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# Christ's Plan for Special Friendships, Courtship and Marriage

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# Christ's Plan for Special Friendships, Courtship and Marriage

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## Introduction

*This syllabus explores God's counsel for the foundation necessary for each person who desires a heaven-blessed marriage.*

*All around us are examples of individuals who rushed into marriage, only to become a divorce statistic a few years later. Of those who marry in America for the first time, fifty percent will divorce. Of those that divorce, half of those will be within the first seven years of marriage.*

*Satan himself has long recognized the powerful influence of marriage for either good or evil. He well knows that if he can succeed in forcing the marriage relation prematurely, the individual has far less chance of a full commitment to Christ. More that the person will be unlikely to complete the training that could help fulfill the special God-given role for his or her life. Note these few startling statements that underscore the importance of this subject.*

“Satan is constantly busy to **hurry inexperienced youth** into a marriage alliance. But the less we glory in the marriages which are now taking place, the better.” MYP 455:1

“Satan is busily engaged in influencing those who are wholly **unsuited** to each other to unite their interests. He exults in this work, for **by it he can produce more misery and hopeless woe to the human family than by exercising his skill in any other direction.**” MYP 455:3

“**Early marriages** are not to be encouraged. A relation so important as marriage and so far-reaching in its results should not be entered upon

*hastily, without sufficient preparation, and before the mental and physical powers are well developed.”\**  
MYP 438:3

*[\*All italics within the SOP statements have been added by the compiler]*

*Jesus well understood the challenges young people would encounter in our day and warned us saying, “But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, **marrying and giving in marriage**, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.” Matthew 24:37-39 (NKJ)*

*With such an awesome prediction about the state of marriage in the last days, thank the Lord for young people who are open to prayerfully studying the counsels on this subject. May the statements and examples given in this syllabus be helpful in making the right decisions in these most important steps in life.*

## Three Foundational Decisions

1. A decision to follow Christ.
2. A decision as to one's life work.
3. A decision to marry or not to marry.

### 1. A Decision to Follow Christ

*Christ longs for youth who will commit themselves first and unreservedly to His service. Today it is rare to find young people who are willing to submit their every desire to Christ and trust Him for their lives.*

*Jesus once told the parable in the book of Luke where He urged all of us, young and old, to **be persistent in spiritual matters**. He ends by raising a real concern saying, "But the real question is this: When God comes to set up His earthly kingdom, how many people will He find **who have faith**?" Luke 18:8 (Clear Word Bible)*

*Soon Christ will return. Soon He will be making up His **144,000**. Notice one of the qualifications. "These are those who **did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure**. They follow the Lamb wherever He goes." Revelation 14:4 (NIV)*

*Jesus longs to ground us in His love before we try to unite our lives in love to someone else. **Without this settling into Christ, we can be dangerous to ourselves and to the others with whom we attempt to have such a personal relationship** as love and marriage. But when we make Christ first in our relationship, we find in Him everything we need for now. The Bible promises to each of us, "Delight thyself also in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart." Psalm 37:4 (KJV)*

Ellen White understood this too. "**Only where Christ reigns, can there be a deep, true, unselfish love.**" MYP 440:1

*A person can be converted any time in their life; but how much better it is to settle the conversion question before marriage, when only one person is involved. Paul wisely recommends in Romans 7:4 that there is a priority the Christian ought to first think about before considering marriage, as we know it today.*

"Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be **married** to another, even to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God." (NKJ)

***If we learn to trust fully in Christ, He will satisfy the longing of our heart, but at the right time.***

*"This **step** [of contemplating marriage] taken unwisely is one of the most effective means of ruining the usefulness of young men and women." AH 43*

### Questions To Settle Before Considering Courtship or Marriage

"We are rapidly approaching the close of this world's history. Every moment is of the most solemn importance to the child of God. The questions that should come to every heart are, '**Am I a Christian? Is the word of God my study? Is Christ dwelling in my heart by faith? Is the law of God the rule of my life? Do the searching truths I profess to believe, penetrate into the very secret places of my life? ...Is the influence I exert, having a saving power on those with whom I associate?**' Unless the truth does have a marked and decided influence upon the character and life of its recipient, it is not doing

its office work in the life, as it should be; and **those who are not being sanctified through obedience to the truth, must be converted, or they will be lost.**" Review and Herald, Sept. 25, 1888

*Settling our relationship with Christ is like laying a firm foundation. Once that **bond** is made, that daily walking with Our Savior, then other important decisions in life can follow. Jesus long ago prioritized it this way, "Jesus said to him, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your **heart**, with all your **soul**, and with all your **mind**. This is the first and great commandment.'" Matthew 22:37, 38*

### **An Appeal to Women**

"Let [a] **woman give herself to Christ before giving herself to any earthly friend**, and enter into no relation which shall conflict with this. Those who find true happiness must have the blessing of Heaven upon all that they possess and all that they do." MYP 440:2

*As a woman gives herself to Christ, and trusts Him to unite her at the right time with the right man, so a man should also look to the Lord for his companion. A Christian man believes the Lord is the right source for a wife. "But a wise, understanding and prudent wife is from the Lord."* Proverbs 19:14

### **An Appeal to Men**

"God's invitation comes to each youth, "**My son, give Me thine heart; I will keep it pure; I will satisfy its longings with true happiness.**" **God loves to make the youth happy**, and that is why He would have them give their hearts into His keeping, that all the God-given faculties of the being may be kept in a vigorous, healthful condition." MYP 408

*Remember that it was God who offered Adam his companion. He knew when and how to make Adam truly happy, and we can trust Him for our future too. "**God Himself gave Adam a companion.** He provided 'an help meet for him'--a helper corresponding to him--one who was fitted to be his companion, and **who could be one with him in love and sympathy.**"* AH 25:3

"Now read the claims of God upon every man and woman: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy **heart**, and with all thy **soul**, and with all thy **strength**, and with all thy **mind**; and thy neighbor as thyself.' He will not release one atom of His claim; He will not accept half worship while half the heart is given to some idol. All the heart, God requires, all the mind. You are not allowed to have the mind diverted from God and **centered** upon any other object." TM 439:1

*Ellen White summarized it this way, "Our only hope of reaching heaven is to be one with Christ, and then, in and through Christ, we shall be one with one another."* The Upward Look 141

## **2. A Decision as to One's Life Work**

"We need to follow more closely God's plan of life. To do our best in the work that lies nearest, to commit our ways to God, and to watch for the indications of His providence--these are rules that ensure safe guidance in the **choice of an occupation.**" ED 267:3

### **A. First Learn Practical Skills**

#### **Youth Are to Learn A Manual Skill**

*How should a young person committed to Christ proceed to prepare his life for effective service?*

“Now, as in the days of Israel, every youth should be instructed in the duties of practical life. Each should acquire a knowledge of some branch of manual labor by which, if need be, he may obtain a livelihood. This is essential, not only as a safeguard against the vicissitudes of life, but from its bearing upon physical, mental, and moral development. Even if it were certain that one would never need to resort to manual labor for support, still he should be taught to work. **Without physical exercise no one can have a sound constitution and vigorous health; and the discipline of well-regulated labor is no less essential to the securing of a strong, active mind and a noble character.**” MYP 177

### **The Purpose of Our Schools**

“Parents do not send their children to our college or to our offices to commence a lovesick, sentimental life, *but to be educated in the sciences or to learn the printer's trade.* **Were the rules so lax that the youth were allowed to become bewildered and infatuated with the society of the opposite sex as you have been for some months past, the object of their going to Battle Creek would be lost.** If you cannot put this entirely out of your mind and go there with the *spirit of a learner* and with a purpose to arouse yourself to the most earnest, humble, sincere efforts, *praying that you may have a close connection with God,* it would be better for you to remain at home.” 5T 109

### **What Should Be The Focus of Study?**

“Before taking upon themselves the possibilities of fatherhood and motherhood, men and women should become acquainted with

- **the laws of physical development**
- **with physiology and hygiene,**
- **with the bearing of prenatal influences,**
- **with the laws of heredity,**
- **sanitation,**
- **dress,**
- **exercise,**
- **and the treatment of disease;**
- **they should also understand the laws of mental development**
- **and moral training.”** Ed 276:1

### **A Warning to Those in Training**

*In a section entitled “Potential Workers for God Entangled” we see how hard Satan schemes to divert Godly young men from serving the Lord in the special place and work He has prepared.*

“There are many of the young whom God would accept as laborers in the various branches of His work, but Satan steps in and so entangles them in his web that they become **estranged** from God and powerless in His work. Satan is a sharp and persevering workman. He knows just how to entrap the unwary, and it is an alarming fact that but few succeed in escaping from his wiles. They see no danger and do not guard against his devices. He prompts them to fasten their affections upon one another without seeking wisdom of God or of those whom He has sent to warn, reprove, and counsel. They feel self-sufficient and will not bear restraint.” AH 80-81

