

BOUNDLESS



a girl's guide to
MARRYING WELL



MARRYING WELL IS BECOMING AN UNREALIZED DESIRE

MOST WOMEN hope to marry, but for many, it's not happening like they thought it would. It seems too far away, or too unlikely, given the men they know and those they're meeting. Some wonder if their standards are too high. Others suspect all the good men are already taken.

It's not enough to just coast along, counting on today's dating culture, and our culture's definition of marriage, to deliver a God-honoring and timely marriage to a good man. If you hope to marry well, you need to do more — and less — than what the culture says.

By understanding and embracing God's design for marriage — as well

as a principled approach to it — you have a better shot at not only getting married, but marrying well.

That's where this booklet comes in. Based on the counter-cultural, biblical concepts of intentionality, purity, community and Christian compatibility it's designed to encourage and equip you for marriage. Not marriage at all costs, but marrying well for your good and God's glory.

May God bless the time you spend reading this, align your desires with His, and help you become a godly woman for a godly man.

*Candice Watters, general editor,
Founder, Boundless Webzine*

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LIVE LIKE YOU'RE PLANNING TO MARRY

Are you planning to marry, or just hoping to?

Hope is good. It's what keeps you going when you're weary (Isaiah 40:30-31). It's what sustains you when marriage seems out of reach. But hope alone isn't enough. You also need to live like you're planning to marry. Does that mean loading up your planner with strategies and to-do items for getting married by Christmas? YES! And a whole lot more.

OK, not really. Planning in this case means intending; doing things that are consistent with what you expect to happen and avoiding things that aren't. When it comes to getting married, being intentional looks a lot like basic Christian discipleship. Don't worry; I'm not suggesting if you just try to be

a better Christian, God will reward you with a husband. It's not like "good Christians" get husbands and "bad ones" don't. This isn't a cosmic rewards plan with God pulling a husband from His prize box for the women who do everything on His checklist. It's simply the unfolding of sowing and reaping.

Paul wrote, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (Galatians 6:7). Good living produces good fruit. "What about for-

giveness?" you ask. "Can't God still bring a husband to someone who has messed up a lot?" Thankfully, yes. God does forgive us again and again. But Paul encourages us not to go on sinning just because grace abounds. We shouldn't presume upon God by doing whatever we



please while hoping He'll still bless us with a husband. That's not a good plan for marriage any more than declaring bankruptcy is a good plan for financial health.

Living like you're planning to marry means intentionally resisting the cultural traps of male bashing, procrastinating, unrealistic expectations, hyper independence, and avoiding risk and instead cultivating community, stewardship, and purity — the elements of Christian discipleship that can best help you recognize and embrace good opportunities for marriage.

Are you planning to marry, or just hoping to? Isn't it time to connect the two?

Candice Watters

WHY THE WAIT?

The problem of delayed marriage has a lot to do with men who won't take initiative. Women want to be pursued and men are charged by God to be the pursuers. Proverbs 18:22 says, "he who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord." Finds. That's

an active verb. It instructs the man who wants God's blessing to get out there and look. To the men we say, "Get going, it's time you accept the challenge to pursue marriage." And to the women, "stop glorifying the single years as a super-holy season of just you and Jesus." Yes, being single does provide the chance to be uniquely intimate with Jesus. Enjoy that. But don't over-emphasize it. Why? Because it gives guys permission to kick back and let

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you. If they think you're perfectly happy as a single, why wouldn't they let you stay that way? Especially when so many of them are gun shy. Thanks to a 50 percent (give or take a few points) divorce rate and absentee dad problem, many of them grew up without a mentor (their dad) and without a godly model for what marriage should look like. Many of them are scared, and *continued on page 8*

for good reason.

That's not an excuse to bash men. Women have an important ability to help them move toward marriage. How? By esteeming it. By not being embarrassed about wanting it. By going after it — to a point. You can nurture men toward mar-



riage by helping them see that it contains a lot of what they're looking for, even if they don't yet know it. Think of Jimmy Stewart in *It's a Wonderful Life*. He's depressed that once again, his plans to get out of small town America and see the world have been thwarted and he's left tending the family business with just his mom and alcoholic uncle for companionship. He's questioning his very existence; longing to know his destiny. What's his mom's suggestion? "Why don't

you go talk to Mary," she says. "I'll bet she could help you find the answers you're looking for."

Marriage holds the possibility of partnership, adventure, creativity, challenge and many more of the things we long for, but try to obtain with inferior pursuits. As Amy and Leon Kass observed in their roles as professors at the University of Chicago, "...we detect among our students certain (albeit sometimes unarticulated) longings — for friendship, for wholeness, for a life that is serious and deep, and for associations that are trustworthy and lasting — longings that they do not realize could be largely satisfied by marrying well." (*Wing to Wing, Oar to Oar*, 2)

Candice Watters

ARE YOU READY TO DATE?

The first step in the process of moving toward marriage is to evaluate yourself spiritually. One of our guiding principles is that we are trying to be (or prepare to be) a godly spouse even as we try to find a godly spouse. All singles

Intentionality

who profess Christ and aspire to marriage — even as a possibility — have this responsibility (even outside this area of life, we should all be trying to grow in Christ). Are you a Christian? If you're already sure of that basic answer, are you a growing and mature Christian? Are you generally humble and teachable, and do you respect authority? As a practical matter, are you responsible and holy in the way you possess your own spirit, mind and body?

As you begin to seriously consider marriage generally or a particular relationship, your first step should be to soberly reflect, before God, on your own spiritual walk and maturity in Christ. If you aspire to be a godly wife someday, what have you done and what are you doing to prepare for that ministry?

Second, are you at a place in

your life at which you are ready and able to marry? “Practice” and “recreation” are not good reasons to date. Dating is for the purpose of finding a marriage partner.

In my view, if you can't happily picture yourself married within a year, you're not in a position to date.

Third, once you decide that you are ready to date, look to God's Word to decide the kind of person to date, and evaluate potential dating partners on those criteria, rather than relying primarily on the world's treatment of ideas like “attraction” and “chemistry.”

In short: Pick a potential dating partner with an eye toward godly manhood and womanhood — with an eye toward who would make a good husband or wife, defined by those characteristics God esteems in His Word, not the ones Hollywood likes.

Scott Croft



NOT YOUR BUDDY

In *Relationships*, Dr. Pamela Reeve discusses three levels of friendships: acquaintances, companions and intimate friends. She observes that men and women cannot sustain an intimate friendship without one or the other harboring romantic expectations. She therefore recommends that men

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and women avoid being intimate friends outside of courtship and marriage. Companions, she says, generally spend less than two hours together a week. When a man indicates he would like to see the woman more than that, but claims they are “just friends,” he sends a mixed message.

Reeve writes: “One party can selfishly enjoy all the benefits of a relationship, the warmth and relief

from loneliness, the satisfaction of the attention that feeds the ego — all without the accompanying commitment. One party luxuriates, while the other party feels cheated and is left with deep unsatisfied longings.”

I've recently observed several non-dating relationships that seem to fall into the “intimate friends” category. In every case, it is the woman who is paying the price emotionally. Why? When a guy starts investing his heart, he can do something about it by making a move. And if the girl rejects him, the friendship ends or changes significantly. A woman, however, can hang on in this kind of relationship indefinitely, hoping the guy will eventually share her feelings. She makes herself available to him as a “friend,” all the while hoping the friendship will blossom into something more.

A woman should not assume that a guy friend she's spending time with is: a) just too shy to make a move; b) thinking she's the woman of his dreams but the timing isn't right; c) in denial of God's will that they be together.

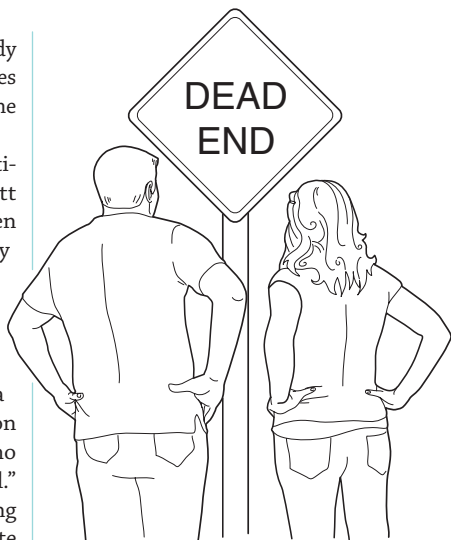
A woman loves to read into a guy's every action. That's her relational crime. But the guy does her a disser-

vice by allowing her to be his “buddy girl” — a female friend who provides the relational benefits without the commitment.

In his article “Physical Intimacy and the Single Man,” Matt Schmucker points out that men defraud their sisters when they indulge in this type of relationship. “Simply put,” he writes, “a man defrauds a woman when, by his words or actions, he promises the benefits of marriage to a woman he either has no intention of marrying or if he does, has no way of finally knowing that he will.”

Single men and women are failing each other. Uncommitted intimate friendships may satiate immediate needs, but they lead to frustration and heartache. Not to mention, for singles ready for marriage, these “friendships” waste time and energy.

