

Court, Date, or Wait...

Rules of Engagement for Our Class

- Our Theme: Seeking Truth, Building Convictions
- Participation is Essential
- Questions are Welcome
- Respect is Required
- Preparation Multiplies the Benefit

Underlying Assumptions (for now)...

2 Timothy 3:16–17 - *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”* (ESV)

- The Bible is inerrant and is our standard of truth
- God knows what He is talking about
- God’s Word provides wisdom on salvation and how to live in this world.

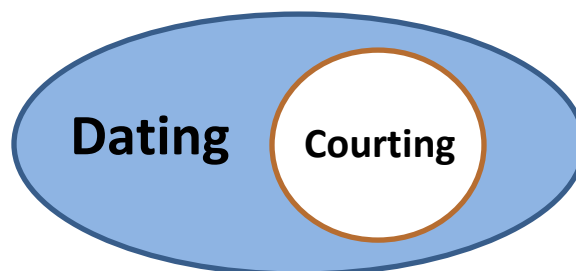
Understanding our Terms

Courting – to seek the affections of, especially: to seek to win a pledge of marriage; to engage in social activities leading to engagement and marriage.

Dating – a social engagement between two persons that often has a romantic character.¹

Q1: What is the difference between courting and dating?

- Courting is an older term that harkens back to a day with different standards of morality and marital commitment. By definition, there is a marriage-focus or marriage-intent in courting.
- Dating is the more current term and its connotation reflects the standards and practices of our day. Dating is a more inclusive term that can describe any romantic meeting, apart from any intention to marriage.



Courting versus Dating

Q2: Why do some people say that Courting is more Biblical than Dating?

- The examples we see of “romantic meetings” in the Bible are spiritually polar-opposites. Either two people were pursuing marriage, or the relationship was akin to prostitution (see Song of Solomon 1:5-7).²

¹ Both definitions are taken from Merriam-Webster’s 11th Collegiate Edition.

Court, Date, or Wait...

- Recreational dating (romantic meetings and relationships with no view towards marriage) has no Biblical precedent and is very dangerous.
- Because “courting” is typically marriage-focused and was used during a period in which views on relationships and marriage were more Biblically-based, it is favored by some over “dating.”

Q3: Why is Recreational Dating dangerous?

- Because marriage is not the objective, God’s directives concerning marriage and what to look for in a spouse are not a priority.
- It can create emotional bonds that make discernment and decisions to end a harmful relationship more difficult down the road.
- Temptations to physical intimacy, which is sinful outside the bounds of marriage.

Q4: Should I use the term “Courting” instead of “Dating”?

The terms overlap. It is my conviction that it is more important to have a right practice than to focus on a right term. Whatever you call it, Biblical principles should define and guide your “romantic meetings,” whether you are dating or courting.

Q5: Why is it important to have a View towards a Biblical Marriage when Dating or Courting?

Proverbs 3:5–6 - *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”*

Because God’s Word will guide:

- Why you date/court
- When you date/court
- Who you date/court
- How you date/court

Assignments

1. Write down at least one question you would like me to address in this study. You do not have to put your name on the card.
2. Review one of the examples of romantic relationships that led to marriage below. What was initial attraction based on? What can we learn about their resulting marriage?
 - Isaac & Rebecca – Genesis 24
 - Jacob & Rachel – Genesis 29
 - Moses & Zipporah – Exodus 2
 - Ruth & Boaz – Ruth
 - Solomon & Shulamite – Song of Solomon
 - Samson & Philistine – Judges 14

² Note that I am speaking about “romantic meetings” between males and females. I am not addressing all non-romantic relationships between males and females.

Romantic Relationships in the Bible

Q6: What led to some of the marriages we read about in the Bible?

- Marriage after a demonstration of character (Isaac & Rebecca) – Genesis 24:1-28, 50-67
- Marriage after attraction & demonstration of character (Jacob & Rachel) – Genesis 29:1-20
- Marriage after a demonstration of character (Moses & Zipporah) – Exodus 2:15-22
- Marriage after a demonstration of character (Ruth & Boaz) – Ruth
- Marriage after mutual attraction (Solomon & Shulamite) – Song of Solomon 1:5-10
- Marriage after attraction (Samson & Philistine) – Judges 14:1-3

Q7: What can we learn about their resulting marriage?