### **Caution Regarding So-called Talented Persons**

“It is not true that brilliant young men always make the greatest success. **How often men of talent and education have been placed in positions of trust, and have proved failures.** Their glitter had the appearance of gold, but when it was tried it proved to be but tinsel and dross. They made a failure of their work through **unfaithfulness.** They were not **industrious and persevering,** and did not **go to the bottom**

**of things.** They were not willing to begin at the bottom of the ladder, and with patient toil ascend round after round till they reached the top. They walked in the sparks (their bright flashes of thought) of their own kindling. They did not depend on the wisdom which God alone can give. Their failure was not because they did not have a chance, but because they were not **sober-minded**. They did not feel that their educational advantages were of value to them, and so did not advance as they might have **advanced in the knowledge of religion and science**. Their mind and character were not **balanced** by high principles of right." FCE 193

### **What Women Should Study**

"It is the right of every daughter of Eve to have a **thorough knowledge of household duties**, to receive training in every department of domestic labor. Every young lady should be so educated that if called to fill the position of wife and mother, she may preside as a queen in her own domain. She should **be fully competent to guide and instruct her children** and to direct her servants, or, if need be, to minister with her own hands to the wants of her household. It is her right to **understand the mechanism of the human body** and the **principles of hygiene**, the matters of **diet and dress, labor and recreation**, and countless others that intimately concern the well-being of her household. It is her right to obtain such a knowledge of the **best methods of treating disease** that she can care for her children in sickness, instead of leaving her precious treasures in the hands of stranger nurses and physicians." AH 87,88

### **B. Parents Should Guard Their Children Against Pre-Mature Relationships**

#### **Parents Should Set Boundaries**

"Parents, your sons and daughters are not properly guarded. **They should never be permitted to go and come when they please, without your knowledge and consent. The unbounded freedom granted to children at this age has proved the ruin of thousands.**" FE 63

#### **Parents Are Neglecting Their Responsibilities**

"Boys and young men are allowed and encouraged to take liberties by immodest advances of girls and young women. May God arouse fathers and mothers to work earnestly to change this terrible state of things, is my prayer." 2T 483

#### **What Parents Can Teach Their Youth**

"I know there will be no **decided change** for the better until parents feel the importance of greater carefulness in educating their children correctly. **Teach them to act with reserve and modesty.** Educate them for usefulness, to be helps, to minister to others rather than to be waited upon and be ministered unto." 2T 459-460

"This is a fast age. Little boys and girls commence paying attentions to one another when they should both be in the nursery, taking lessons in modesty of deportment. **What is the effect of this common mixing up?** Does it increase chastity in the youth who thus gather together? No, indeed! it increases the first lustful passions; after such meetings the youth are crazed by the devil and give themselves up to their vile practices.

**Parents are asleep and know not that Satan has planted his hellish banner right in their households...**The children are infatuated with a lovesick sentimentalism, and the truth has no power to correct the wrong. What can be done to stay the tide of evil? **Parents (*Lifestyle Educators!!!*) can do much if they will.** If a young girl just entering her teens is accosted with familiarity by a boy of her own age, or older, she should be taught to so resent this that no such advances will ever be repeated. **When a girl's company is frequently sought by boys or young men, something is wrong.** That young girl

needs a mother to show her her place, to restrain her, and teach her what belongs to a girl of her age.” 2T 482:1

### **Parents Need to be Wiser**

“When parents and guardians manifest one tith of the shrewdness which Satan possesses, then can this association of sexes be nearer harmless. As it is, Satan is most successful in his effort to bewitch the minds of the youth; and the **mingling of boys and girls only increases the evil twentyfold.**” 2T 482-483

### **C. Our Schools and Inst. Should Enforce Rules**

“In our **sanitarium**, our **college**, our **offices of publication**, and in every mission **the strictest rules must be enforced.** Nothing can so effectually demoralize these institutions and our missions, as the want of prudence and watchful reserve in the association of young men and young women. **Give them freedom to go and come as they will in each other's company, and they will regard it as a restriction of their rights to be bound about with rules and regulations.** Those who plead for the liberty to associate together are soon **spoiled with lovesick sentimentalism;** the enervating influence of this **much-to-be-dreaded** disease unfits them for their duties, and they cannot fill any position of trust.” 18MR 296:1 [1885]

### **Caution with Even Older Students**

“This is an age when the world is teeming with corruption. Were the minds and bodies of men and women in a healthy condition, were the **animal passions** subject to the **higher intellectual powers of the mind,** it might be comparatively safe to teach that boys and girls, and the youth of still more mature age, would be benefited by mingling much in the society of one another.

If the minds of the youth of this age were pure and uncorrupted, the girls might have a softening influence upon the minds and manners of the boys, and the boys, with their stronger, firmer natures, might have a tendency to ennoble and strengthen the character of the girls. **But it is a painful fact that there is not one girl in a hundred who is pure-minded, and there is not one boy in a hundred whose morals are untainted.** Many who are older have gone to such lengths in dissipation that they are polluted, soul and body; and corruption has taken hold of a large class who pass among men and women as polite gentlemen and beautiful ladies. It is not the time to recommend as beneficial to health the mingling of the sexes, their being as much as possible in the society of one another. **The curse of this corrupt age is the absence of true virtue and modesty.** 4T 95-96

### **Battle Creek College Prohibited Courting**

“I do not wish to have you disappointed in regard to Battle Creek. **The rules are strict there.** No courting is allowed. The school would be worth nothing to students were they to become entangled in love affairs as you have been. Our college would soon be demoralized.” 5T 109

### **The Demoralizing Effects of Flirting**

“Students are not sent here to form attachments, to indulge in flirtation or courting, but to obtain an education. **Should they be allowed to follow their own inclinations** in this respect, the college would soon become demoralized. Several have used their precious school days in slyly flirting and courting, notwithstanding the vigilance of professors and teachers.” 4T 433

### **Not the First Thread of Courting Allowed**

“We have labored hard to keep in check everything in the school like favoritism, attachments, and courting. **We have told the students that we would not allow the first thread of this to be interwoven with their school work. On this point we were as firm as a rock.** I told them that they must dismiss all idea of forming attachments while at school. **The young ladies must keep themselves to themselves, and the young gentlemen must do the same.** The school was established at a great expense, both of time and labor, to enable students to obtain an all-round education, that they might gain a knowledge of agriculture, a knowledge of the common branches of education, and above all, a knowledge of the Word of God.” 8MR 256:1 (Letter 145, 1897, p. 3, To W. C. White, August 15, 1897.)

### **Not Just A Standard for One School**

“In our schools in Battle Creek, Healdsburg, and Cooranbong I have borne a straight testimony concerning these matters. There were those who thought the restraint too severe; but we told them plainly what could be and what could not be, showing them that **our schools are established at great expense for a definite purpose**, and that all which would hinder the accomplishment of this purpose must be put away.” CT 101

“Those who give evidence that their thoughts run in a low channel, whose **conversation** tends to **corrupt** rather than to elevate, *should be removed at once from any connection with the institution*, for they will surely demoralize others.” CH 295:0

### **Older, Mature Students Different Treatment**

“In all our dealings with students, age and character must be taken into account. **We cannot treat the young and the old just alike.** There are circumstances under which men and women of sound experience and good standing may be granted some privileges not given to the younger students. The age, the conditions, and the turn of mind must be taken into consideration. We must be wisely considerate in all our work.” CT 101

### **The Leaders Must Maintain High Standards**

“The guardians of the institution must ever maintain a high standard and carefully watch over the youth entrusted to them by parents as learners or helpers in the various departments. **When young men and women work together a sympathy is created among them which frequently grows into sentimentalism.** If the guardians are indifferent to this, lasting injury may be done to these souls and the high moral tone of the institution will be compromised. If any, patients or helpers, continue their familiarity by deception after having had judicious instruction, *they should not be retained in the institution*, for their influence will affect those who are innocent and unsuspecting. Young girls will lose their maidenly modesty and be led to act deceptively because their affections have become entangled.” CH 294:1

### **D. When Trained There is a Special Work and Place for Us**

Our Lord teaches that the **true object of life is ministry.** Christ Himself was a worker, and to all His followers He gives the law of service--service to God and to their fellow men...The law of service becomes the connecting link which binds us to God and to our fellow men. To His servants Christ commits "His goods"--something to be put to use for Him. He gives "to every man his work." Each has his place in the eternal plan of heaven. Each is to work in co-operation with Christ for the salvation of souls. **Not more surely is the place prepared for us in the heavenly mansions than is the special place designated on earth where we are to work for God.**” COL 326-327