Men and women who find themselves in a dead-end friendship should take responsibility. A woman is responsible to be wise with her heart. Solomon said, “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life” (Proverbs 4:23). If a woman feels her heart longing for a man who’s not pursuing her, indulging those



feelings is unwise. Song of Songs puts it this way: “Do not awaken love before it so desires.” As a generation of women drunk on chick flicks, we want romance to happen so badly we allow ourselves to fantasize about relationships that have no founding.

Ecclesiastes croons, “There is a time for love.” If you are indulging in an intimate friendship with a man who is not pursuing you, you are accepting a cheap imitation of love. And by spending all your time with a guy who will never put a ring on your *continued on page 12*

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finger, you may miss a potential suitor. Above all, if you find yourself in an intimate friendship with someone of the opposite sex, ask the Lord for wisdom and discernment. When it comes to male-female relationships, lacking intent, the buddy system is a bad idea.

Suzanne Hadley

FRIENDSHIP FRAUD

In Thessalonians 4:1-8 admonishes us not to wrong or “defraud” our brother or sister by implying a marital level of commitment (through sexual involvement) when it does not exist. A broad (but sound) implication of this passage is that “defrauding” could include inappropriate emotional — as well

as physical — intimacy. Romans 13:8-14 calls us to love others, to work for their souls’ good rather than looking to please ourselves. More specifically, verse 10 reminds us that “[l]ove does no harm to its neighbor.” Romans 14:1-15:7 offers a discourse on favoring weaker brothers and sisters above ourselves, valuing and encouraging that which is good in the souls of others.

Bottom line: I believe it is extremely difficult and rare — as a practical matter — to honor these principles in the context of a close, intimate friendship between two single Christians of the opposite sex. Intimate friendships between men and women almost always produce confusion and frustration for at least one of the parties involved. Close friendships by their very nature tend to involve extensive time talking and hanging out one-on-one. They tend to involve a deep knowledge of the other person’s hopes, desires and personality. They tend to involve the sharing of many aspects of each other’s daily lives and routines. In other words, they tend to involve much of the type of intimacy and companionship involved in — and meant for — marriage.

And yet, even with all this deep

Intentionality

communication going on, at least one aspect of these friendships inherently involves a mixed message. No matter how clearly one or both of you have defined what's happening as "just friends," your actions are constantly saying "I enjoy being with you and interacting with you in a way that suggests marriage (or at least romantic attraction)."

The simple reality (of which most people are aware, whether they admit it or not) is that in the vast majority of these types of relationships, one of the parties involved either began the "friendship" with romantic feelings for the other person or develops them along the way. Either way, that person is now hanging on to the "friendship" in the hope of getting something more despite the "clear words" from the other person that he or she wants nothing beyond friendship.

To the extent that one person's roman-

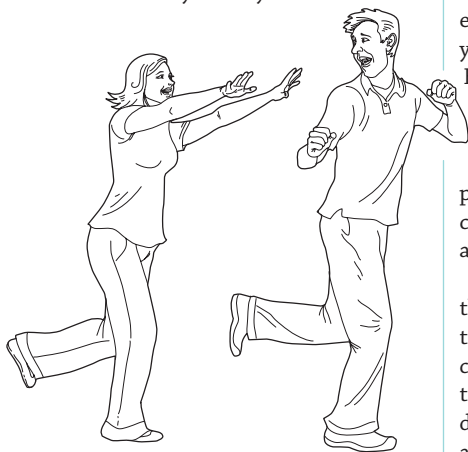
tic feelings have been clearly articulated to the other (and were met with an unfavorable response), to continue in some no-man's land of "good friends" is arguably to take selfish advantage of the vulnerable party. Yes, I know, the other person is an adult who is free and responsible to walk away if he or she is so unsatisfied, but like it or not, it tends not to work that way. Hope springs eternal, whether it should or not.

Scott Croft



WHEN HE'S NOT ASKING

When you do have a strong friendship connection with a man, is there anything you can do to nudge it along short of asking him to be your boyfriend?



While women should do what they can to meet marriable men, where they should not assert is in initiating and pursuing. Like any dance well-executed, one partner leads and the other follows. If you've ever tried to dance with a man and you both try to lead, you know how quickly you both

stumble. Once you've met a man you'd like to date, then it's time to exercise kindness, put your best foot forward in friendship, pray like crazy and maintain good boundaries. The best way to motivate a male friend to "make things official" is to back off from spending so much time with him. If everyone thinks you're dating, then you're probably acting like you are. But by giving him so much access to your time, affection and intimate friendship — without requiring any commitment on his part — you're removing all the incentives for him to be forthright about his intentions.

It's the guy who's supposed to do the asking. By giving him less attention you may actually create the circumstances that will embolden him to act honorably toward you. If he doesn't, you've saved yourself from any more wasted time with a guy whose behavior reveals he's not interested in moving your friendship toward marriage.

Despite all the encouragement a guy may receive from his friends, relatives, pastors, etc. to pursue you, if he hasn't, there's a reason. He may be shy. Or he may not be interested. For you to initiate out

of impatience is likely to send him running the other way.

It's frustrating to feel like there's nothing you can do. But you can pray and you can go about the life God has given you; living to the full. The young man may observe you being content and find your confidence attractive (assuming it's genuine). That's always a possibility. What's nearly certain is that if you're the first one out of the gate toward a romantic relationship, you'll either scare him off or attract him in a way that only encourages his passivity.

Candice Watters

THE INFLUENCE

God has given women a position of influence, encouragement, and counsel. This happens in varying degrees in all of our relationships. Entire books have been written on this subject, but I will defer to the concise description of a godly woman's example and influence found in 1 Peter 3:1-5 (emphasis mine):

"Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the

word, *they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.*

Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful."

The Lord has given women the opportunity to be holy influencers. Unfortunately, many of us try to influence change through the barrage of our words (read: nagging, whining, manipulating) rather than through the purity and reverence in our attitudes that is built upon a gentle trust in God's ability to change people.

Carolyn McCulley



WHAT HAPPENED TO COURTSHIP?

Today, there are no socially prescribed forms of conduct that help guide young men and women in the direction of matrimony. People still get married — though later, less frequently, more hesitantly, and, by and large, less successfully. For the great majority, the way to the altar is uncharted territory: It's every couple on its own bottom, without a compass, often without a goal. Those who reach the altar seem to have stumbled upon it by accident.

The change most immediately devastating for wooing is probably the sexual revolution. For why would a man court a woman for marriage when she may be sexually enjoyed, and regularly, without it? Contrary to what the youth of the sixties believed, they were not the first to feel the power of sexual

desire. Many, perhaps even most, men in earlier times avidly sought sexual pleasure prior to and outside of marriage. But they usually distinguished, as did the culture generally, between women one fooled around with and women one married, between a woman of easy virtue and a woman of virtue simply. Only respectable women were respected; one no more wanted a loose woman for one's partner than for one's mother.

The supreme virtue of the virtuous woman was modesty, a form of sexual self-control, manifested not only in chastity but in decorous dress and manner, speech and deed, and in reticence in the display of her well-banked affections. A virtue, as it were, made for courtship, it served simultaneously as a source of attraction and a spur to



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manly ardor, a guard against a woman's own desires, as well as a defense against unworthy suitors. A fine woman understood that giving her body (in earlier times, even her kiss) meant giving her heart, which was too precious to be bestowed on anyone who would not prove himself worthy, at the very least by pledging himself in marriage to be her defender and lover forever.

Once female modesty became a first casualty of the sexual revolution, even women eager for marriage lost their greatest power to hold and to discipline their prospective mates. For it is a woman's refusal of sexual importunings, coupled with hints or promises of later gratification, that is generally a necessary condition of transform-

ing a man's lust into love. Women also lost the capacity to discover their own genuine longings and best interests. For only by holding herself in reserve does a woman gain the distance and self-command needed to discern what and whom she truly wants and to insist that the ardent suitor measure up. While there has always been sex without love, easy and early sexual satisfaction makes love and real intimacy less, not more, likely — for both men and women.

Leon Kass

WHY MEN NEED SEX

There are two categories of readers — those who have had sex and those who haven't. Among those who have had sex, some are repentant and others aren't. Among those who haven't had sex are those who have been tested with opportunities for it and those who haven't. Whatever your sexual history, the goal remains: Live from today forward like you're planning to marry — like you're planning to one day fully enjoy the blessings of sex within a *continued on page 20*

good marriage. For those who have had sex already, true repentance — admitting your sin and turning away — allows you to experience God’s gracious forgiveness and restoration.

Premarital sexual activity is incompatible with Christian discipleship. Perseverance in purity is central to it. It’s also central to your path to marriage. As Sarah Hinlicky wrote in “Subversive Virginity,” “A virgin woman is an unattainable object of desire, and it is precisely her unattainability that increase her desirability.” This applies both to those who’ve never had sex as well as those who’ve repented and

gone back to being chaste; what’s often called “secondary virginity.”