- Isaac & Rebecca – No indication of marital problems beyond favoritism with children.
- Jacob & Rachel – Because of Jacob's marriage to Leah, there was jealousy & strife in the home
- Moses & Zipporah – We don't know much.
- Boaz & Ruth – All indications are that it was a good marriage.
- Solomon & Shulamite – Solomon had multiple wives and we know the idolatry of some of those wives led him astray from God, and also the other wives who served the Lord.
- Samson & Philistine – Their marriage failed quickly because of lying, mutual immaturity, and dysfunctional families.

Q8: What can we observe from these examples?

- There was not a single way in which couples were brought together.
- Typically, parents/guardians were involved in the match and/or blessing the marriage.
- All of these examples are from the Old Testament. The New Testament does not provide examples of romantic relationships that led to marriage.³
- Marriage based solely on attraction did not have as much success as marriage based upon character. Attraction has its place; but its place is not the top priority.
- Even successful marriages and marriages between saved people can have challenges.

Applying Biblical Principles to Dating/Courting:

- Who is the intended audience of the Bible? See Matthew 28:18-20 and Revelation 14:6. The message of the Bible is intended for the whole world. You all come from the same culture, but the Bible wasn't written to just one culture.
- Does the Bible intend to homogenize all cultures (make them all the same)? See Romans 14:1-6, 14:17, Colossians 3:17, and Revelation 7:9.
 - No. New Testament Christianity does not even try to homogenize expressions of worship to the one true God, much less other cultural expressions.

³ This doesn't mean the New Testament is silent on marriage or on providing principles that should be applied to dating/courting.

Court, Date, or Wait...

The Anchor Young Adults

Seeking Truth, Building Convictions

- The Bible intends to bring all things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, which means that we remove things that are sin; add the practice of righteousness; and leave neutral (unsinful) cultural expressions alone.
- The Bible foresees a day in heaven when distinct nations, ethnic groups, and languages unite in worship to the Lord. Their cultural distinctions are not obliterated in heaven. Sin is destroyed and righteousness remains.
- What does this have to do with dating/courtship?
 - The Bible does not establish ONE way of initiating marriage. We see arranged marriages; courtship; marital decisions (Boaz & Ruth)... Not one is elevated above the others as THE way to initiate marriage. God worked in each of these situations.
 - Whatever our circumstance may be, we want to make sure it is applied Biblically: remove those things that are sinful and replace it with practices that are righteous.

Because we are living in America, we must ask and answer the questions in our cultural context: From here on out, understand that I am redefining dating in a Biblical context and am including the concept of courtship.

- Why should I date?
- When should I date? ... get engaged? ... get married?
- Who should I date?
- What should dating look like?

Q9: How did courting change into dating?

- Historically (from the Bible), we see a lot of arranged marriages (no consent necessary).
- In American history, courtship was the “norm” until the early 1900’s. Wars/Women’s Liberation/Commercialization/Urbanization all played a role. See May 15, 2016 article from NY Post, [“The fascinating history of how courtship became ‘dating.’”](#)

Assignment

If obeying God’s commands concerning dating/courting cannot guaranty a successful marriage, why bother? At issue here is the weight (worth) of what we value. If we most heavily value the comforts of this life, the approval of men, worldly success (i.e. the things of shallow and temporary significance), then you will not even try or be able to sustain obedience to God (see **Matthew 13:5-7**).

Salvation and sanctification change our value system, assigning much greater weight to what is deep and enduring (consider Saul/Paul and Job). As this happens, our reasons for obedience multiply exponentially in number and value (see **2 Cor 4:16-18**). These reasons include, but are not limited to:

- Because He is worthy of our faith and obedience.
- Because obedience makes us more like Christ, who pleased the Father in every way.
- Because the good He will accomplish through our faithfulness far outweighs any inconvenience or discomfort we may experience when He allows a trial to pass our way.
- Because He rewards faithfulness and sin carries consequences.