“The Lord is acquainted with us individually. Every one born into the world is given his or her work to do for the purpose of making the world better.... Each one has his sphere...He allots to every one a place and a work, and if we individually submit ourselves to be worked by the Lord, however confused and tangled life may seem to our eyes, God has a purpose in it all...” HP 228

### **While in School Make the Most of It**

“Your opportunities for work are fast passing. You have no time to spend in self-pleasing. Only as you strive earnestly to succeed will you gain true happiness. Precious are the opportunities offered you during the time you spend in school. **Make your student life as perfect as possible. You will pass over the way but once.**” 7T 275

### **The Lifetime Value of Practical Training**

“Culture on all points of practical life will make our youth useful after they leave the school to go to **foreign countries**. They will not then have to depend upon the people to whom they go to **cook** and **sew** for them, or to **build** their habitations. And they will **be much more influential** if they show that they can educate the ignorant how to **labor with the best methods and to produce the best results**. A smaller fund will be required to sustain such missionaries, because they have put to the very best use their physical powers in useful, practical labor combined with their studies...And wherever they go, all that they have gained in this line will give them standing room.” CT 313-314

## **3. A Decision to Marry or not Marry**

*The ideal time to consider marriage is after one has a solid foundation and commitment with the Lord. The second part of the foundation is laid when one has obtained a skill or vocation that could support a couple should marriage occur. With this foundation laid, one may be ready to consider the question, should I marry or should I not be married?*

*Realizing marriage is a symbol of the family in heaven, and that the Lord seeks to restore the marriage institution to its high and holy position, when one desires to consider marriage, they should move forward prayerfully and cautiously.*

*In this section you are invited to prayerfully consider the **seven steps** that can help prepare the way for a truly Christian marriage. Each step contains its own counsel; steps designed to safeguard your future.*

“The family tie is the closest, the most tender and sacred, of any on earth. It was designed to be a blessing to mankind. And it is a blessing wherever the marriage covenant is entered into **intelligently, in the fear of God, and with due consideration for its responsibilities.**” AH 18

## **Step One - Could I Serve the Lord Better Remaining Single?**

### **Seek for God’s Will**

“**Marriage is something that will influence and affect your life both in this world and in the world to come.** A sincere Christian will not advance his plans in this direction without the knowledge that God approves his course. He will not want to choose for himself, but will feel that **God must choose for him.** We are not to please ourselves, for Christ pleased not Himself.” AH 43:3

*Some suggest that because of the lateness of earth's history it is too late to marry and raise families. Scripture however leaves the marriage choice an option. The bottom line is to know how the Lord is leading each of us.*

1 Timothy 4:1-3 “Now the (Holy) Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons...forbidding to marry...” (NKJ)

*As we study the Scripture we find the Lord's concern was not so much to marry or not marry but the correct understanding of the principles of marriage.*

“Jesus did not enforce celibacy upon any class of men. He came not to destroy the sacred relationship of marriage, but to exalt it and restore it to its original sanctity.” AH 121

*Although most individuals eventually choose to marry, remaining single is an option and can be honorable for those who desire to serve the Lord in that manner.*

### **Jesus Discusses the Marriage Question**

“Then Jesus' disciples got into a discussion with Him, saying, ‘If those are the restrictions on divorce, then it's better not to get married at all.’ Jesus answered, ‘If you can't live with a wife as a marriage partner, then don't get married. But there are men who can carry marital responsibilities very well. A person's background plus a number of other factors may shape his suitability for marriage. There are some people who choose not to marry. These are some things you have to take into consideration.’” Matthew 19:10-12, The Clear Word Bible

### **Paul Discusses Marriage**

1 Corinthians 7:1,7,8 (LNT) “Now about those questions you asked in your last letter: my answer is that if you do not marry, it is good...**I wish everyone could get along without marrying, just as I do.** But we are not all the same. God gives some the gift of a husband or wife, and others **He gives the gift of being able to stay happily unmarried.** So I say to those who aren't married, and to widow--better to stay unmarried if you can, just as I am.”

“If Paul could remain single, and recommend the same to others, that he and they might be wholly the Lord's, why not those who would be wholly his, and wish to make a sure thing of **avoiding the cares, trials, and bitter anguish**, so frequent in the experiences of those who choose the married life, remain as he was? And more, if he chose to remain so, and could recommend it to others, eighteen centuries since, **would not to remain as he was, be a commendable course for those who are waiting for the coming of the Son of man, unless evidences were unquestionable that they were bettering their condition, and making Heaven more sure by so doing? When so much is at stake, why not be on the sure side every time?**” RH Mar 24, 1868

*One of the strongest statements in favor of remaining single should be considered prayerfully and in light of all the counsels regarding marriage.*

“In this age of the world, as the scenes of earth's history are soon to close and **we are about to enter upon the time of trouble such as never was, the fewer the marriages contracted, the better for all, both men and women.**” 5T 366

*With more than fifty percent of marriages ending in divorce or separation, and recognizing that Christians have not generally improved the record, we can appreciate Paul's counsel to believe. However, when the whole of Scripture is considered, God looks with pleasure upon a marriage that attempts to fulfill the Biblical model.*

John 2:1,11(NIV) "On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there...This, the first of His miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee."

The Scripture model of marriage is clear,

Hebrews 13:4 "Marriage should be held in honor by everyone...." (Clear Word Bible)

### **Balance to Previous Statement**

"When the sacred nature and the claims of marriage are **understood, it will even now be approved of Heaven, and the result will be happiness to both parties, and God will be glorified.**" MYP 455

"When the divine principles are recognized and obeyed in this relation, marriage is a blessing; it guards the purity and happiness of the race, it provides for man's social needs, it elevates the physical, the intellectual, and the moral nature." PP 46

*Obviously the Lord intends marriage to be a true blessing to men and women. **If we believe that the Lord is leading us to marry, how can we be certain? Will a union with someone special bring glory to His name? In the following sections the various steps that can answer these questions will be covered. Before considering these steps it is critical that one's frame of mind is at peace, and absolutely willing to let God set the pace.***

## **Step Two - Do I Understand What True Love Is?**

### **A. God's Ideal For Marriage**

Genesis 2:18 "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper **suited** for him.'"

"Christ came not to destroy this institution, but to **restore** it to its original sanctity and elevation. He came to restore the moral image of God in man, and **He began His work by sanctioning the marriage relation.**" AH 99

"Like every other one of God's good gifts entrusted to the keeping of humanity, **marriage has been perverted by sin**; but it is the purpose of the gospel to restore its purity and beauty. . . ." AH 99

"**Home** should be made all that the word implies. It should be a **little heaven** upon earth." AH 15

"God would have our families symbols of the family in heaven." AH 17

"**There is a sacred circle around every family which should be preserved.** No other one has any right in that sacred circle. The husband and wife should be all to each other. The wife should have no secrets to keep from her husband and let others know, and the husband should have no secrets to keep from his wife to relate to others. **The heart of his wife should be the grave for the faults of the husband, and the heart of the husband the grave for his wife's faults.** Never should either party indulge in a **joke** at

the expense of the other's **feelings**. Never should either the husband or wife in sport or in any other manner complain of each other to others, for frequently indulging in this foolish and what may seem perfectly harmless joking will end in trial with each other and perhaps estrangement. I have been shown that there should be a sacred shield around every family. AH 177

### **B. Today's Unfortunate Reality**

*Historically speaking few marriages are truly happy. Many who would like to divorce do not merely for the sake of the children. "And they lived happily ever after" is the ending to a story we seldom hear today.*

*National surveys report that six out of ten new marriages are failing. Divorces in America have tripled since 1960. Before children can reach the age of eighteen, three-fifths of them will live with a single parent.<sup>1</sup>*

"The marriage institution was designed of Heaven to be a blessing to man; but, in a general sense, it has been **abused** in such a manner as to make it a **dreadful curse**." MYP 461

"We are living in the last days, when the mania upon the subject of marriage constitutes one of the signs of the near coming of Christ. **God is not consulted in these matters**. Religion, duty, and principle are sacrificed to carry out the promptings of the unconsecrated heart. There should be no great display and rejoicing over the union of the parties. There is not one marriage in one hundred that results happily, that bears the sanction of God, and places the parties in a position better to glorify Him." 4T 503, 504

"**Few have correct views of the marriage relation**. Many seem to think that it is the attainment of perfect bliss; but if they could know one quarter of the heartaches of men and women that are bound by the marriage vow in chains that they cannot and dare not break, they would not be surprised that I trace these lines." AH 44

### **C. What is Satan's Counterfeit For Love?**

#### **Classic Description**

"Two persons become acquainted; they are infatuated with each other, and their whole attention is absorbed. Reason is blinded, and judgment is overthrown. They will not submit to any advice or control, but insist on having their own way, regardless of consequences. Like some epidemic, or contagion, that must run its course is the **infatuation** that possesses them; and there seems to be no such thing as putting a stop to it." AH 71:3

"Samson went down to Timnah and **saw** there a young Philistine woman. When he returned, he said to his father and mother, '**I have seen** a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife.' His father and mother replied, 'Isn't there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?' But Samson said to his father, 'Get her for me. She's the right one for me.'" Judges 14:1-3 (NIV)

#### **Baseless Love Contrasted**

"That love which has no better **foundation** than mere **sensual gratification** will be **headstrong, blind, and uncontrollable**. Honor, truth, and every noble, elevated power of the mind are brought under the slavery of passions. The man who is bound in the chains of this infatuation is too often **deaf to the voice**

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<sup>1</sup> Michael J. McManus, Marriage Savers, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1993, p. 29.

