

Love that Lasts

Why Sexual Desire Is Best Fulfilled in Marriage

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Bible quotations are from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise noted.

Other Bible abbreviations: KJV (King James Version), NKJV (New King James Version), NLT (New Living Translation), and NRSV (New Revised Standard Version)

Within Bible quotations, **boldfacing**, underscoring and words enclosed in brackets [...], have been added by this author.

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Why This Article Is Different

This article explains the essential principles that will help singles find a lifetime of love and sex within a marriage. It is written primarily to **young people and their parents** as both often make major mistakes and do not work together as well as they could. Older singles and divorcees will find it helpful, too, as the topics covered have a great effect on how they got into their present state.

With millions of writings on sex and marriage available today, how is this one any different?

It is very different. The vast majority of writings on the subject of sex fall into these three categories:

- 1) **Books and articles primarily designed to be exciting and appealing so they will sell lots of copies.** These make money for publishers and authors, but whether they help or ruin the lives of their readers is of little importance. These represent most of what one will find for sale today.
- 2) **Writings sincerely designed to help readers find sexual happiness, but without wisdom and teaching from the Creator of sex.** The conclusions in these works are based on experimentation and observation, and they differ widely in approach. A few come very close to rediscovering the biblical teaching.
- 3) **Writings based upon the Bible, but with varying amounts of understanding.** Some of these writings are very good, but many mix church traditions and manmade rules with Bible teaching. Some make the mistake of saying God's way is not as fun as the "world's way", but you have to follow God to avoid "burning in hell forever". In reality, God's way is best for now and the afterlife—it is the massive false advertising of sex in our society that makes God's way appear difficult and less fun.

This article presents a sound Biblical view of sex and marriage and then goes on to explain why it works today, and why so many other approaches that seem exciting do not work. The information presented here comes from thorough Bible study, a wide variety of reading, and many real-life situations personally observed by the author over several decades. It has much to recommend to parents as well as singles—and religious teachers, too.

Sex is a wonderful thing, but like any other resource that God gives us, we must manage it well. Indeed, a main part of our existence is to learn to manage our life resources (Matthew, 25:14–46 tells the story). A young person with a strong body can make it last a lifetime—or they may destroy it in a few months by binge drinking, fast driving, dangerous drugs or continual partying. A man who inherits a million dollars can use it for a lifetime of accomplishment, or can spend it in a few days and lose nearly all of his friends at the same time.

A person's sex life is a lot like the above examples. One can nurture it and enjoy it for a lifetime, or one can destroy it in a short time by a seared conscience, bitter emotions and/or a debilitating sexually transmissible disease.

This article will be most helpful to people who are willing to think about the future as well as the present. People who only think about "**what they want** right now" often must reach the point where bad decisions cause them to be "**suffering miserably** right now", and then they will think about their future. This writer hopes that you will be willing to think about your future before more trouble comes.

Not a Whitewash

This article accepts the biblical teaching that sex belongs only in marriage: "You shall not **commit adultery**" (Ex 20:14) and that God "hates divorce" (Mal 2:16). But it will not be so foolish as to state that all religious leaders and parents who claim to teach from the Bible teach it accurately—or obey its teaching themselves. Nor will this writer claim that everyone who attempts to live by Bible teaching on sex has a trouble-free life.

But you must be realistic and willing to think past the barrage of TV, movie and print media that continually tell us that sex with almost anyone, anywhere can be a good thing.

Think about all of the people whom you know well—not the ones who appear to always have a happy smile, but the ones whom you have really spoken with and shared inner thoughts. How many have been really happy to grow up in a single-parent family? How many did not care that they did not know who their father was? How many had no lasting bad effects from their parents' affairs or divorces? If you don't know anyone from this kind of background, it would be helpful to get to know them—especially if one is thinking about living a life of "sexual freedom".

On the other hand, has every life-long monogamous marriage produced happy, content children? No, marriages and child rearing can fail for many reasons other than sexual promiscuity. But from this author's own experience, plus the writings of many others, most people who describe their childhood as happy and positive come from a family of two parents who were faithful to each other.

If you do not know anyone like this, it would be good for you to try to get to know a couple like this. Where do you find them? Look for happy couples who work together in a church, charity or other volunteer-type of group. Do not necessarily look at the highest-ranking leaders or the most dynamic preachers—there can be a lot of vanity in those positions—look for those who consistently cheerfully serve in responsible, even if mundane, positions. Couples who have their jobs, home and children under control, but who are still able to make time to voluntarily serve others and who willingly choose to work together are often a good example of how a happy marriage can work.

Even some honest modern sociology research finds that people, regardless of religious beliefs, enjoy sex the most with the person with whom they had it first. This explains the common practice of people with marriage troubles spending hundreds of hours or thousands of dollars to locate their high school or college “sweethearts”. It also shows that God had our best interests at heart when he told us to find one good mate when we are young, and to stay with them for life. He put it like this:

May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer—may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love (Prov 5:18–19).

Some people may feel uncomfortable with explicit talk, as in the Bible verse above. When God, parents or other respectable people talk about sex, it can often “feel” embarrassing or unnecessary—hard to take. But the same subjects and body parts can be mentioned in TV shows or in song lyrics, and most people do not rush to turn them off. Through years of exposure, many people have learned to tolerate explicit references to sex in entertainment, but not in respectable life. This is not good. The Bible takes the approach of straightforwardly talking about sex whenever it is necessary. This avoids the extreme common in entertainment or among some young people where nearly every conversation contains a joke or reference to sex. It also avoids the opposite

extreme common among some religious or older people where sex is either never mentioned, or spoken of in such cloudy terms that one has a difficult time understanding what was meant.

Because this article is written to a wide audience, some may find it too explicit; others may find it too vague. It assumes that the reader has a basic understanding of sexual practices. If the reader does not, he or she is encouraged to talk to his or her parents. Unfortunately, parents are not always able or willing to talk about the subject, in which case you should obtain one or more books on the subject. There are thousands available today. Christian authors tend to err by mixing their own ideas and theology with the clear teachings of the Bible. Secular authors tend to err by mixing harmful deviant sexual practices with the God-designed use of sex. Probably no book is perfect. Keeping this in mind, one may simply search local or Internet bookstores for something appropriate. One Christian Internet source is: www.diskbooks.org/bsf.html

Two books this author found are: *The Sex Education Dictionary for Today's Teens & Pre-Teens* by Dean Dr. Hoch, Nancy Hoch, Camille H. Severe (Illustrator); 116 pages; Landmark Publications, 1990; ISBN 0962420905.

Celebration of Sex for Newlyweds by Douglas Rosenau; 128 pages; Tomas Nelson, 2002; ISBN 0785265236.

If One Does Not Marry, What are the Alternatives?

Many singles frequently say something like this, “Marriage is too far away for me to think about right now, but that doesn't mean I don't have an interest in sex”. That is an honest and true statement. Many young people hope that they will be married someday, but for now, they are just kind of taking each day at a time, “crossing each bridge as they come to it”. Indeed, men and women with advanced behavioral science degrees will recommend that very philosophy. “If you don't know where you are going, it doesn't matter which road you take”—just take the easiest road each time. But that is not likely to result in life-long happiness.

If one says, “I don't want to think about marriage now”, it is important to realize that one is then choosing one of the lifetime alternatives to marriage. Yes, a change of mind can come later. But a life-long happy marriage is most likely to result from life-long efforts toward that goal—both before and after the wedding.

Some very attractive and capable young people may say, “I don’t want the strings of marriage tying me down right now”. It is hard for them to also realize that they are also saying: “I plan to live the end of my life alone, with no family.” The latter sounds rather awful, but young people should think about it now. If they do not marry, what will happen? Their parents are most likely to die before they do. Their siblings, if any, may move to different parts of the country. Without marriage, they will have no children, no spouse. It is not quite so easy for people over 50 to hop over to a club and find companions in the way that young people do.

Many young people who were raised in a two-parent family—whether it was stable or in turmoil—take the benefits of a family for granted. It is easy to forget about the times when their family was there to care for them when they were sick or dejected. They do not yet know what it is like to be sick in bed and realize that nobody really cares whether they ever get up again or not. They have forgotten how many times they were out of money, needed food or needed a place to stay and their parents filled in. Many young people do not fully appreciate the work that their parents did for them, nor are they thinking much about how they will do that work for their children.

If you do not prepare for a monogamous marriage—sex with only your spouse—**you are preparing for something else**, whether you plan it out or just let it happen. There are basically four alternatives to life-long marriage (with some possible combinations of those alternatives):

1. Celibacy—no plans to marry or have sex.

This is a very difficult option to maintain in a world where sex is continually brought to mind. It produces few emotional scars, but it does leave people very unfulfilled. Nevertheless, it is the best alternative for those who are not planning to be married someday. But in the big picture, God commands us to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:27–28) and to marry (Gen 2:24). Only in rare instances, God gives certain people a mission in life that precludes them from marrying (Matt 19:28–30). Jesus and Paul (1Cor 9:5) are two examples. Of the many people, such as certain religious priests, who plan to be celibate, success is only rarely achieved. Secret sex (both straight and gay) and guilt are commonplace. Even the apostle Paul said: “But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion” (1Cor 7:9). If one

has any interest in sex at all, it is much more sensible to plan for marriage than it is to plan for celibacy, then one day find celibacy unbearable, yet find oneself unprepared for marriage.

2. A series of sexual relationships. Even psychologists who do not believe in God often conclude that sex belongs only in loving relationships. They recommend a level of emotional and intellectual intimacy before a couple engages in sexual intimacy—but not necessarily a long-term commitment. (At least they have the Bible teaching half-right!)

People who engage in sexual relationships without lifetime commitment will almost always have a **series** of relationships. Only rarely, do **uncommitted** couples start sharing sex and later decide to remain true for life. Whether some or all of these relationships involve formal marriage is not much of a factor. To God, a marriage intended to last until someone wants a divorce is little different than a couple simply living together. While the Bible positively mentions big wedding feasts, it never mentions a minister or priest “pronouncing a couple ‘man and wife’”. Indeed, it shows that the willingness for people to marry and sexual intercourse between the couple produce a marriage (Ex 22:16, Gen 34:2–4; Deut 22:28–29). The Bible says that righteous Isaac “brought her [Rebekah] into his mother Sarah’s tent; and he took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her” (Gen 24:67, NKJV). So whether a person has a long list of wedding ceremonies, or just a series of live-in partners, the effect is about the same to God—and to any children who might be dragged along through the mess.

When people have a series of sexual relationships, they are almost never happy—each usually lasts until it becomes so bad that one or more parties breaks it up. Even the most popular, attractive people (in Hollywood or your home town) rarely say: “I’m on my 12th girlfriend and I think this is the way to live” or “I’ve enjoyed meeting and then breaking up with all nine of my boyfriends.” No. Even the most glamorous people admit that there are many “hurts” involved with serial sexual relationships. (Please realize that “stars” are sometimes paid to give dishonest interviews where they will claim that the swinging, single life is great—but that is usually just to “keep their image” which sells their movies, music, etc.)

Multiple sexual relationships frequently lead down one of two paths: a) more and more shallow relationships, which tend to be shorter and shorter;

b) longer but fewer relationships, suffering more and more from the hurt of each breakup—sometimes stopping altogether. Both of these paths leave many people wishing they had one good relationship.

3. Casual sex—sex without relationships.

Sex merely for entertainment with little long-term emotional attachment is continually depicted as “normal” by nearly all media today. Those involved are usually shown as young and glamorous, having fun with few adverse consequences. The media contains thousands of times as many references to casual sex as it does references to the one million abortions per year, the 12 million new cases of STDs each year, or the fifth of our population over 12 infected with the genital herpes virus (USA stats from www.cdc.gov, www.ama-assn.org/special/std. Please read the section on Sexually Transmissible Diseases later in this paper.)

Nearly all STDs result from casual sex. Much harder to measure are the many broken lives—even suicides—which also result from sex without relationships. This category includes singles and married “swingers” who meet many people to have sex “for fun”, as well as those who pay or receive money for sex. Indeed the lines between dating and prostitution are often very blurry. There are singles bars and hangouts where people go to meet someone for free sex—everyone who goes there knows that. In other establishments, men buy drinks and maybe dinner or a “gift” and women will have sex with them. The activities there are usually called “dating”, but the only thing that legally separates them from prostitution is a verbal or written price list. Whether or not a price list is used, the dynamics of these places much more resemble competitive businesses than loving relationships. Sexual favors are received based upon the gifts given in exchange. Pretty or exciting women usually receive more than homely or dull women do. Ugly men have to pay more than handsome men do.

While sex within a loving relationship—especially a life-long one—tends to produce satisfaction, casual sex tends to leave both people feeling empty. What they are missing is a mentally, emotionally and spiritually intimate relationship. But the sex industry continually offers bigger, faster, “better”, more exciting and different kinds of sex. So in a vain quest for fulfillment, people often “progress” to multiple partners, bizarre sex, homosexuality, bondage, sado-masochism, bestiality, necrophilia (sex with dead people) or other more perverse things

that they once thought they would never do. Some give up on sex entirely, while others may repent of the mess and try to pick up the pieces and establish a marriage for the rest of their lives.

4. Homosexuality. This category is the end result of several paths through the world’s errant sexual maze. Some people become homosexual either due to overly dominant, or else absent parents. Children who were molested when they were young—especially if it is by their parents or an authority figure—can develop homosexuality. Biological disorders and environmental toxins have been shown to create homosexual tendencies in a few cases. Also, adults who have many bad experiences with the opposite sex sometimes give up on it and resort to relationships with people of their own sex. Bisexuals often have their first homosexual experience simply because it is a “new and different thing to try”—just like they have tried so many diverse heterosexual practices. Still others enter into homosexuality simply because they live with or near other homosexuals and their practices are introduced as normal to them. Although many homosexuals claim that their tendencies are hereditary, there is little genetic logic in the claim. Since very few homosexuals have children, any “homosexual genes” would just die out of the population.

The Bible teaches against homosexual sex acts, just as it teaches against adultery, idol worship and other practices that are common today. However, the Bible teaches: “If we confess our sins, He [Jesus] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1Jo 1:9, NKJV). Homosexuals need to know that recovery is possible and that Christ will help them. Help is available through groups like the **National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuals**, 16633 Ventura Boulevard Suite 1340, Encino, CA 91436-1801; 818-789-4440, fax: 818-789-6452; Internet: www.narth.com. A list of Christian groups that help homosexuals may be found on the Internet at www.sw-mins.org/homosexuals.html

Nobody needs to feel hopeless because he or she is presently in one of the above categories. Satan has deceived the whole world (Rev 12:9). We are all sinners in need of repentance, forgiveness and recovery from our sins. But it is better for everyone involved if they can stay out of the above categories. Single people need to plan to fulfill their sexual needs by planning for a life-long marriage. Initially those plans will largely involve getting to know a lot

of people, learning to get along well with them, learning what kind of person one would like to marry and keeping oneself sexually pure. **It is much easier to remain sexually pure when one has plans to marry than when one is simply adrift.** It is important to read the Bible and to get to know enough happily married people that you are convinced that marriage is the **best** way to produce the ultimate sexual satisfaction: physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually.

Changes for Parents and Young People

Sex outside of marriage is so common today primarily because the entertainment media, schools and government treat it like it is the normal, reasonable thing to do. The “carefree fun” aspect is greatly overstated and the pitfalls are usually ignored. On the opposite side, parents and religious groups do not often accurately describe married life, and they may place additional burdensome teachings on young people who do not belong.

In reality, there is much that both single people and their parents can do to make marriages, and sex within marriage, more enjoyable and more effective. Let us learn what the Bible says on the subject and consider what parents and young people need to do—this writer actually has more to say to parents than to their children. Readers who are older singles will find this section helpful in understanding their own personal difficulties that originated from their teen and young adult years.