Court, Date, or Wait...

The Anchor Young Adults

Seeking Truth, Building Convictions

Why Date?

Everything we have studied so far indicates that “dating” (an American creation) can be Biblically-purposed when it is practiced in the context of marriage preparation. As we have discussed, recreational dating (dating for the experience or “fun” of it) is very dangerous. In other words, removing dating from the context of marriage and the seriousness of that commitment removes any good, redeeming Christian purpose, and it becomes an opportunity for Satan to gain a foothold in your life.

The answer to the question, “why date” is easy. Dating (practiced Biblically) may be appropriate if: [God is calling you to marriage](#).

The harder question you must answer is this: [Is God calling me to marriage?](#)

In order to answer this question properly, we should review the purposes of marriage.

1. Companionship/Need for a Suitable Helper

Genesis 2:18 - *“Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”*

Read **Matthew 19:3-12**, focusing on verses 10-12, and answer the following questions.

1. Why did Jesus’ disciples remark that it was better not to marry? [When Jesus emphasized the binding nature of marriage, they thought it seemed too difficult to risk.](#)
2. What is a eunuch? [A eunuch is a man who is unable to have children.](#)
3. Why would Jesus speak about eunuchs? [In their cultural context, marriage was the default: everyone did it unless there was an extenuating circumstance \(like being a eunuch\). The eunuchs represent the unmarried.](#)
4. What are the three types of eunuchs Jesus mentioned?
 1. [Those who are born without the ability to reproduce \(no ability or desire to marry/reproduce\);](#)
 2. [Those who have made eunuchs by others \(the ability to marry/reproduce taken away\); and](#)
 3. [Those who choose to be eunuchs for God’s kingdom \(those who remain single in order to devote themselves to a more pressing calling from God\).](#)
5. What was the point Jesus was making? [Marriage is not for everyone, but fear is not a good reason to avoid marriage. As we are considering these comments it is important to recognize that Jesus is not validating selfish/sinful behavior \(I don’t want to commit to marriage so I’ll just play the field\). He is stating that there are legitimate reasons to not marry, but they are not rooted in selfishness \(our plan\) but rather in God’s plan.](#)

Court, Date, or Wait...

The Anchor Young Adults

Seeking Truth, Building Convictions

2. To Have Children and Provide them a Stable Home

Genesis 1:28 – “And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.””

How do Jesus’ comments in Matthew 19:3-12 pertain to becoming a parent? Some people have no ability/desire to have children. Some do not have the opportunity. Some surrender this opportunity to devote themselves to a more pressing calling from God.

3. To Provide a Visible Picture of the Love between Christ and His Church

Ephesians 5:31–32 – ““Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”

Every marriage is called to become this picture of love between Christ and the church, but as we have seen, not everyone is called to marriage.

4. Pleasure with Purity

Read **1 Corinthians 7:1-9** and answer the following questions.

- What does Paul mean when he says, “I wish that all were as I myself am.”? Paul was unmarried and therefore able to devote himself more fully to the ministry.
- What does Paul acknowledge in verse 6? Not everyone has the same “gift” he does from God. Having or not having a gift is not a sign of blessing or weakness, but of calling.
- What was Paul’s gift? Paul was able to be unmarried and content. He was not overwhelmed by the temptations that arise more easily outside of marriage (i.e. loneliness, not having children, but specifically the desire for physical intimacy).
- What was Paul’s advice concerning the decision on whether to marry (or in our case, to date at the appropriate time)? Consider your giftedness. Everyone faces desires of various types. Is marriage part of God’s plan for you to fulfill His purpose in this world and live in purity? It is better to marry than to be overwhelmed with desires that you have not been called or equipped to overcome long-term outside of marriage.

Assignment

Perform a self-evaluation based upon these concepts we have discovered. Recognize that you may not be able to come up with a definitive answer right now, but to the extent you are able, do you believe God has called you to marriage? Why? Answers will not have to be shared with the class.