**of reason and conscience;** neither argument nor entreaty can lead him to see the folly of his course.” AH 51:1,2

“The young are bewitched with the mania for courtship and marriage. Lovesick sentimentalism prevails. Great vigilance and tact are needed to guard the youth from these wrong influences.” AH 52:1

“You have fallen into the sad error which is so prevalent in this degenerate age, especially with women. **You are too fond of the other sex. You love their society;** your attention to them is flattering, and you encourage, or permit, a familiarity which does not always accord with the exhortation of the apostle, to **‘abstain from all appearance of evil.’** ...There is much of this low sentimentalism mingled with the religious experience of the young in this age of the world.” AH 52-53

#### **D. What is True Love?**

“Dear friends, let us love one another, for **[true] love comes from God.** Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.” 1 John 4:7,8,12

“Only where Christ reigns, can there be a deep, **true, unselfish love.**” MYP 440:1

“**Love is a precious gift, which we receive from Jesus.** Pure and holy affection is not a feeling, but a principle. Those who are actuated by true love are neither unreasonable nor blind.” MYP 435 [AH 50]

“True love is not a strong, fiery, impetuous passion. On the contrary, it is calm and deep in its nature. It looks beyond mere externals, and **is attracted by qualities alone.** It is wise and discriminating, and its devotion is real and abiding.” AH 51:1,2

“True love is a **high and holy principle,** altogether different in character from that love which is awakened by **impulse,** and which **suddenly dies when severely tested.**

**Love is a plant of heavenly growth, and it must be fostered and nourished.** Affectionate hearts, truthful, **loving words,** will make happy families and exert an **elevating influence** upon all who come within the sphere of their influence.

Love . . . is not unreasonable; it is not blind. It is pure and holy. But the passion of the natural heart is another thing altogether. While **pure love will take God into all its plans,** and will be in perfect harmony with the Spirit of God, passion will be headstrong, rash, unreasonable, defiant of all restraint, and will make the object of its choice an idol. In all the deportment of one who possesses true love, the grace of God will be shown. Modesty, simplicity, sincerity, morality, and religion will characterize every **step** toward an alliance in marriage.” AH 50-51

### **Step Three - If To Be Married, Am I Prepared? (An Inventory)**

#### **A. Is My Character Developed Sufficiently?**

“You have peculiarities of **character** which need to be **sternly disciplined and resolutely controlled** before you can with any safety enter the marriage relation. Therefore marriage should be put from your mind until you **overcome the defects in your character, for you would not make a happy wife.** You

have neglected to educate yourself for **systematic household labor**. You have not seen the necessity of **acquiring habits of industry**.” AH 90:2

*Search your heart, do self-examination – which are your weaknesses? Write them down; ask others to evaluate you...*

### **B. Am I Old Enough?**

“Early marriages are not be encouraged. A relation so important as marriage and so far-reaching in its results should not be entered upon hastily, without sufficient preparation, and before the mental and physical powers are well developed.” MYP 438

“The young affections should be restrained until the period arrives when **sufficient age** and **experience** will make it honorable and safe to unfetter them. MYP 452

The good of society, as well as the highest interest of the students, demands that they shall not attempt to select a life partner while their own **character** is yet undeveloped, their **judgment** immature.” MYP 442:2

*What age is old enough? Of course there are various considerations when maturity is considered. However, in Numbers 14:29 we see that God held no person under twenty years old accountable for the rebellion that occurred on the way to the Promised Land. Women generally are considered mature between 20-23, and men at 22-24.*

A youth not out of his teens is a poor judge of the fitness of a person as young as himself to be his companion for life.” MYP 452

### **C. Do I Have Sufficient Health?**

“The parties [those considering marriage] may not have worldly wealth, but they should have the far greater blessing of **health**. And in most cases **there should not be a great disparity in age**.” AH 81-82

“Most men and women have acted in entering the marriage relation **as though the only question for them to settle was whether they loved each other**. But they should realize that a responsibility rests upon them in the marriage relation farther than this. They should **consider whether their offspring** will possess physical health, and mental and moral strength.” MYP 461

### **D. Am I Faithful in My Parents Home?**

A principle: Luke 16:10 “He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much.” NKJV

“**It is by faithfulness to duty in the parental home** that the youth are to prepare themselves for homes of their own. Let them here practice self-denial, and manifest kindness, courtesy, and Christian sympathy. Thus love will be kept warm in the heart...” MYP 466

### **Do I Respect My Parents or Guardian?**

“**Wise is that young man and highly blest who feels it to be his duty, if he has parents, to look up to them**, and if he has not, who regards his guardian, or those with whom he lives, as counselors, as comforters, and in some respects as his rulers, and who allows the restraints of his home to abide upon him...You consider it beneath you to do duties about the house--chores and little errands. **You have a**

**positive dislike for these little requirements; but you should cultivate a love for these very things to which you are so averse. Until you do this, you will not be acceptable help anywhere...**

I have a case now in mind of one who was presented before me in vision who neglected these little things and could not interest himself in small duties, seeking to lighten the work of those indoors; it was too small business. **He now has a family, but he still possesses the same unwillingness to engage in these small yet important duties (*the power of long term developed HABIT*).** The result is, great care rests upon his wife. She has to do many things, or they will be left undone; and the amount of care which comes upon her because of her husband's lack is breaking her constitution." 2T 308-309 (Letter to An Orphan Boy)

"To each student in the home I would say, **Be true to home duties.** Be faithful in the discharge of little responsibilities. Be a real living Christian in the home. Let Christian principles rule your heart and control your conduct. Heed every suggestion made by the teacher, but **do not make it a necessity always to be told what to do. Discern for yourself. Notice for yourself if all things in your own room are spotless and in order,** that nothing there may be an offense to **God,** but that **when holy angels** shall pass through your room, **they may be led to linger because attracted by the prevailing order and cleanliness."** 6T 171

#### **E. Can I Provide For a Family?**

*It's one thing to learn a trade or some profession, but it's another thing to have a steady job or income. Especially for the young man who wishes to consider marriage, he must ask himself, "do I have sufficient, regular funds to support a family?"*

"In early times custom required the bridegroom, before the ratification of a marriage engagement, to pay a sum of money or its equivalent in other property, according to his circumstances, to the father of his wife. This was regarded as a safeguard to the marriage relation. **Fathers did not think it safe to trust the happiness of their daughters to men who had not made provision for the support of a family.** If they had not sufficient thrift and energy to manage business and acquire cattle or lands, it was feared that their life would prove **worthless.** But provision was made to test those who had nothing to pay for a wife. They were permitted to labor for the father whose daughter they loved, the length of time being regulated by the value of the dowry required. When the suitor was faithful in his services, and proved in other respects worthy, he obtained the daughter as his wife; and generally the dowry which the father had received was given her at her marriage. . . .

The ancient custom, though sometimes abused, as by Laban, was productive of good results. When the suitor was required to render service to secure his bride, a

- **hasty marriage was prevented,**
- and there was **opportunity to test the depth of his affections,**
- as well as his **ability to provide for a family.**
- **In our time many evils result from pursuing an opposite course.**

**No man is excusable for being without financial ability!!!** Of many a man it may be said, He is kind, amiable, generous, a good man, a Christian; **but he is not qualified to manage his own business.** As far as the outlay of means is concerned, **he is a mere child.** He has not been brought up by his **parents** to understand and to **practice the principles of self-support."** AH 92-93

#### **Kind of Companion to Seek**

"...let a young woman accept as a life companion only one who

- possesses pure,

- manly traits of character,
- one who is diligent,
- aspiring,
- and honest,
- one who loves and fears God.