Men need the motivation that the promise of sex provides, and women need the security of marriage to fully embrace sex. “Not having sex before marriage is a way of insisting that the most interesting part of your life will take place after marriage,” writes Wendy Shalit in *A Return to Modesty*, “and if it’s more interesting, maybe then it will last. And ... if it lasts, maybe then you can finally be safe.”

Men don’t see marriage, or anticipate it, the way women do. When the benefits of marriage are doled out prematurely, from the man’s

perspective, all that remains are the responsibilities. You’re thinking, *Marriage will be all this, plus — plus we can set up a home, plus we can have babies together, plus we can grow old together, and more.* He’s thinking, *Marriage will be all this, minus — minus my freedoms, minus my financial independence, minus*



my old friends, etc. And so you have the tired old cliché about the cow and the free milk.

The full context of our sexual drive and its purposes is much more significant than we can comprehend in a moment of temptation in a dimly lit room.

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Living a life of purity is a tremendous challenge in the midst of our hypersexualized culture. But it's nowhere as challenging as trying to manage all the seen and unseen consequences that come when we reject God's design. Worse still is trying to grow a good marriage in a garden filled with the weeds you've planted. It's well worth the effort to stay pure, or if you've already fallen, to repent, receive forgiveness, and be pure again¹.

Candice Watters

THE LOOK OF A PURE MAN

The prevalence of pre-marital and extra-marital sex in this country is creating a spiritual blindness that is already negatively affecting women. Seeing women primarily as potential sex partners changes the way men view women; it affects what we value about them; it distorts the way we relate to them. Instead of treating them as if we were their brothers or fathers, we become sexual predators — mentally, if not in practice.

Here's what, as believers, godly men are supposed to be. Listen to this glorious picture from Isaiah 32:1-4:

*"Each man will be
like a shelter from the wind
and a refuge from the storm,
like streams of water
in the desert and the
shadow of a great rock
in a thirsty land."*

A holy man is a spiritual force, a "God oasis" in a world that needs spiritually strong people. When the winds of *continued on page 22*

turmoil hit, such men are shelters. When the storms of life unleash their fury, such saints provide a refuge. When people are thirsty to be

valued for who they are and for what God made them to be, holy men are like streams of water in the desert. By their words, actions, and eyes, they affirm what God values most in a woman's worth. When the heat of temptation is tearing this world apart, godly men become like the shadow of a great rock.

Evil has a disintegrating power in our lives. It corrupts us. It affects the way we see, hear, feel, and think. According to 2 Peter 1:4, when we give ourselves over to evil, we begin to spiritually disintegrate.

To look at, or think about, or

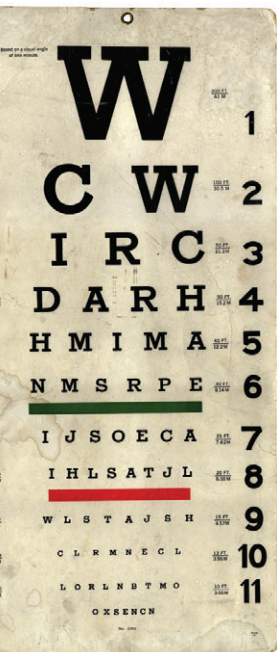
treat, any woman to whom you are not married, in a sexual manner, corrupts you. It has a disintegrating influence in your life; it blinds you to who that woman really is, and it will negatively affect your ability to relate to her in a holy and healthy manner.

But the more I give way to lust, the less I will see of God; the disintegrating power of evil will draw me away from the noble and corrupt my perception. I will become, ironically, "blinded by sight."

Gary Thomas

AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?

Why in the world, a woman may ask, should I have to guard how I dress just because some man can't keep his mind out of the gutter? To be sure, it's a Christian man's responsibility to fight lust and "keep his mind out of the gutter." But I wonder if that question isn't the mirror logic of a man who would ask: Why do I need to guard what I say simply because she reads more commitment into



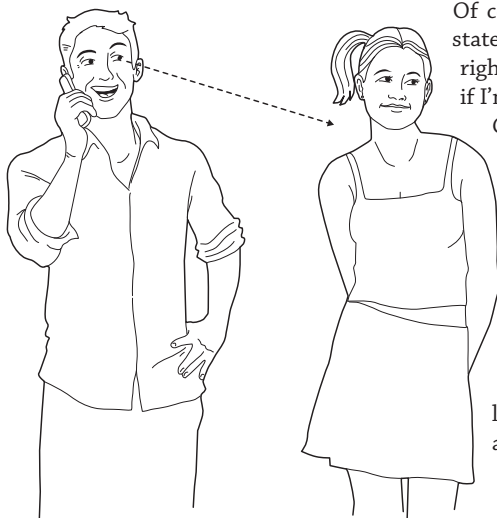
my words than I mean?

The fact is that a woman is attracted relationally. It makes no sense for a man to say she shouldn't be that way. She is. God designed her that way. And the fact is that men are attracted (in part, at least) visually. God designed them that way.

Of course, what God intended to be a pathway to bond us to our spouses, can also be an area of vulnerability to sin. Just as a woman can be tempted through her heart, a man can be tempted through his eyes. I remember how in the movie *Clueless*, the main character,

Cher, tries to get a boy's attention by sending herself chocolates and flowers and then she makes an observation: "Sometimes you have to show a little skin. That reminds guys of being naked and then they think of sex."

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Of course, I disagree with her statement, but she's absolutely right about the result. And, so, if I'm going to help to keep my Christian brothers from stumbling, I need to be careful how much skin and how much, ahem, form I am revealing.

In other ways, my brother will be my keeper. But in this way, I can be his. I can help him by making sure I'm one less skirmish in the battle against lust.

Heather Koerner

BALANCING BEAUTY

Knowing that men have to fight their sin nature (Job 31:1) is not justification for women to neglect their outward appearance. Being overweight and unattractive does little to attract a man's attention and ultimately, his affection. It's true there are men for whom externals mean nothing. But most men do want to marry a woman they find attractive. And it's not just that they want someone pleasant to look at. How you care for your externals sends powerful messages to men about your stewardship of what God's given you.

The principles of stewardship and modesty are universal and apply equally to women who emphasize their looks too much, as well as those who emphasize them too little. Many Christian women struggle with the problem of overemphasis on beauty. But others fall into the category of "mismanagement" or neglect. The former needs to pay more attention

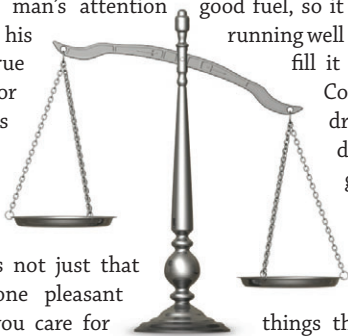
to their modesty, and the latter need encouragement to be good stewards.

The goal should be appropriate attention to your looks as opposed to our culture's current obsession with them. That includes daily exercise for health and well-being, not hours of compulsive training at the gym. It also means giving your body good fuel, so it has the best shot at running well for a long time. If you fill it with junk, it won't.

Consume the food and drink your body was designed for (whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables, lean protein, plenty of water) and steer clear of those things that leave it sluggish and diseased (refined sugars, hydrogenated oils, white flour — basically pre-packaged junk food). The human body is like a high-performance vehicle; you're a Ferrari, not a Yugo. You need to treat yourself accordingly.

When you do, you not only model stewardship, you also show that what matters to men matters to you. And often, that communicates a respect that's the most attractive thing of all.

A quick rule of thumb is that what's



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modest is that which conceals, and what's feminine is that which adds to a woman's beauty. This includes not only her clothes, hair and makeup but also her heart — this is the second and more complex aspect of your femininity. 1 Peter 3:3-5 says,

“Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful.”

This verse is not saying that outward beauty is wrong — many of the holy women of old were quite beautiful. Rachel, Abigail, Vashti, Esther and the Shulamite come to mind. In fact two of them were so beautiful in outward appearance, Sarah and Rebecca, that their husbands, Abraham and Isaac,

lied about being married to them in order to protect their lives. But Scripture is equally clear that when we make the creature — rather than the Creator — our focus, we're guilty of idolatry. And the consequences that follow are ugly. (See Ezekiel 16 and Isaiah 3:16-26.)

We must not indulge our desire to stir up a fleshly reaction in men. It's tempting to want to do things that get us noticed. But it's sin on our part to be soliciting notice for the wrong reasons. And ultimately, any relationship that would come out of such notice would be corrupted from the start.

It's well worth your effort as a single woman to cultivate beauty both inward and out. Not only does it honor the One who made you lovely, it works to protect you from the kind of suitors who have less than honorable intentions. How you dress does affect the type of men who will want to get to know and date or court you. If you are careful with your appearance, balancing your efforts to enhance your God-given beauty with your attentions to your heart and soul, you will be more attractive to the men whose intentions are honorable.

Candice Watters



SEX IS ENERGY THAT HOLDS PEOPLE TOGETHER

The physical attraction between men and women causes them to establish a family and invest themselves in its development. It encourages them to work and save and toil to ensure the survival of their families. Their sexual energy provides the impetus for the raising of healthy children and for the transfer of values from one



generation to the next.