Court, Date, or Wait...

Who Should I Date?

Review the book, Shooting for the Mark, by Pastor James Keen.

Q10: Are we supposed to be actively looking for a spouse or wait for God to bring one to us?

It isn't possible to provide a blanket answer to a question like this because the answer will differ from individual to individual. However, here are some pre-questions to consider that will lead you to the right answer.

- What season of life are you in? The answer to the overarching question differs from person to person, in part, based upon the season of life you are in. The answer for a 10-year old, a 16-year old, a 21-year old, and a 30-year old would likely be very different. Our next section in this lesson will address "when" we should start dating. For now, let me say that the question isn't answered by age as much as it is readiness: physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, and financial.
- Do you sense that marriage is part of God's calling on your life? Review the points under "Why date" and look back to the last assignment. Have you sought His will in this matter?
- Why do you want this relationship? The following questions are derived from an article entitled, "*Five Questions to Ask before Dating*" by Jaquelle Crowe. It can be found on the *Desiring God* website. I found the questions to be insightful and piercing. You should be able to answer these questions honestly and properly before pursuing a dating relationship.
 1. Am I pursuing this relationship for validation?
 2. Am I pursuing this relationship because of expectation or pressure?
 3. Am I seeking to define and develop this relationship in community?
 4. Do I have short-term intentions?
 5. Am I seeking this relationship in submission to God?
- Do you have strong biblical convictions about who you should marry? Getting the answer to this question right is ESSENTIAL. Review our prior lessons. Fundamentally, godly convictions are formed and maintained in godly community (with God and godly people). **1 Timothy 3:14-15** calls the church the pillar and support of the truth, right after talking about the essential qualifications for leaders in the church. Godly leaders will promote a godly community. A godly community holds the truth aloft in a world of darkness.

By illustration, the ocean tide is very persuasive. The deeper you wade out into the water, the more it pushes your body, even dissolving the sand under your feet. Pretty soon, you will find yourself moving with the tide rather than standing firm. The only way you can remain immobile is to fasten yourself to a rock that is immovable. The ways of the world run contrary to God's Word. The world is like the ocean tide. Unless you are building your convictions upon the rock and maintaining contact with that rock (in godly community), you will find yourself moved by the tides of the world. Your convictions will falter.

Court, Date, or Wait...

The Anchor Young Adults

Seeking Truth, Building Convictions

- What is the Biblical model for finding a spouse? Do we actively look or wait for God to bring one to us? Discuss **Genesis 24:1-67**, the account of how a bride was found for Isaac. Answer the questions below based on what we know from our text and surrounding passages.
 - What season of life was he in? Sarah was 90 when she bore Isaac (**Gen 17:17**) and she died when she was 127 (**Gen 23:1**). The events of Genesis 24 occurred after the death of Sarah, so Isaac was at least 37 years old. He was certainly of marrying age and was likely a mature adult.
 - Was marriage part of God's calling on his life? God had made a promise to Abraham to bless him with descendants. This promise would be fulfilled through Isaac (**Gen 23:12**). It was God's will for Isaac to have children, so it was also clearly God's will to have them through marriage.
 - Why did Isaac (and his family) want this relationship? As just discussed, this was part of God's plan for Isaac's wife. We also see that Isaac needed a woman in his life. He was in mourning after the death of his mother and God designed him to need this help-meet, a missing piece in his life (**Gen 24:67**).
 1. Was he pursuing this relationship for validation? No.
 2. Was he pursuing this relationship because of expectation or pressure? This one is a bit cloudy. We don't know if Isaac even knew what was going on.
 3. Was he seeking to define and develop this relationship in community? Yes.
 4. Did he have short-term intentions? No. This was about marriage.
 5. Did he seek this relationship in submission to God? Absolutely, God's principles were followed and His presence was invoked.
 - Were there strong convictions about who he should marry? Absolutely! Abraham was concerned about Isaac falling for one of the local idolatrous girls. He wanted his son to marry someone with a God-fearing upbringing and a God-following character. Abraham's servant carefully used these qualifications in seeking a bride for Isaac.

