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Christian Morality

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CHRISTIAN MORALITY

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Sex And Morals

No subject generates as many questions and as much controversy and confusion as sex and morals. Morality, however, encompasses more than sexual behavior. The Bible gives us some direct and practical guidelines on the matters of morality. This course is generally presented for young teenagers, however, it may also be helpful to older persons as well.

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Chapter One

What about Sex Before Marriage?

“If you love each other, is it alright to have sex before marriage? Or should you wait until you are married?” “I am still a virgin, is there something wrong with me?” Questions like these abound among young people today.

Nevertheless, “It is the exceptional young person who has not had sexual intercourse while still a teenager,” concluded the Alan Guttmacher Institute in its 1981 report. “Eight in ten males and seven in 10 females report having had intercourse while in their teens.”

“And why not?” you may ask. After all, it is only natural to want to feel loved. And when you are young, your passions can be powerful to the point of distraction. Furthermore, there is the influence of your peers. They may tell you that premarital sex is fun, and that when you really like someone, it is only natural to want to be intimate with them. Some may even say that having sex proves your manhood or womanhood. Not wanting to be viewed as odd, you may thus feel under pressure to experience sexual relations.

Contrary to popular opinion, not all young people are in a hurry to give up their virginity. Consider, for example, a young single woman named Mary. She was getting a medical checkup when her doctor inquired: “What method of contraception are you

using?” When Mary replied, “I’m not using any,” her doctor exclaimed: What! Do you want to get pregnant? How do you expect not to get pregnant if you’re not using anything?” Mary replied: “Because I’m not having sex!”

Her doctor stared at her in disbelief. “This is unbelievable, she said. “Kids come in here 13 years old, and they are no longer virgins. You are a remarkable person indeed.”

What made Mary “remarkable?” She obeyed the Bible’s admonition: “Now the body is not for fornication (including premarital sex)...Flee from fornication.” (I Corinthians 6:13, 18). Yes, Mary recognized premarital sex as a serious sin against God! “This is what God wills,” states I Thessalonians 4:3, “that you abstain from fornication.” Why, though, does the Bible forbid premarital sex?

The After Effects.

Even in Bible times, some engaged in premarital sex. An immoral woman might invite a young man to indulge, saying: “Do come, let us drink our fill of love until the morning; do let us enjoy each other with love expressions” (Proverbs 7:18). The Bible, however, warned that pleasures enjoyed today can cause pain tomorrow. “For as a honeycomb the lips of a strange woman keep dripping, and her palate is smoother than oil,” observed Solomon. “But,” he continued, “the aftereffect from her is as bitter as wormwood; it is as sharp as a two-edged sword” (Proverbs 5:3-4).

One possible aftereffect is the contracting of a sexual transmitted disease. Imagine the heartache if years later down the road one learned that a sexual experience has caused irreversible damage, perhaps infertility or a serious health problem! As Proverbs 5:11 warns: “You have to groan in your future when your flesh and your organism come to an end.” Premarital sex also leads to illegitimacy, abortion, and premature marriage, each with its painful consequences. Yes, one engaging in premarital sex truly “sins against his or her own body” (I Corinthians 6:18).

Recognizing such dangers, Dr. Richard Lee wrote in the *Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine*: “We boast to our young people about our great breakthroughs in preventing pregnancy, and treating venereal disease disregarding the most reliable and specific, the least expensive and toxic, preventative of both gestational and venereal distress, the ancient, honorable, and even healthy state of virginity.”

Guilt and Disappointment.

Many young people have further found that premarital sex to be bitterly disappointing. The result? Feelings of guilt and diminished self-respect. Twenty-three-year old John admitted: “It was a big letdown, no feeling good or warmth of love as it was supposed to be. Rather the full realization of how wrong the act was hit me. I feel totally ashamed at my lack of self-control.” Confessed a young woman: “I came back to reality with a sickening thud....The party was over and I felt sick, cheap, and dirty. It didn’t make me feel any better to hear him say, “Why on earth didn’t you stop us before things went too far?”

Such reactions are not rare, according to Dr. Jay Segal. After studying the sexual activities of 2,436 college students, he concluded: “Dissatisfying and disappointing first (sexual intercourse) experiences exceeded those that were fulfilling and exciting by a ratio of almost two to one. Both males and females recalled that they were greatly disappointed.” Granted, even married couples may sometimes have their difficulties when it comes to sex. But in a marriage, where there is genuine love and commitment, such problems usually can be worked out.

The Price of Promiscuity.

