work through, areas where we had to work to meet minds. However, our apparent incompatibilities have helped *both of us* to grow tremendously. I have learned a lot from being married to someone different from me in some basic ways. I've grown to learn how to accommodate someone else, how to adapt, how to think about more than just myself.

Without a doubt, the process of learning how to be a team, how to make a marriage succeed, has been *the most awesome growth experience of my life*. What God has taught us and how He has blessed us through this marriage *far exceeds* what we had anticipated. And after over a decade and a half of marriage, our love is greater than ever.

I know God brought us together. I don't have to wonder if I made the right choice. I don't feel I *made the choice*—I really did put it in God's hands, and this is the marriage He created. So for us, it has been a matter of *how to make it work* and how to gain the *very most benefit* from the situation God placed us in.

One thing I regularly thank God for is the fact that my wife is a very converted woman. She works very hard to please God and to serve our family in so many ways. That quality—the fact that she allows God to guide her life, to change her and correct her—is *the ingredient I need in a helpmeet*.

One Ambassador College graduate told me she remembers

Mr. Armstrong giving a Bible study where he said that any two converted people should be able to make a marriage work. Based on my experience, I believe that. When I see people struggling with marriage problems, I think, *This is not a personality compatibility issue—this is a conversion issue.*

The world says that if you're not "soul mates" it will never work, so hold out till you find "the one" with whom you are in perfect sync. But the truth is, it takes time to develop that kind of teamwork—and it's a wonderful process.

A "match made in heaven" can end up being very different from how Hollywood might portray it! So when you're dating, don't confuse diversity with incompatibility. Differences between you and another person don't mean you're not "soul mates"—they mean you're human. Don't close yourself off to a potential relationship just because it doesn't seem picture perfect. That's not to say compatibility isn't important—but *complementarity* is also something to consider. Every combination of two people is a unique chemistry experiment. If both are submissive to God, that relationship will help sharpen and benefit each of them in untold ways!

Beauty Is Vain

By Gerald Flurry (*John's Gospel: The Love of God*)

God says in Proverbs 31:30 that beauty is vain. I don't think most people who are beautiful believe that.

A young man may set his sights on a very physically beautiful woman. What is that beauty going to accomplish? God wants us to passionately give our lives to His Work the way Jesus Christ did. Will that woman's beauty help that young man in the Work? I know of no way it would help the Work. It hasn't done anything for us here at headquarters that I know of.

God is trying to teach us that there is a **DEEPER KIND OF BEAUTY** you had better make your priority, or you will get in serious trouble.

How many times have we seen *spiritual beauty* overlooked in human beings?

Even in God's Church, this is a danger, because we can follow the world's example, where beauty is almost **EVERYTHING!**

Yet God says it is NOTHING, if you look at it spiritually.

Lucifer had tremendous beauty, and he got his mind on *that*, of all things. That is stunning to me.

Obviously, a man who is going to get married wants a woman who appeals to him—but you had better beware of the danger there. If your heart is in God's Work—if you are giving your whole life to God and this Work as Christ did—you must be extremely careful.

Haven't we all seen a few outstanding gals—who possessed truly dazzling spiritual beauty—overlooked because maybe they didn't have the physical beauty that some other women have? The same can be true the other way, too—men being overlooked for purely *physical* reasons.

We don't want to get our minds on that! That is the way Satan thought. This great created being actually got his mind on *his own beauty!* That took precedence over everything, and it fouled up his mind. He began to corrupt his wisdom and grow obsessed with *himself!*

Lucifer introduced a new kind of thinking in the universe that had never been there before. How ugly he became, LOSING SIGHT OF THE REAL BEAUTY THAT GOD WAS CREATING IN HIM. That became the worst disaster ever—that is, before mankind was created.

God's own Laodicean people are facing a catastrophe of even greater magnitude. However, 50 percent of them will die forever! How could they turn away from God the Father so easily if they really loved Him? How could they rebel against the one who has given them everything? What's wrong with their thinking? Well—God says they are “rich, and increased with goods” (Revelation 3:17). THEY ARE INTO BEAUTY—PHYSICAL BEAUTY. They have exalted their own *physical desires*.

The tragedy is, Jesus Christ was transforming them into THE MOST BEAUTIFUL BRIDE THERE EVER WILL BE THROUGHOUT ALL ETERNITY! There will be only one Bride of Christ to rule the universe with Him forever! The fact that they chose their own kind of physical beauty is INSULTING, LAWLESS, OBSCENE! But we have seen it happen.

Lucifer failed utterly because he *exalted himself*—not his Creator. Satan is still the god of this world. He has sold his self-oriented line of reasoning to the world—and that is exactly the way the world thinks.

Certainly beauty in people is a wonderful thing. I'm not against beauty. God created it. But it is still vain. It is of no real value to God; if it were, I suppose He would have made all of us extremely beautiful and handsome physically.

Let's not forget that we are all made in the likeness of God. But that's only the beginning. God is now creating His own mind and character in His firstfruits. In the resurrection we shall be born into God's Family with unparalleled beauty that lasts forever!

That is where our focus must be. That is what should excite us mightily. We are going to have the magnificent beauty of that God pictured in Ezekiel chapter 1 and Revelation chapter 1—forever!

We must think about this more deeply—maybe far more deeply than what we have in the past.

LET'S NOT FALL IN LOVE WITH THE CREATION—LET'S FALL IN LOVE WITH THE CREATOR!

What is He like? What is God like, who can create human beings and angels, who can design and manufacture the magnificent universe? Think about GOD! Because THAT IS WHAT WE CAN BECOME—if we can get our minds off ourselves, our own beauty or something physical that dazzles us, and get our minds on the CREATOR!

IT MAKES SENSE to fixate on God—to be dazzled by God. But it isn't logical to a selfish mind.

It's *lawless* to focus on beauty the way Lucifer did. We must anchor our minds in GOD'S LAW. The FIRST COMMANDMENT is, *You shall have no other gods before the true God!*

We are to become perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect—in mind and character (Matthew 5:48). THAT IS UNPARALLELED AND UNSURPASSED BY ANY OTHER KIND OF BEAUTY.

Think about it: Is beauty in this world more a blessing than a curse? I don't think so. I would say *beauty is more of a curse*. Look where it leads the men and women who have it! Look at the kinds of lifestyles it leads them into. It can be very dangerous.

If you're a man who is committed to and whose passion is God's Work, as it was with Jesus Christ, and you marry a woman who is only partially committed to God's Work, what will happen in your marriage? You will obviously have difficulties, conflicts and serious problems. And I submit to you

that you will have some serious regrets.

There are examples of beautiful women in the Bible who were truly committed to God. There are also examples of beautiful women who weren't so committed, and husbands who had real problems with them. If you're a young man and you want a physically beautiful woman, you had better be careful in choosing her.

Nothing is better than a good marriage, and nothing is worse than a bad marriage.

Let's make sure we put God first and let God direct us to that beautiful woman or handsome guy. Let Him do the directing, and then the marriage will be right and good and beautiful and productive.

True Spiritual Beauty

By Gerald Flurry (*The Song of Songs: God's Greatest Love Song*)

Song of Songs 3:1 says, "By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not." This is not something that happened on one particular night. *Night after night after night* the Laodicean woman sought after Christ, but she couldn't find Him. Verse 2 shows her roving the city streets searching for Him and failing to find Him. Clearly she was still rebelling against Him, otherwise He would be close at hand.

Despite that rebellion, however, this spiritual woman still has profound spiritual *potential*, from Christ's perspective.

In chapter 4, Christ speaks to her. "Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks: thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from mount Gilead" (verse 1). He is talking about how *beautiful* His wife is! She is still His wife in embryo.

Christ describes His lovely wife in the most glowing terms (verses 2-4).

Amid all this praise, here is perhaps the most stunning statement: "Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense. *Thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee*" (verses 6-7).

What remarkable testimony! This is Christ's goal! This is the way He views His Laodicean wife—as SPOTLESS, PERFECT! Though she is not in that state today, IN THE END *that is what she WILL BE!*

God views things that are not yet as though they already are.

“Come with me from Lebanon, my *spouse* [or my *Bride*], with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions’ dens, from the mountains of the leopards. Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my [Bride]; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck. How fair is thy love, my sister, my [Bride]! how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices!” (verses 8-10).

This is a fascinating statement. God is using this beautiful woman—probably one of the most beautiful who has ever lived—to illustrate how enraptured He is with our spiritual beauty! God is *not* concerned about physical beauty here—He is simply using that to exemplify *spiritual* beauty.

The Laodiceans’ main interest is physical beauty—physical things. God is just the opposite. An eternal Family of spiritual beauty is His number one passion. He even gave His only begotten Son to achieve that goal.

Spiritually, God illustrates here what real beauty is. It is beauty that lasts forever! God uses the Song of Songs to teach all of us the depth of His love for spiritual beauty! What an inspiring future God has planned for each one of us.

How can you compare God’s eternal love with physical beauty or things? GOD IS LOVE—HIS LOVE IS EVERYTHING. NOTHING REMOTELY COMPARES TO GOD’S LOVE!

