

Love and Romance



You have probably read at least a few, if not many fairytales that end with a happy couple galloping off into the sunset to live 'happily ever after'. Stories like *Cinderella*, *The Princess and the Pea*, *Repunzel*, *Sleeping Beauty* or *The Frog Prince* may come to mind.

If you are a boy, perhaps you have thought how grand it would be to be the brave and handsome hero who rescues the beauty from her misery and makes her happy forevermore.

If you are a girl, you have probably dreamed of being the beauty, who is rescued by the hero and taken away to live in everlasting happiness.

Or perhaps if fairytales are not so familiar to you, you may have enjoyed looking at your parents wedding photos and wondered what it must be like to be the happy couple at the centre of the all the beautiful arrangements. Maybe as a young child you have even dreamed or pretended to be the beautiful bride or the handsome bridegroom as you played fantasy or role-playing games.

In a book for adult men called *Wild at Heart*, the author John Eldredge says that these are the dreams and desires written in the heart of every boy: To be a hero, to be a warrior, to live a life of adventure and risk.

In the female equivalent, *Captivating*, by John and his wife, Stasie Eldredge, they explain how every little girl longs to be swept up into a romance, to be part of a great adventure and to be the beauty of the story.

They say that these desires are more than child's play – they are the secrets of the heart of man and woman and they are meant to fit together beautifully.

"A woman in the presence of a good man, a real man, loves being a woman. His strength allows her feminine heart to flourish. His pursuit draws out her beauty. And the man in the presence of a real woman, loves being a man. Her beauty arouses him to play the man, it draws out his strength. She inspires him to be a hero." (*Captivating*, p 18)

So, if you can relate to these ideas, relax - it is quite normal and natural to have these thoughts and ideas about yourself and about the future one day with the partner of your dreams. Perhaps you have even wondered how you will ever find Mr or Miss Right – the person who will make this dream come true ...or perhaps you have wondered how your parents came to the decision that they had found the right person to marry.

If you *haven't* thought much about this kind of thing, that is also fine. However, you can probably expect that in the next few years, you will start to become more and

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more aware of the relationships between boys and girls and men and women and it will be good to be prepared in advance.

The purpose of this article is to gently lead you to a place where you will learn how to build a relationship that will allow you to be the man or woman that God intends you to be and bring both you and your future spouse fulfilment and the joy of relationship that God intends for you both.

This may seem far away at this stage in your life, but because of the dreams and desires of our hearts, as described above, many young girls and boys start trying to find their own way to have those needs met and end up having their dreams shattered, with devastating effects that last right into their adult lives and do damage to their marriage relationships and families.

So, it would be better to learn right now, with your parents guidance and within the safety of a loving family, how to avoid the common pitfalls of love and romance and in so-doing make a decision to set yourself up for a successful relationship one day, rather than learning the hard way though heart ache and pain, like so many others do.

The society we live in seems to flood us with the concept of love, romance and dating. More poems have been written about love than any other topic and wherever you go, the media blares out songs about romance and dating, but the ideas they promote are not necessarily part of God's plan for our lives, so we need to learn just what His plan is.

Love is a captivating subject and the intrigues of relationships have fascinated people for centuries. Let's look at where it started.

The Need for a Companion

Did you know that it was God who first said "It is not good for man to be alone"?

When he created Adam in the Garden of Eden, he realized that Adam needed a helper. Even though God was there, in a relationship with Adam that was yet to be spoiled by sin, God realized that Adam needed someone with flesh and blood to be his companion.

You are probably familiar with the story of how God made Adam go to sleep and then created Eve from one of his ribs.

"And God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them." Genesis 1:27

Then he blessed them and gave them a purpose that they should fulfil together:

"God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Genesis 1:28

God also wanted them to live in obedience and in an intimate relationship with Him.

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Today, nothing has changed. God still wants us to live in obedience and in an intimate relationship with Him.

All of us want *intimacy* – to be close to someone, to share our hopes, fears, secrets and affections with someone – to be known by someone. God made us that way.

However, because many people do not have an intimate relationship with the Lord, they try to have their needs fulfilled by other people and very often they do so by pursuing a romantic relationship with someone.

Many people date because they want the benefits of intimacy but they seldom want the responsibility of a true commitment, or they are not ready for a commitment. This is selfish. Teens that date are usually too young to make a lifetime

commitment, but rather pursue dating for their own selfish reasons or for recreational purposes.