Sexual drives urge a man to work when he would rather play. They cause a woman to save when she would rather spend. In short, the sexual aspect of our nature — when released exclusively within the family — produces stability and responsibility that would not otherwise

IF SEXUAL ENERGY WITHIN THE FAMILY IS KEY TO A HEALTHY SOCIETY, THEN ITS RELEASE OUTSIDE THOSE BOUNDARIES IS POTENTIALLY CATASTROPHIC.

occur. When a nation is composed of millions of devoted, responsible family units, the entire society is stable, responsible and resilient.

If sexual energy within the family is the key to a healthy society, then its release outside those boundaries is potentially catastrophic. The very force that binds a people together then becomes the agent for its own destruction.

Dr. James Dobson

SEX IS NOT ABOUT WAITING

The Bible teaches that we should reserve sexual intimacy for marriage for no other reason than that, if we are Christians, we belong to God. Sex outside of marriage is not only a sin against ourselves and our partner, but a fraudulent misrepresentation of God and a cruel distortion of the intimacy He created to be a picture of the eternal intimacy of the Trinity itself.

Sexual intimacy is all about union. Physically, of course, that's obvious. But there's so much more. In sexual intimacy, we also know a union that is emotional, as our hearts are knit together even as our bodies are. We know a union that is intellectual, as we come to understand and know one another in intimate detail. We know a union that is even spiritual, for as every married couple figures out, the best sex isn't when I make sure I get what I want, but when I

forget about myself, and give myself for the blessing and delight of my spouse. And at that moment, we are very close to the heart of Christ, "who loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25).

But there's more. This union of sexual intimacy, complete in itself, is also a sign and symbol of an even more profound union of

lives in the covenant marriage, when a man leaves his father and mother, and is united to his wife, and the two become one flesh. Being "one

flesh" with someone can refer in a secondary way to sex, but primarily it's just a Hebrew way of saying one family, flesh and blood. The union of marriage is not an alliance of families, with each partner representing a previous set of priorities and loyalties. No, and this was and remains quite radical, marriage is a union that dissolves the old bonds, the old loyalties, the old priorities, and creates one new family, with all that entails — one new set of priorities, one new set of fundamental loyalties.

continued on page 28



Without the union of marriage, the union of bodies is a parody and mockery of itself. Bereft of its proper point and context, sexual intimacy outside of marriage does not bring us into the lover's embrace, but merely exposes us to the stranger's stare, and reduces us to the means of someone else's pleasure.

The intimacy of sexual union, as desirable as that is, is also a picture of the marriage union, which in turn is a picture of our union with Christ.

As profoundly intimate the experience of sexual union is, at its best, it is just a hint, a small taste of the joy and satisfaction and perfect intimacy we will know with Jesus, when we are united to Him as His Bride. That union won't be sexual, but there is no other union God's given us that speaks more truly of the intimate love we'll know in Christ. To rip one of these unions out of its connection with the others is to destroy not only its goodness and meaning, but to distort the pattern that it was designed to display.

Sex outside of marriage, therefore, is a fraud and a fake. It pretends to be true intimacy, but is nothing more than exposure. It uses the language of love and commitment, but knows nothing of

either. And by suggesting that true pleasure and intimacy can be had without loving, covenantal commitment, it perpetrates a massive assault against the very character and glory of God, whose eternal, intimate, loving relationship within the Trinity is the blueprint and pattern for every intimate pleasure that you or I will ever know.

Michael Lawrence

DON'T LET THE POT BOIL

If the physical relationship becomes the defining feature of the relationship, you're going to see things more positively than they are. When you're totally in love and the hormones are really rolling, you're going to miss things that you should have been able to pick up on.

I was making breakfast for my boys one morning, which I do most mornings when I'm in town. And my son Kyle likes smoky links. So I was boiling some water and I threw some smoky links in the pot. And here's this really hot, bubbling pot of boiling water with a few smoky links in it for Kyle. And as it's about

to boil over, I notice it's all white and foamy. And I'm thinking, if I didn't know what was in that pan, I definitely couldn't tell when it's this hot and bubbling over. If you're cooking and you want to know what's in the pot, and it's bubbling too much or boiling over, you don't see what's in there unless you remove some of the heat. You have to cool it off a bit and pull it back down or else you don't see really clearly what's in there. Now, I happened to know what was in there because I put it in there.

But when we're falling in love with somebody that we

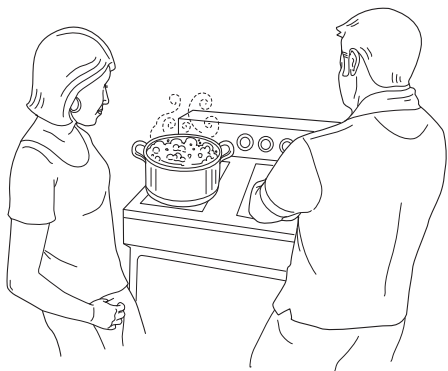
don't know and there's a lot of heat—it's bubbling but we don't see so clearly what's in the pot. That could be a really great meal. That could be like the meal for the rest of our lives in terms of what God has for us, or it could be like the worst possible thing that we could eat. I mean it could be disastrous and we're not going to see clearly if we don't get the heat back down.

**TO TURN IT DOWN
IN A DATING
RELATIONSHIP
MEANS YOU HAVE
TO REMOVE SOME
OF THE HEAT.**

This is a danger to us because we can over interpret our love right now, and its degree of sustainability, and what it really means in terms of depth of what's possible in life.

The way to regulate the temperature, just like with the stove, to turn it down in a dating relationship means you have to remove some of the heat. When no one but the two of you are around, there's no accountability. There's total intensity and that's total heat all the time.

Scott Stanley



HOW TO TURN DOWN THE HEAT

Q *I'm a believer, dating a great Christian guy, wondering if he's the one — and we're struggling with "physical issues" — what should I do?*

A What I think you're asking me is "Considering how strong and misleading my sexual feelings toward this young man have been, how can I tell whether the idea that he is the husband for me is coming from God or my hormones?" The answer is that you can't tell — yet. But you can after time. Here's how.

First the distraction of all those sexual feelings has to be cleared away. There is no "gradually" about repentance and abandonment of sexual sin. You have to stop what you shouldn't be doing.

That means an immediate and total end to the use of your bodies for sexual recreation. Anything which sexually arouses — for example, kissing sessions — is out; arousal was designed by God not "for affection" but as preparation for intercourse. Purity also means a total end to anything that tempts you to the impure behavior, such as being alone with each other (even

for prayer). Be together, certainly. But be together in public places, and with family, and with friends.

By the way: He doesn't have to agree to this. You don't need his consent to repent and abandon sexual sin. If at some point he says "This isn't for me — see you some time," you have your answer to the question of whether he is the right

husband for you. That means he's not.

After you've gone "cold turkey" on sexual behavior, and kept it up without lapse for at least six months, I think you'll find it much easier to determine God's will without the distraction of excessive



sexual feelings. I don't mean that you won't be attracted to the guy any more! You don't yet know how you'll think and feel toward him then; that's one of the things you'll find out. But whatever attraction you feel toward him will no longer be artificially and misleadingly amplified by all of that sexual behavior.

J. Budziszewski

LEAVING THE EDGE

I have never been offered sex. But that doesn't mean I haven't struggled to maintain my purity. The attacks have come in various forms. The trashy women's magazines I read when I was babysitting as a teenager. The TV shows and movies I've chosen to watch. The impure thoughts I've indulged. The temptations I've given into. I'm being brutally honest here, because I know I'm not the only one. In and of themselves, these failures don't seem like a big deal. In fact, if I'm comparing myself to others, my overall purity would probably rate above average. And because of that, it can feel like these little concessions don't negatively affect my life,

my relationship with God or my future marriage. But they do.

Paul writes: "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people" (Ephesians 5:3). Not even a hint.

The kicker comes a few verses later:

For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person — such a man is an idolater — has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. (5:5-6)

Our culture is full of "empty words" that tell us that sexual gratification is most important. But Paul warns that choosing anything — whether sexual impurity or greed — over God is idolatry. So our choices regarding "how far is too far" aren't about the behaviors themselves but about our esteem of God and His commands. These choices are so serious that we can potentially separate ourselves from our spiritual inheritance — not only the prize awaiting us in heaven but the power in Christ we can have *continued on page 32*



now. One friend described it this way: “Getting too physical just dulls you spiritually. Pretty soon stuff that felt wrong doesn’t feel wrong anymore.”

If you are in a relationship — even a godly one — a whole universe of purity choices presents itself. Is kissing OK? What about making out? What touch is appropriate and what touch is sinful? On the ladder of physical expressions that ends with sexual intercourse, at what level does one begin sinning? The flaw in these questions is that the emphasis is on the wrong thing: the behaviors. Purity is a

heart issue. Luke 6:45 says: “The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart.”