We must see the marriage of the Lamb and the Bride of Christ as God does! This is talking about TRUE SPIRITUAL BEAUTY—beauty more exquisite than we can even describe!

God keeps praising this wife for how beautiful she is. He is encouraging His people to do everything we can to love Christ and our Father in return. It is deeply *moving* and *beautiful* to God when His people overcome and build holy, righteous spiritual character. *Please recognize*, He is saying, *that when you add to that beautiful character, you become absolutely, FABULOUSLY beautiful to me!* CONSIDERING WHAT THE BRIDE OF CHRIST WILL BE DOING FOR ALL ETERNITY, THESE ARE NOT EXAGGERATIONS. God is telling us what real, eternal beauty is—and that is what God is working to build in His people.

My Sister, My Bride! Something else in these verses is *stun-*

ningly wonderful.

Look again at Song of Songs 4:9-10, where Christ says, “my sister, my [Bride].” Isn’t that a strange statement? *My sister, my Bride*. He uses the same expression in verse 12, and again in the first verse of chapter 5. In Song of Songs 5:2 He says, “my sister, my love,” which conveys the same idea.

Why is Christ saying “my sister”? He is a Husband—but He also views this spiritual woman as His *SISTER*. In fact, He always puts “*sister*” *FIRST*!

This gives us a beautiful perspective of the God Family that we must always remember.

God’s Family is bigger than just Husband and wife. It is about sisters and brothers, as well as Husband, wife and Father.

In Malachi 1:6, God asks the Laodiceans, *If I am a father, where is my honor? You’re insulting your Father! You don’t have this Family vision!*

Think about this. What Jesus Christ is saying really represents the attitude a man needs in looking for a physical bride! He should be looking at the woman he is considering for marriage and saying, *My sister, my bride*. *FIRST OF ALL, SHE’S A SISTER*—a member of the Family of God! The Family of God comes first! The man who finds a bride who has already filled her role within that Family configuration has truly found something breathtakingly wonderful!

My sister, my bride. Do you fellows look upon the woman you want to marry as a *sister*? Is she really like a sister to you, spiritually? Or do you just skip over that part? First you should determine that she is a solid member in God’s Family before you choose her to help you build a physical family! “*MY SISTER, MY BRIDE*” HAS REAL DEPTH THAT WE NEED TO PRAY GOD WOULD HELP US TO SEE. ONLY GOD’S HOLY SPIRIT CAN REVEAL THAT PROFOUND AND INSPIRING STATEMENT TO US. AND IT TAKES TIME TO UNDERSTAND IT, EVEN WITH GOD’S HOLY SPIRIT.

We must work to build God’s deep, deep love while there is *time!*

Deceived Christians in this world incessantly talk about God’s love. But they only have a shallow concept of what God’s love really is. God’s love is so profound that we have to continually and fervently pray for His love to grow in our minds and our character.

The Laodiceans' love has waxed cold (Matthew 24:12). That is the greatest crisis of all! They no longer have God's love in them. Instead, they now mostly have the world's shallow love. They must build God's love in their lives again to ever be born into God's Family of love.

The love of God takes on a far deeper meaning in the Song of Songs!

How to Know the True Feelings of Someone You Like

The Notebook of Richard Rice, Chapter 17

Often the time comes in a dating relationship when one becomes serious about the other. There's an underlying uncertainty, however, as to whether the relationship is mutually shared. He or she is unable to "read" the mind or intent of the other.

The secret to understanding the person you like can be summed up in a simple word—RESPONSE. If that person has similar feelings and cares for you, he or she will RESPOND IN LIKE MANNER. They will return the love you give through obvious, direct and overt actions.

It is simply a law of life that true love is a "sharing" principle. When you give of yourself in love and concern, the recipient of your affection will respond in kind if that person is interested in you. This is not meant to imply that we should give in order to get. But, if a man truly loves a woman—and she's equally attracted to him—she will experience a desire to give love in return. Through outward signs and actions, she'll let her feelings come through. You won't find it necessary to "probe" for an answer. She'll express it in clear, tangible language so you'll have no reason to doubt.

What If There Is a Lack of Response? If, on the other hand, you've been dating for a reasonable period of time and there's no visible response, wise up to the fact that she's probably not interested—so hold your feelings in check. By a lack of response, she's saying in effect, "I don't have the same feelings as you do. I really don't want to get involved—at least not yet. I simply want to be a friend."

RESPONSE is not something you should have to “dig out” of the other person. True love is not a one-sided affair—it’s a relationship that will be shared by both. When love is true and real, the response will always be mutual and will flow naturally and spontaneously. IF SHE’S NOT TELLING YOU SOMETHING BY NOW, THEN OBVIOUSLY SHE HAS NOTHING TO TELL.

Also, if there is a high level of inconsistency in the attitude of the other person—on one date he or she seems responsive toward you, but on the next date they’re as cold as ice, this is a good indication that it’s NOT in your best interest to continue the relationship. True love is consistent!

Just because the person you’re dating does not respond to your overtures as you hoped, don’t allow yourself to become discouraged or think of yourself as being inferior or unworthy. There may be valid reasons why the individual does not want to get serious. The person may be interested in someone else. They may feel inadequately prepared for marriage. They may have other plans such as graduating from college, or embarking on a career, etc. Maybe they have heavy debts to pay off. The person may think himself too young and inexperienced to enter into a relationship and needs more time to grow and mature. If these points apply, face the truth squarely and don’t try to convince the person to change his or her mind. Be patient and continue to date others!

Let’s assume you discover that the other person really isn’t interested and doesn’t want to get involved! Should you then break off dating altogether? Only if you are deeply entrenched, miserably frustrated, and can’t get him or her out of your life. The Christian approach, however, is to discipline oneself and back off from dating too much when you find the relationship is not working out.

Whatever your decision, you should treat the person with utmost respect as you would any other Christian in God’s Church. Don’t hold a grudge and act spiteful. Forget the relationship, but continue to be a friend.

Should You Ever Ask for Another’s Feelings? Is there ever a time to ask the person his or her true feelings about you? In most cases this will not be necessary if you have followed the above guidelines. The feedback you receive will tell the story.

Let's suppose, however, that both of you have grown in love, but have not divulged your innermost secrets. If your relationship has progressed this far, you will of necessity want to open up and be candid with each other. The key is to wait long enough to be assured your love is real and that you both can talk comfortably about it. Until you can do this, give yourself a little more time to let the relationship blossom and flourish.

To sum up the matter, if there is doubt, uncertainty or any degree of negativism about how the other person feels—especially if there has been a long dating experience—it is wise to recognize the warning signs and honestly admit the truth: It is not a satisfactory relationship and should not culminate in marriage!

In a true love relationship, you BOTH will respond to each other within the framework of God's law. You will share, give, help and serve each other. There will be a growing together, a learning process, a blending, a mutual attraction that is MORE than just physical. There will be a spiritual harmony that is based on respect, admiration and honor—and will involve the complete and total union of your hearts and minds. When you've enjoyed a long dating experience and it has grown strong and durable through time, then you have the knowledge that, "YES, this person is the RIGHT one for me! We are in love! Marriage is the next wonderful, beautiful, and natural step in our relationship! There is NO DOUBT about it!"

How You Can Recognize True Love

The Notebook of Richard Rice, Chapter 26

Assuming the person you are interested in meets the fundamental spiritual requirements of being eligible for marriage—such as being baptized, a member in good standing, having the fear of God, and being truly converted—and assuming you both have mutual feelings for each other, how can you then recognize true love?

Realize that true love is based on a foundation of mutual respect and friendship. The relationship will have unfolded gradually into its present state. You will truly have come to know and appreciate each other as two endearing friends. Once a solid friendship has been built, you are better equipped

to recognize true love when it emerges.

There will be a spark of attraction—a certain amount of romantic chemistry. Even though this spark is usually present, it's not an emotion that blinds you to reality. To base a commitment purely on physical appeal leaves you without a sure foundation of enduring love. Lust is like an intense fire that quickly burns out. By comparison, true love is like sunshine that warmly glows and endures. Infatuation is usually self-centered, but true romantic love will mature into genuine outgoing concern for the other. Be sure there is a proper balance between what your heart feels and what your head knows.

Getting to know the other requires time and togetherness. Therefore, being certain your love is real will take a great deal of interaction, communication and seeing each other in many situations. If you continue to gravitate to each other in spite of occasional conflicts and differences, you can be reasonably sure there is something special in your relationship.

You will have developed a kindred spirit and like-minded outlook. Two people deeply in love will share the same values, goals and basic interests. You will have grown to appreciate one another's unique qualities, strengths and talents. You'll be compatible in the essential areas of life and experience a meeting of minds on all important issues. You'll work at understanding what makes the other tick and desire to help him or her find fulfillment. There'll be no sense of intimidation or jealousy when one has achieved recognition or triumphs. To the contrary, you will support and mutually encourage each other to excel. You will have established common goals and will be working together to attain them.

You will yearn to be with that person and miss him or her when you are apart. He or she will begin to fill your thoughts. You'll find yourself looking for ways to serve each other and watching for needs you can meet. This inner longing will be based on the joy of companionship and the desire to share each other's thoughts and experiences. If you're separated for days and you're not lonely or bothered by the absence, then it's doubtful that you're truly in love.