To find Rebecca, the servant put himself in the right place, looking for the right things.

Was active looking involved in Genesis 24? Yes. The servant made a long journey to find a wife.

Was passive waiting involved in Genesis 24? Yes. The servant depended upon the Lord.

What is the answer to our question? **Proverbs 3:5-8** is the best summary. Trust in the Lord (have the right motivations, the right convictions and do things the right way) and He will direct your paths. Put yourself in the right place; look for the right things; and wait for Him.

Court, Date, or Wait...

When Should I Date?

We will find that the foundation we have laid in the prior sections will guide us in answering the other questions concerning dating/courting.

Q11: How old is a good dating/courting age?

The question implies that there is a “magic” age when dating is permissible and purposeful. However, the Bible never defines a specific age and customs vary from culture to culture. It is kind of like the “age of accountability” described in the Bible. There is an “age” of innocence when a baby/child/young person is not held eternally accountable to God for their sin (**2 Samuel 12:23**). However, there comes a time when our spiritual eyes are opened to our guilt and need for salvation (**Romans 7:9**). The “age” at which this occurs is never defined. It is different for each person, but it is a time of transition.

Does this mean the Bible gives us nothing to go on? Not at all! However, I want to reframe the question as, “*When am I ready to begin a dating relationship?*” Here are five points to consider in determining your personal “readiness” for dating.

- When your Parents/Authority Figures/Godly Advisors agree that it is time. See **1 Corinthians 7:36-38** as a point of reference. Everything we have studied in Scripture indicates that godly marital relationships are formed in cooperation with godly community. Even if you don’t have Christian parents, you should have godly advisors in your life who can speak truth to you. The following points are things that I as a parent would consider in making such a determination for my children.
- When you have found someone to date that is in the “marrying zone”. This has been a HUGE emphasis of our lesson. Are they saved? Are they being sanctified? Entangling your heart with someone who does not want to follow Christ is incredibly dangerous.
- When you have the right perspective on dating/marriage. Remember that this class is not just about acquiring knowledge but building convictions. As a parent, I want to know if your head is on straight. Where are your priorities? Where are your boundaries? Have you demonstrated maturity and “sticking power” to godly convictions?
- When you are on a solid trajectory for marriage readiness. See **1 Corinthians 13:11**. Entering a romantic relationship is intended to set you on a trajectory for marriage. As we have studied, marriage is more than a ceremony and a ring. It is a lifetime covenant commitment between two people that creates a new family unit. Are you on a solid trajectory for becoming a person that will be a solid husband/wife/father/mother? Will you/are you able to fulfill your duties?
- When you have the blessing of the Parents/Authority Figures/Godly Advisors of the person you want to date. If it is important for you, it is important for them too.

Court, Date, or Wait...

Our next question is related to the maturity of the individuals who are dating, and is therefore related to the “when” of dating. Part of having the right perspective on dating and being ready to date is having the right perspective on love and being ready to love.

Q12: Can young couples say “I love you” and really mean it and know what it means?

The word “love” in the English language is used to describe at least two words in the Greek New Testament, each with their own undertone:

- Philos – used primarily for the love for a friend
- Agape – used primarily for the love of God, the love of marriage, the love between believers

The meanings of these words and their uses can get muddled at times and it is hard to be definitive about what is intended. Similarly, our use of the word “love” in the English language is pretty muddy too. It is used in lots of contexts, but its meaning can differ from situation to situation.

When someone in a dating relationship says, “I love you,” what is usually meant? I have romantic feelings for you. You make me feel good and I enjoy that, so I love being with you.

In the context of the prior question, how can someone fall “out of love”? I no longer have romantic feelings for you. I no longer enjoy being with you (for whatever reason).

What is the basis of the use of “love” in these contexts? It is primarily based on feeling. Feeling is the driver for the level and duration of commitment to the relationship.