Let a young man seek one to stand by his side who is fitted to bear her share of life's burdens..." MYP 435:4-436

## Step Four - The Role of Prayer

*We are promised that when we need guidance God will be there for us. Certainly seeking a partner for life is worthy of claiming His special direction.* "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." James 1:5

"Those who contemplate this **step** [of marriage] should solemnly and prayerfully consider its importance and **seek divine counsel** that they may know whether they are pursuing a course in harmony with the will of God. The instruction given in God's word on this point should be carefully considered. **Heaven looks with pleasure upon a marriage formed with an earnest desire to conform to the directions given in the Scripture.**" AH 70

"If men and women are in the **habit of praying twice a day** before they contemplate marriage, they should **pray four times a day when such a step is anticipated.** Marriage is something that will influence and affect your life, both in this world and in the world to come. . . ." AH 71

## Step Five - Seek Counsel

### A. The Principle of Counseling

"In the multitude of counselors there is safety." Proverbs 11:14 & 24:6

*Gallup Polls reveal that **less than 20 percent** of Americans who get married have had any **premarital counseling.***<sup>2</sup>

"If there is any subject that should be considered with calm reason and unimpassioned judgment, it is the subject of marriage. **It is here that the youth show less intelligence** than on any other subject... Professed Christians, whose lives are marked with integrity, and who seem sensible upon every other subject, **make fearful mistakes here.**" MYP 447

"The reason that so grave mistakes are made by the youth is that **they do not learn from the experience** of those who have lived longer than they have. **Students cannot afford to pass off with jest or ridicule the cautions and instruction of parents and teachers.**" CT 223

"Meekness and lowliness of heart will lead men to **desire counsel** at every **step.**" TM 501

"Our only safety is to watch unto prayer, and to *counsel together*, believing that God will keep our *brethren* as well as ourselves, for there is no respect of persons with Him." TM 191-192

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<sup>2</sup> Michael J. McManus, *Insuring Marriage—25 Ways to Prevent Divorce*, Zondervan, 1994, p. 24.

“In his work, Timothy constantly sought Paul's advice and instruction. He did not move from impulse, but exercised consideration and calm thought, inquiring at every **step**, Is this the way of the Lord?” AA 205

### **B. God As Our Counselor**

“Above all, make **Christ your counselor. Study His word with prayer.**” MYP 435

“Let God teach you His way. **Inquire of Him daily** to know His will. He will give unerring counsel to all who seek Him with a sincere heart.” 9T 276

“There is **no safety** for any man, young or old, **unless he feels the necessity of seeking God** for counsel at every **step.**” AH 331

“A sincere Christian will not advance his plans in this direction without the knowledge that God approves his course. He will not want to choose for himself, but will feel that **God must choose for him.**” AH 43

“[The young] They are **infatuated** with the subject of courtship and marriage, and **their principal burden is to have their own way.** In this, **the most important period of their lives,** they need an **unerring counselor, an infallible guide. This they will find in the word of God.**” MYP 443:1

### **C. Parents As Our Counselors**

“If you are blessed with **God-fearing parents,** seek counsel of them. Open to them your hopes and plans, learn the lessons which their life experiences have taught, and **you will be saved many a heartache.**” MYP 435

“When will our youth be wise? ...Shall children *consult* only their own desires and inclinations, irrespective of the advice and judgment of their parents? Some seem never to bestow a thought upon their parents' wishes or preferences, nor to regard their matured judgment. **Selfishness has closed the door of their hearts to filial affection.** The minds of the young need to be aroused in regard to this matter. **The fifth commandment is the only commandment to which is annexed a promise;** but it is held lightly, and is even positively ignored by the lover's claim. **Slighting a mother's love, dishonoring a father's care, are sins that stand registered against many youth...** Take God and your God-fearing parents into your *counsel*, young friends. Pray over the matter.” MYP 448-449

“**In ancient times marriage engagements were generally made by the parents, and this was the custom among those who worshipped God. None were required to marry those whom they could not love;** but in the bestowal of their affections the youth were guided by the judgment of their experienced, God-fearing parents. **It was regarded as a dishonor to parents, and even a crime, to pursue a course contrary to this.**” PP 171

“‘Should parents’, you ask, ‘select a companion without regard to the mind or feelings of son or daughter?’ **I put the question to you as it should be: Should a son or daughter select a companion without first consulting the parents, when such a step must materially affect the happiness of parents if they have any affection for their children?** And should that child, notwithstanding the counsel and entreaties of his parents, persist in following his own course? I answer decidedly: No; not if he never marries. **The fifth commandment forbids such a course.** ‘Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.’” AH 75

### **Respect Your Parents**

**“One of the signs that we are living in the last days is that children are disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy.** The word of God abounds in precepts and counsels enjoining respect for parents. It impresses upon the young the sacred duty of loving and cherishing those who have guided them through infancy childhood, and youth, up to manhood and womanhood...” MYP 444-445

### **Be Open With Your Parents**

“If children would be more familiar with their parents, [about courtship] if they would confide in them, and unburden to them their joys and sorrows, they would save themselves many a future heartache. When perplexed to know what course is right, let them lay the matter just as they view it before their parents, and ask advice of them. **Who are so well calculated to point out their dangers as godly parents? Who can understand their peculiar temperaments so well as they?**

**Children** who are Christians will *esteem above every earthly blessing* the love and approbation of their God-fearing parents.” MYP 450-451

### **Seek Your Parents Point of View**

“... If there ever was a subject [the desire for marriage] that needed to be **viewed from every standpoint**, it is this. The aid of the experience of others, and a calm, careful weighing of the matter on both sides, is positively essential. It is a subject that is treated altogether too lightly by the great majority of people.

Take God and your God-fearing parents into your counsel, young friends.” MYP 449:1

### **D. Men of Experience As Counselors**

“While they are to love and honor their parents, **they are also to respect the judgment of men of experience** with whom they are connected in the **church.**” MYP 445

“When so much misery results from marriage, why will not the youth be wise? Why will they continue to feel that they do not need the counsel of older and more experienced persons? **In business, men and women manifest great caution.** Before engaging in any important enterprise, they prepare themselves for their work. **Time, money, and much careful study are devoted to the subject, lest they shall make a failure in their undertaking. How much greater caution should be exercised in entering the marriage relation--a relation which affects future generations and the future life?**” AH 72

“Some men have insight into matters, having ability to counsel. It is a gift of God.” 2SM 361

### **Counsel with Several Men**

“Counsel together" is the message which has been again and again repeated to me by the angel of God. By influencing one man's judgment, **Satan** may endeavor to **control** matters to suit himself. He may succeed in **misleading the minds of two persons**; but, **when several consult together, there is more safety.**” 5T 30

**“You have now made your religious progress *tenfold* more difficult than when you stood alone.** It is true you were lonely, for you had lost a precious jewel. *But* if you had counseled with your brethren, and committed your ways to the Lord, *He would have* opened the way for you to have connected yourself with one who could have been a help to you instead of a hindrance.” 2T 227

### **Caution Against Over Dependence**

“While education, training, and the counsel of those of experience are all essential, the workers should be taught that they are not to rely wholly upon any man's judgment...Men are individually accountable to God, and each must act as God moves upon him, not as he is moved by the mind of another,...” 5T 724

“We are not to place the responsibility of our duty upon others, and wait for them to tell us what to do. We cannot depend for counsel upon humanity. The Lord will teach us our duty just as willingly as He will teach somebody else. **If we come to Him in faith, He will speak His mysteries to us personally.** Our hearts will often burn within us as One draws nigh to commune with us as He did with Enoch.” DA 668

### **Step Six - Beginning the Courtship**

*Before discussing the courtship, we should consider the differences between dating and courting, and why we only recommend courting.*

#### **SOP Example of Dating**

“**To trifle with hearts is a crime of no small magnitude in the sight of a holy God.** And yet some will show preference for young ladies and call out their affections, and then go their way and forget all about the **words** they have spoken and **their effect**. A new face attracts them, and they repeat the same words, devote to another the same attentions.” AH 57

*Dr. James Dobson writes in his book, Love For A Lifetime, “A dating relationship is designed to **conceal information, not reveal it.** Each partner puts his or her best foot forward, hiding embarrassing facts, habits, flaws, and temperaments.”<sup>3</sup>*

*Joshua Harris, was a single young man when he wrote the book, “I Kissed Dating Goodbye”*

*In the book he describes what he found were “**The Seven Negatives of Dating.**”*

#### **Negative 1 for Dating**

**Dating leads to intimacy but not necessarily to commitment.**

Because dating is accepted as cute, something that makes grandparents smile, it's usually allowed in early teens. Neither is mature in their thinking process, their social graces aren't developed, but they are allowed to go off together, and typically, the parents parting words are ‘have a good time.’ Anyone who's done this kind dating knows well dynamics! After one or two dates these youth are ‘going steady.’ They feel committed. They talk committed. They can be on the telephone hours. Typically, the relationship soon builds to include physical petting and kissing. This may go on months, seldom years, until suddenly one breaks it up and has a new ‘steady’ days later; the other one is crushed.