There will be a willingness to make a lifetime commitment without hesitation or doubt. At this point in your relationship all anxieties and reservations should have been resolved. You

will have learned the art of solving your differences in a mature and self-restrained fashion. You will have learned how to forgive and forget hurts and offenses. Time and again you will have proved that your love is stable and unwavering.

You'll find that serving the other has become a source of great joy instead of an irksome duty. You'll be eager to sacrifice time and pleasure in order to benefit the other. You'll care so deeply that you would give your life for him or her. You'll try to avoid any action that will tear down, discourage or displease the other. If your love is true and lasting, you'll make whatever sacrifice is necessary to keep your commitment intact.

This person will bring out the best in you and keep you focused on God's Kingdom. He or she will never attempt to undermine your principles or defile your conscience. Rather, each will be a source of strength and vitality to the other. God's Holy Spirit will bind you into oneness of mind that nothing can separate. You will feel proud to be seen together in public. You'll also be pleased to have this person to be the father or mother of your children. Each will provide a fertile environment of support and encouragement for the other to grow and flourish.

You can be yourself and feel perfectly comfortable in your relationship. Neither will try to remake or fashion the other into a new mold. Each can speak his or her mind knowing the other will be patient and understanding. You will give each other space to work through problems and attitudes. Both will remember that growth is a process and overcoming self requires a lifetime.

God will reveal that you've made the right choice. If you have trusted God in child-like faith and prayed about your relationship throughout its duration, He will make known to you the answer. This may require much counsel and some fasting. If you use wisdom and caution, God will not allow you to be deceived, since you're looking to Him for guidance and protection. Always remember that your marriage will endure and weather any storms if you keep God at the center.

How to Choose Your Spouse

By Joel Hilliker

What happens AFTER you've dated widely, and you begin

thinking about narrowing the field and moving into more serious dating? How do you choose your husband or wife? How do you know if he or she is the right one? How do you have a godly courtship?

You could compare your history of dating to a diamond shape. It starts at the top with your first (probably slightly awkward) date with one individual, then gradually widens as you grow in experience and date many different men or women. As you mature in your dating and life in general, a point comes when the diamond begins to narrow: You enter a more “serious” phase in preparation for marriage. You narrow the prospects down to a few, and finally, you choose the *one*.

That process of narrowing can be driven in one of two ways. Option one: You have a job, sound finances, spiritual maturity and you feel ready to enter this new stage of life. Option two: You believe you’ve found that special someone; he/she is *the one*, and maturity, finances, the dating diamond—all that fades into the background. You want to go down to *the one*—immediately.

The second option is, sadly, the far more common. But the first is far more desirable.

Deciding whom to spend the rest of your life is among the biggest decisions you will face. It will have a huge impact on your success, accomplishment in life, health, mental wellbeing, lifestyle, happiness, even your personality. *This person* will be your companion for who knows how many mornings, evenings, meals, road trips, vacations. The spouse you choose could have a huge impact on your eternal life! It *will* greatly impact the lives of your children. You need to get it right!

How do you do that?

It’s a crucial life decision. Yet it is one that many otherwise intelligent, capable, successful people make an absolute mess of.

Many factors are working against you, and you can easily make mistakes. How can you be sure he or she is the right one? You could easily be attracted to someone who is very wrong for you. Or you could write someone off who would be a terrific spouse for you. And to be honest, you don’t necessarily know yourself as well as you might think; you might not recognize what qualities you *NEED* in a mate! Your perspective is limited. You are subject to mistakes in judgment. You can’t discern people’s hearts. How can you really *KNOW* this other person?

Here is the great news: You don't have to make this decision alone. You have the best Life Counselor and Marriage Adviser in the universe ready and waiting to lead you! God *WANTS* to work with you and help you. He *wants* to provide you special insight. He wants to be heavily involved in choosing your mate. He wants to be involved in your courtship and in the timing of everything in your life. He wants to guide you to the *right* spouse at the *right* time, setting you up for a fantastic marriage.

Matters of the Heart “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5). It's very easy to lean to your own understanding—ESPECIALLY IN MATTERS OF THE HEART. But doing so can create serious problems.

“*In all thy ways acknowledge him*, and HE SHALL DIRECT THY PATHS” (verse 6). That is a wonderful promise.

“Be not wise in thine own eyes . . .” (verse 7). In choosing a spouse, many people have made the mistake of thinking, *No one else understands how I feel*. Maybe a parent or minister counsels them that the man or woman they are attracted to will be a bad match for them, but they won't listen. That is being WISE IN YOUR OWN EYES. That is fearing something else—loneliness, rejection from another person, getting too old, etc.—more than fearing God.

“It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones” (verse 8). God wants to work things out beautifully for you. If you put your life into His hands, He will save you so much heartache and pain! You will be happier and healthier. You won't end up in a bad situation. The word *health* here means trusting in God is like a medicine; it provides healing. Even if you've made mistakes, God can heal those!

God wants you in His eternal Family, and He knows what you need in order to prepare you for that future. For some people, *that isn't marriage*. The Apostle Paul, because of the “present distress,” pushed marriage aside! (1 Corinthians 7). That didn't make him unhappy or unfulfilled. It was exactly what God wanted for him, and he accepted it wholeheartedly. He plunged himself into God's Work. There may be other reasons God would consider you better off single in this life.

But I believe there are some in God's Church whom God wants to be married, but who are resisting that for some rea-

son. Then there are others who are pushing on God their *own* choice for a spouse.

The point is, to set yourself up for the marriage experience you hope to have, you have to step out in faith, away from the comfort of your own emotions and desires and will. Trust God, not yourself.

God's Choice Think about the process of choosing a mate and going through a courtship on a spiritual level. The process of selecting a spouse is so important to God that Jesus Christ isn't even choosing His own Bride. *God the Father* is choosing Christ's Bride (e.g. John 6:44; 1 Corinthians 12:18).

Anciently, the great patriarch Abraham was a type of God the Father; his son Isaac was a type of Jesus Christ. Genesis 24 gives the amazing history of God providing a wife for Isaac—and in this case, God *directly* chose Isaac's wife.

Abraham sent a servant to find the woman from among his own people. The servant prayed that God would direct him to exactly the right one (verses 12-14). They stepped out in faith and really put the matter in God's hands. God answered this prayer in a wonderful way, making it clear whom He had chosen (verses 26-27).

This was an unusual situation in some ways: Isaac was the son of promise, through whom God would fulfill His promises to Abraham; as one of the patriarchs, he needed a special wife; and he was a type of Christ. But it was *even more unusual* in the sense that Isaac and Rebekah never even met each other!

“And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide: and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels were coming. And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel. ... And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her ...” (verses 63-64, 67).

Many singles in God's Church would LOVE it if God would eliminate all the hassles of singlehood and just say, *Here you go!* If you KNEW it was God's choice, perhaps *you too* would be willing to marry someone like this—sight unseen! Certain rare situations in God's Church have been a bit like this, very obvious and quick.

But in the vast majority of cases, this isn't how God oper-

ates. It is important to understand *why*—and to still apply the *principle* of this marvelous example.

Reason With God What do you do in those situations where God doesn't have someone ride over the horizon and into your life on the back of a camel?

The truth is, successfully navigating the road from “How do you do” to “I do” is hard. There are a lot of ways to get it wrong: traps, obstacles, blunders. How do you really put the situation into God's hands?

Here is a profound scriptural teaching: “COME NOW, AND LET US REASON TOGETHER, saith the LORD . . .” (Isaiah 1:18).

“TRUE EDUCATION IS REASONING WITH GOD,” Gerald Flurry has told the students at Herbert W. Armstrong College. “God wants us to learn to *reason with Him*, to *include Him* in our deliberation and decision-making—TO LET HIS THOUGHTS RULE OUR THOUGHTS! . . . God isn't being unfair—asking us to accept something we can't believe in, or reason is right” (2004 orientation message). God is telling us, *Use your minds. Use the human spirit and the Holy Spirit, and reason with me!*

“If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it” (verses 19-20). *Good* can also be translated as cheerfulness, wealth, happiness. If you reason with God, you'll receive the best of everything!

Think about reasoning with God in everything you do. God wants to work with you, as your partner, in selecting your spouse. He is interested in your thoughts and desires, and He wants to *shape* those. He wants you to exercise your mind, discernment and judgment. He wants you to refine your decision-making capacity as you learn how to include Him. He wants you to seek Him out and draw closer to Him. *Most of all*, He wants to STRENGTHEN YOUR CHARACTER. He can teach you A LOT in the process of selecting a mate that you wouldn't learn if He just said, *This is the one.*

The fact is, there isn't necessarily just ONE in every case. God may consider *several people* to be wonderful potential spouses for you—there are positives and negatives with everybody. He may have a sense of who would be best, but He isn't going to force that on you. Still, He *does* want to be very involved.

Come, let us reason together! God says. *Let's bring godly reasoning into this process. I want to counsel you and work with you to spare you from a bad marriage. I want you to have real joy and fulfillment in this deeply important relationship!*

Seek God's Perspective In order to keep God involved, you must be “[c]asting down imaginations [or reasonings], and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). You must work to overcome all reasoning that exalts itself against God. Are you putting value on something that isn't important to God? Are you overlooking qualities that are very *important* to God?