Read **1 Corinthians 13:1-8** and **John 3:16**. How is biblical love defined in this passage? Biblical love is defined in terms of commitment, compassion, and character. There is a feeling element to it, but that feeling is tied to a deep commitment with the character to fulfill the obligations of love.

Does love grow and mature? Consider **John 21:15-18**, **Ephesians 5:25**, and **Titus 2:3-4**. Each of these passages speak specifically to the need, the command to grow in the capacity and character of our love. Yet even at its pinnacle, our love will never compare to the love of God and Christ.

What does the potential for love to grow and mature mean about the nature of true love? It doesn’t necessarily mean that your capacity to feel grows at all. It most strongly indicates that your capacity to act in a loving way beyond the boundaries of feeling grow. It also indicates that the maturity and resilience of your feelings grow beyond selfish motivations.

Can a young person say “I love you” and really mean it and know what it means? I believe it is possible for a young person to have a degree of true biblical love that can be expressed in a dating relationship. However, a mature perspective would recognize that this love that is experienced is just a sprout that will require time and nurture to grow into the fullness of what it is meant to be.

How to Date

As we have seen in the Bible, marriage relationships initiated and progressed in different ways. There is not a “one-size-fits-all” model. Does that mean that there are no biblical guidelines for initiating and pursuing a dating relationship? No! There are definitely principles that can inform and guide you down a successful path for pursuing marriage. We will discuss some common questions addressing the process from the beginning of a relationship to marriage itself.

Q13: Who should initiate a dating relationship?

The biblical model for the home is male-headship (**Ephesians 5:23**). The roles in the home are patterned after the love of Christ for His church. In that relationship, Christ is the initiator, leader, provider, and protector. We also see several examples of men being initiators in scriptures, such as Jacob (**Genesis 29:18**), Othniel (**Judges 1:13-14**), and David (**1 Samuel 25:40**).

Ruth’s experience seems to depart from this model, however. Read **Ruth 3:1-18**. How do we reconcile Ruth’s actions with the other examples? Boaz was clearly a man of character and was already showing his willingness to be a provider for Ruth and Naomi. Boaz was in a tricky circumstance. There was a nearer kinsman redeemer to him (a legal obstacle), plus a somewhat significant age difference. For Boaz to initiate would be presumptuous and perhaps illegal in their culture. Ruth’s action was necessary for Boaz to know of her interest. Once he knew she was on board, he immediately sought to remedy the legal obstacle.

There are a few takeaways from these passages:

- Men should be leaders in initiating a dating relationship.
- Women should let the men be leaders in initiating a dating relationship.
- Women can send clear signals of interest and availability if there is a man that is both suitable and of interest to you.

Q14: When should parents/guardians become involved?

Your relationship with your parents will probably heavily influence how this will happen. Some young people will be talking to a parent or mentor from the first sparks of interest. Others may not involve them until a bit later in the process.

My recommendation is that when the relationship starts to turn from friendship/acquaintance to romance, parents or guardians should get involved. It is my conviction that a young man should pursue the blessing of both his parents and the girl’s parents before “dating.” This doesn’t mean that he can’t secure the girl’s interest before talking to them (think of Ruth and Boaz); it means that he shouldn’t go further than that without their blessing.

Court, Date, or Wait...

Q15: What should dates look like?

Dates should be designed to support the purpose of dating: getting to know the other person and learning whether they are someone you are called to marry. Overall, I see two stages of the dating relationship, with some overlap between the stages:

1. Investigation/Testing (typically pre-engagement):
 - a. Is this person suitable for marriage?
 - b. Are we spiritually, mentally, and emotionally compatible?
 - c. Is this the person God is calling me to marry?

2. Preparation (typically post-engagement): Moving towards oneness.
 - a. Resolving minor distinctions.
 - b. Clarifying roles.
 - c. Establishing goals.