In most western nations, young people select their own mates, sometimes obtaining only token approval from the parents. In other countries, and throughout much of history, parents chose mates for their children. Which is best? The Bible gives examples of both methods, and indeed both parents and young people need to work together. Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac and it worked out well (Gen 24:3–4), but Rebecca made the final decision to go (Gen 24:58). Samson wanted a Philistine wife, so he asked his parents to get her for him—against their better judgment—and it worked out badly (Jdgs 14:1–3). Isaac and Rebecca told Jacob to marry one of the “daughters of Laban” (Gen 28:1) and he did. But he personally decided he wanted Rachel over Leah (Gen 29:17–18) then Laban tricked him and gave him Leah anyway. Should his parents have warned him about “tricky Laban”? Esau married women contrary to his parent’s wishes (Gen 26:34–35). The Bible contains many other examples of parents choosing wives, as well as exam-

ples of the young people choosing them (David, Solomon, etc.) Some of each worked out good and some bad.

God’s original command, however, goes directly to the young man, commanding **him to leave** his mother and father and be united to his wife:

For this reason a **man will leave** his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame (Gen 2:24–25).

This scripture doesn’t say anything about a woman’s responsibility (or lack thereof) to leave home. While there is no scripture commanding daughters to marry only who their parents choose, it does seem a biblical practice for fathers to approve of their marriage (Ex 22:17; Deut 7:3, Judges 3:6). But when a father is unable to do this, daughters can clearly do it themselves (Num 36:6). The Bible says that ultimately, God chooses good mates:

He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD (Prov 18:22).

Parents and young people should be working together, seeking God’s guidance in finding a mate. So often, it seems that neither parents nor children are listening to each other or listening to God.

Parents and numerous Christian writings will do a fairly good job of expounding **problems** that young people typically face:

- 1) They are too interested in the fun of marriage and not well enough prepared for the responsibilities necessary to take care of a household and eventual family.
- 2) They are “blinded by love” and do not see the real character traits and likely difficulties of their intended spouse.
- 3) They do not talk to their parents. They often do not seek or listen to their parents’ advice.
- 4) They think they know a lot more than they really do.

Every one of these problems is a fairly common occurrence, though there are also young people who *are* responsible, who *are not* “blinded by love”, who *do* listen to parents and who *do* realize that they need more knowledge. All young people need to realize that their parents were once young, and that they have a certain amount of practical wisdom that has been tested over time. Parents, who have watched their children grow up from birth, know a lot about their son and daughter’s characteristics

how they best succeed, and how they fail. God knew what He was doing when He said:

Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you (Ex 20:12).

Even though it may be difficult to talk to parents, and even though their imperfections may be more than obvious, God still indicates that long life comes from honoring them. That does not mean that the young adult must do everything they say, but it means that they should listen and have a good reason why they are deviating from their parents' instruction.

If parents have some of the problems listed below, it may help a young person to take this part of the article to them, or to simply ask their parents to overcome these problems. These are the main difficulties that parents have in helping their older children find a spouse:

1. Parents need to learn to treat their own grown children like capable human beings. The very nature of sex ought to make it clear to parents that its proper use can only be assured if the young person learns what is right. Each person's sexual parts are located on **their** body and under their **control**—God did not give parents a biological way to “lock them up” until they were ready to be married. Parents who think they can physically prevent a young person from having sex by never allowing them to be alone with someone else are deluding themselves. This writer knows of so many cases where teens met up with their lovers by either telling their parents they would be one place but going to another, by sneaking out of their houses late at night, by quietly slipping into a bathroom together at a “supervised” party, etc., etc. Physical control has its place, but reaching a child's mind is by far the most important.

Because parents know all of their children's past faults, they often fail to see when they mature. It is very frustrating to a young person who sees his (or her) parents treat his friends with respect—like they can be trusted to be out on their own—but then treats their own child like he always needs to be watched and checked. This true story will illustrate the point:

When I was young, I was very interested in tools and building things. My father was an engineer and had many tools. I liked building things too, but I had a wild streak in me, so Dad was slow to let me use his power saw that was potentially quite dangerous.

When I was 15, I went to a friend's house to work on a high school float, he handed me his power saw and said, “Here, you probably know the most about this.” So my first use of a power saw was not with my father's expert guidance or even an instruction manual, but based solely on my distant memory of how he used it and a very keen alertness to figure it out as I went along, making sure that I did not hurt myself, and still trying to look like I knew what I was doing in front of my friends. It all worked out fine—but it was a long time before I told my father about it.

How many times does this same sort of thing happen with more important issues such as relationships and marriages? How many parents spend years trying to make sure that their teens are never alone with the opposite sex—even for short times when they would be close by and with long-time friends? How many teens then have their first “alone” experience when they are somewhere that their parents do not know about and possibly with someone of uncertain moral character?

Parents should rightly say “no” to many of the things that younger children request. For example, it is good to say “no” to the eleven-year-old who wants to go on a “date” because friends are doing it. But how many parents say “no” for so long that they never stop to think when it will be time to say “yes”? I have had numerous conversations with parents who said: “my child is not ready for that”. I would go on to ask them, “When will your child be ready? At a certain age? Are there specific signs of maturity that you are looking for?” Usually, the parents had no answer at all—**they had clearly never even thought about the time when their child might be ready.** In some cases, I knew their teen and saw little evidence that the young person was being irresponsible or was not capable of doing what they were asking permission to do.

2. Parents need to assure their near-adult children that they love them and are willing to continue working with them even though they disagree with them. When a young person spends a significant amount of time away from home in school, work or other places, parents *cannot* control their every action. Again, this writer knows of so many cases where a young person has a difference with the parent and they are afraid that their parents will not “be able to handle it” if they tell them, so they keep it a secret—along with everything else about their opposite-sex relationships. The “differ-

ence” of which the parent does not approve could be something as simple as wearing certain clothes, or as important as dating or marrying someone.

This writer knows of cases where young people loved their parents, attended church with them and had a strong personal belief in God, but who planned a marriage without their parent’s knowledge—because they were afraid of what their parents might do if they told them. Some parents recovered right away, others took years before they were even ready to talk to their child. (This is not to say that parents should not have rules against serious sin. Indeed, some parents tell their teens that they may not live at home if they have an ongoing sexual relationship—fornication. They may also tell their teens that if they get pregnant or get someone pregnant, that they must support that child, and if they will not, their inheritance will. There is a vast difference between this kind of sin and a disobedience of parent’s wishes.)

3. Parents must not trivialize their son’s and daughter’s problems—especially the ones that are not trivial. Every parent remembers a time when their teen became upset by another teen who said something mean or embarrassed them in some way. They also remember a time when their teen just “had to” have a certain kind of clothing or go a certain place. With these issues, a parent can assure the child that life will go on without them. But as teens grow into young adults, relationships with their friends become naturally very important to them. When a young person wants to stay up late talking to a close friend with a problem, or wants to miss an “important” school activity to visit a friend who is sick, parents often respond without thinking, “Oh, that isn’t important. Go to bed.” Or, “Go to school.” Now the parent might stay up or miss work to help *their* friend in need. But the parent’s refusal to let their children do the same says to the young person, “my friendships matter, but yours do not”.

The problems tend to get even worse when it comes to marriage. Parents often have a list of requirements for their children’s spouse: a virgin, from a good family, from our church, about your age, with a similar ethnic and educational background, etc. etc. None of these ideas are wrong in themselves. Yet many young people are faced with the question, “**Is there anybody whom Mom and Dad would approve of me marrying?**” And furthermore, is there enough variety available that I can find someone I like as well as someone who likes

me?” The typical Christian parent answer is, “I don’t know of anyone, but don’t worry, God will provide somebody”. The young person feels like there is little hope and nothing he or she can do. What would the parent do if they realized that they would have to move or find a new job in just a few years? Would they simply say, “God will provide,” and not think about it until the time came? Or would they begin looking for possible houses and jobs right away? Would they be discouraged and depressed if there seemed to be **no** possibilities? Yes, young people can have the faith that God will provide for them, but the question “Is there anyone whom I can marry?” ought not to be treated as trivial—especially by parents who may not exhibit any more faith than their children.

4. Parents must not take an “all negative” role in helping their young people find a mate. It is so easy for parents to say, “I am going to raise my children right, I am going to stop them from doing anything bad.” They forget about helping them to do things that are good. How many young people, new to the world of boy-girl relationships, have been put down the first time they mention an opposite-sex interest to their parents? Frequently, when a teen first “lights up” when a specific person calls or meets them face to face, parents too often tease them (“John’s got a girlfriend”) or cut them off (“Jane, you’re too young to be interested in boys”). These young people are not plotting evil, and their parents are not trying to hurt them. But this process of treating their feelings lightly is harmful. It drives teens to talk about their boy-girl interests to other teens or other non-condemning adults rather than to their parents.

An even more serious problem occurs when young adults begin to get seriously interested in a possible mate, and then after much thinking, they cautiously mention him or her to a parent. How often do they get a terse, un-thought-out response like, “Too short”, “From a bad family”, “Too weak”, “Too wild”, “Too dumb”, “Not from our church”, or even “Do I know her?” or simply “Him???” The young person feels crushed; all that they had hoped to confide in their parents may be held inside, or said to someone else instead. While it is possible that the parents three-word complaint may be valid, parents need to realize that their son or daughter is not “perfect” and that there are **not** lots of other “perfect” spouses just waiting to be married. Every potential spouse will have some negative character-

istics. People who think otherwise are deceiving themselves. Parents who are quick to reject a potential mate for one or two weaknesses, without also carefully observing the corresponding strengths, drive their children either to make decisions without them, or to stay single. Parents need to realize that they are discussing the **rest of their sons' and daughters' lives not the parents' lives** and that they should be *working with them*, not ordering them around as if they are still age six.

If a parent wants a good dose of reality, they should try making a list of a few people whom they think might someday make *acceptable* mates for their offspring. You are not looking for “the one”—your child does not even have to like them now. It might help to imagine that a government is going to draft your *unmarried* children to fight in some bloody but unnecessary Vietnam-like war; whom would you rather have your child marry instead of being sent away to die somewhere? This exercise will quickly show you that the situation is not simple, that there are compromises to be made and that you probably do not know your children's peers as well as you would like to. Remember that this is just an exercise, not a plan to badger your children about whom you think they should marry. A big part of raising older children is thinking about what would be best for them, teaching them when they are ready, but accepting the decisions that they make even when they are not as good as the parent thinks they could be.

Parents also need to avoid going from one ditch to the other. Sometimes, parents will drive away every possible mate that their young people find—and then as they begin to reach 30, the parents suddenly realize that their children may never raise a family, so they immediately begin accepting any person whom their children might possibly mention. Parents need to find the right balance between too much and too little advice.

5. Parents need to balance their encouragement to “get a good education and a good job” with their young people's need for love and sex. There is no doubt that many marriages have failed because young people thought about the love and sex part, but were ill prepared economically. But there is also no doubt that when parents put all the emphasis on education, jobs, and buying things before marriage, that some of their children end up not marrying, or marrying too late in life to have children. Indeed, some advanced college degrees are

typically completed by people of ages 25 to 30. Before graduates from these programs marry, they may need to go through a few more years of “internship”, work long hours in a “first job” and/or partly pay off some huge school loans. Many singles do not make it through all of this, and end up having “a little sex on the side”. This is not due to evil plans, but due to our media's over-emphasis on sex or even due to simple loneliness. Taking 6 to 12 years after high school to get an extensive education and a good job may be a good plan for some people, but not for everyone. If someone is more interested in getting married, even if it means a lower economic status, that is not evil—and it is **much better** than working 10 years for the “great job” and fornicating along the way. As Paul said, “But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion” (1Cor 7:9).

Having a good job and money is helpful in finding a mate, but there are other drawbacks worth thinking about for those planning not to marry until their late 20s or early 30s. One is that people who are willing to do this are often those who have more than average difficulty meeting others socially. Many of these will find more difficulty meeting people at 29 than they did at 19. Also, people who have been single for 10 years tend to be much more “set in their ways” and fussy about whom they might accept. Finally, at this age, a large percentage of the “good mates” are already married. It often **does not** work well for two people who have a big investment in schooling to marry each other. If one needs to relocate for the benefit of his or her career path, it may be a disaster for the other's career. Therefore, people with many years of school often end up looking to marry someone substantially younger than themselves—which adds its own set of problems. Many years of college often does make more money available, but it also significantly reduces the number of available mates.

What Does the Bible Say Is Important? Love & Sex or Practicality?

The Bible actually shows that love and sex, as well as responsibility, are important. Today's media emphasizes love and sex almost exclusively. Other generations have emphasized almost exclusively practicality—jobs, home-making, babies, etc. Parents and church groups tend to emphasize the type of husband or wife that is described in Proverbs 31—hard-working, prosperous, well-known, God-fearing, etc. They may like to quote verse 30:

“Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.” These words are all true. A charming beautiful person can be deceptive—especially if they are incapable in other important areas of life. It is a sad thing to see a person who spent their early years learning to put on the best “male” or “female” image, but who has almost no knowledge of how to do the work of marriage. But practicality is not everything.

It is also sad to see someone well qualified for the practical aspects of marriage, but who is so unattractive and boring that nobody will marry them. Even some “Christian” books will actually claim that placing importance on romantic love and sex is a modern practice, or that the Greeks or some other pagans invented this practice. **The truth is, love and sex have been an important part of biblical marriages for a long time.** King Solomon, who had experience with 1,000 wives (1Kngs 11:13), realized that *one* man with *one* woman was the best way to enjoy sex:

May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer—may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love (Prov 5:18–19).

These verses clearly state that young people should enjoy a spouse with a nice body and be “captivated by love”. These things should be a part of anyone’s marriage plans. Both Sarai (Abraham’s wife) and Rebekah (Isaac’s wife) were specifically listed as beautiful (Gen 12:11; 24:16). Why did Jacob choose Rachel?

Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel was **lovely in form, and beautiful** (Gen 29:17).

So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him **because of his love for her** (Genesis 29:20).

Yes, Jacob understood Solomon’s proverb hundreds of years before he wrote it: He liked Rachel’s form and he was so “captivated by love” that he barely noticed seven years of hard work. The Hebrew here translated “lovely in form” definitely refers to the shape of Rachel’s body. There is no need of any biblical explanation for what makes a woman “lovely in form”, what makes an attractive man, or what it means to be “in love”. Young people of all generations have figured out these things.

Other scriptures show that God does place some emphasis on physical appearance and beauty. When God gave an analogy of ancient Israel as his bride (Ezk 16), he did not talk about her attributes of be-

ing a hard-working housewife, but talked about how He made her beautiful, and then how she abused it.

Does this mean that if a woman is not “lovely in form” or if a man is small or thin that they cannot be happily married? Absolutely not! Some of the best marriages of which this writer is aware are between people who were not particularly good looking, but who love each other as they are, and who simply are not in competition with others. Good-looking people can have good marriages too, but they have more trouble with personal vanity or with being deceived by others who “want them for their looks”.

In summary, it is biblically sound for young people to look for a mate who is sexually attractive to them, and parents should honor that. But sex is not everything. It must be weighed in balance with the emotional, spiritual, physical (job, household maintenance, etc.) and other aspects of marriage.

Talking More Important than Restricting

My experience and study has led me to believe that most Christians still do not have the best understanding when it comes to how we think and talk about the bodies God has given us. At times, we get carried along in what amounts to modern “sex-worship”, and at other times we are still influenced by the prudery of the past. This section gets a bit explicit, but then so do parts of the Bible. If a parent is not comfortable reading about these things, then I hope they will think about how effective they will be at talking to their young people about them.

A century ago, the approach to raising teenagers was often to keep them ignorant of sex almost until it was time for them to marry. Young women would literally think they had been injured when they had their first period; men might seek medical help when they had their first nocturnal emission (wet dream). This no-knowledge approach was successful when nearly everyone in a specific community used it, but could also produce disasters when an unprincipled person with sexual knowledge visited the town. It was easy for them to tell other ignorant young people that “sex is the good stuff of life and your parents just don’t want you to know about it so you will just work for them”. Untaught teens may find that kissing and touching each other did feel wonderful, without knowing a thing about diseases, pregnancy or even an exact physical definition of what it means to “commit adultery”.

Today, the only people who successfully raise their young people this way are those in private communities that shut out all outside media. The

average child with access to public schools, TV or the Internet can learn about sex as soon as they are interested. Unfortunately, many parents still do not teach their children young enough, or speak openly enough to their teens. They may use the excuse, “I didn’t know those things when I was their age.” But this is a different world.