Dating and the Effects of Dating

Did you know that there is no biblical command not to date? This topic is one that we need to evaluate in the light of various scriptures. The decisions we make require maturity and wisdom and an understanding of the motives of the people involved. Believe it or not, your parents should be involved – we'll look at Scriptures about their role later.

Most Christians have assumed that it is quite normal for young people to date and to experience several dating relationships until they are ready to choose a spouse (husband or wife). This is considered to be normal preparation for marriage – but is it?



Are dating relationships part of God's plan for us? Let's look at some more Scriptures now that can cast light onto this topic.

Philippians 1:9-10 "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ."

We need to learn to discern what is best and stay pure and we need to learn to love the way God wants us to love:

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1 Corinthians 13: 4-7 says: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

Love is not self-seeking. Let's see whether or not dating is self-seeking:

In a dating relationship, two people start to become emotionally close – they share their thoughts, dreams, fears, hopes etc. and they start to bond. Outwardly they are recognized by others as a couple because of their close relationship. Sometimes the relationship may go further and they will begin to display their affection physically by holding hands or hugging etc.

Pursuing intimacy without commitment awakens desires – both emotional and physical desires that cannot properly be met in a temporary relationship.

A dating relationship eventually comes to an end and at least one of the couple is hurt to some degree by the unfaithfulness and lack of commitment of the other person. Usually someone is left heart-broken and wounded emotionally, feeling rejected by the other person.



Often, a short while later, that person will begin another dating relationship. This time that person will either guard their heart or make sure that they are the one to break up first. Either way over a period of years, a person will experience a series of emotional bonds that are then broken. Some people say it is no wonder then that so many marriages end in divorce – it's the same pattern of behaviour continuing to be repeated.

Staying Pure

1 Timothy 5: 1-2 "Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity."

This verse explains clearly that we are to treat people of the opposite sex as brothers and sisters.

Romans 12: 1-2 "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

God wants us to stay pure in every way. He does not want us to live our lives according the world's standards.



Do you think that dating is the same as treating someone as a brother or sister?

You might ask, what about my needs?

When we deny ourselves and make God's glory and other people's needs our priority, then we set ourselves up to receive the greatest joy and blessing in our lives as well. We develop the kind of character traits that God desires to see in our lives, such as patience, long-suffering, peace, faithfulness and self-control - to name a few.

Our enemy the devil is just waiting for a chance to cause destruction in young lives and dating gives him a foothold. It is extremely difficult to overcome temptation

to sin once desires have been awakened. We need to make sure that those desires are kept in check!

Love, Marriage and the Bible

By now you must be asking the question – How will anyone ever marry if they treat everyone as brothers and sisters? How will they ever fall in love?

The Biblical pattern is not for young people to have loveless, arranged marriages. The Bible clearly instructs husbands and wives to love one another. In Ephesians 5:25 husbands are commanded to love their wives and in Titus 2:4 older women are encouraged to teach younger women to love their husbands.

So how is this supposed to happen?



Statistics show that there are many, many couples who marry because they are in love, but a few years later, when those emotions fade away, their marriages end in divorce. Clearly, this is not a satisfactory model for building good, strong relationships that will last a lifetime. So what is the better way?

Parents Roles in Children's Relationships

In centuries gone by, except perhaps the last one, parents played a strong role in guiding their children's lives from birth until marriage and even beyond! In fact, when it came to dating, there was no such thing. A young man would visit the young girl of his fancy at her home or spend time with her at public gatherings and often young people would be chaperoned.



In this day and age, that may seem very controlling and these days many parents think that they should stay out of their children's affairs.

However, there is a verse that says that a tree is known by its fruit, and if one looks at the fruit of dating and this modern 'hands-off' style of parenting, there is no good fruit to be seen. Instead there are broken hearts, high teenage pregnancy rates, sexual diseases, teenage abortions, high teen suicide rates, teen depression and much other "damage" that previous generations did not experience at this high level.

So instead of criticizing past generations, we should look back and see what wisdom we can learn from their methods. Of course, this should also be examined in the light of the Bible.

The following are just a few of many scriptures that indicate that parents, fathers in particular, as leaders of their families, should play an active role in educating, training, disciplining and controlling their children's behaviour. This is for the children's own good.

1 Timothy 3:4 "He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect."

Ephesians 6:4 "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

Deuteronomy 6: 6-7 "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children."

Titus 1:6 "An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient."

Children were instructed to submit to their parents' God-given authority over their lives. This teaches children to submit to God as well.

The fifth commandment says it very clearly:

Exodus 20:12 "Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you."