#### **Negative 2 for Dating**

**Dating tends to skip the “friendship” stage of a relationship.**

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<sup>3</sup> James Dobson, Love For A Lifetime, Portland, Multnomah, 1987, p. 22.

When two young people get together and start going steady, they hardly know each other. The result is almost always intimacy rather than building a friendship. One-on-one dating tends to move two people beyond friendship and toward romance too quickly.

The premise of dating is “I’m attracted to you; therefore, let’s get to know each other.”

However, the premise of friendship is, “We’re interested in the same things; let’s enjoy these common interests together.” It is open ended.

### **Negative 3 for Dating**

**Dating often mistakes a physical relationship for love.**

My close friend at college, Jack, took out pretty Mary. **Jack never dreamed of getting physical on their first date; and Mary wasn’t “that kind of girl.”** It just happened. They only went on a little drive just to get alone, then they experienced feelings—they thought it was “love.” Once young, *inexperienced, unsupervised* youth opened the physical door, starting with just a touch and a kiss, too often turns out like Jack and Mary. Incidentally, Mary became pregnant.

### **Negative 4 for Dating**

**Dating often isolates a couple from other vital relationships.**

Frequently when two people date, they don’t need anyone else. Often individuals to date, give up parts of their lives that before were wholesome, meaningful, but instead concentrate all their free time with just the two together. **This constant focusing on each other is artificial.** It contributes to a fast-paced relationship with all its dangers. Isolating each other from people who love and understand you leaves one vulnerable.

How many couples have made this mistake of isolating themselves, later breaking up only to find their ties to other friends in disrepair?

### **Negative 5 for Dating**

**Dating, in many cases, distracts young adults from their primary responsibility of preparing for the future.**

Our heavenly Father has a dream for each of us. We are each individually created and have purpose in His Divine plan. Satan is well aware—he has an alternate plan, it’s called ‘distraction’ If we can be lured into premature relationships that often end in obligating couples for marriage, most of the time those individuals have to give up their training, to service an early marriage—with all it’s debts and obligations. Satan triumphs in distracting young adults from developing their God-given talents. Dating, even if it didn’t lead to premature physical relationships, robs one of much time. Countless hours of time that could have been better spent developing first one’s natural gifts—to be better prepared to serve the Lord and eventually a partner/family.

### **Negative 6 for Dating**

**Dating can cause discontentment with God’s gift of singleness.**

Singleness should be looked upon as a gift from God. It’s a season in our lives of boundless opportunities for growth, for learning, for service (mission trips). It’s total freedom to serve God without distraction.

It’s a time to focus on our dreams, developing our talents, learning to plow a straight row without looking over our shoulder at whose watching. It is trusting the question to God, and being free

meanwhile to reach out serving the Lord. One can be free to pray to the Lord about their desire for a partner, but meanwhile, why not enjoy singleness as a gift of God?

### **Negative 7 for Dating**

**Dating creates an artificial environment for evaluating another person's character.**

If a person is sincerely interested in finding out if someone else is a possible marriage partner, typical dating actually hinders that process.

Dating creates an artificial environment for two people to interact. Each person can easily convey an artificial image. Dates, dating, doesn't demand a person to accurately reveal his or his positive or negative characteristics. Dates are considered times for fun, escapes from the real world.

## **The Advantages of Courtship**

*Below is a summary of the negatives of dating compared to the advantages of courtship.*

### **Dating**

1. One's personal readiness is not considered
2. Assumed not serious
3. Experimental in nature
4. An artificial environment
5. Prayer is not considered
6. Familiarity is common
7. Generally lacks physical restraint
8. Lacks commitment
9. Often isolates the couple from others
10. Ends suddenly
11. Leaves feeling of betrayal

### **Courtship**

1. **Prayerfully** considered
2. Personal **preparation**, inventory
3. **Counsels in advance**
4. Ask **permission** from the other family
5. Couple **studies** together; mixes with others
6. **Decides** to refrain from physical contact
7. Focuses on **friendship** building
8. **Watches** for Providences
9. Understands the courtship **may be terminated**

## **Getting Permission for the Courtship**

*When a Christian young man has taken the time to study, pray, and counsel as earlier described and he and his family or counselors believes he is ready, with joy and peace he may go on to the next step, asking permission of the woman's family.*

### **Young Man—Honor Her Parents**

“A young man who enjoys the society and wins the friendship of a young lady unknown to her parents, does not act a noble Christian part toward her or toward her parents. Through **secret communications and meetings** he may gain an influence over her mind; but in so doing he fails to manifest that nobility and integrity of soul which every child of God will possess. In order to accomplish their ends, they act a part that is not frank and open and according to the Bible standard, and prove themselves untrue to those who love them and try to be faithful guardians over them. Marriages contracted under such influences are not according to the word of God. **He who would lead a daughter away from duty, who would confuse her ideas of God's plain and positive commands to obey and honor her parents, is not one who would be true to the marriage obligations.**” MYP 445:2

### **Don't Steal!**

“A **deceptive courtship is maintained, private communications are kept up, until the affections of one who is inexperienced, and knows not whereunto these things may grow, are in a measure withdrawn from her parents and placed upon him who shows by the very course he pursues that he is unworthy of her love. The Bible condemns every species of dishonesty, and demands right-doing under all circumstances.**” MYP 446:2

### **Ask Her Parents Permission**

*Being a father of three daughters I had the typical paternal concerns that my daughters find a man who loved God and would love them as the Lord commanded. In my mind I always expected that if a man knew God and valued the Christian home my daughter was raised in, he would respect me and ask permission to become better acquainted with my daughter, not just help himself.*

*If a Christian young man understands and practices the fifth commandment towards his parents, should he not also give the same respect toward her parents? “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.” Exodus 20:12*

*In our schools where we teach these concepts, over a number of years, I have observed many young men who have followed the counsels contained in this syllabus. The results have been heartwarming.*

### **Two Ways to Ask in Advance**

*When the girl's parents live nearby, the young man can make an appointment with them telling them he has a personal matter he would like to discuss with them. When he speaks with them of his interest, he can offer that he is not asking their permission without first giving them time to think and pray about it as well as to consult their daughter. If the parents live far away, a telephone call or a letter can be used. Whether the girl's parents are Adventists or not, parents deep down inside want to have a part in seeing their daughter successfully married.*

*One caution, when the man asks the girl's parents, don't be surprised if in some cases they reply that this decision is their daughter's business; that she is old enough to make her own decision. Some parents fail to realize their opportunity to be close and supportive with their daughter at this time. However, even with those who seem indifferent to the man's asking, deep inside they are honored and grateful. In any case, once the man has asked, from then on he will likely have an excellent relationship with the family.*

*An alternative method can be that the young man approaches the girl he has prayerfully considered and asks her if she would be willing for him to contact her parents, rather than asking her parents without her knowledge.*

## **Beginning the Courtship**

### **Start Your Courtship by Friendship Building**

*Approach this initial phase of your courtship as a friendship building experience. Avoid any marriage talk at this stage. **Your first objective should be to learn if you could be best friends. Do things in group settings, and don't try to rush through some sort of checklist of all the questions you would ever want to know about.** That will come later, once you discover if you are able to form a real friendship. **From true friendship grows love. But give the process plenty of time.***

“Weigh every sentiment, and watch every development of character in the one with whom you think to link your life destiny. The **step** you are about to take is one of the most important in your life, and should not be taken hastily....” MYP:449:2

### **Use Good Common Sense**

“Courtship, as carried on in this age, is a scheme of deception and hypocrisy, with which the enemy of souls has far more to do than the Lord. Good common sense is needed here if anywhere; but the fact is, it has little to do in the matter.” MYP 450:2

### **The Moral Tone of the Courtship**

***Keep the courtship public.** Avoid going places that are removed from the public. Avoid each other's home when no one else is present, being out late at night, or sitting alone in a car parked out of the way or any other isolated place.*

### **Reserve Physical Contact for Marriage**

*Because the courtship period may not lead to marriage, modesty and reserve is appropriate. Keep it non-physical. No handholding, kissing, stroking. When you accept this it takes the pressure off; it avoids Satan ever taking advantage of you. See how you do at building a real friendship that may grow into love. Physical contact is reserved for marriage; it is a part of the sexual experience.*