In a practical way, this means that the courting/dating period should include:

1. Communication
 - Spanning a variety of topics.
 - Lots of it – Both quantity and quality.
 - Perpetual distance is a challenge. Some in-person time should be included.
2. Activities
 - Shared experiences.
 - You should both grow in comfort with one another: be able to be yourself.
 - You will grow in understanding about yourself and the other.
3. Family Life
 - You will understand them better (where they came from).
 - You should respect their parents and family as well.
 - You should build relationships with their family.
 - You should observe their family. It may be a glimpse into your future.
4. Spiritual Life
 - Prayer
 - Worship
 - Ministry
5. Appropriate Oversight
 - Avoiding tempting situations
 - Having some wise and loving eyes that:
 - Observe
 - Speak the truth
 - Hold you accountable
 - Can ultimately bless a future union from a place of wisdom.

Court, Date, or Wait...

Q16: What are the benefits of praying together while dating?

The benefits can be abundant:

- Building a good habit – see **1 Corinthians 7:5**
- Vulnerability and honesty (if you pray properly).
- The spiritual transformation can impact you both.
- Placing your relationship before God.

There are some dangers:

- Sharing what should not yet be shared.
- A temptation to take God's place for your spouse.

Q17: What is the proper level of emotional involvement in dating?

Emotions are powerful things and as we have already discussed, emotion is mistaken as being the pinnacle of love in our culture (i.e. falling in love) and also an unstoppable force (i.e. the heart loves who it loves). **If these cultural premises are true; then the Bible is a lie.**

Regarding love, the Bible teaches:

- The Pinnacle of Love is Self-Sacrifice. See **John 15:13**.
- Every thought (and feeling) can be brought into submission to Christ. See **Romans 12:2-3** and **2 Corinthians 10:5**.

The reason that this is an important question is that unchecked emotions can easily override our reason, justifying all sorts of poor choices. Uncontrolled emotions are at the root of countless bad marriages and marital problems. The truth is that our feelings do not have to control us and they are not beyond control. Our feelings are simply a reflection of our heart. It is important to recognize that while feelings can form very quickly, it typically takes them longer to change. Fortunately, we serve a God who is able to change, cleanse, purify, and refresh our hearts. We also play a cooperative role in heart change (see **Joel 2:13**).

What is the Biblical model for the emotional involvement between a husband and a wife? See **Ephesians 5:28-31**. The husband is called to love his wife as he loves himself. He is to be deeply invested in her and her wellbeing.

Does the Bible provide an example of emotional involvement between a courting couple? See **Song of Solomon 3:1-5**. The Shulamite referred to Solomon as "him who my soul loves." This appears to be after their engagement and right before the marriage.

Read that passage again in **Song of Solomon 3:1-5**. What is the warning in verse 5, also found in **2:7**? What does it mean? "*I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the hinds of the field, that you do not arouse or awaken my love until she pleases.*" This is an admonition to purity, to thwart the rising passion of the couple.

Court, Date, or Wait...

What does it have to do with the quest to determine the proper level of emotional involvement? Emotion/desire must not override reason. Emotional commitment/desire must not override readiness for commitment and the making of a lifetime covenant commitment before God and witnesses.

Q18: What is the right balance of leadership and submission in a dating relationship? Should it mirror marriage?

The Bible definitely describes roles for each spouse within marriage. Read **Ephesians 5:22-33**.

- The role of the wife is *respectful submission* to the leadership of her husband.
- The role of the husband is *loving (sacrificial)* leadership of his wife for her good.

The question seeks to uncover how the ultimate roles within marriage should inform and guide the dating relationship. Here are some points to consider:

1. Understand what the marital roles mean.
 - Recognize the distinction between roles and tasks. Your tasks with marriage can vary based upon your giftedness and the needs of a situation. That doesn't mean your roles have changed.
 - See **1 Peter 3:1** – The power of influence. The wife is given a key for influencing her husband.
2. Understand what the marital roles do not mean.
 - See **1 Corinthians 7:12-17** – Your allegiance to Christ is first.
 - See **Matthew 19:9** – You are not involuntarily bound to an unfaithful spouse.
3. Consider the fitness of your girlfriend/boyfriend for the biblical wife/husband role.
 - Observe their *character*
 - Encourage their *growth* into the role to which God has called them.
4. Consider your fitness and willingness to assume your role.
 - Whatever that role is, are you willing to “step up” to it? It is always a “step up” from a spiritual standpoint.