Another common mistake parents make is trusting in the rating systems on movies, video games, etc. The idea behind these ratings is to prevent certain knowledge from reaching their children before they are “ready to handle it”. But the ratings are assigned based upon specific content, not upon moral context. For example, a war movie may have an “R” rating because it accurately portrays profanity, corruption, killing, rape—things that really happen in war. If the film is accurate and recognizes good as good and evil as evil, it may be a very good thing for teens to see. They can understand the evil of war without having to be in one. Yet another “R” rated movie may have pointless sex and violence portrayed as “normal” and is not good for anyone to see. On the other hand, many “G” rated movies and prime time television shows do not explicitly show sex, violence or profanity, but they contain a continual stream of lies, cheating, references to sex outside of marriage, threats of violence, ridicule of parents, new age religion, etc. These are far more damaging to children than the “R” rated war movie mentioned above, because children often assume they are all right because they are “G” rated and because their parents are usually not there when they are watching them. Too many children have received their sex education from “G” rated productions—which usually teaches nothing about morality, little about pregnancy prevention, and almost nothing about preventing STDs.

Parents can do more by reading reviews of movies and TV shows rather than trusting the ratings. But parents do the most by concentrating on trying to be with their children and explain things to them rather than on just trying to restrict them. Frequently, the more one tries to restrict things that are “for older people”, the more children want to know about them. It is only natural that children want to be “grown up” and not to miss the “good stuff” that older people do. So children borrow videos and magazines from their friends, older siblings or even their parents. They maybe copy them and share them with other children who do not have such access. Children with full Internet access e-mail stories and pictures to those with restricted access.

From this writer’s experience, many children are more skilled than their parents are at operating VCRs, copiers and computers. Those few who never see the “forbidden stuff” probably hear about it from their friends.

Any system that tries to confine access to “bad stuff” only to “older people” is doomed to fail. It may protect some young people, but it drives others to get it. And what is worse, **because the children know they are “not supposed to have it”**, they do not talk to their parents about it when they get it. Parents add to the rift: when they hear their child use a slang sexual term or talk about a sex act that they consider improper, they may say: “I don’t want to hear you talk like that again.” From this writer’s experience, most teens (even whose parents have talked to them about sex) have one set of sexual words and concepts that they can talk about with their parents, and another set that they only talk about with their friends—realizing that their parents may not want to hear the latter set.

It is a wise and courteous thing to avoid words that would offend other people, but this two-standard concept in general discourages open talk between parents and young people. The solution is three-fold:

- 1) Parents need to be willing to listen and stay calm even when they hear things they do not like.
- 2) Young people need to be more willing to talk to their parents—using terms that they know are less likely to upset their parents, but not avoiding subjects that need to be discussed.
- 3) Both need to have a better perspective about what the Bible says on sex.

To start with a simple example, what would the average parent do if they heard their young teen say, “I met the new neighbor girl and she sure has a nice set of...”—followed by some slang word for “breasts”. Hopefully, the parent would not panic, but acknowledge the statement, possibly suggest some other terminology, but continue the conversation, acknowledging that there are many other important aspects that make up a person: Where was she from? What year in school? Was she pleasant to talk to? What color was her hair? Was she tall, short or average? Was she thin, fat or average? Was her face pretty or ugly? Obviously, children should be taught that it is not polite to openly talk about whether someone is fat or ugly—or about the size of her breasts. But if children want to talk about such things to their parents, they should be free to do so.

That is how family members communicate and learn from each other.

Nature and the Bible teach us that it is all right for a woman to have a nice set of breasts and it is all right for others to notice them. It was God who put a woman's breasts up high and out front, where it is hard to avoid seeing them (whereas many animals have their mammary glands tucked away underneath). God designed men so that their muscles would show. God even must have realized that a man's pants might show a visible bulge when he is excited. God could have designed us like ducks with all sexual parts completely hidden. But he made us like we are and said it was "very good" (Gen 1:31).

The Song of Solomon (right after Proverbs in the Bible) contains eight references to women's breasts, most in a sexual setting (SoS 1:13; 4:5; 7:3, 7, 8; 8:1, 8, 10). The Bible does **not** have separate sections with ratings for various ages of children. When Timothy was taught the scriptures since infancy (2Tim 3:15), he heard the Song of Solomon as well as other Bible stories of rapes, violence and killings. But this was good for Timothy because he heard God's opinion of these things. He learned that men should enjoy a woman's breasts **within a marriage** and that rape and murder occur, but that those who do it deserve the death penalty.

In summary, parents need to concentrate more on open communication than on restriction. When a child wants to see a movie that the parent does not like, they may be better to say, "I will go see it with you if you agree to talk about it after it is over." If a younger child uses a crass sexual term, the parent may ask that they explain the Godly use of that thing using polite terminology. A parent may let an older child go to a marginally acceptable party, with the provision that they explain what kind of conduct is unacceptable and with the promise that they will tell their parents about it when they return. Young people need to have the courage to talk to their parents and realize that much of what they say is true, even though it is not always what they and their friends want to hear.

Sex is Good, but Do Not Idolize It

The best way for people to deal with sex is to speak factually about it—neither idolizing it nor disdaining it. Some people, even those old enough to marry, have a hard time talking to each other about sex without using a different voice and acting like they are doing something "naughty" or "dirty". When parents talk, they frequently say something

like "she is going to have a baby". To say, "she had intercourse and is pregnant," sounds somehow sinful or intrusive. Yet, the Bible does this over and over:

The man had intercourse with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain... (Gen 4:1, NJB)

The word "intercourse" (referring to sex) is used 60 times in the New Jerusalem Bible. Instead of "intercourse" other translations says things like "knew" "lay with", "had sexual relations", etc. Many Bible translators, both ancient and modern, have a hard time being as open about sex as the biblical Hebrew and Greek are. The commonly used King James Version (KJV) can be very unclear in some verses as its translators seemed to be somewhat embarrassed by sexual subjects. On the other hand, modern translations such as the New International Version sometimes put their own sexual interpretation on some verses, and the KJV or other older versions are more accurate. It is usually wise to use more than one translation in studying passages on sex, and ask God to show you what He meant.

In the Bible's original languages of Hebrew and Greek, the references to sex are very clear. **God is simply not afraid to talk about these things when appropriate and we should not be either.** He even uses promiscuous sex as an analogy to describe how the city of Jerusalem behaved like a loose woman. God wrote this in the Bible for all time because he expected people to understand it:

But she carried her prostitution still further. She saw men **portrayed on a wall**, figures of Chaldeans portrayed in red, with belts around their waists and flowing turbans on their heads; all of them looked like Babylonian chariot officers, natives of Chaldea. As soon as she saw them, she lusted after them and sent messengers to them in Chaldea. Then the Babylonians came to her, to the bed of love, and in their lust they defiled her. After she had been defiled by them, she turned away from them in disgust. When she carried on her prostitution openly and exposed her nakedness, **I turned away from her in disgust**, just as I had turned away from her sister. Yet she became more and more promiscuous as she recalled the days of her youth, when she was a prostitute in Egypt. There she lusted after her lovers, **whose genitals were like those of donkeys and whose emission was like that of horses**. So you longed for the lewdness of your youth, when in Egypt **your bosom was ca-**

ressed and your young breasts fondled (Ezk 23:14-21).

God is not saying that it is a sin to have big breasts or genitals, but He is saying that it is a sin to lust after them and have them “portrayed on the wall”. Many pagan religions had temple prostitutes and sexual intercourse as part of their rituals. Those recruited for this job were typically the most attractive ones with the largest breasts and genitals. We don’t call it a religion today, but how many people have pictures on their walls of people of the opposite sex, whom they do not personally know, but who look “sexy” or “hot”? Do they think they will meet that person and marry them someday? Probably not. They are simply being “looked up to” in a way that men and women should not be “looked up to”. They are idolized. We may even call them “teen idols” or “pop idols”.

The Perils of Idolization

Assigning great value to the sexual appearance of a person without knowing their other characteristics is idolatry. This practice takes people further way from the true relationships that they desire. Pictures of “teen idols” do not help one become more ready for a relationship with others, nor do they help one meet other real people for real relationships. Many “pop idols” employ “image management agencies” to portray them as nice people. The agencies arrange for books, magazine articles, interviews, etc. that make a “star” appear like a warm, thoughtful, kind person. In reality, he or she may be accustomed to being treated “better than everyone else” and may be very difficult to get along with.

This brings up another example of idolization. A “plain Jane” can walk into an auto repair shop and be sullenly told, “park your car in lane 6, bring the key back to me.” But a good looking woman can walk into the same shop and find men tripping over each other to park her car, take her key off her key-chain, take her where she wants to go, call her when her car is ready, etc. Both the men and the woman may be married, and none of them may be seriously thinking that of “hooking-up” with each other. Many men are simply used to giving respect to “sexy” women and the women are often used to receiving it. A similar scene will typically take place if a sexually attractive man walks into an office full of women—he will get much better service than that average “Joe”. Frankly, very good looking woman also often get more respect from other women—probably along with thoughts of jealousy—just be-

cause being “sexy” is respected, yes idolized, in our society.

Idolization of all kinds never makes us happy; that is why God said not to do it (Ex 20:3–6). Idolization produces hope, but a false hope. The common historical practice of praying or sacrificing to a statue in hopes for good crops or good business deals may make an ignorant person feel better—like the otherwise erratic forces of nature will be on his side—but the statue can do nothing for him. Sometimes, a person works harder and more effectively just because they think their idol will help them succeed. On the other hand, sometimes people become falsely confident in their idol, and then do not work hard enough. How much better it is to pray to the true Creator God, knowing that He wants what is best for us as well as the rest of the world, and knowing that He has the power to bring it to pass.

People who set up sex idols are like the farmer who prays to a statue. When men spend time with movies, pictures, erotic stories, etc., it gives them a false hope for something that will never happen. They can feel quite good—like they almost are having a wonderful time with that ideal (“idol”?) woman, but in reality, they are getting further away from a true relationship. Sex idols require no care, kindness or communication. At most, they require only a little money to buy the poster, video or whatever. These men do not need to think more about how nice a “pseudo-woman” can be to them, but to learn how nice they can be to a real woman.

Idolization can also happen to women. Some women idolize sexy-looking men. But more often, they idolize wonderfully romantic men who are decisive, rich and powerful, yet tender and accommodating of a woman’s every need. These men often appear in soap-opera type books and movies, but rarely in real life. As with the men, women who spend a lot of time thinking about these men-idols are not getting closer to a real, lasting relationship, but getting further away. The women do not need to think more about how nice a “pseudo-man” can be to them, but to learn how nice they can be to a real man.

The issue in the above two paragraphs is not necessarily about pornography (though most rating systems and even most Christians would see it that way), but it is about people idolizing others whom they do not really know for the sexual image that they portray. God says:

Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge

your neighbor fairly (Lev 19:15).

The Hebrew for “great” here is a broad word that could refer to many things: great in wealth, great in power or even great in body. Do sexy people get lighter sentences in our court systems? Yes they do! And God is not happy. Several studies have found that good-looking people who do wrong to others deserve as much punishment as ugly people.

Other major areas where many people, including many Christians, are victimized by sex idolization are dress, health and surgery. People wear tight clothes, not-warm-enough clothes, high-heeled shoes and other uncomfortable or damaging things because they think they have to conform to the “sexy” styles of the day. Some starve themselves to be unhealthily skinny, or take dangerous drugs to build up muscles in order to have a stylish body. Some expend lots of money on devices or time on exercises to produce bigger breasts or genitals. Yes, some will even have their body altered by surgery. It is a sad thing when people are so trapped by sex idolatry that they want themselves or their partners to undergo surgery and its potential risks just to measure up to false standards. (Surgery is great when it saves or prolongs one’s life, but all surgeries have a few percent risk of failure, infection, injury and other complications—which just are not worth it when there is nothing wrong with one’s body.) The bodies that God gave everyone are all right! It is all right to have either small or large sexual parts! Husbands and wives should want to make love to each other as they are, not in the way “popular opinion” thinks they should be.

Silent Switch from “Them” to “Us”

Some singles (even Christians) will say that the heavy emphasis on sex without marriage in today’s culture does not affect them. They may claim that they can see any movie, look at any website, read any magazine, go to any wild party, maintain friendships with promiscuous people—and it will not affect their personal standards of reserving sex for marriage. Yes, there are some few people who do all of these things, and they themselves abstain from sex. But for each one who lives in that environment and successfully abstains, there are many more who at some point succumb to premarital sex—even though they never planned to.

Why?

Today’s media contains many thousands of stories where otherwise positive, heroic individuals have sex without marriage. Indeed, scriptwriters,

even historians may conclude that a single partner cannot satisfy the “great” people who do great things. There are also thousands of stories about unappealing, even despicable people who still find and enjoy sex outside of marriage. But the problems caused by extramarital sex are rarely dealt with in these movies and writings. Nobody stays up late wondering what happened to the woman who had a one-night stand with a movie’s hero—was she ever able to marry someone else and have a normal family? Did she spend years hoping the hero would come back for her? Did she get a pregnancy or an STD from him? Or did the hero get a disease from her and ruin his chance for a sequel?

If our minds are full with episodes of people who have casual sex but are otherwise successful, it is very easy for us to switch someday from “them” to “us”. At a time when we have strayed from our moral basis, when a certain temptation comes along, when we are depressed or when we are alone with an attractive person who desires us, then it is not that difficult for our knowledge of the unmarried sexual practices of others to suddenly stop being applied to “them” and to begin to apply to “us”.

By contrast, if people’s minds were full of Bible stories or other moral stories, they would be much less likely to lean on extramarital sex in times of difficulty. The Bible gives many examples of prayer and fasting for deliverance in difficulty. The Psalms of David have encouraged many throughout the centuries to trust God for deliverance from emotional hurt. But they cannot help anyone who does not have them in mind, or who does not know enough to read them.

May God help all of us to separate His good ways from the errors of our time!

Plain Talk About Sex

Too many young people have heard thousands of references to sex from friends and the media, but many hear very little about their parent’s own sexual relationship. Does that not somehow convey a message that maybe sex exists mostly outside of marriage? Now, it is true that married people with a successful sexual relationship feel no need to boast to others to enjoy it, whereas those who are sort of competing with their friends to have the “most” or “best” sex, do find bragging important. And of course, the entertainment industry talks about sex continually simply to sell their stuff. But the idea that parents should never say anything about their own relationship to their teens is a leftover from the “keep

them ignorant” era. If the Bible names individual children who were born as the result of sexual intercourse, parents should not be afraid to make it clear that that is how their children came into existence—and that they had a good time in the process.

Now this does not mean that parents should let their children see them having intercourse or that family members should all be naked together. Leviticus 18 lists various kinds of relatives that should **not** “uncover the nakedness” (KJV, NKJV, NRSV) of each other. The literal Hebrew here does mean “uncover the nakedness”, but it also implies sexual intercourse, as other translations say. Every positive example of sexual intercourse in the Bible is in a private place (for example, Isaac took Rebekah into his mother’s tent; his mother having passed away; it would have been unused—Gen 24:67). It was considered a shame to be publicly exposed naked (Isa 20:4; Mic 1:11; Rev 16:15, etc.).

The story of Adam and Eve is also well worth considering. God made them naked and they were not ashamed (Gen 2:25). Nobody else was there; the whole world was their playground. But after they began to decide good and evil for themselves, they concluded nakedness between a husband and wife was not good, so they made clothes for themselves (Gen 3:7). To this day, much of the world seems to be confused on the matter. In “sex is bad” cultures, married couples were often ashamed to be naked together, reserving intercourse for darkness or under covers. They miss some of the fun of married life. In promiscuous cultures, people have no shame in being naked in front of the world, and hence miss the intimate relationship of a monogamous marriage. God intended a middle ground with married couples sharing everything, and a certain amount of modesty between others.

