



The Dating Game

Growing up in the USA I recall a TV show in which a young woman would sit and ask questions to complete strangers who were hidden from her by a wall. The point of the contest was for her to pick a man with whom she felt the most 'affinity' based on how he answered her questions. As I recall, in most cases the answers were rather 'cheesy' and in some cases very *cheeky*. The guys tried to impress the girl with suave and 'cool' answers. As the show neared the end she would choose a contestant with whom she would then go on an all-expense paid date somewhere. He would then come around from the other side of the wall and they would meet for the first time. In some cases it was apparent that the woman was thinking, 'I've made a big mistake' and in other cases the man was clearly thinking, 'I should have signed up for another game show.' But perhaps in some cases the new couple went on to marry and to 'live happily ever after'. Regardless, it was not a great way to find a spouse. The show was pretty corny but very worldly. And sadly, it would seem that often Christians approach the finding of a wife or husband in a similarly lame and just as dangerous way.

My wife recently spoke at a ladies-conference on the subject of dating and courtship. She was asked by one of the organisers if she could title the talk, 'Dating God's Way.' Jill very wisely and graciously said, "No." Her reasoning was simple: there is no God prescribed 'way' to 'date.' In fact, as far as I am aware the only *dating* mentioned in the Bible has reference to 'in the days of so and so' and 'after the reign of so and so', etc. etc.! Of course many will retort, "Amen! The Bible does not talk about dating; rather it talks about 'courtship.'" Really? I don't think so.

Now don't get me wrong, the Bible clearly reveals principles with reference to how a marriage relationship should be pursued. But there are no examples in Scripture of either the conventional *dating* model, or of the recently popular intentional-*courtship* model.

When approaching the question of 'dating' or 'courtship' what the Bible *does* reveal are numerous principles that the wise *parent* will want to learn and to apply; and which the wise 'suitor' or 'suitee' (did I just make up a word?) will want to embrace. I want to make the bold claim that when parents behave with such wisdom then the traditional 'dating game' will be knocked for a six and will be replaced with an intentional courtship approach. And in the end, everyone wins.

So what does this wisdom look like? Well, an entire book, and then some, might be required to address the many issues. But let me mention a few of these.

A first area of wisdom is awareness of our propensity to *superficial attraction*. Eve was enticed to eat of the forbidden fruit initially because she 'saw' something about it that led to her *forgetting* what she had *heard* from God (Gen 3:6). Our children, particularly our teenage children, need to be on guard against being superficially attracted by appearances that may lead to their partaking of forbidden fruit. After all, many young women have given up their virginity because the guy was so deceptively suave and persuasive. And many rotten marriages have come to be as the result of superficial judgments of character. When it comes to pursuing a relationship with someone of the opposite sex, be as wise as a serpent or else you may get bitten by one.

Second, in a romantic relationship there is always the danger of *sexual temptation*. The traditional 'dating game' often results in everyone losing. When a man and woman (regardless of age) are 'interested' in each other (yes, you can tell!) they should be very careful. The Bible repeatedly warns about the dangers of sexual sin. I have this pretty basic premise: if you don't touch then you can't fornicate. Be wise. I am not being prescriptive. I am however giving a warning. Avoid being in

a situation where fornication can take place. If a couple is alone and in the dark it is doubtful that the first thing on their mind is to have a prayer meeting.

Third, when 'boy meets girl' the issue of *marital intention* is an issue of biblical wisdom in pursuing the relationship. How foolish for early teens to pursue a romantic relationship when the possibility of marriage is so far away! To fail to recognize this often leads to so much unnecessary heartache for young people; and sadly, it can leave scars of many kinds; wounds that are difficult to heal. Pursuing *friendship* is the first step towards pursuing marriage. Be friends first and 'lovers' *much* later.

Fourth, let me emphasise what I personally believe is the biggest problem when it comes to the dating game — *parental abdication*. Parents, it's ok to say "No." In fact in many cases it is the most responsible thing to say.

As I have taught for over two decades, the daughter's virginity is the responsibility of her father (see Deut 22:13-21). This is why the Bible teaches that the father is the one who *gives* his daughter in marriage (1 Cor 7:36-38). He is responsible to give a chaste gift to a chaste son in law. Fathers on both sides of the wedding aisle have a huge responsibility. So what does this have to do with 'dating' and 'courtship?' Almost everything.

Parents must not abdicate their responsibility to oversee the 'romantic interests' of their children. And if this means constantly giving a cold shower to their 'feelings' then keep the water running. Be involved. Be watchful. Be intentional. There is a whole lot resting on your shoulders.

I understand that such an intentional approach may make other parents, or a 'suitor', or your own child upset. Well, at the risk of being misunderstood, *too bad*. They will get over it. And if they don't, then regardless, don't cave to the fear of man; rather fear the Lord. After all, as Job instructed us long before there was a 'dating game', '*the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*' (Job 28:28). Be wise, your children one day will thank you for it.

P.S. Mark is dealing with dating in the FBH class 'The Christian and Culture'. For further reading I recommend, '*Her Hand in Marriage*', by Douglas Wilson; '*I Kissed Dating Goodbye*', by Josh Harris as well as his follow up, '*Boy Meets Girl*.'

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