Court, Date, or Wait...

5. Understand where you are right now. See **Ephesians 5:31**.
 - Unless you are an independent adult, you are under the **authority** of another. Typically **parents**.
 - Even as an **independent adult**, it is the marital covenant bond (becoming one) that places us within our roles in marriage.

Q19: How far is too far with physical intimacy?

The non-negotiable undeniably clear teaching from the Bible about sex is that:

1. Sex is good and proper and intended to be enjoyed in the right context. See **1 Timothy 4:3**, **Proverbs 5:19**, **1 Corinthians 7:3**.
2. The (only) right context for sex is within the covenant commitment of marriage between a man and a woman. See **1 Corinthians 6:18** and **Matthew 5:27-28**.
 - There is a distinction between sexual immorality (*porneia*) and adultery (*moicheuo*) in the Greek language. Though they are the same physical act, both are recognized as sinful.
 - Sex is intended to be the capstone on a covenantal commitment of spiritual & emotional oneness.
 - Misuse of the gift of sex is a particularly dangerous sin that will be judged by God. See **Hebrews 12:16**.

Why is sexual immorality a big deal? American culture is HIGHLY sexualized. Sexually provocative images are nearly inescapable. “Casual” sex is common and even expected among teens and adults. However, there is nothing casual about sex. Paul told the Ephesian church that sexual immorality shouldn’t even be joked about among saints (see **Ephesians 5:3**).

There are many reasons why sexual immorality is wrong. Providing an exhaustive list of reasons is beyond the scope of this lesson. Let me provide one thought. Sexual intimacy is physically, emotionally, and spiritually powerful and leaves a lasting imprint. It is not something that can be “shaken off.” See **1 Corinthians 6:18**. It is intended to be a sort of “super glue” to the formation of a good and enduring relationship in the bonds of marriage. It is even the God-ordained doorway to the creation of new life made in the image of God, a sacred blessing given to mankind.

When this glue is poured over relationships that are not ready or meant to endure (or even exist), it can only result in the improper joining of the pieces or even worse, result in a great mess when the pieces are broken apart. See **2 Samuel 13:1-19**. Consider the direct and collateral damage resulting from Amnon’s sin.

Court, Date, or Wait...

It is completely inconsistent that American culture recognizes the danger and damage of sex without the consent of both parties (i.e. rape), but will not recognize the danger of sex outside of marriage, even if both parties consent. The fact is that sexual intimacy is powerful and beautiful within marriage but it is spiritually damaging outside of that union.

Let's consider what God's Word has to say about how to navigate this challenging temptation outside of the bounds of marriage.

1. Protect your personal purity. See **Job 31:1** and **Matthew 5:27-30**. The first way to prevent problems in a dating relationship is to place a high value on maintaining a pure heart and mind. Becoming entrapped in the cycle of lust will spill over into a dating relationship.
2. Sexual touching is meant to take you all the way (called foreplay for a reason). See **Song of Solomon 2:7, 2:15, 3:5, and 4:12**.
 - By sexual touching, I mean:
 - touching, caressing, pressing against, stimulating, etc... the "bad touch" areas of our body that are intended to be covered for the sake of modesty.
 - Other intentionally sexually awakening/arousing touching or kissing.
 - Don't put yourself in that situation until you can go all the way. It will only strengthen temptation or result in sin.
3. In a mature dating relationship, you should set clear boundaries and don't play "near the fence."
 - Men – take a lead in setting the boundaries.
 - Women – don't entice a man in this way to get him or keep him. If that is what draws him to you, it is what will also draw him away.
 - Boundaries should include: no sex, no sexual touching, and other rules you determine are necessary to avoid this problem.
 - Prevent temptation. Don't dress immodestly. Don't be alone in places where sexual immoral behavior could occur. Don't take in media (together or separately) that will create or feed sexual desires.