Somebody may want to know if God makes allowance for times where a person may need to be naked before someone who is not their spouse in order to receive medical help, to have a baby delivered, to flee when there is no time to dress, etc. The answer is “yes”. God once commanded Israelite soldiers to punish an evil people by killing all, except the virgin women (Num 31:14–18). They obviously had to check each woman to see if her hymen was in place. Otherwise, all the younger women would have claimed to be virgins. Please realize that these soldiers were not permitted to rape these women. If they thought they wanted them for wives, they could marry them after a one-month waiting period (Deut 21:10–14). In a different case, when Jesus was being

tried and convicted, one of his disciples left his clothing behind in order to escape (Mark 14:51–52). Once, to make a point to a nation on the brink of destruction, God commanded Isaiah to walk about naked for 3 years (Isa 20:2–4). These and other verses show that there are exceptions when it is not sinful to see a naked person or to be seen naked.

But what should one do if he or she by chance comes upon somebody who is naked? Many people have never thought about this or talked to their children about it. The initial encounter is not a sin, but if one decides to stare and “enjoy the show”, one must realize that they are seeing something that rightfully belongs to that person’s spouse (or future spouse). “You shall not steal” (Ex 20:15). It is best to turn away at the first possible opportunity. Realize that they probably would not want you to talk about what you saw, so do not do it. Sadly, when David saw Bathsheba bathing, he watched long enough to become tempted and decide that he wanted her. He eventually had her husband killed, and God punished him with four premature deaths in his family during the many years that followed (2Sam 11 & 12). If one has a job where it is utterly required to see naked people on a regular basis (e.g. medical and home-care jobs), it is not a sin, but one must be very careful that it does not draw them into sin. If one thinks about it, God sees naked people on a regular basis, **but He does not sin:**

The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good (Prov 15:3).

This writer cannot stress enough that it is important for parents to make a major effort to talk to their children about sex as soon as they are old enough to be interested. Today, they have a lot of competition. There is probably more information on sex available in bookstores and the Internet than one could possibly take in if they read it 24 hours every day. Unfortunately, the vast majority of it is written by people with no particular commitment to marriage. Some of the vocabulary can be fairly disgusting to an older or conservative group of people. However, it is more important for parents to establish meaningful conversations about meaningful subjects than it is for parents to correct their children for every word that they do not like. It is better to work on the wording once a dialogue is established. (It is best to teach children to use words that do not offend those who are hearing them—Rom 14:21. The Bible does not teach that some words are inherently “sinful”; indeed, some of the words

commonly used today were once considered “sinful”.)

Questions on Sexual Practice

As parents establish a rapport with their teens, they should not thoughtlessly condemn sexual practices that their young people may discuss—especially if the Bible says little about them. While parents may find some of them “unnecessary” or even “disgusting”, if they refuse to calmly talk about them with their children, their children will rightly conclude that their parents are preaching their own version of morality, not that which comes from the Bible. The Bible contains no list of approved sexual practices for married people. It says:

Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge (Heb 13:4, NKJV).

This seems to indicate that as long as a couple is married, that their sexual practices do not defile them. This verse, however, does not immediately eliminate the numerous biblical admonitions to use wisdom in all things. This writer read one account of a major city where 5% of their 911 calls were the result of people injured during sex—most doing something foolish. The Old Testament specifically mentions **not** having sex during menstruation (Lev 15:24; 18:19; 20:18; Ezk 18:6 22:10). Some Bible teachers will say that these verses only apply to Israelites or that they are abolished altogether now that the temple/Levitical system has ended. However, numerous Christians do make a practice of abstaining from sex during menstruation and have found that this period of abstinence each month makes the other days much more exciting and fulfilling.

Oral sex is one of the practices about which people frequently disagree. Many will point out that it is a common practice among prostitutes and homosexuals, so it must be bad. This is faulty logic, in that kissing, intercourse and just about every other “acceptable” sexual practice are also common among sexual sinners. The Bible says absolutely nothing about oral sex, either pro or con. This author’s understanding of the medical research on oral sex is that its risk of physical injury or spread of disease is similar to that of intercourse. In other words, married couples who are considerate of each other and who do not have STDs face no dangers from oral sex. Probably the most important factor: oral sex produces a zero chance of pregnancy. This can be a great benefit to couples who want intimacy

without latex or chemicals, but who do not want to raise another child.

Masturbation is another issue about which some ask. The Bible does not say anything. Some preachers think that anyone who masturbates is “going to Hell”; others see nothing wrong with it at all. Many secular counselors promote masturbation as an alternative to sexual relationships—especially for frustrated people who cannot establish a relationship with the opposite sex. From this writer’s experience, that fact that masturbation often becomes an *alternative* to a sexual relationship is what makes it a **problem, not a solution**. Masturbation frequently includes sexual fantasies or use of pornography. The Bible teaching on *these* subjects is clear:

Sexual fantasizing—daydreaming that one is having sex with someone else—is portrayed by most secular teaching as a common, even healthy, practice. But the Bible clearly teaches against this:

But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matt 5:28).

You shall not set your heart on your neighbour’s house. You shall not set your heart on your neighbour’s spouse, or servant, man or woman, or ox, or donkey, or any of your neighbour’s possessions (Ex 20:17, NJB).

God gave us these rules for our good. He knew that our energies are best channeled toward working for ourselves, not simply in wishing or imagining that we have something that belongs to somebody else. A tremendous amount of energy often comes to one’s mind and body anticipating a sexual relationship. People who see a clear hope of getting married often drastically change their lives for the better. They stop bad habits, work harder at their jobs, learn to think of others, and a whole host of other good things. Masturbation and sexual fantasizing, though they are much less dangerous, have a similar effect to pornography and casual sex: they give temporary relief to frustrated people, but they tend to sap them of the energy they need to establish real relationships.

To take a simple physical example, suppose that a young person would like to get a new car. What would be the best way for them to go about getting it?

- 1) Play a video game that simulates driving a car? (like masturbation)
- 2) Close their eyes and imagine they have that car? (like fantasizing)
- 3) Continually look at pictures and specifica-

tions of the car? (like pornography)

4) Drive somebody else's car? (like illicit sex)

Most people realize that few cars are obtained through the above methods. Are not the following more sensible?

- 1) Earn enough money to pay to afford the car (like earning enough money to start a marriage)
- 2) Learn how to care for the car (like learning how to be a good mate)
- 3) Find the best place to buy the car (like finding the best person to marry)
- 4) Learn to drive if you don't already know (learn about sex if you don't already know—this part is usually the least of the problems)

Masturbation and fantasizing about one's spouse might be reasonable for a married person whose spouse is no longer able to have sex. But for the single person hoping to marry someday, masturbation hurts, rather than helps them achieve this goal.

The subject of **anal sex** may be raised by some people, but it is mostly an issue to those who have had frequent sex prior to marriage. A woman's vagina was clearly designed by God to accept the penile thrusting of her husband. When she becomes aroused, it automatically lubricates and thickens. No such changes occur in her rectum—rather, medical evidence shows that the rectal lining is easily torn by penile thrusting. While the Bible does not discuss anal sex between a husband and wife, it has strong words about the practice between two men:

If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads (Lev 20:13).

Questions and discussions about other sexual practices will certainly occur between parents and children, or between potential spouses. This article cannot cover them all. But it does encourage everyone to be patient and slow to anger. On the subjects of sex and religion, people too often try to give loud, decisive and dogmatic answers, hoping others will not notice how little biblical or scientific substance is contained in their answer. But in the end, only answers with substance will prevail. If arguments arise, one of the best things people can do is agree to look for more information (Bible, library, Internet, etc) and come back and talk about it later.

One final question we might ask: "What actually constitutes sex?" Former President Clinton set a terrible example for the nation and world when he claimed that oral sex was not actually "having sex".

The Bible is quite clear on the subject in its teaching not to "uncover the nakedness" of other people (Lev 18) and the scriptures quoted earlier in this section showing that it is wrong to set one's heart upon or lust after someone of the opposite sex to whom one is not married. The Bible frequently mentions kissing, usually between good friends. It does say that a kiss can be part of the trap of an adulteress (Prov 7:5, 13). If kissing is accompanied by lust or coveting, then it is sin. But the Bible does not clearly label kissing as a forbidden sexual act.

Sex in Marriage: Nothing Else Like It!

Today's literature about sex puts great emphasis on positions, pleasure techniques, disease prevention, sex toys, how many, how hard, how fast, how much, how strong, how often, how to avoid boredom, etc., etc. In many cases, sex seems to be more like an athletic competition—to be finished as powerfully and quickly as possible—with a few extra points for innovation and diversity. Love is sometimes a side point, or lost altogether. Is that what the Maker of sex had in mind? Is that the ultimate fulfillment?

It should not be surprising that, most happily married couples do not write or even talk about their sexual experiences—they feel no need to do so. It is an intimate, private world, to which nobody else need intrude. They are content—not in competition with anyone. But there are some few married-for-lifers who see the need to teach others about the benefits of marriage, and to explain what married sex is like. Their descriptions of sex compared to today's typical sex-for-fun-with-anyone are as different as night and day.

Married people talk about feelings of love and happiness that seem like they will last forever. They speak of climaxes so powerful that they wonder how their bodies can stand them. But they also speak of being so close to their mate that they can think their thoughts and feel like they feel—like they are one and the same person. This is actually how God described it:

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh (Gen 2:24).

Happily married people talk about how each sexual experience has a character of its own—like each different kind of flower in a huge garden, each having its own beauty but still being distinct from all the others. Indeed, analogies are about the only way some married couples feel they can adequately

describe their sexual experience—there just does not seem to be the right words for it.

People who have had many sex partners and experiment with **numerous methods and positions** frequently state that they are bored with them and that they are always “looking for something new”. Couples who have only had sex together continually talk about increased feeling and meaning that they derive **from just a single method and position**. Indeed, couples who have erroneously come to believe that there is only one “proper” position for sex often still report a exciting sex life after 30 or more years. The Bible does not teach a single “proper” method or position for sex, and happily married people seem to say that each method or position opens up a “whole world of experience”. They are not bored with **any** position or method, but see them as a variety of interesting starting places, all available to them.

God has put unbelievable variety and capability in human bodies. If we compare a person’s total sex-life to a trip through a large, beautiful forest, the unmarried sex-addict is like someone who races through the forest in an army tank. He or she quickly gets to the end and says “now what?”—not realizing how much they have not seen, not felt and run-over in their hurry. By comparison, the happily married couple is “taking a leisurely walk in that forest, noticing each thing, enjoying conversation, playing with what interests them, and not particularly concerned if they ever get to the end.”

“Fear” and “guilt” are simply **not issues** in most married sex lives. Married folks most always sleep more peacefully or work more effectively after sex—it makes the entire rest of their life better. This is the example opposite of the “sex addict” whose life is frequently destroyed in the pursuit of sex. Life-long partners talk about deep emotional bonding that takes place, smoothing over the worst of hurts, in ways they never imagined. They talk about great power and intensity of feeling—single orgasms so great that **they feel like they will never need another one for the rest of their lives**. Of course, they will have another one, but such is the feeling when it occurs. This writer has seen happily married people shake their head in bewilderment when someone talks about having intercourse five times, one after another. “What was wrong with the first one, that they needed four more?” they asked.

Many of these things are rarely written and even less commonly known. Sure, some married people’s sex lives are nonexistent or a disaster. But those peo-

ple complain a lot more often than the happy couples tell their successes. Single people who are skeptical about this should try to find a happily married couple who is willing to talk about their sex life.

Singles also need to deeply think about the obvious and clear advantages of one virgin marrying another. There is **no fear** of sexually transmitted disease—most virgin-married couples never give it a thought during sex. Also there is often no need for condoms, pills or other hassles in regard to birth control. Many couples have decades of totally unprotected and unimpeded sex—either when they are trying to get pregnant, when they would not mind getting pregnant, when they are already pregnant, or finally, too old to get pregnant. And when the occasional surprise pregnancy does come along to married folks, it is almost always possible for two loving parents to make adjustments and welcome the new baby into the world—avoiding the “abortion, adoption or daycare option” faced by most pregnant singles.

Sexually Transmissible Diseases

Most entertainment sources and many single people treat STDs as if they do not exist. That is why so many people are getting them. The entertainment media produces countless stories with the philosophy that unprotected sex with many others is just fine. They either mention or actually portray all kinds of sex acts with almost no disease protection used. Government, schools and even some of the medical establishment trumpet “safe sex” messages as if condoms were the answer to everything. Unfortunately, the images from the entertainment industry, especially the pornography industry, are much more powerful than the “safe sex” messages and many people just forget about condoms.

But that is only a tiny part of the problem. Forty years ago, pregnancy prevention was approximately equivalent to disease prevention—and condoms were used to do both jobs. Today, there are about 50 different strains of STDs, and condoms provide little or no protection from them. Some types of herpes and other STDs transfer orally or by any close skin-to-skin contact.

In this writer’s search for STD information, it was somewhat amazing to find the “rules” of an adult “sex club” that was actually serious about trying to prevent the spread of STDs. Their procedures sounded more like running a hospital bio-isolation unit than the “great fun” typically claimed for group sex. The rules required all participants to wear sur-

gical gloves, all men to wear condoms, all sex toys to be covered with plastic, a layer of saran wrap be placed between anyone's mouth and any area of anyone else that they might kiss. A change of all latex and plastic was required before touching a new

person. Immediate cleanup was required for any spilled body fluids. Regular STD testing was required of everyone, and any positive reading resulted in removal from the group. It should be remarkably clear that the advertised "sexual free-

Excerpts from Ad for Meg Meeker's Book: *Epidemic: How Teen Sex Is Killing Our Kids*

(Available for \$24.95 from local bookstores or Conservative Book Service, PO Box 96504, Washington, DC 20090, 508-368-5171)

Did you know that 8,000 American teens are diagnosed with a sexually-transmitted disease (STD) every day? That 46% of girls are likely to become infected with a disease after their very first sexual encounter? That, right now, one out of every five adolescents is living with an STD?

If not, you're not alone. The fact is, America is in the midst of what may be the first "politically incorrect" epidemic in history—one that so contradicts the liberal faith in "sexual freedom" as the path to health and happiness that the media simply refuse to report it. What's more, reveals Dr. Meg Meeker in this groundbreaking book, it was that very faith—as endlessly promoted by Planned Parenthood, sex-educators, and the media itself—which actually caused the epidemic by encouraging widespread teenage promiscuity.

Epidemic breaks the story that STDs among adolescents has indeed reached epidemic proportions, and is leaving our kids open to deadly infections, infertility and cancer. Dr. Meeker, who has spent the past 20 years practicing pediatric and adolescent medicine and counseling teens, uncovers the facts about this grave health crisis, and the powerful political and other interests that continue to make it worse. A small sampling of her deeply alarming revelations (just the tip of the iceberg!):

- Why the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) considers the STD epidemic a "multiple" epidemic of at least 25 separate diseases—nearly 50 if you count the various strains of virus groups
- Why over 80% of STD-infected teens are unaware that they have an STD and therefore don't get medical treatment—and may continue to infect others!
- How the idea of maintaining sexual freedom rather than preventing disease remains the driving force and primary focus of national sex education—and why the STD epidemic will continue to worsen as long as it does
- How sex-educators under-inform and mislead, giving kids too little (or downright wrong) information about STDs
- How pharmaceutical companies promote drugs that control STD symptoms—encouraging kids in the delusion that they can be promiscuous without any of the associated problems
- The anatomic and immunological differences that make the adolescent body—particularly the female's—more susceptible to STDs than the adult body, contrary to popu-

lar belief

- In the '60s, a shot of penicillin could cure the two known STDs, syphilis and gonorrhea. Today, there are no simple cures and in most cases there are no cures at all
- How the "sexual freedom" allowed by birth control and condoms promoted the rise of STDs
- Thank you, President Clinton: The astonishing rise in pre-teens and teens who believe that only intercourse qualifies as "sex"—even though STDs are spread via every type of contact
- How TV, movies, magazines and music endlessly send kids the message that unmarried sex has no consequences, and that if you're not having sex there's something wrong with you
- Why, once kids start having sex, their sexual contacts increase, and transmission of disease increases exponentially
- Stealth virus: the strain of Herpes that many teens don't know they have—and are spreading unawares—because of "asymptomatic shedding"
- False claims about condoms. Why, for most STDs, they offer little or no protection
- What studies reveal about the close link between sexual activity and clinical depression in adolescent boys and girls
- Study findings: why 33% of 8-to-11 year olds and 49% of 12-to-15 year olds said that pressure to have sex is a "big problem" for them

"In the middle of America's cultural wars over morality and traditional family values are our children, who hear from the liberal establishment, sadly including such authority figures as physicians, teachers, and clergy, that they are entitled to their sexual expression and experiences with each other and with adults. They are being told that these sexual behaviors are good for them and won't hurt. Psychologically, spiritually, and medically, those are simply lies. Read *Epidemic: How Teen Sex is Killing Our Kids* and learn how to save yours."