Going back to the Ephesians passage, Paul makes it clear that the root issue is idolatry — putting something before God. So if we truly want to put Him first in our lives — including the area of physical purity — the question becomes, “What is God’s plan for sex?”

In “Sex and the Single Guy,” Scott Croft says:

I think it’s important for us to ask, “What is sex? And is sex just intercourse?” Well I would argue no. I would argue that part of our problem is we have tried to create boundaries and draw lines within a whole category of activity that we call an experience as sexual intimacy. And we think we can draw the line here or here or here and all Christians probably agree we have to at least draw the line at sexual intercourse. And then we get into trouble when we do that, right? When we draw our line we say OK we will go this far physically but no further. And then what do we do? Well we come right up to the line because that’s what lines invite us to do.

In the same interview, Michael Lawrence says:

[We must] move the boundary outside of sexual activity. That's where the real boundary should be. Biblically, the boundary is between sexual activity and not sexual activity, not between the kinds of sexual activity we are going to engage in.

Putting our sexuality under Christ's lordship is a lifelong discipline, whether single or married. I know that I have struggled with purity issues just as much outside of relationships as in them; the impurity just manifests itself in different ways. As my friend says: "Being in a relationship just brings to the surface sin and impurity that was already lurking beneath the surface."

Loose sexual boundaries in a dating or even engagement relationship will carry over into marriage. Adultery, pornography, abuse and all types of sexual dysfunction plague Christian marriages and families. And these are simply behaviors that overflow from a heart where sexuality has not been brought under Christ's control. A heart where gratification trumps God's way. Sex is about giving sac-

rificially to another person within a covenant relationship, not taking whatever you can get away with.

That is why purity is such a serious issue. The edge of what is "OK" is dangerous, not because you might accidentally cross the line and commit the big sin, but because letting in even a hint of immorality causes the heart to become calloused toward God. Thank God for His grace. No matter how far we've fallen, we are invited to confess our sins and He is faithful to forgive them (1 John 1:9). Beyond confession there must also be repentance — a true change of heart. I have had to confess impurity and ask God to help me stick to a higher standard. Not so I can appear righteous but so that I can experience closeness with my Father and His full working in my life.

Walking in absolute purity may require some hard decisions about how you will conduct relationships, what TV shows you'll watch and how you'll use your computer. These decisions may appear extreme or odd to those watching. But remember the foundation you are building. Matthew 5:8 says: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." That glorious view makes leaving the edge worth it.

Suzanne Hadley

THINKING ABOUT MARRIAGE

Is it possible to think about marriage too much? I suppose it is. And it's not healthy — or productive — to obsess about it. On a practical level, obsessing undermines the goal. I've never met a guy who was drawn to the “desperate to get married” type. But you can also think about marriage too little. And that has dire consequences of its own.

If you lack a vision for marriage, you're setting yourself up for lax sexual standards, relationships without momentum, and heartache. If you don't have a deliberate goal in mind — either single service or Christian marriage between two chaste believers — it's pretty easy to fall prey to sexual temptation. And many are falling. According to pollster George Barna, “among 21-year-olds, fewer than 1 out of 5 are married, and more than 4 out of 5 have had sexual intercourse — most of them with more than one partner” (*Single Focus*, 43).

The answer isn't to stop thinking about marriage, but to think about

it differently. The hope of marriage is an antidote to promiscuity. If you believe in Christian marriage and are purposefully working toward it, it's a lot easier to set physical boundaries and character expectations in dating. Not only do those boundaries help you obey God's command to save sex for marriage, they increase the likelihood that the men you're spending time with will be good candidates for marriage.

Candice Watters



STOP DATING THE CHURCH

There's nothing in Scripture that imagines a Christian that is not pursuing community with other Christians in the local church. It's not like an option like, "Well, you know, some of you may like to do the church thing, but others of you might have a differ-

And so it's the way that we love others that others see Christ in us. And it's our love for others that gives us an assurance. 1 John talks about our assurance of belonging to God and knowing that He's truly changed us. Because we love people that, frankly, we would not have loved apart from being Christians.

And so that's where in the local church — with all its bumps and its warts, and annoying people, and people that you wouldn't want to have a relationship with — you suddenly start to see the beauty of

God's plan. That it's in that context with fellow sin-

ent plan." No. It always describes our new life in Christ, drawing us together with other Christians. And it's in our relationships with others where the reality of what Christ has done in us, the new life that He's given to us, is worked out and is proven in many ways.

ners who are saved by grace that you work out your salvation with fear and trembling, and you care for people, and you love people and you receive from them and give to them. And God glorifies Himself through that.

Joshua Harris



WHAT'S YOUR PLAN FOR MY GRAND-DAUGHTER?

In the course of promoting his relationships book, comedian Steve Harvey told a story that really grabbed my attention. He tells how he and his daughter and her grandfather were all gathered at a family function, along with “the new guy” — his daughter’s current boyfriend. As Harvey put it, the new guy had been around the house about five times by then so Harvey figured he had “made the cut.”

At some point, boyfriend, Harvey and granddad were in the kitchen together and granddad turned to boyfriend and asked,

“So, what’s your plan for my granddaughter?”

Boyfriend hemmed and hawed a little bit. “Oh, you know, I don’t really have a plan right now,” boyfriend replied. “No, no, no,” granddad replied, “what is your plan for my granddaughter?”

At this point, Harvey related how he was getting really interested and had everybody sit at the kitchen table. Because, Harvey said, granddad and I know one thing because we’re men too: There is a plan. He may not want us to know it. He may not want her to know it. But there is a plan. *continued on page 40*



MY DAD COULD BE AN ASSET IN HELPING ME TO SELECT DATES, HOLD SUITORS ACCOUNTABLE AND PROVIDE ME WITH GUIDANCE.



Eventually, Harvey said, boyfriend admitted that he didn't have any long-term intentions for the daughter. "We're just kickin' it," boyfriend told the two men.

"Great," Harvey said, "now let's invite my daughter in here as well because I think she would like to know that she's just bein' kicked with."

"They broke up the next day," Harvey said.

My dad was not an integral part of my dating process. Honestly, it didn't even occur to me that my dad could be an asset in helping me to select dates (and, possibly, refuse some), hold suitors accountable and provide me with guidance.

Looking back, I realize that both parents and mentors would have made valuable contributions to me as a young woman. And, truth be told, there are certain questions

only a dad can ask. And a certain way that only dads and older men can ask them. "What are your intentions for my daughter?" is just different than "Don't you think we should define our relationship?"

I think there's room for both of those questions. And it would be so nice for women to know from the beginning who was just planning on "kickin' it" so we could do a little kicking to the curb ourselves.

Heather Koerner

OTHER PROBING QUESTIONS

It's not enough to find out what a man's intentions are for you. Pastor Doug Wilson, author of such books as *Her Hand in Marriage* and *Reforming Marriage*, provides a list of 21 questions for fathers to ask young men expressing interest in courting their daughters. (Even if your dad's not on the scene, this list of questions is a great guide for someone with your best interest at heart to ask.)

Among them:

- 1 Tell me about your spiritual

background. What was your church upbringing like? At what point did your spiritual experience become real to you? Have you ever had a period of spiritual rebellion?

2 When was the last time you read through the entire Bible? The New Testament?

3 Do you attend worship every Lord's Day?

And more:

10 What do you believe God has called you to do vocationally? Ten years from now, what do you believe you will be doing?

11 What steps have you taken to reach that goal?

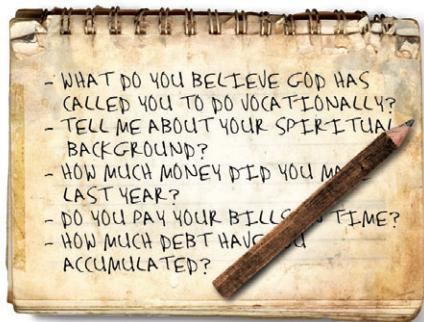
12 What was your GPA in college? How come?

13 How much money did you make last year? Do you pay your bills on time? How much debt have you accumulated? Please describe the nature of your debts (student loans, car, house or credit cards).

Many of them read like questions you would get in a job interview and, as such, the way they are handled may be as important as the answers the guy gives. Still, the answers matter. They reveal something of a man's spiritual, personal

and economic maturity — all of which are necessary for leading a family.

If a young man can't stand up under such questioning from the father of a young woman he's pursuing for marriage, he's no man at all. He's still a boy. And the daughter should be grateful if this line of questioning scares him off. I'll concede, however, that the father should approach the suitor with respect and humility, carefully choos-



ing which questions to ask.

But even if he doesn't, the suitor should be a man and answer the questions anyway. Because a father who's willing to do that probably raised one great, godly woman. One worth risking a few tough, awkward questions.

Motte Brown

YOU NEED A NETWORK

Parents used to be very active in their daughters' preparation for marriage, their opportunities for worthy suitors, their protection from rascals. The parents' blessing was essential to launching a new relationship; their ongoing support a vital part of their daughter's new marriage. That's rarely the case anymore. Single women have been abandoned, left to fend for themselves when it comes to getting married. For better or worse, they're all they have. No longer do young men dating young women recognize any authority or protection in the equation. It's just the guy and his date. No questions asked. Parents have watched their role diminish to little more than paying for the wedding when it does finally happen. While some parents are showing renewed interest in their daughters' struggles to marry well, most women still face the challenge of going it alone.