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This commandment means that children must obey their parents from birth until they marry and even after that, they are to behave honourably towards their parents.

There is no evidence in the Bible that it is wrong for parents to interfere in their children's lives. In fact Eli and David were held responsible by God for their *adult* children's behaviour! (See 1 Samuel 3:13-14 and 1 Kings 1:5-6) God viewed parental involvement as **absolutely necessary**.

The book of Proverbs, which was written by King Solomon to his adult sons, is also filled with verses that indicate that even adult children should heed their parents' instructions.

Proverbs 1:8 "Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching."

Other verses from Proverbs that repeat this message are: Proverbs 4:1, Proverbs 13:1, Proverbs 23:22, Proverbs 30:17

The following are just a few verses from the Bible that indicate that it was acceptable for parents to be involved in "giving their children in marriage", even in New Testament times:

Luke 20:34 "Jesus replied, 'The people of this age marry and are given in marriage.'"

Mark 12:25 "When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven."

God clearly uses parents to influence the lives of their children and in preparation for marriage, He intends that the wisdom and discernment of concerned parents be used to guide young adults in the selection of a mate. Godly parents may have objective insight that could affect such a life-changing decision and this could make the difference between a strong marriage and a broken one.

Now some big questions for you to consider are these:

- As a young person, am I willing to trust God to give my parents (or any other godly person of authority in my life) wisdom and discernment to guide me in this decision of a life-time?
- Am I willing to surrender my will and emotions to the authorities that God has placed over my life?
- In a nutshell you need to ask yourself: Do I trust God and do I trust my parents? Do I believe that they have my protection and my best interests at heart?

Recognising Flirtatious Behaviour

At this point of your life, finding a life-partner is still something far in the future, so let's leave the discussion of how to find a spouse for later.

Now let us look at what the Bible says about flirting and how you should respond when you encounter someone who is obviously trying to get your attention and win your affection or start a dating relationship:

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Perhaps you thought that flirting was a modern-day phenomenon. Well, it is not.

Three times in the Song of Solomon, a book about love and romance, the following warning is given: "Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and by the does of the field: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires." (Song of Solomon 2:7, 3:5 and 8:4)

The book of Proverbs also warns young men against women who are flirty.

Such a woman is referred to in Proverbs as the adulteress. However, in real life, a flirt could be a male trying to win the affection of a girl too. Have you ever noticed how differently some people behave when they are trying to get the attention of someone?



The passage that follows refers to a married woman who is trying to entice a young man into a relationship with her. You may think that this is not the same as single people getting into a romantic relationship. Hopefully by now, from the Bible passages that we have pointed out already, you will realize that God requires purity of both married and single people.

Whatever is inappropriate for a married man or woman to do with another person, is also inappropriate behaviour for young, unmarried people.

Take a look at Proverbs 7, particularly the emboldened words which will be discussed afterwards:

- 1 My son, keep my words
and store up my commands within you.
- 2 Keep my commands and you will live;
guard my teachings as the apple of your eye.
- 3 Bind them on your fingers;
write them on the tablet of your heart.
- 4 Say to wisdom, "You are my sister,"
and call understanding your kinsman;
- 5 they will keep you from the adulteress,
from the wayward wife with her **seductive words**.
- 6 At the window of my house
I looked out through the lattice.
- 7 I saw among the simple,
I noticed among the young men,
a youth who lacked judgment.

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8 He was going down the street near her corner,
walking along in the direction of her house

9 at twilight, as the day was fading,
as the dark of night set in.

10 Then out came a woman to meet him,
dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent.

11 **(She is loud and defiant,
her feet never stay at home;**

12 now in the street, now in the squares,
at every corner she lurks.)

13 She **took hold of him and kissed him
and with a brazen face she said:**

14 "I have fellowship offerings at home;
today I fulfilled my vows.

15 So I came out to meet you;
I looked for you and have found you!

16 I have covered my bed
with colored linens from Egypt.

17 I have perfumed my bed
with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon.

18 Come, let's drink deep of love till morning;
let's enjoy ourselves with love!

19 My husband is not at home;
he has gone on a long journey.

20 He took his purse filled with money
and will not be home till full moon."

21 **With persuasive words** she led him astray;
she seduced him with her **smooth talk.**

22 All at once he followed her
like an ox going to the slaughter,
like a deer stepping into a noose

23 till an arrow pierces his liver,
like a bird darting into a snare,
little knowing it will cost him his life.