— Dr. Laura Schlessinger

"Shocking—The statistics are startling, the data medically sound, the consequences alarming and the personal stories will move you to tears. This is must reading."

— David Hagar, MD, Head of Infectious Diseases, University of Kentucky

dom” of “group sex” has turned into “biological bondage”. All it can offer is a physical, emotional and spiritual relationship made out of plastic.

But many “sellers of sex” are not this honest, and the destruction from sexual promiscuity continues to rise. While medical science has made advances against some STDs over the last 40 years, the STDs have clearly made much greater advances against medical science. An average young person today is far more likely to get an STD and be permanently affected by it than a “free love” hippy of the 1960’s.

Unfortunately, governments, schools and parents are not keeping up with the disease disasters that are befalling single people—many of them teenagers. This problem is much better explained by the doctors who see the victims of rampant extramarital sex. Anyone who does not know about the situation should obtain one of the several books on the subject. Please see the information from Meg Meeker in the accompanying box.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases: A Physician Tells You What You Need to Know by Lisa Marr. Paperback, Johns Hopkins Press Health Book; 1998. ISBN: 0801860431. (Amazon.com and other discount stores: \$12.57)

Epidemic: How Teen Sex Is Killing Our Kids by Meg Meeker, Hardcover, National Book Network; 2002. ISBN 089526143X. (List Price: \$24.95, Barnes and Nobel and other discount stores: \$19.96)

What about Unwanted Pregnancies?

In this day of great availability of birth control information, pills and devices, one might think that accidental pregnancies would be few. But the over one million abortions each year in the USA clearly indicate that an incredible number of women are getting pregnant who never hoped to. With about 60 million women of child-bearing age in the USA, 1 out of 60 whom you see walking down the street will have an abortion this year (on average). Nobody has abortions because they are fun—people are just not preparing for pregnancy. The claimed effectiveness ratings of birth control pills and devices (95% or better) are usually taken from clinical trials where people are carefully monitored. Actual effectiveness in real-life situations has been shown to be much lower, sometimes as low as 40%. Physical barriers come out of place, get broken or are used ineffectively. Pills sometimes are forgotten, taken at the wrong time, or simply fail.

What does God say about pregnancy and unborn babies?

If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman’s husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life (Ex 21:22–23).

These verses show that God regards an unborn baby as a life, and that a person should die for killing one. Abortion, killing on purpose, is a serious matter. It is murder and deserving of the death penalty. (Those who have already had an abortion can still find forgiveness in Christ. Literature to help you is available from Focus on the Family, PO Box 35500, Colorado Springs, CO 80935-3550; tel: 800-232-6459.) This is just one more of the many reasons why sex belongs only in marriage. Yes, there are times when married couples do not want another child, but it is not an embarrassment for a married couple to have a child and they can always put the baby up for adoption if they are unable to care for it. (In cases where a pregnancy threatens the life of the mother, it is like a case when one person threatens the life of another, the one who threatens has to be removed or killed if necessary—but that is much less than 1% of today’s abortion cases.)

The following scriptures explain what should happen when a pregnancy occurs between unmarried people. The verses apply to any intercourse, not just pregnancy, but often nobody else knows when sexual intercourse occurs. Therefore, the Scriptures says, “if they are found out”. When a pregnancy occurs, they are “found out”.

If a man seduces a virgin who is not pledged to be married and sleeps with her, he must pay the bride-price, and she shall be his wife. If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he must still pay the bride-price for virgins (Ex 22:16–17).

If a man finds a young woman who is a virgin, who is not betrothed, and he seizes her and lies with her, and they are found out, then the man who lay with her shall give to the young woman’s father fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife because he has humbled her; he shall not be permitted to divorce her all his days (Deut 22:28, NKJV).

The man is responsible to marry the woman, unless her father utterly refuses (The principle in Numbers 27 shows that the woman herself can make the decision if her father is unable to.) In either case, the man is responsible to pay the “bride price”. Today, the many court systems will order a man to pay

child support whether he marries her or not. This is probably an acceptable alternative to the “bride price”. The couple should marry if it is possible. Children deserve both parents, just as you had, or wish you had both parents.

Parents (now grandparents) should tell their young people that they are expected to stand strong and be a parent and marry or pay child support—and that their college money, inheritance or whatever else the grandparents may give their young people will be used to support their child if the young people refuse. This may sound hard-nosed, but dealing with other human lives is serious business and God teaches us to care for our own.

God gave the woman’s father the right to cancel a marriage in this case for three very important reasons. First, it helps prevent young people who want to get married, but are not ready to get married, from “having sex so they have to get married”. If this were the law of our nation, a couple would know that their efforts to have sex to force a marriage could be easily thwarted by the young woman’s father—and that the young man would still have to pay the “bride price”, anyway. Both would then be in a “lower class” (see next section) and have a difficult time marrying anybody else. Secondly, this gave the father a chance to weed out men who pushed their daughters into sex or who simply appear to be poor husbands. And finally, it gave the father a chance to take into account whether the woman was pregnant or not. If a child results from this premarital sex, he would be much more inclined to have the couple marry and raise the child. Whereas, if there is no child, he would be more likely to reject the marriage.

Since the couple showed their lack of maturity by making the poor decision to have premarital sex, God gave the woman’s father the responsibility to make the best decision for them. He can weigh all of the factors, including the best possible future for the young people and their child, if any, and then ask God for wisdom in what to do.

In today’s American society, parents have legal control over children only through age 17. After that, all they have is economic control. They should try to use this control to fulfill the responsibility God gave the woman’s father. If a congregation or its elders have some influence, they should try to do the same thing. Sometimes, young people may have sex before marriage, realize that it was a mistake, and then seek God’s will. They may have neither parents nor a congregation that is willing or able to

help them. Should they marry, or not? In either case, they need to repent. Then they need to seek God’s wisdom so that they can make the same decision that the woman’s father most likely would: If she is pregnant, then priority should be given to the baby and they should marry unless there is some clear compelling reason why not. If she is not pregnant, then more consideration should be given to what is best for the man and woman’s long-term future. If one or both never wanted a marriage to begin with and still do not want it now, it might be better not to marry.

The obvious lesson in all of this should be: “Do not put oneself in a situation where you would be tempted to have sex and possibly create a new human life, until you are ready to take care of that new life in a loving marriage!”

Whether We Like It or Not, Singles Are Divided into “Classes”

Hopefully the information presented thus far has increased your conviction to **confine your sex life to marriage**, and to encourage others, especially sons and daughters, to do the same. This is good. Achieving a happy marriage and a fulfilling sex life does take some effort. It is best if one plans for it throughout their teen years and beyond.

Do not be fooled. When it comes time to marry, not all people are alike. **There are distinct classes of people, some more desirable than others.** Yes, that does sound rather biased, maybe even bigoted, but there are things that people do sexually that simply cannot be undone. God forgives the sinner, but the effect of sin often still continues. King David was a “man after God’s own heart” (Acts 13:22), but he still sinned by committing adultery with Bathsheba and having her husband killed (2Sam 11). God “put away” David’s sin when he repented, but told him that he and his family would endure a punishment because of it (2Sam 12:10–13). God did not raise Uriaah from the dead, and he let the child born of adultery die. Similarly, when a person loses their virginity outside of marriage, God can forgive them, but he does not reset their body and mind to the status of a virgin.

Also, there are things that can happen to a person, such as being a victim of rape, divorce or spousal death that one may not have caused but that has a profound effect on one’s ability to find a mate.

We have listed 15 classes in an approximate order from **most desirable** to **least desirable**. The classification is not perfect; people could fall into

multiple classes at once and there is much variation within a class. For example, a divorce *victim* (not the fault of a breakup) may be much more ready for a marriage than a widow/widower from a bad marriage. There are probably also special circumstances that do not fit any of these classes. The purpose is to help you think about how you will be considered when you hope to marry, and to think about the kind of person whom you would like to marry.

It is especially vital that everyone understand that his or her sexual activity as a single will have a profound effect for the rest of his or her life—it is easy to do things that later cannot be undone or wished away. It is much easier to move down the classes and decrease one's marriage-ability than it is to move back up.

As you read each of these classes, think about whether or not you or your children would like to **marry** someone in that class. Then think about the class of person that you or your children **are**. Are you resolved to stay that way? Who would want to marry you? Those who have made some mistakes need not give up in despair. They can always repent to God and receive strength not to sink to any lower class (1Jn 1:9–2:1). There are other people who have also made mistakes, but who have repented and recovered—who may be glad to meet and marry you.

These are the 15 classes that this author has outlined:

1. Pure virgins. These people wait until they are married to engage in sex. (Also included are people who may have once wanted premarital sex, but who never had the opportunity—thanks to diligent parents or God's intervention.) This is the kind of person that every young single man or woman should try to be.

2. Technically virgins. These people have never had sexual intercourse, but have engaged in other sexual practices that should be confined to marriage. There is no simple dividing line between class #1 to #2. For example, someone who one time hugged with their hands in private places probably still belongs in class #1. But someone who frequently “uncovered the nakedness” of another, habitually used pornography or who has engaged in oral sex certainly belongs in class #2. This class itself contains quite a range of people, some of whom had only a few sexual experiences and some who had many. **Here are two big warnings to anyone who thinks “as long as I am technically a virgin, I should have no trouble finding a mate”:** A) While

it is much better to be a “technical virgin” than no virgin at all, please realize that it will be a hurdle for pure virgins to consider marriage with someone in this category—there are many emotional scars and baggage for people to overcome. B) Once a person starts into this category, it is very difficult to stop, and it is very easy to drop further. Whatever stuff one does with one girlfriend/boyfriend; whether it be “making out”, “hands under the clothes” or “oral sex”; is likely to also be done with the next person—or maybe even more.

3. Widows/widowers who married as virgins. These peoples' predicaments are not the result of their own sin, but of something that happened to them. The quality of their first marriage will certainly affect their ability for a successful second marriage. They will need to seek God to overcome the hurt of losing their first spouse, but recovery is often nearly complete and second marriages very good. (Note: In cases where the spouse committed suicide, the living person is more in the class of a divorce victim. If the person murdered their spouse, they belong near the bottom of this list.)

4. Like #3 with children still living at home. Again, these people have not sinned to create this condition, but marrying somebody who already has children adds a great deal of complexity to a marriage. Nevertheless, it can work out well. Both parents must work very hard to be fair when there are step-children or half-siblings in a family.

5. Tried to be virgins. These people did not seek sexual experiences but were victims of child abuse, incest, rape, etc. Their experiences can produce great emotional scars, but they can also receive nearly total healing from God. Since they were not the cause of their non-virginity, they usually do not have the same problems with ongoing temptation as do those who voluntarily give up virginity. Nevertheless, abuse is damaging and recovery does not always come quickly. (Anyone who finds someone being abused should do what they can to help stop it. If you or someone you know is being abused, you need to make a plan to escape. Try to find one or more personally **trusted friends** who will believe you and help you without the abuser knowing. Do not automatically trust church, school or government officials—some may start their investigation by contacting the person abusing you—which will make trouble for you, some of these officials may be

abusers themselves.)

6. Mistakers. People who had hoped to remain virgins but at a time of weakness, willingly had sexual intercourse before marriage. This happens sometimes when couples are drunk or are alone for extended periods of time. They realized it was a mistake soon after they did it, repented and did not continue. People in this class can sometimes be less emotionally scarred than the “technically virgins” in class 2 who have “done a lot”. On the other hand, they have nothing that they have “saved for marriage”. But being a “mistaker” is a whole lot better than being a “fornicator”. So if one finds oneself in this class, stay here and don’t drop any lower

7. Divorce victims. These are divorcees whose spouse was the primary cause of the divorce—people who had to leave a marriage that was unbearable. Which spouse filed for divorce is often not the issue: a divorce victim can be abandoned or kicked out by their mate, or their mate can be so unbearable that they must seek a divorce themselves.

(Do not say, “I would never divorce no matter what”. There are cases where husbands beat their wives and children or invite their friends over to abuse them. There are cases where wives have created fraudulent financial documents in their husband’s name, and the husbands were legally unable to defend themselves in court to prevent their own incarceration until they divorced their wives. Also, when a “bad” spouse is planning to file for divorce, there are times when the “good” spouse will be much better able to take care of the children by filing first. God is not fooled; a person who files for divorce when reconciliation is still possible is reaping judgment upon themselves and trouble for their family.)

Unfortunately, most divorced people tend to believe that they were victims, whether they actually were or not. A thorough study of marriage and divorce Scriptures exceeds this article’s scope. For simplification, this article uses “divorce villain” for someone who causes a divorce, and a “divorce victim” for someone who had no reasonable way to avoid a divorce. (These terms are not found in the Bible.) Matthew 18:15–17 applies quite well to marriages; when one believer is offended by their spouse, they should first go to them, then take the problems to other believers as witnesses, then take it to their whole congregation. (Most people would rather try to solve their marriage problems than re-

veal them to their whole congregation.) If a congregation finds that a spouse needs to change, but the spouse will not hear the congregation, then that person is to be treated as an “unbeliever” (Matt 18:17). If an unbelieving spouse is not “pleased to dwell with” (KJV) a believer, then the believer is “not bound in such circumstances” (1Cor 7:13–15). In general, the person who refuses to “hear the congregation” is a “divorce villain”, and the one who does what the congregation says, but cannot avoid the divorce is the “divorce victim.” There are cases when husband and wife refuse to hear the congregation and both are divorce villains. Unfortunately, many people do not know these verses and many congregations are not used to following them. Consequently, many people who claim to be believers end up divorcing based upon their own ideas or those of a counselor who does not know the Bible well. Most believe they are divorce victims when many are divorce villains. Any divorcee contemplating remarriage ought to seek the counsel of other wise believers or ask for clear direction from God before deciding to do so.

8. True repenters. These are people who have been in classes #11 to #15 below, but who have truly come to see their sin, repented, and have been living Godly lives for many months, preparing to be a good mate in the future. Any person, no matter what their trouble, can and should strive to enter into classes #8 through #10. The power of Christ and a conscious, enduring effort is required to change entrenched error. When recovery is genuine, these people can have successful marriages.

9. Like classes #5 through #8, but with children living at home. This does not imply that children are in some way a sin. It is wonderful that single parents take care of their children, but it does complicate future marriages. There is not only the issue of husband and wife getting along, but separate issues of new spouse and children getting along. These children are forever a reminder of a previous marriage or illegitimate birth. Child support payments, visitation and court battles can sometimes dominate married life. A great amount of Godly love is required to see this through.

10. Like classes #5 through #9 above, but carrying one or more incurable STDs. Some STDs render people unable to have children. Some will almost certainly be contracted by one’s new

spouse, or greatly inhibit their sex life. It is often most sensible for people in this class to marry others with similar diseases.

11. Touch-me-nots. These are people who want to be married, but have an aversion to sex—often do not want it at all. This problem affects both males and females. Most of them know that they are this way, but they usually deny the seriousness of the problem. This writer has known people who had avoided trying to have sex for months or years after they were married and really thought there was nothing wrong with that. This problem is opposite from most of the others discussed here and therefore tends to impact Christians far more than others. Sexually promiscuous people generally do not marry someone unless they are already enjoying sex with them. But the touch-me-not often seems like someone of “great character” to prospective Christian mates. (Wow, they can truthfully say that they had been single for so many years, and never even so much as kissed anyone.) Yet when a normal Christian hoping for a normal God-given sex life marries a touch-me-not, it can be a disaster for them.