### **Refrain from Late Nights Together**

“These hours of midnight dissipation, in this age of depravity, frequently lead to the ruin of both parties thus engaged. Satan exults, and God is dishonored when men and women dishonor themselves. The good name of honor is sacrificed under the spell of this infatuation, and the marriage of such persons cannot be solemnized under the approval of God. They are married because passion moved them, and when the novelty of the affair is over, they will begin to realize what they have done. In six months after the vows are spoken, their sentiments toward each other have undergone a change.” MYP 458:0

### **Observe Each Others Families**

*Besides getting to know one another, the couple should take every opportunity to get to know each other's parents. Not only can it show “honor” and respect to them, it provides you with information about what their family is like, which also has implications as to what your partner could be like.*

### **Now Is the Time to Ask Questions**

“Let the woman who desires a peaceful, happy union, who would escape future misery and sorrow, inquire before she yields her affections, *Has my lover a mother?* What is the stamp of her character? **Does he recognize his obligations to her?** Is he mindful of her wishes and happiness? If he does not respect and honor his mother, will he manifest respect and love, kindness and attention, toward his wife? When the novelty of marriage is over, will he love me still? Will he be patient with my mistakes, or will he be critical, overbearing, and dictatorial?” MYP 450:1

### **Other Questions to Ask**

“Before giving her hand in marriage, every woman should inquire whether he with whom she is about to unite her destiny is worthy. **What has been his past record? Is his life pure?** Is the love which he expresses of a noble, elevated character, or is it a mere emotional fondness? **Has he the traits of character that will make her happy?** Can she find true peace and joy in his affection? **Will she be allowed to preserve her individuality,** or must her judgment and conscience be surrendered to the control of her husband? As a disciple of Christ, she is not her own; she has been bought with a price. **Can she honor the Saviour's claims as supreme?** Will body and soul, thoughts and purposes, be preserved pure and holy? These questions have a vital bearing upon the well-being of every woman who enters the marriage relation.” MYP 439:2

### **Can You Be Yourself?**

*Are you relaxed in each other's company? Can you be yourself? If not, talk about it with each other and then with your counselor. This is very important. If you have to try too hard you probably are not meant for each other.*

### **Don't be Controlling**

*Give each other space. Don't try and do everything together. You each need space to think and pray about the relationship. It is not necessary or wise to try and spend time together every day, several times a week are enough.*

### **Time Together and Wholesome Activities**

*If you live on a campus, circumstances may allow you to eat in a cafeteria regularly and attend religious services together. Beyond this, two to three times a week for several hours to visit and/or study may be enough time. Sabbath is a good time. **Doing activities together is a nice way to get to know each other and it keeps the courtship not so formal, so intense.***

### **Don't Let the Courtship Fully Occupy You**

“The habit of frequently being in the society of the one of your choice, and that, too, **at the sacrifice of religious privileges and of your hours of prayer, is dangerous;** you sustain a loss that you cannot afford.

“The habit of sitting up late at night is customary, but it is not pleasing to God, even if you are both Christians. These untimely hours injure health, unfit the mind for the next day's duties, and have an appearance of evil. My brother, I hope you will have self-respect enough to shun this form of courtship.” MYP 438:1, 2

### **Ideas for Studying Together**

*Books to consider reading together during this time: Messages to Young People; Mind, Character, and Personality; Desire of Ages.*

### **Keep it economical**

*Do simple activities that are wholesome and not expensive. Be reserved with gifts to begin with. **The nicest gift anyway is common courtesy and thoughtful deeds.***

### **Counselor Help**

*Have a counselor you both can talk to weekly or bi-weekly. (If you don't know of a pre-marriage counselor, seek out a godly pastor and his wife or older church couple who have been successful in their marriage and ask them to serve as your counselors.)*

*Allow each other to see the counselor also alone if desired. **If you have had any disagreements, stressful times, are they settled? How did you settle it? Are you both really satisfied?** Talk about some of these experiences with your counselors. Ask them if you handled it well. Your counseling sessions will be twice as helpful to you if you come with some questions.*

### **Length of Courtship**

***How long should a courtship last; ideally, one year.** Nine months can be spent in the courtship followed by three months engagement. This gives the couple time to know each other in a variety of circumstances; **to learn ones strength and weaknesses.***

### **Will Your Courtship Measure Up?**

*Ellen White years ago was inspired with this description of the process that can lead from friendship building to genuine love and commitment to marriage.*

*“Let every **step** toward a marriage alliance be characterized by modesty, simplicity, sincerity, and an earnest purpose to please and honor God. Marriage affects the afterlife both in this world and in the world to come. A sincere Christian will make no plans that God cannot approve.” AH 49*

*May the Lord, the One who created marriage to be a blessing, bless your courtship experience.*

## **Step Seven – The Marriage Decision**

***Eventually the couple decides if they are suited for each other.** If God is leading they have built a relationship and love for one another. **Other mature individuals, the counselor included, can see God's blessing too.** When the question is asked and if the answer is yes, then they are ready to be engaged to be married.*

### **Engagement**

*“Every marriage engagement should be carefully considered, for marriage is a **step** taken for life. Both the man and the woman should carefully consider whether they can cleave to each other through the vicissitudes of life as long as they both shall live.” AH 340*

*“The **step** you are about to take is one of the most important in your life, and should not be taken hastily. While you may love, do not love blindly.*

*Examine carefully to see if your married life would be happy or inharmonious and wretched. Let the questions be raised, **Will this union help me heavenward?** Will it increase my love for God? And will it enlarge my sphere of usefulness in this life? If these reflections present no drawback, then in the fear of God move forward.” AH 45*

### **Do Christians Break Engagement?**

“Even if an engagement has been entered into without a full understanding of the character of the one with whom you intend to unite, do not think that the engagement makes it a positive necessity for you to take upon yourself the marriage vow and link yourself for life to one whom you cannot love and respect. Be very careful how you enter into conditional engagements; but better, far better, break the engagement before marriage than separate afterward, as many do. AH 48

### **A Practical Tool**

*One marriage compatibility instrument I have appreciated helps couples that have been courting evaluate potential strengths and weaknesses. The premarital inventory PREPARE has a booklet of 165 questions, asked of the man and woman separately. Their answers are compared by computer and returned to the counselor. The couple meets with the marriage counselor and reviews the results of the inventory during several sessions. PREPARE has a record of predicting with 80% accuracy who will divorce.<sup>4</sup>*

### **The Marriage Ceremony**

“Christ has given Christians no sanction to say when invited to a marriage, ‘We ought not to be present on so joyous an occasion.’ By attending this feast [at Cana] Christ taught that He would have us rejoice with those who do rejoice in the observance of His statutes. He never discouraged the innocent festivities of mankind when carried on in accordance with the laws of Heaven. A gathering that Christ honored by His presence, it is right that His followers should attend. After attending this feast, Christ attended many others, sanctifying them by His presence and instruction.” AH 100:4

### **Display, Extravagance, and Hilarity Are Inappropriate At Weddings**

“Marriage ceremonies are made matters of display, extravagance, and self-indulgence. But if the contracting parties are agreed in religious belief and practice, and everything is consistent, and the ceremony be conducted without display and extravagance, marriage at this time need not be displeasing to God...

It has always seemed so very inappropriate to me to see the marriage ordinance associated with hilarity and glee and a pretense of something. No. It is an ordinance ordained of God, to be looked upon with the greatest solemnity. As the family relation is formed here below, it is to give a demonstration of what they shall be, the family in heaven above. The glory of God is ever to be made first.” AH 100-101

## **SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Behavior of Married Individuals**

“We must guard against the sins of this degenerate age. Let not Christ's ambassadors descend to trifling conversation, to *familiarity with women, married or single*. Let them keep their proper place with becoming dignity; yet at the same time they may be sociable, kind, and courteous to all. They must stand aloof from everything that savors of commonness and *familiarity*. This is forbidden ground, upon which it is unsafe to set the feet. Every word, every act, should tend to elevate, to refine, to ennoble. There is sin in thoughtlessness about such matters.” GW 125

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<sup>4</sup> Michael J. McManus, *Marriage Savers*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1993, p. 11.