If you truly bring every single thought into obedience to God, you are reasoning with God! But you have to be *honest* with yourself, whether you are really doing that. Don't play mind games with yourself. Don't allow your emotions to take over.

“Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end. There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand” (Proverbs 19:20-21). *Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon* says *devices* refers to that which anyone meditates, purposes or plots; often especially of evil counsels. This is about reasoning with God!

“A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps” (Proverbs 16:9). We all have a Jeremiah 17:9 heart. We all have human nature. We all have to fight our own selfishness.

Maybe you have a list of qualities you'd like in a mate. *What does God think of your list?* Talk to Him about it. God has a list of qualities you need in a mate. Have you ever asked yourself what's on His list?

Take another look at your list and ask God to help you align it more with His. Before you “eliminate someone” from your list, ask God about it. Does *He* want you to rule that person out? Are you reasoning with Him about it? Do you really see that person the way God sees him or her?

Remember this critical advice: “Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature ... for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). God sees people differently than we do. None of us would even be here

if God looked at people the way we tend to.

Questions to Ask Here are a few questions you might keep in mind as you evaluate potential mates:

What is it that interests you about this person? Be honest about what you find attractive. Are these attributes that matter to God?

What evidence do you see that this person is putting God first? It's not that he or she has to be a spiritual giant—we are all at different levels. Sometimes people hold other singles to too high of a standard, expecting a single man to act with the leadership and maturity of a minister who has been married 20 years. But is the person *putting God first*? *Is God's Work truly important to him or her?*

“If you're a man who is committed to and whose passion is God's Work, as it was with Jesus Christ, and you marry a woman who is only partially committed to God's Work, what will happen in your marriage? ... I submit to you that you will have some serious regrets,” Mr. Flurry wrote (*John's Gospel: The Love of God*).

Look past this individual's personality—how smart, funny or attractive (not that those things wouldn't factor in). *What is his or her CHARACTER?* Is he kind, caring, giving, serving? Is she honest, trustworthy, responsible? How does he treat older people? How does she act around children? How does he treat people who tend to be overlooked and don't appear to have much to give back?

How do you feel when you're around this person? Do you feel comfortable, relaxed, natural? Or do you feel like you have to work hard to be charming or interesting?

Men: When you're around her, do you feel like more of a LEADER—more of a MAN? Do you feel like a *better version of yourself*? Does she like the way you lead?

Women: When you're with him, do you feel *free to be feminine*? Do you feel like more of a GODLY WOMAN? Do you feel comfortable letting him lead—or does following him make you nervous or irritated? Do you sense that he really has your best interests and well-being in mind? Do you feel protected—or do you feel like you have to be careful and keep your guard up?

What evidence do you see that this individual *loves* his or her God-given role? That he or she embraces it and really wants to be excellent at it?

Is this person growing spiritually? Is he or she really working to improve himself or herself, according to God's will and with God's help?

Will this person *help you* become a better, godlier person?

These are deep questions to answer. But then again, marrying someone is a momentous decision. It's easy to throw those kinds of considerations out the window and get distracted by things that aren't nearly so important, like looks, attraction or some kind of spark. If you are really reasoning with God, you will be able to keep these kinds of questions in mind. And as you get to know someone, you'll begin to be able to answer them honestly. And God is going to help you find accurate answers!

Having a clear-headed, God-centered approach to these considerations will go a long way in avoiding mistakes, and it will truly keep God in the driver's seat. It will help you tremendously in being able to answer whether this person is "the one"!

Involving the Ministry When should you involve God's ministry in your dating? If your mind starts entertaining more serious interest in a particular person, it is never too early to involve the ministry. We recommend talking to a minister as soon as you have a desire to narrow the dating experience down to one person.

If your parents are around, don't overlook their counsel regarding your dating experiences. Also, there is nothing wrong with getting input from siblings and close friends. God could use any number of people to help give you the perspective you need.

Realize, however: You are responsible for your own decisions. No one else is going to make your mind up or prevent you from making a mistake. You have to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. And you have to take responsibility for your own choices.

Yes, you need to counsel—but ultimately, it comes down to trying to **DISCERN GOD'S WILL** and then choosing to **FOLLOW IT**. That isn't always simple. But how God can teach you if you seize this opportunity to learn how to **REASON WITH GOD**—the best Life Counselor and Marriage Adviser in the universe!

"Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his

house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock” (Matthew 7:24-25). Apply this to your courtship and marriage. If you hear God’s counsel and then apply it, you’re going to be building your future marriage on a rock.

If you fail to apply God’s counsel—if you trust yourself and are governed by emotion—here is what you can expect to happen: “And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it” (verses 26-27).

God sees everything (Psalm 33:13-15). “The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations” (verse 11). His counsel, or advice, stands forever! You can always count on it.

Once you are married, you don’t want to be second-guessing whether you made the wrong choice because you overlooked these important considerations. There is tremendous security in knowing that God helped you choose your mate!

GUIDELINES FOR A GODLY COURTSHIP

It’s time for serious dating. You have dated widely, narrowed down the possibilities, followed God’s lead and chosen the one you think is your future husband (or wife). And he (or she) has chosen you.

Now the question is: How do you have a godly courtship—that period between dating exclusively and exchanging vows at the altar?

A courtship lays the foundation for a marriage. A *godly* courtship lays the foundation for a *godly* marriage.

The beautiful thing is, all the lessons you learned through the process of dating widely still apply in more serious dating. And having a picture of what serious dating should be can even help you in the dating that leads up to it.

Single Men: A Mind-set You Need to Build

By Joel Hilliker

In many places in Scripture, God shows special concern for widows and fatherless. That shows you He considers it vitally important that WOMEN AND CHILDREN HAVE A MAN PROTECTING THEM. For those who lack that man in their lives, *God Himself fulfills the role of Protector*—and with extraordinary zeal (e.g. Exodus 22:22-24).

Men: Are you *zealous* like God about the duty He gave you to protect women and children? Are you vigilant against any threat to them? Do you shield them from harm and injustice, even at risk to yourself?

To our *great shame*, our modern society sorely lacks this elementary mind-set of manhood. Men are confused about sex roles. Teaching men to protect women is not only lacking, it is condemned. God denounces our selfish society and men who don't care for the needs of widows and the fatherless (Isaiah 1:23). He says providing a masculine presence and relieving their affliction is *pure religion* (verse 17; James 1:27).

For some of us, the false thinking of Satan's world has rubbed off on us more than we probably realize.

Men: Do you look after the women in your life? Do you show them care, concern and honor? Are you the *first* to step up to a difficulty, a challenge, a threat? Perhaps you've never been *taught* to do so. Or perhaps you fear offending a "liberated woman" by intervening on her behalf. Much of the time, however, we men don't step up simply because we don't feel like it. We are being selfish.

Being a protector is not a list of rules to follow—it is a godly *mind-set* that manifests itself in specific actions. Your relationships with the single women in the Church give you a wonderful opportunity to practice it.

One single woman said, "We women with no men *get hard* because we aren't being protected by anyone." That is usually what happens when a woman has no protector: She starts to *protect herself*—and she becomes hard. Then some single men respond by saying, *I'm not interested in her because she's too hard!* They simply write her off, without feeling any sense of obligation or responsibility toward her. Yet they may well be

part of the reason she has had to harden and protect herself!

These women occasionally need a man's help. This woman said she really appreciates one *married* man's effort to look after single women as sisters and doing maintenance or yard work for them.

Single women: WORK and FIGHT not to become hard! Look to God as your Protector—and even to the men in the Church where possible. Be close to your minister. As God's representative, he fights to protect the flock. Don't harden yourself! Exercise faith and patience.

Single men: Be a PROTECTOR toward the single women in God's Family! This isn't something you can wait to do until after you marry. Do this *in your dating*. Care for and look after the single women. Look for opportunities to step up and take care of them. Every time you do so, you make God's women feel more secure—and you strike a blow at your selfish nature.

And realize this: When the women get no dates from the men in the Church, Satan notices—and often begins to come after them with men from the world. Those women become lonely and more vulnerable to that kind of temptation. You can protect your sisters from that by helping them to know that they are very cherished members of God's Family!

Also realize: A godly man who is a protector will *never* push the boundary on a date. The woman should feel comfortable and protected, physically, mentally and emotionally. God COMMANDS that a man restrain and protect women from *his own lust!* He must be a trustworthy man of character in order to defend others from his own baser nature.

In Courtship When dating starts moving toward marriage, the natural tendency is to loosen the standards. But at that point, it is even MORE important to uphold the woman's dignity. You need to *restrain yourself*—in order to PROTECT HER! Many relationships start with the man taking advantage of the woman—even many relationships that *lead to marriage*. These are not built on a foundation of the man being a *protector*—but a kind of *predator!* That is a terrible foundation for a marriage.