The solution for this problem is for touch-me-nots **to be honest and recognize the seriousness of their problem** before they become engaged to be married. If someone is not excitedly looking forward to sexual intercourse with a loving relationship during their first couple of days of marriage, it is their spiritual duty to get help and resolve it. Their problem may be physical, or it may be due to past emotional trauma of some kind. They may simply be able to go to Christ and receive a divine healing. But they must understand that it is a sin to keep it a secret, then dump it on their spouse after the marriage. Anyone who is fearful of sex must tell his or her spouse ahead of time. Yes, they are afraid to talk about it because they are afraid nobody will marry them. But telling the truth and not getting married is a lot better than lying, getting married, and then getting divorced. Exodus 21:9–10 teaches that a woman was free to leave if her husband refused to have sex with her. Paul taught that husbands and wives’ bodies belong to each other (1Cor 7:1–6). If a believer marries and finds their spouse is a touch-me-not, they should immediately seek counsel to determine if there is a solution to the problem. If none is apparent, they may have the marriage annulled (made as if it never existed). Most governments and churches recognize marital annulments

for this reason.

12. Fornicators. These people have willingly had sexual intercourse multiple times outside of marriage. They may want to marry, and some do, but they have a high tendency to divorce at the first sign of problems. A sequence of failed marriages is no better than a sequence of fornications. People like this need to first repent, learn to live without sex for a while and learn to really love someone else apart from sex.

13. Divorce villains—people who have abandoned a marriage or made one unbearable for their spouse. Many of these people think that their divorce was “not their fault”. Most will seek to remarry—often very soon after their last marriage broke up. The best thing for them to do is to remain single and work on their problems that caused the divorce. The best way to avoid marrying a divorce villain (representing themselves to be a victim) is to **talk to their former spouse**. Unfortunately, people who are excited about marriage are rarely willing to investigate previous marriages—even though they are the best predictor of how their future marriage will work out.

14. Perverts. These people are obsessed with deviant or homosexual sex and cannot, in their present condition, be satisfied with a normal marital sexual relationship. This paper will not attempt to catalog all of the perverted sexual practices that exist—new ones are probably being developed as you read this. But any couple considering marriage should honestly discuss each other’s approach to sex and let the other decide if it is perverted. People become perverted from frequent fornication, prostitution (being or using), pornography usage, etc. Young, impressionable, people with **no** biblical or honest moral guidance can also get this way simply by absorbing all their values from perverted TV, movies and friends—without actually engaging in sex at all. Some perverts can hold a job and appear to function in society, but cannot maintain normal social relationships. Others are not able to keep a steady job as they continually offend fellow workers by offering to have sex or perverted sex talk. An even more troublesome group of perverts cannot stop from touching others. The men in this category frequently spend a lot of time in jail.

Perverts may technically fit into one of the other classes above, but as long as their mind is perverted,

they need to consider themselves in this class. Many perverts do not see themselves as abnormal, and hence have a very difficult time overcoming their problems. Sometimes, two perverts can marry and enjoy perverse sex together; but such relationships rarely last long and can be awful for any children produced by them. Christians need to pray that people in this condition will recognize it, and come to God for repentance, strength and healing.

15. Liars about their sexual past. Some people will actually try to convince someone to marry them by lying about past marriages, sexual experiences, etc. In terms of this article, they will try to represent themselves as a class far above where they belong. Trying to build a marriage based on lies is obviously a foolish thing to do. Yet some people realize that many will reject them as a mate if they tell the truth. But their act of deception puts them in the lowest class of all. Liars must be classified as the worst because they deprive their potential spouse knowing the truth and making an informed decision. It is one thing to marry a former-fornicator or even a former-pervert knowingly—the person who does it will simply have to live with his or her decision, and if marriage trials come, they will have to rely on God to see them through. It is far worse for someone to marry thinking their spouse has a good past and later find they do not.

Whoever you are, you do not want to be a liar. You do not want to marry a liar. One positive aspect is that people usually know when they are in this class—which gives them the chance to repent and seek to live a new life in Christ. Overcoming lying is often not as difficult as overcoming addictions. All you need to do is tell the truth about yourself to close friends. Once done, there is little chance that you will go back to telling the old lies, your friends will know better and will not believe them. Being truthful does not mean that they have to reveal every “yucky” detail about the past, but the general nature of your problems, the general “class” you fit in, the existence of previous marriages, and the setting right of previous lies should be confided to friends who will help you.

Certainly, whenever a person plans to marry, they should answer these kinds of questions about their past to their prospective spouse. Almost any believer should prefer to marry someone who has sinned greatly, repented and feels confidently forgiven by Christ to marrying someone who has sinned greatly and still feels a need to hide it.

The above classes largely deal with previous sexual experience, but many other factors also enter into a person’s ability to be married: Are they in control of their emotions? Are they truthful in conversations, or do they try to change reality to fit their desires? Can they hold a job? Can they wisely handle money? Are they addicted to coffee, alcohol, or drugs? Are they overweight? Can they stay calm in times of adversity? All of these characteristics are important. So often, people look for these characteristics in others, without looking to see if these characteristics are in themselves.

Admitting Where We Are

Both parents and young people need to look at the above 15 points and honestly determine where they are. Parents who lie about their past thinking that they are “protecting” their children are making a big mistake. They are placing themselves in class 15. Young people are very adept at finding out about their parents’ sins. This writer knows of parents who lectured their children, telling them that they married as virgins and expecting their children to do the same. Later, when the children found out it wasn’t true, the parents lost all credibility and the children went out and did whatever they wanted. How much more effective would they have been if they had told the truth about the past, and told their children that they are confident that they could do better.

The effectiveness of parenting methods can be summarized here, from best to worst:

- 1) **Live the right way, teach the right way.** Children may still stray, but when they get in trouble, they know what is right, they have seen it work, and they will usually return to it.
- 2) **Live the right way, but provide little teaching.** Children will often learn the right way by observation, but probably not as well as when it is taught. Untaught children are more likely to stray than in #1, and they will probably take longer to return if they do.
- 3) **Make mistakes, but acknowledge them and repent, and teach the right way.** Sometimes, this can work nearly as well as #1, especially when the parents openly encourage their children to “do better than they did”. Children will often see the results of the mistakes and try not to repeat them. However, if children stray, there is still a tendency for them to repeat their parents’

mistakes.

- 4) **Make mistakes, but provide little teaching.** This method leaves most of the work to the children. Some will see the mistakes and strive hard not to repeat them. But most children will simply do what comes easy, as their parents did, and repeat the mistakes.
- 5) **Make mistakes, but hide them and teach the right way.** Parents who do this are trying to take a short cut to method #1. For a while, it may appear to work. But when the children find out that their parents did not do what they taught so strongly, there is a strong tendency to abandon their teaching and do whatever they want.

Young people need to understand their importance in their “family tree”—realizing that they are the **only one** who can or will ever occupy their position. They can make their part of the tree a blunt limb that dies young, or they can righteously marry and be a solid branch that will grow for generations. Everyone needs to understand how God works:

...I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand *generations* of those who love me and keep my commandments (Ex 20:5–6).

Sins of parents are visited on later generations. Even though God forgives our sins, the *consequences* of “forgiven sin” still go on. This happened to King David (2Sam 12:9–14) as well as the apostle Paul (Acts 9:15–16; 1Cor 15:9). When people repent, consequences are often reduced or made bearable, but they are rarely eliminated. On the other hand, everyone in prosperous countries today needs to realize that they are reaping the blessings of righteous men who have gone before us—we are part of those “thousands of generations” to whom God is “showing love” because of some who kept God’s commandments. Parents and children need to be determined to follow God’s commandments that are good for us, and that will produce blessings for thousands of generations after us.

God promises a future resurrection where people from many different generations will meet and be rewarded or disciplined for what they have done in this life (Matt 11:21–24; 12:41–42; Luke 11:31–32; John 5:28–29; Rom 14:10; 2Cor 5:10; Rev 20:11–15). What are we going to say to our ancestors, and what are we going to say to our descendants if we

do not live our lives as God instructs, so that we are a blessing to ourselves and to our children? How much better will it be if we are the bright spot in their family tree?

Making a Plan to Marry

Single people who are biblically qualified to marry and who are looking for a mate need to take some time to think about what they need to do. Writing down a personal plan is always helpful—one can always go back and check it. There are many possible factors, not all of which are covered here. This article deals primarily with sex and relationships, but establishing a good job, a place to live, a functioning household, etc. are also important. We will list 12 simple, positive things that singles should do, then cover 10 pitfalls to avoid.

1. **Ask God to help you to be the right person, and also to find the right person.** Ask Him to show you how to change to be ready, and where to go to meet the right person. Avoid doing the things that will cause you to “drop lower” in the classes above. Do what you can to move higher, if possible.

2. **Think about who you would like to be and whom you would like to meet.** If you want to make lists, make four of them:

- a. Points about yourself that you feel others would see as desirable characteristics that would make you a good spouse.
- b. Points you would like to change about yourself in preparation for marriage. (If you do not think there are any, ask your friends.)
- c. A few things that you feel your spouse “must have”. High on this list should be a belief in God and the truth of the Bible, as well as a commitment not to let a church organization dictate one’s relationship to God.
- d. Points you would like to see in a potential mate, but that are not completely essential.

If your “c” and “d” lists are a lot longer than your “a” and “b” lists, then you may be asking to remain single for quite a while. People who have many ideas about what they **want** in a marriage, and have not thought much about what they plan to give, are likely to have trouble finding a mate and trouble staying married if they find one. These lists should include personal goals, financial and job plans, how marriage decisions will be made, children and sex.

3. Understand the effect of each person's strengths and weaknesses in marriage. When both people have the same strengths and the same weaknesses, it is easier for them to understand each other, but often harder to help each other. Consider these three possibilities:

- a. Both husband and wife have artistic but not mechanical abilities. They enjoy working together decorating their home, but need to pay a mechanic for simple car problems. When vacationing, they both like to visit art museums.
- b. Both husband and wife have mechanical but not artistic abilities. Either one can handle car problems or they work together on difficult ones. They have to hire someone to decorate their home. For vacation, they both like to visit technical museums.
- c. The husband has mechanical abilities and the wife has artistic abilities, but not the other way around. The wife decorates the house and the husband handles the car problems—neither task needs to be “hired out”. But when vacationing, they have different preferences of where to go.

This is just one example of hundreds of different characteristics, personality traits, and abilities that individuals might have. No couple will have *all similar* characteristics, no couple will have *all different* characteristics. This keeps life interesting! It should be clear in the above example that the husband and wife with different strengths can do more together than a couple who have similar strengths. But the more differences, working together can be more difficult. Differences can be a blessing or a curse, depending upon how one looks at them. A couple could spend their vacation arguing whether to go to an art or technical museum and never see anything—that is the worst use of a difference. Also, they could separate and each go where they want. Or, they could spend some time at each of their interests, each learning about an aspect of life that they otherwise would miss. That is the best use of differences.

4. Look for a marriage where each partner has a similar overall contribution. One-sided marriages do not seem to work well. It is fine for partners to have vastly different strengths and weaknesses. But it is not good if one partner has nearly all of the strengths and/or the other has nearly all of the weaknesses. This can happen in just about every

possible sort of way. Here are some examples:

- a. An average looking woman with no outstanding skills plans to marry a self-made millionaire who is also a musician, artist, athlete, mechanic, public speaker and doesn't mind making the bed or doing the dishes when she is too tired.
- b. A man who works a factory job and then watches TV and drinks beer until bedtime hopes to marry a beautiful woman who has a very good paying job and who can pretty much take care of the children, house and yard herself.
- c. An intelligent, well-educated man, seeks to marry a sexy “air-head” woman. He realizes the great difference between their abilities, but tells her it is all right because he does not need her help to run his life. He will hire a cook and a maid if necessary; all he expects from her is sex and babies.
- d. An intelligent, opinionated woman wants to be married, but does not want anyone to tell her what to do. So she finds a less capable man whom she can easily manipulate. (Since women naturally spend much more time than men thinking about relationships, it is much easier for them to manipulate men than the men realize.) She can even cause him to think that he is making the decisions by simply presenting him with several alternatives—several obviously bad ones, and “the one she wants”.

These plans to find and marry “someone who will do most of the work” or “someone who can be controlled” are **not** what God intended. The NJKV Bible well-translates Genesis 2:18: “And the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper **comparable to him.**’” That is exactly what the Hebrew means. This author has known of marriages like all of the above, and they have had major difficulties. When one partner is doing most of the work, sometimes the other does less and less. The stress on the hard-working partner may become too great and they may snap or stop. A lot of prayer is required to change the lazy one to begin contributing more. Also, when a person discovers that they have been “controlled” through much of the marriage, they may stop cooperating. In this case, the more-capable partner needs to allow—even help—the less-capable partner to do more things and make decisions for him or herself.

People are much better off looking for mates

“comparable” to themselves—people of a similar level of capabilities, but not necessarily all the same abilities. However, these are very general principles and it is a mistake to try to apply them too narrowly. It is foolish to say: “we love each other and want to marry, but I think the other’s overall capability is a few percent below mine, so I will hold out for someone equal.” This writer knows very capable people who passed by many potential mates because they were “not quite good enough”. Some of those capable but picky people ended up marrying too late to have children, others ended up marrying deceptive people who pretended to be wonderful then became abusive after the marriage. Many articles and books have been written about what is needed to prepare for marriage and what to look for in a prospective mate—it would be good to read some of them.

5. Work hard to meet and spend time with a variety of people. The purpose of this is not only to find a mate, but to learn the value of other people. God loves all of them; they are all important to Him and they should be important to us. This writer has been sad many times to see a single person come to some church or other group activity, spend the first few minutes determining if there is anyone there who could be a potential mate, and then simply leave if there is none. I am sure they think they are being efficient in their search for a mate. But it looks like they have more interest in themselves than they have genuine concern for others—and potential mates will figure that out.

Try a wide variety of means to meet others: church activities, singles get-togethers, doing volunteer work, pen pals, Internet chats, activities with friends’ friends, etc.

6. Make wise use of singles services. These include singles meetings, dating services, pen pal lists, Internet singles services, etc. Some people meet a person through these singles services and live “happily ever after”. Many others try them once and are frustrated. Some use them extensively and are frustrated. The key is in what one expects of them and how one uses them. They cannot guarantee success any more than a phone book guarantees your satisfaction with its listings—it just helps you find them. The more promises a service makes, or the more it costs, the more likely it is to be a disappointment. Advertisements of “beautiful women or successful men just waiting to marry you” are virtu-

ally always false. Beautiful women and successful men do not need to use singles services—unless they are very strange in some other way. The best one can hope from a singles service is to meet several people who might be interesting to you. These services are usually quite good at selecting people based upon physical characteristics: age, height, weight, geographical location, etc. They are also useful at selecting people based upon interests: sports, music, camping, etc. The important thing to realize is that in most successful marriages, both husbands and wives often do not find all of the characteristics that they once thought they “had to have” in a mate.

When it comes to evaluating personal characteristics, such as kindness, compassion, punctuality, etc., singles services are almost worthless. People who claim to have such characteristics often have very little of them; those who have a reasonable amount of such characteristics actually understand them and know that they fall short, so they do not claim to have them. The best way to use a singles services, is to meet many people through them, rather than letting a computer select a few. This way may take more time and money, but there are few things in life more important than a good marriage. Singles services can be useful in evaluating the truthfulness and self-understanding of a person. If you find a person to be as they described themselves in a singles directory, that is a positive thing. Someone who lies to be “more appealing” is not ready for marriage.

7. Make wise use of the Internet and other communications. Many Christian authors will say that the Internet is a bad place to meet singles because you cannot see or hear them, only read what they write. Yet that same author might praise the courageous women in England who corresponded with young men settling America in the 1700s, and later came over to be their wives, having never met them. Correspondence relationships have been around for millennia—some are good, some are bad. There are advantages to establishing intelligent communication before physical attraction is involved, but there is also risk of deception. Email or “chat rooms” are a lot faster than the postal system, so a lot more—good or bad—can be accomplished in a shorter timeframe. Like most relationships, it is important to progress in a controlled purposeful manner. One cannot set one’s heart too early—one must be ready to end the whole thing if significant

lies are found (no matter how “good” some of the rest of it may appear).

