



## **I've got a date! Now what?**

### ***What are you supposed to do on a date?***

Perhaps the heading above made you pick up this article with a measure of curiosity. After all, I think most people have a bit of romantic streak in them. I'm sorry if I disappoint you in what follows, but I am not about to write a dater's guide of things to do and not to do, or of places to go and not to go. I'll leave that for someone else. I would like to discuss one thing, however, that couples are supposed to do on a date. I think it is very important.

Courting has the purpose of paying attention to someone in the hope of winning that person's favour with a view to marriage. Dating is a time to become acquainted with each other. It is a time to discuss and become aware of each other's commitment to the Lord, and of each other's understanding of what the Lord requires of them in marriage and in life in general. It's a time of testing each other to ensure that both share similar views and commitments. So whatever else a couple might do on a date, this should be first and foremost: they must communicate about such things.

This needs to be stated. For although young couples are spending increasingly more time together, I find they are spending less time communicating, at least on these important issues. A number of years ago I began to ask couples who intend to marry to answer a lot of detailed questions that they should be discussing together, such as: What does love mean according to the Scriptures? What evidence is there that their love for each other reflects this Scriptural definition of love? Have they thought about what they love about the other person, and why they love him/her? Have they ever given consideration to where this love originates, and on what this love depends? Are they able to define what marriage is, and explain the two-fold purpose of marriage? What does it mean for the young man that his wife-to-be is created to be his helper? Does the young man understand what is expected of him as the head of his wife and, if the Lord should bless them with children, also of his children? Does the young woman know what it means to submit? These are only a few of the many questions that need to be discussed by the couple so become aware of each other's commitment to the Lord, and of each other's understanding of what God requires of them in marriage and in life in general.

I mentioned that in general couples do not discuss in any depth the matters that should be discussed. They think that they know what the other person feels, and they assume that they share the same views and commitments. Sometimes they do. But marriage is far too important to enter into on the basis of assumptions. If there is no common understanding on some of the vital questions about marriage, about commitment to God, and about life in general, there will be added tension in the marriage, and perhaps great disappointment and heartache. Whatever couples do on their dates and during their courtship, let it be this, that they communicate!

### **How about including dad and mum?**

Can't you just picture it: going on a date with Dad and Mum sitting in the back seat! That's not what I mean, of course. Scripture shows, parents being very much involved with selecting whom their sons or daughters would marry. There seems to be much wisdom in this. Who could be a better counsellor in making such an important decision than the ones who know you perhaps even better than you know yourself?

On some occasions, the parents might know the potential suitor to whom their son or daughter is attracted. But in many occasions, they will not know him/her. Therefore it is important that opportunity is given for the parents to become well acquainted with this young man or woman. In fact, it could happen that parents have never really discussed in depth matters pertaining to marriage with their own son and daughter.

What would be very beneficial, then, is for couples to communicate with their parents. Let each spend time at the other's homes, rather than always going off alone or to the homes of friends. Let each invite the other to their home during the course of the week, and join in the evening meal. For often the dining table is also the conference table, and a lot of matters are discussed in this comfortable setting. Let each go to the other's homes on Sundays after church, when there is time for coffee and relaxed discussions. Since some matters are very personal, both parents and young couples should look for opportunities to be alone, if this is difficult because of other family members always being present, parents might occasionally "double-date" with this couple and go for a quiet meal in order to create an opportunity for personal discussion. In whatever way it is to be achieved, let there be communication between young couples and their parents.

### **How about including God?**

So far, we've stressed the need for a courting couple to communicate with each other, as well as with their parents. There is also a need for a couple to commune with God during their courtship. If the couple have fulfilled the pre-requisite for courtship, that is, if each of them have made profession of faith before the Lord and His church, they will have communion with God individually. This communion with God through the reading of His Word and through prayer is vital to their personal relationship with God. But it is also beneficial if the couple join in communion with God together as couple.

In what way will it be beneficial? In the first place, each will become more convinced of the other's devotion to God as they enjoy communion with God **together**. It is one thing to **hear** how someone **speaks** about his/her relationship with God. It is quite another thing to **see** how that person **relates** to God. It is one thing to hear someone speak about his faith, and another to see that faith in action. As the couple read and discuss the Scriptures and pray together, they will each learn how the other understands the message that God speaks to them, and how each applies it to him/herself.

In the second place, the couple will grow together spiritually. If a couple enjoy fellowship with one another, they will be entwined together in love. But when the two of them join together in communion with God, a three-fold cord will be formed. When God is given an active place in a couple's courtship (and marriage, for that matter), then the relationship ceases to be one of a young man and woman, but becomes a relationship between a young man, woman together with their Lord. A three-fold cord will be of far greater strength than any two-fold cord, especially because of the strength that the "third cord" (the Lord) adds to the relationship.

How could this be practically put into practice? It might feel funny at first. It feels ninny, because it isn't usually done. But if parents encourage their children to do this on their date, and speak about with their children, it will not seem so strange. In fact, it will be expected. And if young couples are sincere in their faith, they will not allow such feelings to stand in the way of something so noble as this.

Let the parents not only encourage the couple to have devotions together, but also provide a setting where this can occur. Rather than saying "goodbye" to each other outside the door, or saying "goodbye" while sitting in the car, parents could offer the young couple the lounge or the family room as a fitting place for them to have their evening devotions together. Who knows, this might even keep the couple from spending too much time in the car alone, where they meet with great temptations. These times of communion with God might well provide the couple with the spiritual strength to resist all sinful desires, and help them keep their bodies pure and holy.

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