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- 24 Now then, my sons, listen to me;
pay attention to what I say.
- 25 Do not let your heart turn to her ways
or stray into her paths.
- 26 Many are the victims she has brought down;
her slain are a mighty throng.
- 27 Her house is a highway to the grave,
leading down to the chambers of death.

To put this in modern language, let's refer to such a person as a flirt – someone who is flirting for your attention may do any or all of the following:

1. Use persuasive words and smooth talk (verses 5 and 21) – they will hint of their love for you, praise you, shower you with compliments and flattery.
2. Gaze at you longingly, wink at you or look at you with a special sparkle in their eye to let you know that you have their attention. They will smile and laugh with you.
3. Dress and groom themselves to capture your attention or admiration. (Verse 10)
4. Pursue you and always try to be near you, or phone you, sms you or find any excuse to talk to you. (Verse 15)
5. Try to touch you, perhaps playfully or by grabbing an arm or leg, rubbing your back, holding your hand, tousling your hair, teasing you, or tickling you. (Verse 13)
6. They may even suggest a relationship by telling you their feelings towards you and saying they want a serious romantic relationship with you. (Verse 18)
7. They will see nothing wrong with their behaviour and motives, not realizing that they are being self-seeking and entertaining the desires of their own fleshly nature. (Proverbs 30:20 says: "This is the way of an adulteress: She eats and wipes her mouth and says, 'I've done nothing wrong.' ")

Note the father's instruction regarding how to respond to this behaviour in verse 25:

"Do not let **your heart** turn to her ways or stray into her paths."

It is important to note that the son is instructed not just to avoid the flirt, but not to let *his heart* turn to her ways. In other words, he needs to guard his thoughts and feelings that may be stirred up by the flirt. He needs to keep his mind and emotions pure.

Please note, that there is nothing wrong with feeling a strong attraction to somebody or having strong feelings towards someone, but it is *what we do about those feelings* that can lead us into sins like impatience, self-seeking or selfishness, possibly lust

and many other sins that could follow. Sin first begins in the mind. Young people need to be careful not to stir up romantic desires **until the right time**.

James 1: 14-16 explains it like this: "...but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. Don't be deceived, my dear brothers."

Proverbs 4:23 says "Above all else, **guard your heart**, for it is the wellspring of life."

Perhaps if you encounter someone who flirts with you or gives you more attention than is comfortable, you should discuss this with your parents or an adult advisor whom you trust and ask for their objective advice in the situation. By doing this, you will not only gain valuable advice, but you will be building the relationship with your parents. They will learn to understand you and the issues you are dealing with and will see that you are mature enough to listen to their opinion.

No Flirting, No Dating, then What?

Increasingly, the word "courtship" is being used among Christians who have recognized the dangers of dating. Courtship can simply be defined as parent-authorized dating between two people who are both of marriageable age and are seriously contemplating marriage. However, some authors use the word courtship to describe a binding commitment or betrothal.

A word of warning: while researching this topic, we discovered that some authors have become very legalistic and have misinterpreted certain scriptures to suit their teachings, so be careful about what you read! There could be so many different situations that wisdom is needed for each unique case.

As a general guideline, we suggest that young people get to know each other as friends, in non-romantic settings such as family get-togethers, or in church or group functions. Ideally, if a young man feels attracted to a young lady, whom he believes could be a potential wife, he should first spend time in prayer seeking God's will for his life and relationships. If he then believes that he should pursue a relationship with the young lady, he should ask his parents or trusted adult advisor to also pray about the relationship and confirm what he believes.

If his parents affirm that he should propose to a certain young lady, he should then talk to her and her father. In an ideal situation, she and her parents should pray and seek the Lord's will for this decision. If the young man's offer is rejected he should have the integrity to move on with his life.



If the offer is accepted, the couple should become engaged, and there should be no reason to delay setting a wedding date.

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Since a marriage is a serious commitment, perhaps now you can understand the wisdom in both seeking approval from your parents (and the other person's parents) as well as spending time in prayer, asking God to confirm that you are making the right decision by entering into a relationship with someone. It is not a decision to be taken lightly.

If your parents have died or are not able to be a part of this decision-making process for whatever reason, it would be wise to consult another godly person who would be able to mentor you through this process.

Read the following inspiring testimony on the Internet:

- *Courtship: A Love Story* by Jennie Ethell Chancey - <http://www.new-life.net/cortshp1.htm>

Further Reading for Parents

- *Courtship Principles vs. Rules* by David Crank
<http://www.unlesstheordmagazine.com/articles/Courtship%20Principles.htm>