If getting one or both of your parents involved in is not an option — whether for reasons of death, divorce, geographic distance, different faith convictions, or simply lack of interest — you're not without hope. Paul provides a remedy in Titus 2. Speaking about the range of ages in any church body, he encouraged the older believers to counsel the younger ones:

“Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-



YOU NEVER KNOW WHERE A MENTOR'S INSIGHTS IN THE FORM ADVICE, OPEN DOORS, AND INTRODUCTIONS MAY LEAD.



controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God” (Titus 2:3-5).

Getting wisdom from someone who’s further down the road is invaluable. Even if their journey’s been a bumpy one — maybe more so — they’re better able to provide scouting than your peers.

It’s far trendier, and less awkward, to seek the advice and help of your friends. But when it comes to finding a husband, older women and couples have a lot more help to offer. Not only do they have wisdom, and possibly even names of eligible bachelors, they also have a wealth of life experience to share about everything from education and career choices, church involvement, cultural discernment, and political activity to candid advice about helath and beauty. It’s like

having a mom who’s dispassionate (not a bad thing when you’re talking about your eating habits, clothing choices and hairstyle).

And it’s not just *what* mentors know, but *whom*. If you only spend time with people in the same season of life you’re in, the competition for available men will likely be fierce. But if your friends span the generations, it’s probable they will know or be related to eligible men. And if these friends are believers in marriage — and they know you have marriage as a goal — they can be helpful allies. You never know where a mentor’s insights in the form of advice, open doors, and introductions may lead.²

Candice Watters

FINDING MENTORS

Do the people in your life know you desire marriage? Do they know the qualities you’re seeking in a husband? They might be willing accomplices in the search — and even helpful ones at that. Start to pray for and seek out mentors. Look for older couples you can spend time with. Ask them to *continued on page 44*

pray with and for you about your desire for marriage. And if they worry that they don't know any eligible bachelors right now, remind them that it doesn't mean they won't meet one in the future.

This kind of “help” carries certain risks, and you wouldn't want to be introduced to just any available male. That's why it's important to pray about whom you approach for mentoring. One of the keys to a successful mentoring relationship is finding a person, or people, who have strengths in the area you are trying to improve. In the case of mentoring toward marriage, that means approaching a woman whose own godly life gives her credibility to speak into

yours. Some women still bear the scars of the feminist revolution. Some are still bitter over their own failed marriages. One good test

ONE OF THE KEYS
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is how a woman reacts to Genesis 2 and Ephesians 5. Because you're seeking help for marriage, what a potential mentor believes about marriage — and how she lives it out in her own life — matters.

Once you've identified someone you look up to who would be a good fit for this role, it's important to ask her if she's willing to mentor you. Make it

official, says mentoring expert Bobb Biehl, author of *Mentoring*. Doing so creates opportunities for serious discussion and deep questions that might feel inappropriate in casual conversations. “In seeking a men-

tor,” he says, “don’t hesitate — initiate.”³

Candice Watters

YOU HAVE A MENTOR, NOW WHAT?

Once you have a mentor, what should you do with her? I think regular and casual is the way to go. Mentoring is different from discipleship, which is highly structured and driven by the teacher. Think of this as a friendship with someone you look up to and respect. The less structured the relationship, the less intimidated both of you will be about spending time together the more likely you’ll be to allow issues to come up naturally. That doesn’t mean you shouldn’t have a regular time set to meet each week or bi-weekly or monthly (or whatever works for your schedules), but when you do meet, you’re not working through a formal curriculum. Meet for coffee, take walks, discuss books you’re reading,

talk about what God is showing you in Scripture, tell her what’s currently weighing on your heart, and let her encourage you, pray with you, and when necessary, challenge you.

When you do start dating, make the effort to spend time as a couple with your mentor(s). Hopefully the man you are dating will have a mentor, or be open to having one, too. Getting input from a seasoned married couple will help keep your dating relationship on the right track. If the man isn’t a good fit, figuring that out early will spare you a lot of heartache and wasted time. If what you’re after is a strong, healthy marriage relationship, strong healthy relationships within your Christian community are the best way to get there.⁴

Candice Watters



THE DANGER OF FINDING THE ONE

Our culture has embraced a rather absurd notion that there is just one person who can “complete us.” This is a disastrous mindset with which to approach a lifelong marital decision. The notion of a soul mate has inspired

countless movies, novels, and top-40 songs. One Rutgers University study found that 94 percent of people in their 20s say the first requirement in a spouse is someone who qualifies as a soul mate. Just as surprising, 87 percent think they’ll actually find that person “when they are ready.” A culture suspicious of God nevertheless has brazenly embraced some sort of forceful and intelligent destiny that brings two lovelorn souls together!

The real danger in this line of thinking is that many people mistake a storm of emotion as the identifying mark of their soul mate.

When the music fades and the relationship requires work, one or both partners suddenly discover that they were “mistaken”: this person must not be their soul mate after all! Otherwise, it wouldn’t be so much work.

Next they panic. Their soul mate must still be out there! Such people can’t get to divorce court fast enough, lest someone steal their “one true soul



mate” meant only for them. When we get married for trivial reasons, we tend to seek divorce for trivial reasons.

God is sovereign but He doesn’t always make His plans clear to us. We are encouraged to use wisdom, not destiny, as our guide when choosing a marital partner. There is no Scripture saying that God creates “one” person for us to marry. This is because Christians believe that God brings the primary meaning into our lives. Marriage — though wonderful — is still secondary.

Gary Thomas

WHO IS A GOOD CHOICE?

Proverbs says, “A wife of noble character, who can find?” (31:10). This passage has been hilariously misunderstood as being directed toward women, but the verse you’ve just read makes it clear that Proverbs 31 was written mostly for young, single men, telling them, “This is what you want to look for in a wife.” And the top thing to consider is this:

MARRIAGE IS 98 PERCENT LIVING AND 2 PERCENT LOOKING— SO LEARN TO VALUE CHARACTER OVER APPEARANCE.



“Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised” (Proverbs 31:30). The Bible is telling young men to search for a woman of character; looks won’t last, but character never leaves.

The same is true when you’re searching for a man. Marriage is 98 percent living and 2 percent looking — so learn to value character over appearance.

The reason it is so crucial to adopt the Bible’s view of “good and bad choices” over your destiny of finding “the one” is that the former attitude allows you to objectively consider the person you marry. There is no objective measurement of “destiny.” Powerful emotions can blind us to all sorts of clues; when we adopt the biblical attitude of making a “wise” choice, we can use all that God has given us to arrive at a solid *continued on page 50*

decision that should be based on a number of factors:

1 SCRIPTURAL MANDATES

Is the person a believer who fears God (Proverbs 31:30) and who is biblically eligible for marriage (Mark 10:11-12)?

2 WISDOM

How do they handle their money? (Proverbs 31:16, 18)

Is this person a hard worker? (Proverbs 13:4; 26:13-15)

Do they live an upright life? (Proverbs 13:6, 20; 25:28)

Does this person wound people with their words, or are they an encourager? (Proverbs 12:18; 18:21)

Are they peaceful, or quarrelsome? (Proverbs 17:19; 29:8)

3 PARENTAL, PASTORAL AND WISE ADVICE

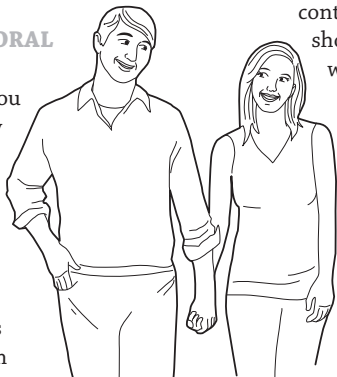
Your parents know you better than you may realize, and even if they aren't believers, they generally want the best for you. Also talk to your pastor and people you respect for their counsel: "Does this relationship seem

like a 'fit' to you? Are there any areas you're concerned about?" If the people I most respected had serious reservations about a relationship, I would assume I had lost my objectivity due to infatuation, and put all marriage plans on hold.

4 PRAYER

Rejecting the notion that God creates one person just for us doesn't discount the reality that God can lead us toward someone, and help us make a wise choice when we seek Him in prayer.

Marriage is a school of character. Clement of Alexandria, an early church father (ca. 150-215), captures this thinking marvelously when he writes, "The prize in the contest of men is shown by him who has trained himself by the discharge of the duties of marriage; by him, I say, who in the midst of his solicitude for his family shows himself



inseparable from the love of God.”

Clement asks, who wins the prize? Not the couple displaying the most emotion, with the biggest smiles on their faces, or who can't keep their hands off each other; but rather, those who, through the duties and sacrifice of marriage, have trained themselves to love with God's love.