“Fornication before marriage ... puts a scar on the future marriage that can never be erased or healed,” Herbert W. Armstrong wrote in *The Missing Dimension in Sex*. “Many today

commit fornication, and then marry the partner in fornication. I do not say such a marriage cannot be happy—it may, and ought to be. But I do say that scar will always remain! It has taken something away from the marriage. Even though happy, it might have been happier!”

Courtship is a crucial phase in a relationship. It is *critical* that the man be the protector of his bride-to-be. Never put her in a situation where she has to defend herself *from you!* If you are not serving as her protector, then she has to *protect herself!* If, during your courtship, you teach her that she has to protect herself from you, that will carry over into the marriage.

“‘We’re going to be married, anyway,’ argue many engaged people. ‘So what’s the difference?’ What’s the *difference?* It’s the difference between *SIN* and righteousness—between *RUINING* the marriage, and *SAVING* it for a true *God-plane* relationship—between corroding and seriously detracting from this lifelong companionship, and keeping it clean, pure and full of joy” (ibid).

What a difference timing makes! Demonstrate character in courtship. Doing so is the difference between sin and righteousness, corrosion and purity. Men: Courtship is your opportunity to prove your trustworthiness, to show her that she can trust you and feel safe with you—that she can look to you as her protector.

Every man must protect women and children from his own worse nature. This includes curbing his anger, impatience, cruelty and mean-spiritedness. Simply treating women with *dignity* and *honor* is a form of protecting them. A man who demeans a woman causes her to feel defensive around him, when she should feel protected!

It is important to realize, too, that being a successful protector means you must protect *your own mind* FIRST! Don’t get into material influences that you shouldn’t. A man who is satisfying his own lusts, failing to safeguard his own mind from the evils of this world, is seriously compromising his ability to protect others.

A man who becomes a protector initiates a beautiful virtuous cycle. As he fulfills his role, he actually grows in the respect, honor and love he holds for those he protects. And when they feel protected and loved, *they* grow in admiration and respect for *him*. When a woman feels safe with a man, she becomes more womanly and lovely. When children feel cared

for, they tend to grow more humble and teachable.

Pray that God will help you think as He does. Pray He will sensitize your vigilance. Pray He will give you the right emotions. Pray He will steel you to your duty, wherever it surfaces. Pray He will prod you to right action. And pray for opportunities to step up and be a man—a protector.

Do Not Have This Conversation With Your Date!

By Joel Hilliker

Conversation between a man and a woman is wonderful. The two can help each other in so many ways: develop their personality, sharpen their social skills, grow in compassion and empathy, broaden their perspective and so on.

When a spark of romantic interest enters a relationship, this can also be wonderful. But it also complicates matters somewhat, and, handled poorly, can lead to problems.

Why problems? Because emotion—though a tremendous blessing when guided and channeled properly—is not necessarily helpful. The wrong kind of conversation between a man and a woman stokes emotion, feeds infatuation, and clouds your ability to maintain wise objectivity.

Just listen to pop radio, and you know it is easy to say things that get the juices going: *I love you! I can't live without you! I would walk 500 miles just to be with you!*

We are subtler about it, but we can still stir up emotions in ways that seem gratifying but turn out to be harmful. In some situations in God's Church, men and women are saying things to one another aimed at *getting something* from the other rather than really showing outgoing concern. Remember, you must give account before God for EVERY IDLE WORD! (Matthew 12:36).

Here I want to help you recognize and avoid *one specific trap* that the desire for a relationship can easily lead you into if you are not careful.

It tends to emerge as you begin to get to know someone who appears to be a viable possibility for lifelong companionship. It is actually a *specific topic of conversation* that you might find yourself wanting to bring up.

I'm speaking of THE CONVERSATION ABOUT "US."

Let's Talk About 'Us'? This is discussion about *the two of you*—about *your developing relationship*—about *how much you enjoy your time together* (I'm not talking about, "Thanks, I had fun"—I'm talking about a *conversation ABOUT* how much fun you have together, what wonderful companions you are for each other)—about *the possibility of you sharing a future*—about *whether you're spending enough time together*—or whether you wish you could spend more time together—or how someone else asked you out but you wish you could have gone with *them*—etc. ad nauseam. There are thousands of variations on this theme. Whatever it is, it's a comment or discussion that puts focus on your friendship, or your relationship.

I'm telling you, this is a trap.

Why have this conversation? *Because you like the little hit of excitement it gives you.* But the only purpose it serves is to stir up your emotions and to *feed infatuation*. Such discussion also tends to have a snowball effect. Once "us" becomes a topic of discussion—it can become a greedy monster.

Realize this: Once you say something, you cannot unsay it. Once you say, "I really like you. I'd like to date you more," then that bell is rung. It cannot be unringed. *You had better mean it*—and you had better be careful. When you make a statement like that, it creates expectations in the mind of the other person—perhaps beyond what you intend. (In some cases, people DO intend to create those expectations *even when they don't really intend to fulfill them*. Those are very self-absorbed people—and they have a serious problem!)

In a sense, A STATEMENT LIKE THAT IS A PROMISE. Every step you take toward intimacy is a step you cannot untake. That statement took you closer to full intimacy. You devoted a little piece of yourself—and you probably took possession of a little piece of the other person too. Think about it: Either you're going to end up marrying that person—or not. It is either going to lead to another step, and then another, toward marriage—or at some point you are going to have to painfully back away from it. But you cannot undo it.

ALL THROUGH YOUR DATING, ALWAYS CONDUCT YOURSELF SO YOU WILL HAVE NO REGRETS. *You don't want to have to back off from ANYTHING you ever said or did.* As you enter more serious dating and courtship, always conduct yourself for no regrets! Con-

duct yourself so that if *at any point* God shows you that this isn't a good match, you would *still* have no regrets: You treated each other as brother and sister throughout, with respect. You focused on friendship. You upheld each other's dignity!

Even with the person you do end up marrying, you want to look back on your courtship as having laid a **RIGHTEOUS FOUNDATION** for a **WONDERFUL MARRIAGE!** You have no regrets because you built that marriage on a rock!

So, what is an *alternative* topic of conversation that will create no regrets—and that actually is **HELPFUL**?

Getting to Know You As you find yourself in a relationship that seems to have the possibility of progressing to something more serious, it is good to transition to more substantive conversation—conversation that is clear-eyed and honest about *what is really important to you*.

Talk about God's Work and God's truth. Discuss what values matter most to you. What virtues inspire you. What qualities of character you most appreciate when you see them in others. What areas you are personally trying hardest to develop and to grow in.

These kinds of conversations can help you get to know not only the other person, but even yourself!

This is not to say you should start trying to force having intensely probing conversations, especially early on in a relationship. But if you want to build a stronger friendship with a brother or sister in the faith—and you are also interested in testing your real compatibility with someone—then it shouldn't feel that strange to engage in some deeper conversation about some of the more important things in life.

Go deeper than just your *interests* or even your *goals*. You might have similar interests with someone (“*We’re so compatible because we both love tennis and animated movies!*”). You might even have similar goals with someone (“*We’re so compatible because we both have a dream of moving to a small town somewhere and opening a coffee shop!*”). But you might be very different from someone in more-fundamental areas.

Find out things like:

- What is his/her attitude toward serving: volunteering for jobs, joining Spokesman Club, driving an extra two hours to pick someone up or visit a shut-in?

- How important is hospitality to him/her?
- Does he/she prefer having a lot of people around, or spending more time in solitude?
- How important is *work* to him/her?
- How important is time management? How motivated is he/she to make productive use of free time?
- How important is it to him/her to continue their education?
- How much *energy* does he/she have? Does he/she always crave activity, or does he/she need a lot of down time?
- What is his/her attitude toward money? Is he liberal or frugal? How important are quality possessions and a high standard of living to him/her?
- How important is it to him/her to take care of his/her things? Is he/she a do-it-yourself-type person?
- What priority does he/she put on proper diet and exercise?
- What value does he/she put on friendship? What about loyalty?
- How important is open communication and honesty to him/her?
- Is he/she a positive, upbeat person? When trials hit, how important is it to him/her to react positively? To not complain? To have joy?

These are issues that don't necessarily have a "right answer." But any item on this list could be very important to one person and not at all to another. Wildly different answers could indicate a lack of compatibility that should at least factor into your decision-making.

In God's Church, hopefully we are all striving to be more like Christ; in many areas, there should be a fair amount of agreement, since we all seek Christ's mind. But still, *we are all different*. One person may put a premium on this set of values; someone else may have a significantly different priority list in values. If you are reasoning with God and keeping your emotions in check, then in getting to know someone, you will be able to see clearly if there are major, problematic differences.

The nice thing about talking about these things is, it isn't about trying to increase the *romantic aura* around the relationship. It's simply about *building friendship*, and *building the Family of God*. You won't have regrets about having upbuilding, wholesome conversation!

Sincerity and Truth Here is a superb goal to have in your dating and courtship: ALWAYS BE SINCERED, AND ALWAYS BE TRUTHFUL.

God puts a high premium on SINCERITY and TRUTH (1 Corinthians 5:8). These are wonderful virtues to keep in mind as you are getting to know someone through dating, especially someone you think might make a lifelong companion. Be *sincere* with the person you're interested in. Don't put on a show.