“It may be that men and women will necessarily be united more or less in our important mission fields. **If this is the case, they cannot be too circumspect.** *Let married men be reserved and guarded*, that no evil may truthfully be said of them. We are living in an age when iniquity abounds, and an unguarded word or improper action may greatly injure the usefulness of the one who shows this weakness. *Let the workers keep up the barriers of reserve*; let not one instance occur of which the enemy can make capital. **If they begin to place their affections upon one another, giving special attention to favorites and using flattering words, God will withdraw His Spirit.**” 5T 594

“Shall not the *women* professing the truth keep strict guard over themselves, lest the least encouragement be given to unwarrantable *familiarity*? They may close many a door of temptation *if they will observe at all times strict reserve and propriety of deportment.*” 5T 602

**“If a woman lingeringly holds your hand, quickly withdraw it and save her from sin.** If she manifests undue affection and mourns that her husband does not love her and sympathize with her, do not try to supply this lack. Your only safe and wise course in such a case is to keep your sympathy to yourself. Such cases are numerous. Point such souls to the Burden Bearer, the true and safe Counselor. If she has chosen Christ as a companion, He will give her grace to bear neglect without repining; meanwhile she should diligently do all in her power to bind her husband to herself by strictest fidelity to him and faithfulness in making his home cheerful and attractive. If all her efforts are unavailing and unappreciated, she will have the sympathy and aid of her blessed Redeemer. He will help her to bear all her burdens and comfort her in her disappointments. She shows distrust of Jesus when she reaches for human objects to supply the place that Christ is ever ready to fill.” 5 T 598

“When a woman is in trouble, let her take her trouble to women. If this woman who has come to you has cause of complaint against her husband, she should take her trouble to some other woman who can, if necessary, talk with you in regard to it, without any appearance of evil.” EV 460

When a woman relates her family troubles or complains of her husband to another man, she violates her marriage vows; she dishonors her husband and breaks down the wall erected to preserve the sanctity of the marriage relation; she throws wide open the door and invites Satan to enter with his insidious temptations.” AH 337, 338

“The man who stands in a position of responsibility in any of our schools cannot be too careful of his words and his acts. **Never should he allow the least approach to familiarity in his relations to the students, such as placing his hand on the arm or shoulder of a girl student.**” CT 256

“Satan well knows the material with which he has to deal in the human heart. He knows--for he has studied with fiendish intensity for thousands of years--the points most easily assailed in every character; and through successive generations he has wrought to overthrow the strongest men, princes in Israel, by the same temptations that were so successful at Baalpeor. All along through the ages there are strewn wrecks of character that have been stranded upon the rocks of sensual indulgence. As we approach the close of time, as the people of God stand upon the borders of the heavenly Canaan, Satan will, as of old, redouble his efforts to prevent them from entering the goodly land. He lays his snares for every soul. It is not the ignorant and uncultured merely that need to be guarded; he will prepare his temptations for those in the highest positions, in the most holy office; if he can lead them to pollute their souls, he can through them destroy many.” PP 457:3-458

### **A Call for Reserve**

“Young ladies connected with our institutions should keep a strict guard over themselves. In word and action, they should be reserved. Never when speaking to a *married man* should they show the slightest freedom. To my sisters who are connected with our sanitariums, I would say, gird on the armor. **When talking to men, be kind and courteous, but never free.**” CH 591

“The usefulness of young ministers, married or unmarried, is often destroyed by the attachment shown to them by young women...**They should show a distaste for such attention;** and if they take the course which God would have them, they will not long be troubled. They should shun every appearance of evil; and when young women are very sociable, it is the ministers' duty to let them know that this is not pleasing. They must repulse forwardness, even if they are thought to be rude, in order to save the cause from reproach.” GW 129

“Be jealous of yourself, never become puffed up, never flatter yourself or accept flattering from any man or woman. **When persons attempt to flatter you, tell them they are giving voice to the temptations of Satan.**” Series B, number 16, p. 18

“Those who do nothing to encourage temptation will have strength to withstand it when it comes; but those who keep themselves in an atmosphere of evil will have only themselves to blame if they are overcome and fall from their steadfastness.” CT 257

### **Is Marriage with an Unbeliever an option?**

“One of the greatest dangers that besets the people of God today, is that of association with the ungodly; especially in uniting themselves in marriage with unbelievers. With many, the love for the human eclipses the love for the divine. They take the first step in backsliding by venturing to disregard the Lord's express command; and complete apostasy is too often the result.” SD 165

“The unbelieving may possess an excellent moral character; but the fact that he or she has not answered to the claims of God, and has neglected so great salvation, is sufficient reason why such a union should not be consummated. The character of the unbelieving may be similar to that of the young man to whom Jesus addressed the words, "One thing thou lackest;" that was the one thing needful.

The plea is sometimes made that the unbeliever is favorable to religion and is all that could be desired in a companion except in one thing--he is not a Christian. Although the better judgment of the believer may suggest the impropriety of a union for life with an unbeliever, yet, in nine cases out of ten, inclination triumphs. Spiritual declension commences the moment the vow is made at the altar; religious fervor is dampened, and one stronghold after another is broken down, until both stand side by side under the black banner of Satan.” 4T 505

“To connect with an unbeliever is to place yourself on Satan's ground. You grieve the Spirit of God and forfeit His protection. Can you afford to have such terrible odds against you in fighting the battle for everlasting life? Ask yourself: ‘Will not an unbelieving husband lead my thoughts away from Jesus? He is a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God; will he not lead me to enjoy the things that he enjoys?’ The path to eternal life is steep and rugged. Take no additional weights to retard your progress.” AH 67:1,2

## “For Better or For Worse”

### Divorce

“This kind of marrying and giving in marriage is one of Satan's special devices, and he succeeds in his plans almost every time. I have the most painful sense of helplessness when parties come to me for counsel upon this subject. I may speak to them the words that God would have me; but they frequently question every point, and plead the wisdom of carrying out their own purposes; and eventually they do so.” MYP 458:1

### Our Present Condition

“In consequence of hasty marriages, even among the professed people of God, there are separations, divorces, and great confusion in the church.” AH 80

### Reality According to God's View

“Your ideas in regard to the marriage relation have been erroneous. *Nothing but the violation of the marriage bed can either break or annul the marriage vow.* We are living in perilous times, when there is no assurance in anything save in firm, unwavering faith in Jesus Christ. There is no heart that may not be estranged from God through the devices of Satan, if one does not watch unto prayer.” AH 341:3

“God gave *only one cause* why a wife should leave her husband, or the husband leave his wife, which was *adultery*. Let this ground be prayerfully considered.” AH 342:2

“‘Thou shalt not commit adultery.’ This commandment forbids not only acts of impurity, but sensual thoughts and desires, or any practice that tends to excite them. Purity is demanded not only in the outward life but in the secret intents and emotions of the heart. Christ, who taught the far-reaching obligation of the law of God, declared the evil thought or look to be as truly sin as is the unlawful deed.” PP 308

### Still Married in God's Sight, Although Divorced

“A woman may be legally divorced from her husband by the laws of the land and yet not divorced in the sight of God and according to the higher law. There is only one sin, which is adultery, which can place the husband or wife in a position where they can be free from the marriage vow in the sight of God. Although the laws of the land may grant a divorce, yet they are husband and wife still in the Bible light, according to the laws of God.” AH 344:2

“If the wife is *an unbeliever* and an opposer, the husband cannot, in view of the law of God, put her away on this ground alone. In order to be in harmony with the law of Jehovah, he must abide with her unless she chooses of herself to depart.” AH 344

“If your dispositions are not congenial, would it not be for the glory of God for you to change these dispositions...I tell you both to seek the Lord...You can and must change your attitude.” AH 345

### Grounds for Divorce Not Always be Exercised

“In regard to the case of the injured sister, A.G., we would say in reply to the questions of ----- that it is a feature in the cases of most who have been overtaken in sin, as her husband has, that they have no real sense of their villainy. Some, however, do and are restored to the church, but not till they have merited the confidence of the people of God by unqualified confessions and a period of sincere repentance. This case presents difficulties not found in some, and we would add only the following:

“1. In cases of the violation of the seventh commandment where the guilty party does not manifest true repentance, if the injured party can obtain a divorce without making their own cases and that of their children, if they have them, worse by so doing, they should be free.”

“2. If they would be liable to place themselves and their children in worse condition by a divorce, we know of no scripture that would make the innocent party guilty by remaining.” AH 346

### **Separation in Difficult Situations**

“I have received your letter, and in reply to it I would say, I cannot advise you to return to D unless you see decided changes in him. The Lord is not pleased with the ideas he has had in the past of what is due to a wife. . . . If [he] holds to his former views, the future would be not better for you than the past has been. He does not know how to treat a wife.” AH 343

“I cannot see what more can be done in this case, and I think that the only thing that you can do is to give up your wife. If she is thus determined not to live with you, both she and you would be most miserable to attempt it. And as she has fully and determinedly set her stakes, you can only shoulder your cross and show yourself a man.” AH 344