Gary Thomas

WHAT GOOD GUYS ARE LOOKING FOR

Single Christian guys the world over, when they hear a Christian girl wonder where all the good guys are, scream a collective “right here!” Although it might seem that these guys are nowhere to be found, they want you to know they are all around you, and they are looking for you. They would tell you that not every guy is a jerk, not every guy is passive, and not every guy is simply interested in skin-deep beauty.

The “good” guys are hoping to find a girl who's authentic — the real deal — who's not hiding behind what she thinks people want to see. If she talks a good Christian line, but seems concerned more with how people perceive her rather than being comfortable with who she is, that's a turn-off. Guys see that as an attempt to compensate for what she lacks. A woman who is secure in who she is — honest about her weaknesses and humble about her strengths — is a woman who is hard to resist. Develop an authentic, adventuresome and risky faith, one willing to follow God wherever He leads. Don't mistake femininity for passive, *continued on page 52*



Christian Compatibility

inactive faith. Are you willing to get in the trenches and get a little dirt on your face for Christ? Nothing is more beautiful. Marriage and parenthood require a warrior's tenacity. When a girl is willing to love the unlovely and give without thought of receiving anything in return, guys take notice.

This is going to sound like the guys are making excuses, but hear us out. Everything — I mean everything — in this world is trying to keep us from maturing into manhood. The culture is holding nothing back in an attempt to keep us passive boys, and many of us are fighting it tooth-and-nail with every weapon we can get our hands on. We're frustrated about the fact that at times our fears — of relationships, of the future, of, yes, women — paralyze us.

Most young men have had little in the way of authentic Christian masculinity modeled for them, so they're blazing new territory. They're not there yet, but they're

working on it, and they are often as disappointed in their progress as you are. Just remember, even though there's a lot more of what he doesn't know than what he does know, he's learning, so don't give up on him yet. Your support means everything to him. Ask how you

can pray for him; speak words of encouragement; if you notice his efforts toward maturity and manhood, let him know. It'll do wonders for him.

The good guy can be like the great restaurant that only locals know about. The tourists miss it because they fall

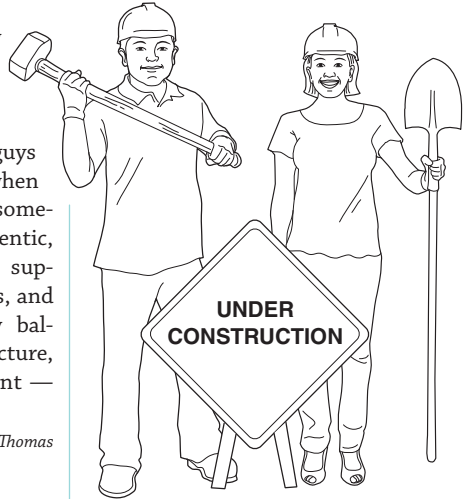
for the "traps" of the neon sign and convenient location of the franchise, not realizing that the best is tucked away just a few blocks over. The good guy is more a discovery, finding him can take more effort because you have to work your way past all the flash of the franchise guy. He could be working in the cubicle next to you, or sitting just a few rows over in class, or playing guitar in your church small group.

A WOMAN WHO
IS SECURE IN WHO
SHE IS — HONEST
ABOUT HER
WEAKNESSES AND
HUMBLE ABOUT
HER STRENGTHS —
IS A WOMAN WHO
IS HARD TO RESIST.

Take the time to get to know him. The one who might be easy to overlook could turn out to be the best kept secret.

Hang in there. The good guys are out there, hoping that when they find you they've found someone who is pursuing an authentic, adventuresome faith, who supports more than she criticizes, and whose priorities are rightly balanced. Concentrate on that picture, and guys — the kind you want — will find it hard to look away.

John Thomas




SETTLING

Worries about settling reveal a selfish approach to marriage that misunderstands the Bible's idea of love. "Holding out for true love" means demanding a person to whom I am completely attracted in the secular sense, somebody who meets all the qualifications on my "list," and whom I believe is the "best I can do." In the minds of many singles, anything short of finding that perfect match created in one's mind falls short of "true love" and constitutes the sad and unwise act of "settling."

This approach conceives of finding a spouse from the standpoint of what will be most enjoyable for me based on my tastes and desires. What will I receive from marriage to this or that person? In the world's version of attraction, I'm a consumer, not a servant. I respond to attributes of yours that I like because of their potential to please me. Again, this is not malicious or evil — it's just not how we're primarily called to treat one another. It's not the Bible's idea of love.

In Scripture, love is described not as a mere *continued on page 54*

NOBODY REALLY “SETTLES” IN A BIBLICAL MARRIAGE BECAUSE GOD HAS DESIGNED MARRIAGE AS A WONDERFUL GIFT THAT GETS BETTER WITH AGE.



emotion based on personal desire (i.e., “attraction”), but as an act of the will that leads to selfless actions toward others. According to Jesus Himself, the second-greatest commandment (after loving God) is to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31). He also said “greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Jesus’ love for us did not result from our inherent loveliness or our wonderful treatment of Him. He didn’t go to the cross as a spontaneous response triggered by mere emotion. His perfect love of us was a choice, an act undertaken despite our lack of attractiveness — and it led to both sacrifice and joy.

In any discussion of earthly circumstances or relationships, when we are tempted to pursue and think

we’re entitled to an idealized, easy, hassle-free life, it’s not a bad thing to think about the truth of what we deserve, and the blessings God has given us instead. God’s people don’t settle; the “best we could do” apart from Christ is a horrible tragedy compared to the lives we have with him. Nobody really “settles” in a biblical marriage because God has designed marriage as a wonderful gift that gets better with age. This is what people worried about settling don’t seem to get. They think joy in marriage is all about the original choice one makes about whom to marry, rather than how they nurture and build their marriage. Again, this misses the picture of biblical marriage.

Marriage is incredibly fun; it’s also incredibly hard. For most people it is the greatest act of ministry and service to another person that they will ever undertake. Husbands are literally called to “give themselves up for” their wives. Wives are called to submit to, respect, and serve their husbands “as to the Lord.” Though husbands and wives receive countless blessings from a biblical marriage, the very idea of biblical marriage describes an act — many acts — of love, ser-

vice, sacrifice, and ministry toward a sinful human being. According to Scripture, marriage is anything but a selfish endeavor. It is a ministry.

Sure, it takes hard work. But if two people are truly faithful as spouses, growing in God's word, studying one another deeply and attentively with an eye toward uniquely ministering to and serving each other, both will find that 10 years in they are known and loved and cared for better and more deeply than when they were newly married. That doesn't hinder passion, people. It builds it.

Scott Croft

THE REAL NON- NEGOTIABLES

Have you ever known a man that you've thought about dating, but in the end, ruled him out because he didn't measure up? If you're holding out for perfection, or have a long list of must-haves, it's possible you're overlooking some good men who are already in your life. What's needed is an objective standard for what makes

a good match, because, for a Christian woman, there are some non-negotiables for choosing a mate. Thankfully we have a standard that's completely reliable.

- » A man must be a believer.
- » He must be able and willing to provide for his family.
- » He must love sacrificially.
- » He must be honest, have a good reputation and strive for the qualities of a spiritual leader. (See Acts 6:3, 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9)

If you're measuring a man against that list, considering his aptitude for growing into full maturity in those areas, then marrying him is praiseworthy. *continued on page 56*



Even if he is shorter than you. Or younger. Or bald. Failing to meet our worldly expectations — our romantic shopping list — is no liability if he meets biblical ones. That's the only list that matters.

And marriage to such a man could hardly be called settling. In another day, it went by the much more pleasant, and desired, description: settling down. When

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faced with a big decision, my dad used to say, "Honey, you have to settle the issue. Make the best decision you can, in view of the wisdom of Scripture and prayer. Then move forward confidently." Putting the unending list of options to rest is freeing. Once you make a decision, you can stop noodling, debating, and weighing the alternatives, and get on with the rest of your life.

Candice Watters

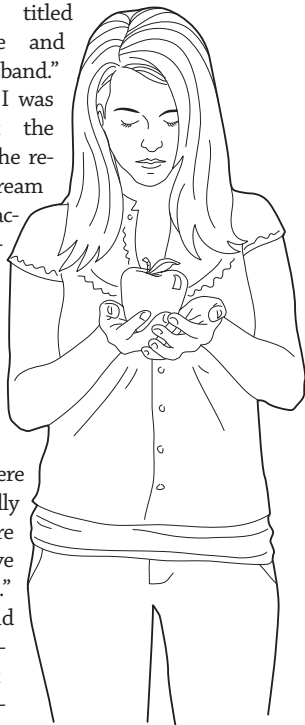
EXPECT TO MARRY A SINNER

I was clicking through some posts on a singles forum and came across one titled "Dream wife and Dream husband."

I admit that I was surprised at the maturity of the responses. Dream spouse characteristics included honest, church-going, non-judgmental, secure, empathetic and so on.

Of course, there were some silly ones in there too: "Like Eve before the fall."