Sincerity means purity, innocent or childlike simplicity, candidness. *What you see is what you get.* The root word means pure, sincere, unsullied. And the roots of that word mean "to be found pure when unfolded and examined by the sun's light." That is how God wants your life to be. He wants you to be able to live your life in the sun—in the light!

With the person you are dating, or courting, you don't want *them* to be insincere and deceitful. You want to make your decisions based on truth! And you owe it to the other person to be sincere and truthful as well.

Here is another practical suggestion: As you are courting, BUILD YOUR DATING AROUND SERVING. Spend time together with a shut-in. Do a work project together. Serve together at a Church function. This reveals more of the character of the person you're dating. This is illuminating and upbuilding, which is exactly what dating should be—AND what MARRIAGE should be! It also helps you to avoid getting locked into myopic romance, where your focus is entirely on each other and quite selfish.

When all is said and done, there really shouldn't be a big difference between a date you would have during the "date widely" phase and a date during a serious courtship! It should still be two people getting to know one another, focusing on upbuilding Christian fellowship, showing respect for each other and for God's standards. *Throughout* your courtship, the more you can focus on simply building the friendship, the better!

Marriage Counseling and Engagement

By Joel Hilliker

When and how should two people approach the ministry for marriage counseling? The general guideline that we give to students at Herbert W. Armstrong College is that it should be

after you have dated exclusively (which is also undertaken with ministerial counsel) for two or three months; ideally at or about the time you say, “I love you.”

Remember though, you cannot *love* someone you do not truly *know*. Do not say “I love you” too soon!

Once you seek marriage counseling, what should you expect? It varies from couple to couple. Allow the minister to guide you through it, and don’t compare your courtship with another couple.

Generally, the minister will question you about your physical preparedness: how much savings you have, your employment situation and so on. The Church doesn’t have a rule about this, but individual ministers may have specific expectations, or your minister may counsel you what he feels would be wisest in your situation.

You will likely review *The Missing Dimension in Sex and Why Marriage—Soon Obsolete!* There will be lots of questions. You will likely cover subjects like love, the God-ordained roles of husband and wife, compatibility and finances.

Be patient! Expect the process to take place over a period of months.

At some point, you will reach the engagement period. A typical engagement lasts two to three months, sometimes four.

Remember, PHYSICAL INVOLVEMENT BEFORE MARRIAGE SHOULD BE EXTREMELY LIMITED.

What is appropriate behavior during your engagement? Holding hands; a fond embrace; an occasional goodnight kiss—if not prolonged. Just realize: IT IS EASY TO GO TOO FAR!

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: ... a time to embrace, and A TIME TO REFRAIN FROM EMBRACING ... A TIME TO LOVE, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace” (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 5, 8). EVEN IF IT’S THE RIGHT THING, BUT DONE AT THE WRONG TIME, IT’S STILL THE WRONG THING.

God is very particular about this, firstly, because He wants to protect you from hurt. Touch is *extremely powerful* in BINDING YOU TO ANOTHER PERSON. People in the world use it all the time—and it can leave you feeling *connected* to someone who is *totally wrong for you*. There is extraordinary science about how much happens hormonally with touch, and how we be-

come biologically and psychologically bound together with someone. When done the wrong way, this leaves our reason completely short-circuited!

You must use touch wisely. FOLLOWING GOD'S LAW IS THE WAY TO DO IT.

God has awesome and beautiful reasons for essentially *eliminating touch* from the equation before you are married. He wants you to avoid the pain of breaking up. He wants you to *develop character by refraining*.

A MAN WHO TAKES THE LEAD IN THE RIGHT WAY DURING THE COURTSHIP IS SHOWING HIS BRIDE-TO-BE THAT HE IS A MAN OF CHARACTER IN WHOM SHE CAN PLACE HER FULL TRUST.

Developing the *character muscle* to “refrain from embracing” comes in handy even after marriage. There are times God tells a married couple to “refrain” (e.g. 1 Corinthians 7:5). He wants you to show love by putting the *other person's needs above your own desires*. After all, what is love? It is “the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:10). REAL LOVE IS GOING TO STAY WITHIN THE BOUNDS OF GOD'S LAW! The real love of God actually fulfills the law. If you are pushing the limits of what you're supposed to do—if you're going contrary to counsel—if you're compromising—THAT IS NOT LOVE, IT IS LUST! It is *selfishness* and SIN!

Read the story of Balaam in Numbers 22 through 24, and consider Mr. Armstrong's analysis: “Balaam wanted to go just as far in the wrong way as he dared. That is Satan's way! Now just how far may you safely go in doing what you *want* instead of what you OUGHT to do? Haven't you often compromised on this? Haven't you often wanted to do something you knew you really ought not? And haven't you sometimes gone at least *partway*, thinking that perhaps if you didn't go *all the way* in doing wrong, you might 'get away with it'?”

Mr. Armstrong relates this specifically to dating: “How many, under temptation to commit fornication or adultery, go *partway*—perhaps just a little ‘necking’? And how often does that lead to going just a *little farther*—and then perhaps just a *little farther still*? GOING THAT FIRST PART WAY IS ALREADY COMMITTING THE ACT SPIRITUALLY—according to the spirit, or intent, of the law! WHEN YOU DID THAT YOU WERE ALREADY GUILTY IN GOD'S SIGHT.”

In God's eyes, going the first step is DOING THE ACT! He judges according to your intent. YOU MUST CONTROL YOURSELF SEXU-

ALLY—THAT IS THE LAW.

YOU ONLY HAVE ONE CHANCE TO HAVE A GODLY COURTSHIP. Men: The way you conduct yourself communicates a lot to a woman whether she can trust you. IN YOUR DATING, YOU ARE LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR YOUR LEADERSHIP IN THE MARRIAGE.

Consider this amazing truth: When dating is done God's way, two people can date, build a wonderful friendship, realize they aren't right for each other, and part company *with little or no heartbreaking pain*. That is an absolutely REMARKABLE testament to the WISDOM in God's way of dating! Having to part is certain to bring a measure of disappointment. But the closer that man and women adhered to God's standards, and the more they kept God at the center of their thinking throughout that process, the less disappointment there will be, and the quicker they will be able to recover and move forward. They won't have regrets and bring emotional baggage into a subsequent relationship.

Ideally, however, a couple progresses through a courtship and then commits to one another in marriage. When they do so, they forge a *lifelong, binding covenant* SAFEGUARDING that relationship. *It is AT THAT POINT that God intends the walls to come down* COMPLETELY—including the physical barriers they were careful to preserve in dating. God's design is that sex only occurs within that wonderful, protected state of a FULLY COMMITTED RELATIONSHIP, when FULL TRUST can accompany that intimacy.

COMMITMENT OPENS THE DOOR FOR DEEPER LOVE. As anyone who is in a long-term, committed, godly marriage can attest to, the more you think on this, the more you realize just HOW WISE God was in *commanding* that that LIFELONG COMMITMENT be established before you enter into that full intimacy with a mate.

True Love Begins in Marriage The reality is, LOVE TAKES TIME. The bond you develop during your dating and courtship is just a *fraction* of what you develop over time because you've made that commitment to each other!

Don't think you need to have some deeply passionate bond before you even marry. The REAL LOVE develops AFTER THE COMMITMENT TAKES PLACE. Those couples who split up after three, five or 10 years just because they feel like they're "growing apart" have no idea what they are missing out on by not sticking with their commitment!

I once heard about this story of a couple that was dating. They really liked each other, but one thing holding the man back from marrying was that she had a very large nose. He found it unattractive, and he told her. She said she wouldn't mind getting a nose job—she had considered it for a long time anyway. So they got engaged. Life got busy, and she didn't have time to do the operation before the wedding. After they married, their lives were even busier. Soon she was expecting. Before they knew it, they had been married a few years with a couple of kids. Finally, one day she decided to have her nose operation, and she made a doctor's appointment. When she told her husband about the appointment, he was shocked: "What? You're going to let someone touch that beautiful nose of yours? Please don't!"

You grow into love. Don't expect to have the deep love of a couple that's been together 20 years before you even get married.

"And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death" (Genesis 24:67). Isaac took Rebecca to be his wife—and THEN he loved her! He didn't even *know* her before that.

Commitment opens the door for greater love. And when sex is preserved for that *special covenant relationship*, then it is elevated to a HOLY PLANE! Rather than just being a form of self-gratifying recreation, it is an expression of a *spiritual bond*. Marriage makes *two people one*—spiritually ONE! And sex is the physical manifestation of that reality. The Bible actually equates the two: It calls marriage and also sexual intercourse (even with a harlot) "one flesh"! (1 Corinthians 6:16).

There is so much wisdom in the way that God instructs us to date and to court. It protects you in some wonderful and valuable ways! It protects you from emotional devastation by forcing you to keep your emotions in check. It postpones the intimacy that leads to problems when it is broken. It postpones it until it is completely safe and secure within the bounds of a permanent covenant.

Do it God's way, and you can navigate the tricky waters of dating—even serious dating and courtship—and lay the groundwork for a successful, happy marriage!

