

Marriage is important in God's eyes (Genesis 2:18, Hebrews 13:4) and it is right that young men and women should be concerned to find the right partner, but the process of finding a husband or wife is one in which many young Christians lose their way. Let me suggest some principles that will help you avoid the common pitfalls.

Put God First

In every area of life the Christian's first thought must be, "How can I bring the greatest glory to the Lord?" God must come first whatever the personal cost may be (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Don't Waste Your Time

The Christian has the eternal bliss of heaven to look forward to. Every child of God is a stranger and pilgrim passing through this world for a relatively short time. In that time there is much to be accomplished: we cannot afford to waste any of it in fruitless daydreaming, self-indulgent pleasure or experimental relationships (Ephesians 5:16). It is the world's way to start dating at an early age and to "try out" relationships. Many young Christians have wasted important years of their lives in relationships that have led nowhere. They have exposed themselves to unnecessary temptation and caused themselves much grief from which they have taken months or years to recover. Is it unreasonable to suggest that a couple should not start dating until each has already considered prayerfully the future course of his or her life, decided on whether marriage is for them as individuals, observed one another for some time in the company of other Christians and made a decision to enter into a serious relationship with a view to marriage?

Do You Really Need The Hassle?

To be married is the norm (Genesis 2:18) but there are some who, because of their calling from God will choose to remain single (Matthew 19:10-12). Singleness is not an inferior state, but it is an exceptional state with special difficulties. We must carefully consider the direction in which God is calling and honestly ask the question, "Given the way in which I believe I am being directed to serve the Lord, could I best serve Him as a married person or as a single person?"

Only In The Lord

It is clear and beyond question that a child of God should never enter into a relationship that binds and obligates him to an unbeliever (1 Corinthians 7:39, 2 Corinthians 6:14-16): to do so is an act of sinful rebellion and often incurs the chastisement of God.

Use Your Head

In making decisions, including decisions about the choice of a partner, we are directed to be led by wisdom, not feelings and to exercise careful thought, not acting on impulse (Ephesians 5:15). Further, we are to exercise that wisdom that is revealed in the word of God, not the wisdom of the world, which is foolishness (1 Corinthians 3:19). God does not, in normal circumstances, tell us specifically whom we should marry but He does give us, in scripture, wise counsel to guide us in our choice. He has told us what is the purpose of marriage. He has told us what are the responsibilities of a husband and of a wife. He has told us what are the qualities that should be aspired to by Christian husbands and wives. We must consider these things carefully and having understood the wise counsel of God actively seek a partner who is committed to strive toward such standards. Search the scriptures to see how much God has to say on these things, and in particular study the following passages: Genesis 2:18-25, Proverbs 31:10-31, Ephesians 5:22-33, 1 Peter 3:1-7.

Look In The Right Places

Having come to a wise decision about the kind of partner you are seeking, look in the places where such people are likely to be found. Be prepared to travel a bit. Make enquiries. The worth of an excellent wife is far above rubies (Proverbs 31:10) and precious gems are not readily found. Of course, do not forget that nothing should take priority over God given duties (Matthew 6:33).

Take advice

One of the greatest failings among young Christians is the failure to consider the wise advice of godly elders. It is not without significance that in the book of Proverbs youth is paralleled with naiveté (Proverbs 1:4, 7:7). The wisdom of years of experience is to be respected. If that is true should we not seek it out regarding what is one of the most important decisions of life?

Be Honest

No one would disagree that the Lord's people should be truthful always, yet when it comes to relationships we are rather inclined to play games with one another. We hide our true feelings and expect others to guess accurately what we are thinking. Marriage is a relationship of openness. It is the only human relationship in which total openness is appropriate, and if a good marriage is going to be built it must start on a foundation of openness and honesty.

Flee Youthful Lusts

The Christian is constantly faced with temptations that arise not only from the world but also from within: the lusts of the flesh (1 Peter 2:11). Among those strong desires which wage war against the soul scripture gives special mention to the pull toward sexual sin. God's word gives us no warrant to assume that we are strong to resist it, rather we are warned to flee from it and to avoid not only the sin but also the possibility of being tempted (e.g. Proverbs 5:8). In practice this means that a Christian couple, before marriage, must be very careful about the situations they place themselves in. They will need to have some time alone together, but they must be very careful about how and where they spend that time and they must set clear rules for themselves. For the same reason a relationship before marriage should not be unnecessarily prolonged.

Suggestions For Further Reading

- Hanging In There, John Dickson, Matthias Media, 1997
- Decision Making And The Will Of God, Garry Friesen, Multnomah, 1980
- Christian Living In The Home, Jay E Adams, Presbyterian And Reformed, 1772
- Pure Sex, Tony Payne and Philip Jensen, Matthias Media, 1998
- Strengthening Your Marriage, Wayne Mack, Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977