The thread got me thinking about some teaching I heard a



few years ago before I got married, a talk given by Pastor Dave Harvey called “When Sinners Say I Do.” The gist of the sermon was that if I enter into marriage knowing that my wife will sin, then I won’t be disappointed when ... surprise ... she does sin. The talk shows how you can tell whether or not your doctrine of sin is being applied effectively in your relationship. The first “indicator” is: “We are More Aware of Being a Sinner Than Being Sinned-Against.” Fascinating.

What I took away after listening to the sermon was an encouragement to practice grace and have realistic expectations, expectations based in what Scripture says about human nature. I think it may be helpful to think of “The One” as someone who’s sinful, just as you are. I think that’s better than to think of them as the idealized “soul mate” with whom you’ll be able to enjoy a problem-free, effortless relationship. While it’s true that singles should do a good deal of work “up-front” in selecting a spouse, it’s also true that because we’re all sinful, a good relationship will continue to take a good deal of effort and require a good deal of grace.

Ted Slater

FAITH FOR THE MAN HE’LL BECOME

If you’ve had numerous godly male role models in your life — your father, pastor, boss, family friend, uncle, small group leader — you may already have a mental picture based on the qualities you appreciate in these men. You may see some of the husbands and fathers in your church and think to yourself that you’d like to marry a man just like them. Those are great aspirations to have! But first you may need to talk to their wives. These women didn’t marry the husbands they have today. Typically, they married less seasoned men. Thanks to the Holy Spirit’s refinements over time, as well as the feminine counsel, influence, and encouragement of these wives, their husbands are different some 20-plus years down the line.

Now take a look at the young men you know. Can you see them with eyes of faith? Like trees in spring-time with an *continued on page 58*

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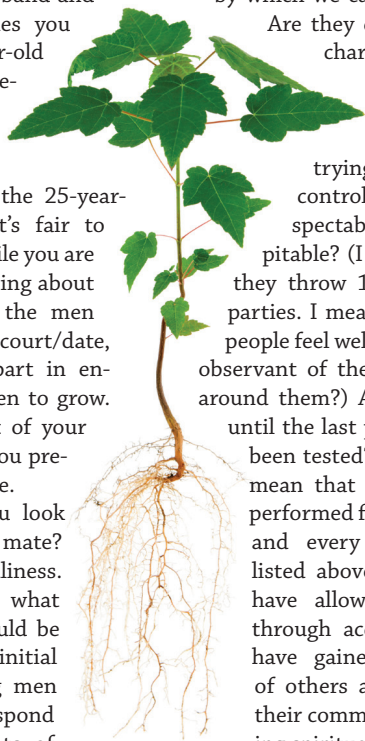
impressionistic haze of buds, the potential for growth is strongly evident but it's not yet fully realized. There is a learning curve to a man's leadership as a husband and father. The qualities you see in a 50-year-old man's life were developed over 50 years. There are 25 more years of growth ahead for the 25-year-old man before it's fair to compare them. While you are called to be discerning about the characters of the men you befriend or court/date, you also have a part in encouraging these men to grow. In fact, that's part of your learning curve as you prepare for being a wife.

What should you look for in a potential mate? A trajectory of godliness. Intentionality is what young women should be looking for — the initial efforts that young men make as they respond to the requirements of masculine servant-leadership described in the Bible. 1 Timothy 3:1-10 lists the traits required of church

leaders, but elsewhere in Scripture they are also required of all believers. That's why this compact list presents trustworthy standards by which we can evaluate men.

Are they cultivating these character traits? Are they trying to be purposeful? Are they trying to grow in self-control? Are they respectable? Are they hospitable? (I don't mean that they throw 10-course dinner parties. I mean, do they make people feel welcome — are they observant of the needs of those around them?) And so on, right until the last point: Have they been tested? Testing doesn't mean that these men have performed flawlessly on each and every character trait listed above, but that they have allowed examination through accountability and have gained the approval of others around them for their commitment to pursuing spiritual growth.

Honestly, though, when we are attracted to a man, we can be a bit dazzled by him and not as objective



as we need to be — a normal reaction. Therefore, watching a man's commitment to the Bride of Christ is going to help us discern how he will interact with an earthly bride. We really should want to marry men who love one person more than they love us — Jesus. And if they love Jesus, they are going to love His bride.

Carolyn McCulley

MARRIAGE MATURES WOMEN TOO

Marriage — and the influence of a loving, supportive, respectful wife — has a positive effect on men. And that's something single women often forget. I'm sure I was guilty of what Carolyn McCulley describes as "hav[ing] a mental picture [of your future husband] based on the qualities you appreciate in these [married] men" you look up to. Whether it's your "your father, pastor, boss, family friend, uncle, small group leader" or another godly role model, if he's married, he has the benefit of a special influence.

I know from my own relationship with Steve that he's a much different

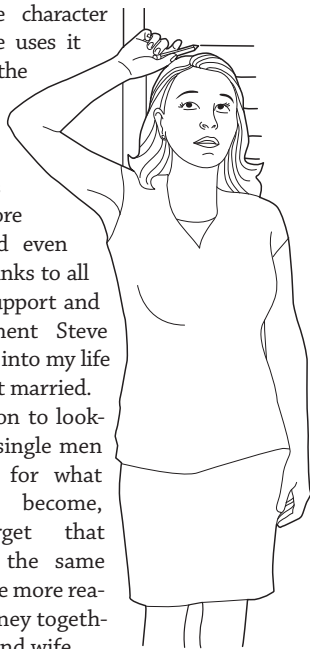
man than the one I married nearly 10 years ago. He's more spiritually mature, more seasoned, even more handsome.

But that's where I'd add an addendum: I'm different too.

Don't forget, as you look at the single men we know with "eyes of faith," that women have a lot of growing to do too. Just as God uses marriage to mature the character of men, He uses it to redeem the nature of women.

I'd dare say I'm less harsh, more refined and even prettier thanks to all the love, support and encouragement Steve has poured into my life since we got married.

In addition to looking at the single men you know for what they can become, don't forget that you're on the same path. All the more reason to journey together as man and wife.



Candice Watters

PRAY BOLDLY

I used to pray for a husband like this,

Oh, God, please don't make me be single my whole life. I really want to be married. Oh, I hope it's not Your will for me to be single. I don't think I could do it! Please bring someone into my life soon, very soon. But help me to be patient in the meantime. And God, if You do want me to be single — but I hope You don't — please give me the grace for it, because I really don't feel it. Did I mention how much I hope that's not Your will for me?

I wish I had read about Bartimaeus when I was single. It wasn't until after I was married that his story, recorded in Mark 10:46-52, leapt off the page.

When Bartimaeus, the blind beggar, heard that Jesus was approaching, he shouted, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" This was no tepid request. Even as the crowd rebuked him, telling him to be quiet, the Bible says, "He shouted all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'"

His clamor was rewarded. When Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" he replied,

"Rabbi, I want to see."

Jesus didn't disappoint. "Immediately he received his sight." But it wasn't Bartimaeus's flattery, neediness, or even his volume that made the difference. Jesus said, "Your faith has healed you."

Unlike Bartimaeus, I asked, but doubted. Till my mentor helped me see my prayers for what they were: faithless requests for something I wasn't even sure it was OK to want. I was embarrassed to admit my desire for marriage, and here she was encouraging me to not only acknowledge my hopes, but also pursue them. Suddenly I felt free to really pray. My petitions changed. No longer weighed down by doubts that what I wanted was good, I asked with confidence:

Lord, You created me. And I believe You created marriage for my good and Your glory. I don't know Your timeline, but I'm asking You to fulfill my desire to be married. Thank You, Lord, for this strong desire You've placed in my heart. Thank You that You've already been where I'm headed and that You know what my future holds. Thank You for marriage and for my future husband. Please be with him and prepare his heart to do Your will.

It's one thing to pray for a hus-

Christian Compatibility

band. But what would it look like to pray boldly, fervently, ceaselessly? And how would that kind of prayer affect the outcome?

Once you've embraced the calling of marriage, recognized the damage of the fall, remembered God's faithfulness, and accepted His redemption; when you're living like you're planning to marry, being intentional about discipleship, and looking for ways to support those around you in their roles, then you can pray boldly. Pray boldly for yourself and for your friends in Christ to esteem marriage, for your community to accept its role in reversing this post-marriage culture, for godly men to grow in their role, for God to do His redemptive work in your life to prepare you to be a godly wife as you trust His ways, and for belief that He can help you get married. Some are called to celibate service, and they're specially gifted to live that out. But the rest of us are called to marriage. Asking God for a mate is asking Him for something He created and called very good.

For those who are called to marriage, such prayers are nothing more than asking Him to give us what He wants you to have.⁵

Candice Watters



Lord, You created me. And I believe You created marriage for my good and Your glory. I don't know Your timeline, but I'm asking You to refine my desire to be married and fulfill it. Thank You, Lord, for this strong desire You've placed in my heart. Thank You that You've already been where I'm headed and that You know what my future holds. Thank You for marriage and for my future husband. Please be with him and prepare his heart to do Your will.

CONTRIBUTORS

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