Chapter 4

Parenting

SUCCESSFUL SINGLE PARENTING

By Dennis Leap (*Royal Vision*, July-August 2004)

SO, YOU'RE A SINGLE PARENT. TAKE HEART: YOU ARE NOT ALONE. It is ever more common for a parent—father or mother—to end up facing the challenges of life without a mate but with children. Single-parent households are on the rise in Western society.

God's Philadelphia Church has its share of single-parent households. Some have suffered the heartbreak of a spouse dying; many have come into the Church divorced or separated from their mates. Some have suffered divorce or separation as a result of coming into the body of Christ. God's ministers understand well that even two parents raising a family is a tough job. We fully know that being a single parent—acting as both Dad and Mom—is both daunting and demanding. Yours is not an easy task.

Be assured. You can do it! Here are some practical steps that you can take to be successful as a single parent.

Embrace Your New Life We should be honest. Those who enjoyed a loving and fulfilling companionship in marriage find the readjustment to single life difficult. Add to this the responsibility of acting as both mother and father—many days end leaving you physically and emotionally drained. Negative emotions creep in. Single parents often battle loneliness, frustration, envy and bitterness. As a result, many people in this situation are overworked, tired, easily upset and irritable. There are even greater challenges for those recovering from a death or bitter divorce. However, you must recognize that wishing your life was different will never help you do a good job as a parent. Embracing your new life—accepting your status—is the first step to success. Yes, this is a big challenge. How do you do it?

Look at the Apostle Paul's example. He had to face many hardships in his Christian life. He was single. There were times he most likely desired a mate (1 Corinthians 9:5). But his difficult task of taking care of the Gentile congregations prevented him from doing so. He did not focus on what he

lacked—a mate. Paul worked diligently to get his mind off himself. He focused on his job. In the end, he was extremely successful as a type of father—a wonderful parent to God’s people (1 Corinthians 4:15-16).

How did he do this?

He stated, “Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (Philippians 4:11). Strive for contentment. Find every measure of happiness, no matter how little, with your single status. This will enable you to focus on your job of parenting. Do everything possible to shift the focus off you. Realize this kind of contentment comes with prayer, study, meditation and fasting.

Esteem Your Child’s Needs Recognize that children in single-parent families are also suffering. The problems of adjusting can be just as traumatic, if not more so, for a child. The loss of a father is tough for a boy. A mother could have a hard time valuing her son’s hobbies. Who can measure the loss of a mother for a girl? A daughter may soon recognize that dad doesn’t grasp her feminine needs. Likewise, major problems also result from the lack of attention of the parent of the opposite sex.

Although supposed family experts have promoted alternative families for years, key experts have recently come to recognize that the care of both parents is necessary to completely fulfill the emotional needs of a child. There are marked disadvantages for the children of single parents. Sara McLanahan, a Princeton University sociologist, writes, “Children who grow up with only one of their biological parents (nearly always the mother) are disadvantaged across a broad array of outcomes. ... [T]hey are twice as likely to drop out of high school, 2.5 times as likely to become teen mothers, and 1.4 times as likely to be idle—out of school and out of work—as children who grow up with both parents. Children in one-parent families also have lower grade point averages, lower college aspirations and poorer attendance records. As adults, they have higher divorce rates. These patterns persist even after adjusting for differences in race, parent’s education, number of siblings and residential location” (*The Consequences of Single Motherhood*). We mention these facts not to discourage you but to show you the importance of seeing to the needs of your child.

Understanding and then facing the disadvantages for your child will help you minimize potential negative effects. The best way for you to get your mind off yourself is to focus your attention on your child. Paul taught, “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Philippians 2:3-4). All Christians are admonished to put others’ needs before their own. Certainly Christian single parents must place the highest priority on their children.

Recognize that the lack of attention is the root cause of all the disadvantages listed above. Here’s why neglect often takes place.

Most single parents—especially mothers—struggle with financial and work-related difficulties. Although there are many programs available for you, training and updating work skills can be an intimidating challenge. It is time consuming. Then, even reentering the job market can be a major hurdle to jump. Making ends meet is generally still difficult, even with a good job. Having a job increases the costs for a family. Transportation, clothing and daycare can eat into an already tight budget. Besides daycare, many single fathers need to employ cleaning and cooking services. It is not surprising then that many single parents end up working overtime or two jobs. Many single parents make the mistake in thinking that money and things make up for the loss of the second parent. Because of such thinking, some devote more time to the work of earning a living than other very necessary things such as helping with school work, spending time in doing chores or just plain discussion about the day’s events. Many children of single parents complain that parents just are not there for them.

It is all too easy to miss the real needs of a child. All children (with either two or one parent) need attention more than money and things. There are times when your child’s need for attention must take priority over finances and budgets.

Here is the point. You simply cannot do it all by yourself. So, the next step you need to take is to get help!

Make God Your Partner Continually remind yourself that you are not alone. Certainly, it is very easy to feel alone if you focus on the physical. Learn to look at your situation spiritu-

ally. Spiritually, you have both a Father and a Husband. Make God your partner in everything you do. Don't forget that God knows your situation and is ready to help you in every way. God never fails us. We often let God down by not asking for help. Lean on God as never before, and He will be the strong pillar beside you.

With the increased demand on your time and energy, be sure to get your prayer and Bible study in first each day. Ask God to guide and bless your day. Daily ask Him to protect you and your children from accident and illness. And most of all, ask God to give you the power to fight discouragement.

Focus a portion of your Bible study time on God's clear promises to supply our needs, especially those of single parents (Philippians 4:19). Don't forget to study the fact that God will not give us trials greater than we can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). There are special promises you can claim as a single parent. For example, in Psalms it states, "The Lord . . . relieveth the fatherless and widow . . ." (Psalm 146:9). Here is a promise that God will help carry the burdens of single parents. God is not limited as to what He will do. This promise includes spiritual, financial, emotional and social needs. Psalm 68 states that God is "A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows . . ." (verse 5). This verse means that God will protect you and your child from all harm when you truly look to Him. Psalm 10 states that God is "the helper of the fatherless" (verse 14). Wise King Solomon wrote, "[E]nter not into the fields of the fatherless: For their redeemer is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee" (Proverbs 23:10-11). God is the mighty redeemer of widows and orphans. God will use all of His might to defend and sustain you. In the short run, you may suffer as all humans do. But in the long run, God always takes care of things—even if some try to mistreat you.

Put God and His way of life first in your life. Trust God to provide for you. Seek God's guidance in every situation you encounter. Ask God for extra help to face your problems—head on—with courage. When you go to God, expect God to bless you—for that is exactly what God plans to do.

Seek Counsel Single parents need sound advice. All people do. Solomon declared, "Where no counsel is, the people fall:

but in the multitude of counselors there is safety” (Proverbs 11:14). The value of wise counsel is priceless. Those who stubbornly go it alone without counsel often suffer unnecessary hardship.

God has set His ministers over the Church to help the brethren (Hebrews 13:17; 2 Corinthians 1:24). This certainly includes single parents. Be sure to seek out the ministry for help with tough problems. Be sure to counsel prior to making big decisions like a major purchase, a job change or a move to a new location. In addition, teach your children to seek your counsel or counsel from the ministry as well.

Seek the advice of others who may be able to help you with specific problems. Find a lawyer you can trust to help with legal problems. When facing financial problems, besides your minister, you may need to meet with a financial professional. In general, child discipline problems will require you to seek the help of your minister. In addition, observe the good examples of others around you. Learn to lean on the help of strong, godly families. Many families are happy to include you and your children in activities.

Don't hesitate to seek out the sound advice of your extended family and friends. Learn to ask for help when you truly need it. The most successful single parents are the ones who keep in touch with their minister, family and friends.

Being a single parent has its handicaps. You need a fully developed support system. Sometimes a simple chat with an understanding ear is all you need to get up and running again. Trusted friends who listen without forcing their advice or opinions on you are a precious treasure. When you find such a friend, seek his or her help. The solutions for many difficulties come while simply talking about your feelings. Always tell your friend how thankful you are for his or her understanding ear. Don't forget to return the favor.

Get Organized The roles of a single parent are many. Being a mother, father, homemaker, breadwinner, bookkeeper and nurse can pull you in many different directions—all at the same time! The key to your effectiveness lies in organization.

Single parents suffer from the tendency to allow life to get out of control. Control your life. Get organized. If you have not

done so, set a schedule for yourself and your children. Get the whole family involved. Start by making a daily list of things to be done. Be sure to set realistic goals. Then set priorities. Remember, your schedule is a guide. Be sure to allow for unplanned occurrences that can divert planned activities. Yet, work at sticking to the schedule. Having a schedule will give your family structure and direction. Both attributes create an environment of security.

The easy way to set a schedule is to write it down on a calendar. Note the assigned activities for each family member. Be sure to allow your children to help with the cooking, cleaning and laundry. This will not only take the burden off you, it will help them learn responsibility and feel needed and useful. When your children learn to do home chores well, it will free you up to do other things.

Organize your records. Develop a simple filing system for your important papers, bills, letters, insurance policies, etc. Be sure to schedule office time for yourself to keep your filing system in good working order.

Make a financial budget and stick to it. An out-of-control budget—meaning no budget—could lead to disaster.