When an Internet relationship looks at all like it might be serious, it is time to move it to a more solid reality. Some people do pretend to be someone whom they are not on the Internet, so one wants to bypass the “phonies” as soon as possible. Exchanging telephone calls, pictures or videotaped messages can bridge the reality gap. (Those worried about giving out their address to an “unknown” can get a PO Box or have it sent to a friend’s place of business.) If a face-to-face meeting ever makes sense, it should be done in a neutral environment and each party should bring along a friend if possible. If all of these meetings establish that the person is indeed as they appeared to be when writing on the Internet, the relationship may well be worth pursuing. But couples must realize that all their written communication does not substitute for face-to-face time. Spending a few days together is not a basis for a good marriage, even when preceded by thousands of e-mails. One party will probably have to move to be nearer to the other, so they can see each other on a regular basis. It is much better to move with intent to marry, and then move back if it does not work out, than it is to marry in a hurry, and then contemplate a ruined life or a divorce.

8. Be honest, patient and determined with people you like. Some people tend to be very straightforward and say what they think right away. If you are this way, and you meet someone whom you would like to marry, use some restraint, and do not tell them the first day, or first week. Make sure you feel the same way after several more meetings or communications before bringing up the subject.

On the other hand, some people are too slow to express their true feelings. This writer is aware of compatible couples who knew each other for a long time and would have liked to marry each other, but both were afraid to talk about it, so each ended up marrying somebody else who “pushed them” into it. Honest communication is required for a marriage, but it is one thing that *can be practiced before* the wedding. If you have known someone for several months and would like to marry them, look for a good time to talk about it, but do not wait too long. One should express potential marriage interest along with clear patience to continue the friendship even if there is no mutual marriage interest at the time. **Numerous Bible examples show that men should take the lead in asking, even if they think they**

will be rejected. This author knows of many good marriages that first came from a relationship where one said “no” at first. Marriage should always be discussed several times before an official proposal is made. The “surprise proposal” may make exciting TV scenes, but it does not generally produce well-thought-out, happy marriages.

9. Be honest and fearless with people who like you. In the process of looking for a mate, you will run into many others who are looking at you. If someone seems interested in you, but you do not think they are right for you, do not run or hide from them. Peacefully “saying ‘no’” is a skill that you will need for marriage—you can practice it on someone whom you will not marry! On the other hand, do not be too quick to dismiss someone based upon one observed problem—their other good qualities may make them worthwhile. Some people seem to get some kind of gratification from “blowing off” others who are interested in them. It may be a vanity thing: “I’m so popular that I have to push away people who want to marry me.” This is wrong. If someone expresses interest in marrying you, you can tell them “no” nicely and encourage them to keep looking elsewhere.

Sometimes, people insist that they have to be “very nasty” to someone interested in order to “get them to leave me alone”. Yes, there are **stalkers**. A very few are violent. **If you are stalked by a potentially violent person**, get the necessary help right away—a court restraining order, a concealed weapon, a new place to live or whatever else is required. But most stalkers are just annoying—they just keep showing up and trying to win the love of someone who does not want them. This author has helped several people get rid of them—quickly in every case. The common practice of trying to avoid them, ignore them or “blow them off” usually does **not** work. The stalker takes these as signs of insecurity and figures that if he/she just keeps on, that they may be successful. A straightforward approach to the stalker is usually much better. Once you realize the situation, it is best to try to get rid of a stalker all at once. Here is a plan:

- a. Plan a communication with the stalker. This can usually be a letter or a package. However, if the stalker is a person who does not read well or if lots of stuff or people are involved, a face-to-face meeting may be necessary.
- b. Give back all of the stuff that the stalker

gave you. If the stalker loaned you money, give it all back, even if you have to borrow to do it. It is best to give things back, but if you have disposed of things that the stalker gave you, include a list of every thing you disposed of and how you did it—the stalker needs to firmly see this in his/her mind. The stalker must no longer feel “invested” in you. If you say, “but the stalker gave me these things with no strings attached”, realize that the stalker was wrong—if you want to get rid of a stalker, you **must get rid of his/her stuff**.

- c. Kindly state in the letter or at the meeting that you understand that the stalker is interested in you, but that you are not interested in him/her, but that someday the stalker will probably meet somebody who is. Tell the stalker that you are not interested in his/her affections and that he/she should stop wasting time and go on to find somebody who is interested.
- d. Have some of your friends write letters or state at the meeting the same stuff as in point “c”. If you have any friends whom the stalker also knows, they would be best, but others will work. Friends who are the same sex as the stalker are the most helpful. If you have a real boyfriend/girlfriend, they are best to involve, but faking one could backfire. A stalker tends to view his/her stalking as an intimate affair between he/she and you. Involving other people, usually turns them off completely.
- e. If you have helped the stalker in any way in the past (rides to school/work, etc.) tell them that you simply cannot do it any more. It is fine for you or your friends to suggest alternatives, but make it clear that you will not get involved in an on-going search to help the stalker—all contact ends at the letter or at the meeting.
- f. Most stalkers are people who need friends and help (who are not at all ready to be married). Our nation’s legal system will probably not help them. Only if it appears that the above points fail should you mention the possibility of restraining orders or prosecution under the stalker laws (many states have them).

10. Set personal standards of physical inti-

macy, which you will not violate. The Bible does not give detailed standards of all that **is** or **is not** right for a couple to do before they are engaged and/or married. We do find that Jacob kissed Rachel before they were engaged or married (Gen 29:11), but it may have been more like a “greeting” than a “romantic” kiss. Many scriptures show that sexual intercourse before marriage is forbidden. You do not want to set your standards so tight that you feel compelled to run away from a potential spouse who simply gives you a hug of appreciation. On the other hand, you do not want to set your standards so loose that they lead you down the path to premarital sex. It is **not** usually effective to say: “I will not allow myself to get sexually aroused.” This can occur simply by staring into the eyes of the **right** person, or from holding their hand. That is not sin, but once arousal occurs, now what are the standards? At such a time there may not be clear minds to think what the standards should be—think them out in advance.

Whatever standards you set in advance, you should expect to accept from the person you marry. If you see nothing wrong with kissing someone whom you may not marry, then expect to marry someone who has kissed as many people as you have. With herpes and an increasing number of other STDs proven transmittable through kissing, kissing many people is not a good idea. Some people want to wait until they have discussed marriage for a kiss, others until they are engaged. Most God-fearing couples have standards that require they stay dressed in each other’s presence and keep their hands outside each other’s clothes until they are married. **Each person is responsible to God and to their future mate** for what they let themselves do when they are single.

11. Prefer group activities to one-on-one dates. Most people behave a lot better and think a lot more reasonably in a group setting (as long as the setting is not riotous). While there is certainly a need for engaged couples to spend many hours alone together planning their future, it is not good to try to rush to this one-on-one stage with someone you have just met. This is **not** saying that it is sin for a couple to “go out on a date” together. There are needs for personal standards based upon one’s self-control. However, some men have told this writer, “If I was alone with a beautiful woman, I’m not sure if I could control myself.” These men should not go out alone with women. Others may not have this problem at all. Several authors have written books

on finding a mate without dating. One popular one is *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* by Joshua Harris. (ISBN 1590521358).

12. You will always be a child of God first, a husband or a wife second. Some of the most angry people and some of the most evil deeds have come to pass in the process of men and women seeking out mates. If one trusts God, they can be at peace through the entire process—even if that wonderful person you have gradually been getting to know disappears, or is “stolen” by somebody else. Never forget the need to pray and study the Bible even when the quest for a mate is keeping you going every available moment. “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matt 6:33).

The “Don’ts” for a Good Marriage

The above steps are good things to do. There are also some “don’ts”. Please read and take to heart the cautions, below:

1. Don’t have unreasonable expectations for marriage. Marriage is an immediate blessing to the lonely and to those feeling desperately in need of sex. It is a long-term blessing for raising children and Christian growth. These things are good. But if one is not close to God, unhappy with oneself, difficult to get along with, lacking in friends, lacking in money, overweight, quick to anger, or overcome by other personal problems, marriage is not likely to solve these problems. A single person with these problems needs to try to solve them, not just “hope to get married”.

2. Don’t get too close too soon. When two people have been looking for a long time, find each other, and both acknowledge that marriage could be a possibility, there is a tendency to *hit an emotional high and lose control*. The emotional high is good—even if the marriage never works out, the temporary feeling of great hope can produce wonderful results in a person’s life. “Losing control” is not good. There needs to be a **balance** of the *good feeling* and the *realization of great responsibility* for the two people and their families to determine if this marriage is a good thing. The wonderful feelings of being together, sharing innermost thoughts, and having genuine love and concern for each other are good. Young people often suddenly feel much closer to this potential mate than they do their parents. If par-

ents do not like or understand the relationship, it may separate them even further. Both young people and parents must resist the temptation for isolation at this time. Parents must realize that if they do not accept the fact that their son or daughter is interested in someone they do not think is the best, that he or she can still marry them anyway. Children must realize that if they cut their parents off, or engage in sex before marriage, that they are destroying much of the blessing that would be rightfully theirs.

3. Avoid steady dating. One of the best ways to avoid “too close too soon” is not to date only one person unless definite plans for marriage are in place. When companionship is hard to find, steady dating can often be convenient: when a social activity occurs or when there is just time with “nothing to do”, it is easy to call one’s “steady”—instant companionship! If the steady becomes uncooperative, or begins to get interested in somebody new, it’s over. Just look for a new “steady”! The difficulty with this practice is that people eventually like a “steady” enough to marry them, but when they later have marriage trouble, **they continue the practice of ditching the current “steady” (now a spouse) and looking for a new partner.** Statistics and personal testimonies bear out the relationship between long-time multiple steady-dates before marriage and divorce after marriage. Singles are best off with many friends of both sexes, patiently looking for one to marry, if they so desire. Steady dating, better called “courtship”, is sensible only when a marriage is seriously being considered, and should be broken up only when one or both parties are convinced that a marriage is unworkable.

4. Don’t be pressured. Television, movies, work-mates and friends so often say, “*everybody* is doing it; a 17-year old who doesn’t have some personal sex stories to tell is as bad as one who hasn’t learned to drive.” This may be hard to resist when it is repeated day after day. **But it is a big lie!** If you finds that friends or workmates are beginning to pressure you into premarital sex, then it is better to drop those friends or quit your job rather than mess up your marital status for all eternity. Asking God for strength to resist always works. You can be sure it is His will to help you!

5. Don’t be too wild. Some people want to live life to the full, experience everything, and just take it all in. In general, this is not a bad idea as long

as it occurs within the wisdom that the Eternal has given us. But some people do not always use this wisdom—they cannot resist a dare or a challenge. Climbing a flagpole or secretly “decorating” a friend’s house or car can be a harmless thing that makes life exciting. But when it comes to sex, “harmless dares” are usually not good. Streaking (running naked), flashing (showing private parts), party games and other crazy things people do can have life-time consequences, even though the person doing it may plan to remain a virgin till marriage. Governments can prosecute a person and classify them as a “sex offender” for life; pictures can show up on the Internet and produce a lifetime stigma. After such events, people will often say, “I did it before I even knew what was happening.” The way to prevent this kind of spur-of-the-moment mistake is to think out your own personal standards ahead of time that you will enforce upon yourself. For example: “If I am with a social group and someone decides to expose themselves, I leave.”

6. Don’t get in dangerous situations. These can occur to both men and women, but the way they work out is often quite different. **Women** need to avoid situations where they might be forced to have sex against their will. They should **not** make the foolish assumption that rape is a crime from which the law protects them. Yes, it is a crime, but the law does not *protect* a woman, it only prosecutes men after the fact. While it is probably best that raped women do go to court so that their attacker is punished, many women have reported that going through a rape trial is like being raped again. The defense almost always try to prove that the woman was “loose” and “wanted it” and will ask all sorts of detailed explicit questions. Most rapes do happen to women who dress and act in a manner that “shows off” their body, but they also happen to naïve women who simply have no idea that an apparently nice man would do such a thing.

Problems most often happen when women are in strange places with people they know only a little, and are with few long-time friends. This problem can be reduced by dressing conservatively, not being alone, not being one-on-one with a less-familiar man, and avoiding strange places. If a man is not interested in going places where a woman feels safe and comfortable, she probably does not want a relationship with him. If a woman is incredibly picky about where she is “safe and comfortable” (maybe only at very expensive restaurants), then a man

probably does not want a relationship with her.

Men need to avoid situations where women use sex to get what they want. One good example is Potiphar’s wife (Gen 39), who had Joseph falsely jailed for attempted rape. Even today, unscrupulous women still pretend interest in a man, get into a situation where they are alone with him, and then claim to be a rape victim if he will not do their bidding. They will tear their own clothes and injure their own bodies to fake evidence of a struggle. Even if the case never goes to trial, it can often ruin a man’s reputation—and if it does go to trial, this kind of woman is usually a skilled actress and much better able to convince a jury she was raped than a woman who was a real victim. Sex is not about love for these women, but about power and money—they will usually not mind answering explicit questions to get what they want.

The number of possible problem scenarios is almost limitless—the woman can be a total stranger to the man or someone he has known for years but not yet exploited. She may start by simply giving away “favors”—hugs, kisses or touches—being careful not to appear “too loose” to the man. She may ask for what she wants in order to keep giving these favors, or she may get pictures or other evidence and threaten to reveal their relationship to the man’s family, boss or church. It is best for a man to simply tell the woman that he is not interested in the sexual favors that she is trying to impart. If she does not stop, he should tell others about it—try to get them to witness what she does, if possible. Men should avoid being alone with women whom they discern to be the manipulative type—if men are not sure who is, they can often find out by asking other women who know them. In some rare cases, a man should change jobs or living quarters in order to avoid a woman who is a “Potiphar’s wife”—women like that can be every bit as dangerous to men as rapists are to women.

7. Don’t get obsessed with gender-specific interests. It is good to have hobbies—especially practical ones. However, they should not turn into obsessions—something that one does with every spare moment and can talk about little else. If all a single man can talk about is sports, hunting, science fiction, big trucks or other similar things, it will be difficult for a woman to have a relationship with him, unless she is similarly obsessed, which is rather rare. Similarly, if single women are obsessed with romance stories, fashion, fine china, makeup or

some other “feminine” interests to the point that that is all they can talk about, it makes it difficult for men to have a real relationship with them. Both men and women sometimes fill their lives with gender-specific interests because they think it makes them look “really masculine” or “really feminine”. It is rarely helpful, and often harmful, in finding a mate. These people may well be “hiding” from the opposite sex to some degree. They need to learn to understand the opposite sex better, both to find a mate and to have a good marriage.

8. Do not try to help or “rescue” mixed up people by becoming romantically involved with them. This problem affects women far more than men—intelligent women sometimes feel that their love and skill will “turn a man around” and cause him to outgrow his serious problems (such as abuse, alcoholism, drug addiction, gambling, violence, non-communication, etc.). People with messed up lives **do not** need a girlfriend to care for them or to marry them. They need Christ so they can get their own lives in order so that they can contribute to a marriage someday. This writer has virtually never seen a “rescue” relationship or marriage work, even with incredible efforts on the “rescuer’s” part.

What frequently happens is that the “rescuer” *enables* the mixed up person to continue their behavior longer than if they were left to themselves. Since the “rescuer” always has some kind of character fault, no matter how small, the mixed up person rarely sees the one-sidedness of the situation: “I get drunk and smash up the house a lot, and she gets upset and yells when I do it—both of us have problems.” Both people in this kind of relationship need to get outside help—from their parents, relatives, friends, their church or professionals. Getting help is an admission that the “rescuer” cannot do it alone, which does not come easy, but he/she never should have tried. The troubled person needed to begin solving these major problems before marriage.

The outside help needs to clearly show the mixed-up person how much they need to change. They should work out a plan for change within a certain time. If dramatic improvement has not been achieved, and if the two are not married yet, then they should split up. If they are already married, and the mixed up person does not change, should they divorce? That is a fairly complex question that we cannot answer here. One should get help with it. In cases where an abuser is beating or threatening to kill the spouse or the children, then divorce is

probably necessary.