Keep your home environment in order. Because of a harried life, some have the tendency to allow a home to fill with clutter. Although it may be a real challenge, give away, sell or simply throw out those items not necessary or used. Find a storage place for everything and then be sure to put things away when finished with them. Two scriptures to keep in mind here: “For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints,” and “Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40).

Build Closeness The major way to offset the difficulties of a single-parent family is to build family closeness. Closeness comes by spending time with the children. Scheduling time together must be a top priority.

Be aware that the loss of a parent can cause your child to crave your attention more than normal, especially at first. All children experience feelings of insecurity when a parent dies. All children experience rejection when parents divorce. You will need to develop real empathy for your child. By support-

ing them, you will teach them to support their siblings and eventually other people. In time, each member of a strongly united family grows to give and receive emotional and moral support. When one is down, the others step in to provide strength and encouragement.

How do you build this kind of closeness?

Single-parent families must share regular meals together. Few families in this world eat any meals together. Meal times provide family togetherness, security and time for communication. Meal-time communication is a lost art in our society. Turn off the television during meals. Use the time wisely to share thoughts, feelings and concerns. Talk about positive things like goals and how God has intervened during the course of the day.

As the parent, lead all discussions. Draw out your more reserved children. Ask specific questions: What was the most exciting part of your day? What good thing happened to you? Tell your children how your day went. If you are open and honest, your children will learn to be the same way. Be sure to let your children tell you what is on their minds. Learn about their interests. Then guide and align all interests to be in concert with God's laws and ways.

Listen carefully for problems at school. Problems can be related to studies or other students. You can help prevent poor grades by spending time with your children while they do homework. All children need remedial help at times. Don't be ashamed to seek help if you see problems. Build a good working relationship with your child's teacher, who can be an extra arm for you to provide positive help for your child.

Attend as many school activities as possible. Your personal involvement will strongly encourage your child. In addition, there is no better way to get a good view of your child and their friends. Learn about your child's friends. Make your home a center for youth activity. Allow your children to invite their friends home when you are present and monitor all activities. Direct your children away from associates that can have a negative effect upon them. Teach your children to choose friends wisely.

Maximize your weekends with your children. The Sabbath is the ideal time for family Bible study and prayer. Of course, during the week you should also take the time to teach your

children about God and to pray with them. However, the Sabbath allows you the time for concentrated effort.

Encourage your children to participate in all Church-sponsored youth activities. Even though we are scattered, each region hosts activities to help inspire and uplift the youth of God's Church. All teens should be encouraged to attend the Philadelphia Youth Camp. The Church also plans special activities for young people at each Feast site. Don't miss these opportunities.

Reserve Sundays for family time. Work together around the home. Take care of missed cleaning chores, or use the day for grocery shopping and preparing for the week ahead. As time and budget permits, use the day for family recreation and fun. Family picnics, hikes and sporting activity add a refreshing diversion from family stress and strain.

Serve Others Beside personal family closeness, you and your children need to be close to the Family of God. Be sure to attend services regularly. Spending time with God's Family each week will strengthen and encourage you and your children.

Be sure to serve others. God has called all of us to a life of service—even widows. Remember that God used a widow and her son to serve the great Prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17:9-24). God blessed this widow richly by bringing her son back to life after a serious illness. Whenever possible volunteer to help God's work. Encourage your children to help as well—according to their age and ability.

Learn to serve and help others. Invite brethren over for a meal or some games. Be sure to include both singles and families. Some couples may actually have more serious problems than you. There are times they need someone to lean on. Focus your attention on your guests. When you generate warmth and happiness, this will set a wonderful example for your children. When you get into the habit of thinking about others, your own problems will shrink into a proper perspective.

Realize there are two ways to approach your situation. You can be positive. This is obviously the best way. Being positive will energize you to meet all the challenges you face. Or, you can be negative. Being negative only makes a tough situation

more difficult. It will destroy the happiness of you and your children. Being negative will sap your strength when you need it most.

Bitterness is the threat to your success as a single parent. No matter what the cause is of your single status—death, separation or divorce—don't succumb to anger, envy and resentment. You are not the first single parent. In this present evil world, you will not be the last. Others before you have done a truly marvelous job in raising balanced and stable children. You can do the same.

Epilogue

A Secret to Being a Happy Single

By Stephen Flurry

BEING SINGLE CAN BE FRUSTRATING. BUT WITH GOD'S HELP, YOU can learn not just to *cope* with the frustrations—but to actually *appreciate* them!

God actually wants you to be *happy* as a single. Yes, He wants you to be dating and preparing for marriage and family. After all, that is your eternal future! (e.g. Revelation 19:7). But God wants to teach *all* of His people to be *content* in whatever circumstances He places them.

The Apostle Paul set an admirable example in this regard. He had a physical ailment that was an agonizing trial for him (2 Corinthians 12:7). He was anointed for it three times, desperately desiring God to remove it (verse 8).

We know it was God's will to heal Paul of this uncomfortable infirmity—but *just not at that time*. God told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (verse 9). *Don't worry about your weakness*, God said. *Focus on MY strength!*

How did Paul respond? "Most gladly therefore will I rather *glory in my infirmities*, that the power of Christ may rest upon me," he said. "Therefore *I take pleasure in infirmities*, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for

Christ's sake: for *when I am weak, then am I strong*" (verses 9-10).

Once Paul ACCEPTED that he would have to live with this weakness, his whole attitude changed. He viewed the trial as an opportunity for God to work things out despite his weakness. He appreciated that it would keep him humble (verse 7). When Paul saw God's power at work, he actually became *grateful* for his infirmity.

This is the attitude God wants all of us to take on. *God sees our weaknesses as opportunities*. In fact, the weaker the instrument God uses, the more His grace and power is manifested.

Paul encouraged us to always think on the positive (Philippians 4:8). He set the example in doing so (verse 9). He explained, "I have learned, *in whatsoever state I am*, therewith to BE CONTENT" (verse 11).

Contentment was something Paul *learned!* Who knows how much time passed between those three anointings—or how frustrated and discouraged he got waking up each day with the same affliction? But over time, he *learned* how to cope with it—even to the point of *rejoicing* in it!

"I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want" (verse 12; Revised Standard Version). There is a *secret* to facing any and all circumstances, including singlehood. That secret is TO LEARN HOW TO BE CONTENT. Whether abased or abounding, Paul learned to thank God in every circumstance.

Our human nature always wants to *get*. It grows terribly discontent when it doesn't obtain what it wants. It frets and worries, strives and agonizes to get more for the *self*. And it is always in a rush, selfishly wanting everything *right now!*

God, by contrast, brings tremendous contentment into our lives. His Holy Spirit brings fruits of *joy*—genuine happiness; *peace*—contentment and peace of mind; and *patience*—WAITING for God to fulfill His promises in His own time. Developing the patience to wait on God is a crucial key to true contentment.

"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (verse 13). Purge feelings of inferiority, fears of failure, and negative thinking. Commit your life into God's hands, serve Him and obey His Word. He will give you the strength you need.

"Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the

desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass” (Psalm 37:4-5). As long as you delight yourself in Him, God will give you the desires of your heart!

Many people today WANT A LOT—the best job, the fancy car, the nice home, the passionate romance. But we have to delight in God and commit our ways to Him, or we set ourselves up for frustration and failure. God wants to bless us and give us a lot—but we must put Him above everything else, and learn to patiently and contentedly wait on Him.

There is a definite TIME ELEMENT involved in this formula. “Rest in the LORD, and wait *patiently for him*: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass” (verse 7). REST in the Eternal. WAIT PATIENTLY on Him. Never fret, getting caught up in comparing yourself with others.

“[T]hose that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth ... and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (verses 9, 11). That is where true contentment leads.

Being discontent with your singlehood is dishonoring God and showing a lack of faith. Impatience and frustration has led many singles to make terrible life decisions. Don't be among them.

Rest assured that continually putting yourself in God's hands will yield good results in the end. “For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And *let us not be weary in well doing*: for in due season WE SHALL REAP, IF WE FAINT NOT” (Galatians 6:8-9). Don't allow yourself to get overanxious for a quick return. Let PATIENCE work its PERFECT WORK (James 1:4).

“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and BE CONTENT WITH SUCH THINGS AS YE HAVE: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5). Put God first, and then BE CONTENT with what He provides.

“[G]odliness *with contentment* is great gain” (1 Timothy 6:6). *Contentment* here means a perfect condition of life, in which no aid is needed—a sufficiency in life's necessities.

“For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out” (verse 7). This is true physically—

but not spiritually. That is why we shouldn't set our hearts on physical things in this life: because, like our physical bodies, they won't last! The spiritual realm, on the other hand, is incorruptible and eternal, which is why Jesus advised us to invest in heavenly treasures (Matthew 6:19-21).

The thing is, if we become godly and are content, then physical blessings will follow! (verse 33).

Singles who think that marriage will solve all their problems too often find that their dissatisfaction and their inability to embrace their life circumstances follows them into the marriage!

It is the *happy single* who becomes the happy married person!

So in order to prepare for your future marriage and family—physical and spiritual—learn to *be content* in your present state. Delight in God, commit your way to Him, trust in Him—and He will give you the desires of your heart!