9. Don’t idolize the opposite sex or use pornography. This was covered in a previous section, but a few more things will be mentioned here because this problem stops so many people from having a successful marriage. When people put up posters of pretty women and handsome men whom they do not know, they are idolizing the sexual aspects of that person. They are looking for something for themselves, and hoping to give nothing in return. How much better is it to put up a list of one’s own personality traits that one would like to improve?

Similarly, when people collect books and videos of sexy and attractive men and women, and read or watch them repeatedly because they like to “live” in that pleasurable fantasy. It is much better to have pictures of real friends, even if they do not look as good as the commercial ones. Learning to appreciate true friends, in spite of their known weaknesses is a good thing.

Idolization is often the first step toward pornography use. People need to understand that pornography is a multi-billion-dollar industry that is not primarily about sex, but about money. Skilled psychologists engineer many kinds of pornography to attract people in whatever particular mindset they may have. For those who are just curious about what the opposite sex looks like, they produce “candid pictures”. For those who want a “turn on”, there are sexually suggestive pictures and stories to match. For those who really would like a relationship, there is pornography designed to falsely satisfy their needs with a story like: “My name is Tammy. I like to hike, swim, bowl, cook, and talk about the meaning of life. I like to share myself with just the right person—you. Here is a picture of me. If you would like to see more of me, you can order...” And the orders come in—that is why the ads are there. Unfortunately, the men who view this picture and story rarely think that there are thousands of other men looking at the picture, that the story is fiction—probably written by an advertising man, that the woman will never see their order, and that after they view the pictures, they will feel empty. But not to worry—the pictures they received certainly will contain some ads for yet more pornography.

Romance novels and videos do much the same thing for women. The total size of the business is less than pornography, but there is always another book with another man with such wonderful words that women will read them. Many of these stories

are written by women who have never been married—or at least not for very long. But they do make a lot of money from their writing. They create male characters skillfully designed to appeal to women—every bit as false as the “I want nothing but sex” women portrayed in pornography.

Unless the power of God or common sense takes hold, people can spend months, years or their entire life in the pornography/romance-story trap. It can be as addictive as alcohol or smoking. These users are generally **much less able** to establish meaningful, loving relationships with the opposite sex. The people who create porn and romance enterprises do not care about their customers’ or even their models’ futures. They are there for the money now—when their customers are bored with one thing, they will find something more exciting, or more depraved, to sell next.

Some will claim: “pornography is not all that harmful, it can stimulate real relationships”. That is not where it leads at all. Researchers agree that “the holy grail of the porn industry” is the “snuff film”—someone has sex with another person then cuts them up and kills them. If real “snuff films” are made, their circulation is kept very limited to avoid prosecution, but the fact that thousands of simulated ones are made and sold for high prices is evil and disgusting. Anyone who thinks that “a little excitement from porn can’t hurt” needs to know that the path is exciting, but it leads to disrespect and eventual hate for the opposite sex, **not to love**.

10. Be careful when working in modeling, acting and entertainment fields. Many people, even Christians, say “I can work in these fields, but know better than to do anything immoral.” That is a good attitude, but please read all of this section to realize how treacherous the traps can be. Newspapers and magazines often have ads that say, “make good money through modeling, no experience necessary”. Some will even advertise “clothed shots only, no porn”. Some will emphasize their respectability, connections with art schools or big name production companies, etc. Most of these ads solicit women, a few solicit men. Some ads will be looking for “actresses” or other entertainers. Sometimes, talent scouts will come and find you. Think. Who will pay “good money” for unskilled models, actors, entertainers, etc.? Professionals must be skilled and good-looking. While there is a small need for unskilled models and actresses in specific areas with specific characteristics, the big demand for unskilled

people is in the porn industry—it always needs new, young, innocent-looking types.

There are experts, both men and women, in cleverly getting people into pornography even though they may start out to be strongly against it. They may pay a girl hundreds of dollars for fully-clothed pictures for an hour or two photo-shoot. That can be exciting when a woman makes as much money in a couple of hours as she makes all week in her regular job. The studio may encourage her to move into a better apartment or buy a better car. She may work solid for a few weeks, then be told there is “nothing” for a week or two. Later, a very kind and apologetic female agency manager may tell the new model that “all the work they have now is for semi-nude pictures and they will pay twice as much as normal. She need not worry—only women will be in the studio when the photos are taken and they will be used for a respectable ad in another country where nobody will recognize her.” Now, this woman has the choice of doing something that seems little different than a trip to the “doctor’s office”, or being unable to pay her bills. The studio may even bring in other models who will pretend to be in the same predicament, but tell her why they decided to “go ahead and do the photos”.

Would it not be easy for this model to just walk out and say, “I don’t do porn, forget it”? If the nice and friendly approach does not work, then the studio may get nasty. They might pull out pictures secretly taken of the model when she was in their dressing room, and show her some fine print on the contract she signed that says they can use any picture taken of her anywhere on the studio property and they can put it with any story they want. They may then show her a lewd caption and story put with her pictures, maybe on the same page as other very gross pictures. They may say that this is going in a local magazine and that they will send a copy to her family and employer. They will remind her that many respectable employers will simply find a way to fire someone who has been in the porn business. Suddenly, it may look a lot better to agree to just one semi-nude scene than to “lose everything”.

But once this compromising has begun, it is hard to stop and the studio owners know it. They are experts at manipulating young models to do “just a little more” each time until they get what they want. A model may be flattered, told that she is one of the most beautiful people they have seen and certain to become a celebrity with big contracts in a few months—even though that is a complete lie. Is all

this legal? Most of it is, and the pornographers are experts at dealing with the legal issues—knowing what evidence to save and what to destroy—and the young model is not. Once a model has taken money a couple of times for nude photos, she will probably never be able to sue a studio over photos taken without her knowledge—especially if other models testify that “they all knew about the dressing room camera”.

Once in the corrupt system, models soon lose their “innocent look” and the easy money that first came with it. As the pornography “viewer”, “progresses” to more and more nasty things to stay satisfied, the pornography model has to “progress” to more and more nasty things to stay employed: more explicit pictures, porno-films, telephone sex, live entertainment and maybe prostitution. Most porn models and prostitutes (men as well as women) do not like their job and feel trapped in them. They fear their employer’s reprisals, they need the money to keep going and they know that almost nobody wants to hire a former-prostitute (except those who want her to continue to work as a prostitute somehow).

The rather complex methods described above would be used by a “higher class” outfit to entrap exceptional persons who originally wanted no part of pornography. The “lower class” side of the porn industry can be simple and wicked: Models are kept addicted to drugs and beaten or threatened with death if they try to go to the police or leave. But since this paper is addressed to Christians, they are more likely to fall into the complex traps described above. Similar traps might occasionally be used by sexual perverts high in corporations or organizations in an effort to get virgins to have sex with them. Remember that sexual perverts are usually anxious to bring virgins (men or women) into their evil ways—they know they are not going to get a disease from them, and they usually do not care if they give one away. The obvious answer is for a person to pray to God for strength, and then to leave the evil environment, whatever the cost.

While the following statement may sound utterly ridiculous to some, it is profoundly true and should be considered by beautiful women. **Rather than work in the sex industry, it would be better for a woman (no matter how beautiful) to marry one of the typical “dud” single guys who might have otherwise been a life-time pornography user.** Why should a glamorous woman marry a “dud”? If the “dud” made even an average effort to do “his share” of the work, both lives would be better. He

could use the money he would have spent on porn and other addictions to help support her—his life with her could be quite happy. The woman could still work at a legitimate job and/or they could have children. They would not get STDs and they could still love each other and take care of each other when they are old. The porn industry just dumps its old or diseased models and cares not if their users ever have a normal marriage. Yes, it would be best for a beautiful woman to marry a man who is her equal, and for the “dud” to make something of himself and marry someone more like him. But even a humble, difficult marriage that delivers little would be better than a life of pornography that has a lot of promises, but delivers emptiness.

We are not saying that it is impossible for a moral person to work as a model, actor, musician or other entertainer. These are good things that can have a good use, but the professional industry has a lot more sin than righteousness in it. The field tends to have many people who will “do anything to get ahead”. A person who wants to follow God but still work in the modeling or entertainment business needs to have clear priorities, a close relationship to God and sense enough to find out exactly how each agency, job or contract will work before signing up with them. They also must be willing to say good-bye to money to preserve morality whenever the question arises.

Hopefully, **nobody** has read the previous 10 points and concluded “sex and marriage are so difficult that they must be avoided at all costs”. Throughout human history, billions of people have found someone to marry, and most of those stayed married for life. People from poorer countries actually have more stay-together marriages than wealthy countries. Wealth gives people the ability to try many alternatives to marriage—virtually none of which work very well. Rich or poor, the more Godly understanding people have about sex and marriage, the better off they are.

Summing It All Up

1. Sex is a good, God-given thing to be desired—and is best enjoyed in a good marriage.
2. Not everyone is equal regarding their ability to marry. The more pure a person has kept themselves, the better prospects for marriage they are likely to find.
3. To find a capable, attractive, fun-to-be-with mate, learn to be one yourself.

4. Develop a realistic impression of yourself—ask friends to help you. A wrongly positive or a wrongly negative self-impression does not make a good marriage.
5. Avoid relationships when one person does most of the giving—the marriage will come apart when that person wears out, and meanwhile the other person is not growing.
6. If you find yourself in some kind of trouble—bad lifestyle, seeing somebody who is not good for you—get out right away and if you cannot, get help right away. Help can come from parents, relatives, friends, a church or professionals, but get help.
7. “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1Thes 5:16–18, NKJV)

So You Are Getting Married!

When you do find someone whom you think you want to marry, encourage them to meet as many of your family and friends as possible. Try to arrange for more than token meetings, so they can really get to know them. Do more than just small talk or recreational activities. Work together, make meals together, do the dishes, together, etc. Talk about money, housing, cars and the physical necessities of life. These things will do a lot to show you what the future will be like. People usually try to be “on their best behavior” to impress their potential spouse, but their family will often not be so careful. Being around someone’s family shows the environment that they came from.

Does that mean that a marriage is “off” if some of one’s family and friends do not get along with a potential spouse? No! There will probably always be some family members and friends who will find something wrong with your spouse and vice versa. Listen to the reasons **why** your family and friends advise you to marry or not marry a person. If their reasons are selfish, you can often discard them. Some selfish or personal reasons might be: “don’t like physical appearance”, “not cultured enough”, “not rich enough”, “does not share relatives’ hobbies and interests, etc.” Remember that the two of you are marrying, not your relatives.

If relatives **bring up real reasons** that you can see are right, then you should think deeply before marrying that person. Such reasons might be: “does not do their share of household work”, “too irresponsible”, “still involved in other relationships”, “dissimilar belief in God”, “lying”, “deceiving”, etc.

The same issues need to be covered for your spouse’s opinion of your relatives. If they feel like they are treated terribly by your relatives, you may find yourself having to choose between continuing a relationship with your family or with your spouse. Since God places your first loyalty to your spouse, you may have to give up some of your relationship with your family if they do not accept your spouse. But if they are right, then do not marry. Think that through before marrying.

If you say, “I can’t have my friends and family meet the person I plan to marry because they just would not understand him or her,” then you may be in real trouble. If your relationship is so different that you cannot explain it to your family and friends whom you have known for many years, then you may not be able to explain it to yourself in a few years.

When people below age 30 marry, it is always better to seek the permission of the parents. There is no legal requirement, but the Bible frequently mentions the woman’s father’s approval as important. From a strictly practical point of view, obtaining the parent’s approval will be very helpful—the parents should work to help the marriage. If one asks and they do not approve, that is little worse than not asking at all—if unasked, they will always be able to say, “we never approved of this marriage”. So it is always better to ask—young people might learn from what their parents have to say, and they might be surprised at what they say, also.

Couples need to work together on planning the wedding. How well they work together at that task is a good indicator as to how the beginning of their married life will be. It is a time of wanting the best for each other. It is also a time for a couple to learn to put each other first—making the wedding the way they want it, not the way Mom, Dad or other relatives want it. If parents have a tendency to meddle in the couple’s affairs, the wedding is a good time to stand up to them—it will probably save them years of grief after they are married. On the other hand, if the parents are footing the bill for the wedding, and the couple does not like what they want to do, they need to be prepared to do it without Mom and Dad’s money. It is not bad if the new couple and their parents spend as much time talking as they spend working on the wedding. Getting these new relationships off to a good start is very important.

If you desire an elaborate wedding, there are numerous books that will help you plan it. Weddings can also be extremely simple. However, this

author does recommend inviting as many friends and family members as want to come. The wedding is an open commitment that you intend to spend your lives together—you should want the world to know. If a couple does not have the money for fancy decorations, do not buy them. If they do not have the money to feed everyone, ask friends to provide a “pot-luck” meal.

While it may come as a shock, the Bible does not give a single example of a priest or minister performing a wedding ceremony. The practice is only about 600 years old (Jesus came 2,000 years ago). Marriages in Bible times were confirmed by a written or oral contract, public declaration, the witnesses invited to the wedding feast, and the private consummation by the couple. The Bible gives no wedding ceremony, so a couple is free to plan their own if they so desire.

Even the state was not involved in marriages, historically. Today, there are many legal details that need to be handled when a couple marries. They can still be handled without the intervention of a church organization or a government, but one must know how to do it. Governments recognize marriages performed by judges or by church ministers, but obtaining a state marriage license can present some difficulties. Much more information about this is available in our free literature *Starting a Local Congregation* and *Wedding Ideas*. See the back cover to order. This writer strongly recommends that a couple either learn what is necessary to marry without a state marriage license, or to obtain a marriage license. Do not simply ignore the situation.

Obviously, plans will be needed for after the wedding: Will there be a trip following the wedding? What kind of birth control, if any, will they use? Where will the couple first live? How will their possessions get there? What new things will they need? What things might they have duplicates of? These and many of the other questions are the stuff of life—working together. This paper cannot cover them all, but it highly recommends that an engaged couple be planning them. Newly-weds’ love for each other will carry them through a lot of rough spots, but there is no reason to make more rough spots than necessary.

Marriage, the Ultimate Spiritual Experience

With all of these cautions, it is important to re-emphasize that there is **nothing else like** a good marriage: for love, for sex, for children, for compan-

ionship and for spiritual growth. The Bible is full of wonderful comparisons.

Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun, which is **like a bridegroom coming forth** from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course (Psm 19:4–5).

I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a **bride beautifully dressed for her husband** (Rev 21:2).

There are three things which are too wonderful for me, yes, four which I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea, **and the way of a man with a virgin** (Prov 30:18–19, NKJV).

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. **Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her** to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—**but I am talking about Christ and the church** (Eph 5:21–31).

May God bless and strengthen everyone who reads this. May they submit themselves to Him and follow His word. May they keep themselves pure and may He bless them with a wonderful and enjoyable marriage. 

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To obtain literature by phone, letter or e-mail, please give the order code (e.g. ALLIVE) from the beginning of each item that you are requesting

Free Tracts

- ALLIVE—All Who Die Shall Live Again!** Comfort for people who have lost loved ones.
- ALLTEN—Do All Religions Teach the Ten Commandments?** Some do more than others.
- GIFGIV—The Gift of Giving.** One of the many spiritual gifts listed in the Bible.
- GODTAK—Does God Still Talk to People?** See what the Bible says and what happens today!
- NEWLIF—A New Life.** Basic message of repentance from sin, baptism and a new life in Christ.
- PABCBR—Port Austin Bible Campus: Helping the Homeless.** Learn about this unique program where, by God's grace, the poor help the poor.
- RESFAC—The Resurrection of Jesus Christ—Is it a Fact?** For those skeptical about the biblical resurrection.
- REINCA—Reincarnation or Resurrection?** Eastern and New Age religions talk about reincarnation. Is it compatible with resurrection?
- RELIG—What Is Christian Religion?** It is living by the Bible through the power of the Holy Spirit, not joining a church.
- SASABB—Scriptures About the Sabbath.** Nearly all Bible verses on the Sabbath with only 20 sentences of commentary.
- SINGLE—How Can You Meet Other Singles?** Help for singles interested in marriage.
- SINOTH—What Should I Do About the Sins of Others?** The Bible gives widely varying solutions depending upon the situation.
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