Some young people feel no guilt whatsoever about having relations, and so they go all out for sensual gratification, seeking sex with a variety of partners. Researcher Robert Sorensen, in his study of teenage sexuality, observed that such youths pay a price for their promiscuity. Writes Sorensen: “In our personal interviews, many (promiscuous youths) reveal....that they believe they are functioning with little purpose and self-contentment.” Forty-six percent of these agreed with the statement, “The way

I'm living right now, most of my abilities are going to waste." Sorenson further found that these promiscuous youths reported low "self-confidence and self-esteem."

It is just as Proverbs 5:9 says: Those engaging in immorality "give to others (their) dignity."

The Morning After.

Once a couple have had illicit sexual relations, they often look at each other differently. A boy may find that his feelings for the girl are not as intense as before; he may even find her less attractive. A girl, on the other hand, may feel exploited. Recall the Bible account of the young man Amnon and how lovesick he was over the virgin Tamar. Yet, after intercourse with her, "Amnon began hating her with a very great hatred" (2 Samuel 13:15).

A girl named Martha had a similar experience. After having sexual relations, she admitted: "I hated myself (for my weakness), and I hated my boyfriend. In fact, the sex relations we thought would bring us closer ended our relationship. I didn't want to see him again." Yes, by having premarital sex, a couple cross a line over which they can never go back.

Paul H. Landis, a respected researcher in the field of family life, observes: "The temporary effect (of premarital sex) may be to strengthen the relationship, but the long-term effects may be quite different." Indeed, couples who have sex are more likely to break up than are those who abstain! The reason? Illicit sex breeds jealousy and distrust. Admitted one youth: "Some fellows when they have intercourse, think afterwards," if she had it with me maybe she had it with someone else." As a matter of fact, I felt that way.....I was extremely jealous and doubtful, and suspicious."

How remote this is from genuine love which "is not jealous,....does not behave indecently, does not look for its own interests" (I Corinthians 13:4-5). The love that builds lasting relationships is not based on blind passion.

The Benefits of Chastity - Peace and Self-Respect.

Staying chaste, however, does more than help a youth avoid dire consequences. The Bible tells of a young maiden who remained chaste despite intense love for her boyfriend. As a result, she could proudly say: "I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers." She was no "swinging door" that easily "opened up" under immoral pressure. Morally, she stood like the unscalable wall of a fortress with inaccessible towers! She deserved to be called "the pure one" and could say of her prospective husband, "I have become in his eyes like her that is finding peace." Her own peace of mind contributed to the contentment between the two of them. (Song of Solomon 6:9, 10; 8:9-10).

Mary, the chaste girl mentioned previously, had the same inner peace and self-esteem. She said: "I felt good about myself. Even when workmates would ridicule me, I viewed my virginity like a diamond, valuable because it is so rare." Additionally, youths like Mary are not plagued by a guilty conscience. "There is nothing nicer than to have a good conscience toward God," stated Jack, a 19 year old Christian.

"But how can a couple get to know each other well if they don't have sex?" wonder some young people.

Building Lasting Intimacy.

Sex alone cannot forge a permanent relationship; neither can expressions of affection, such as kissing. A young woman named Ann warns: "I learned from experience that at times you can get too close physically too soon." When a couple spend their time lavishing affection upon each other, meaningful communication ceases. They may thus gloss over serious differences that can resurface after marriage. When Ann later began to date another man, the one she eventually married, she was careful to avoid becoming too intimate physically. Explained Ann: "We spent our time working out problems and discussing our goals in life. I got to know what type of *person* I was marrying. After marriage, there were only pleasant surprises."

Was it hard for Ann and her boyfriend to show such self-control? "Yes, it was!"

confessed Ann. “I am just naturally an affectionate person. But we talked about the dangers and helped each other. We both wanted very much to please God and not spoil our upcoming marriage.”

But does it not help for a new husband or wife to have previous sexual experience? No, on the contrary, it often detracts from marital intimacy! In premarital sexual relations, the emphasis is on self-gratification, the physical aspects of sex. Mutual respect is undermined by uncontrolled passion. Once each selfish patterns are formed, they are hard to break and can eventually wreck havoc on the relationship.

In marriage, however, a healthy intimate relationship demands restraint, and self-control. The focus must be on giving, “*rendering* one’s sexual due,” rather than *getting* (I Corinthians 7:3-4). Staying chaste helps you develop such self-control. It teaches you to put unselfish concern for the other’s welfare ahead of your own desires. Remember, too, that marital satisfaction is not purely due to physical factors. Sociologist Seymour Fisher says that a woman’s sexual response also depends upon her having “feelings of intimacy, closeness, and dependability” and her husband’s “ability to identify with his wife and...how much confidence she had in him.”

Interestingly, in a study of 177 married women, three fourths of those who had engaged in premarital sex reported sexual difficulties during the first two weeks of marriage. Furthermore, all who reported long-term sexual difficulties “had histories of premarital intercourse.” Research has further shown that those engaging in premarital sex are twice as likely to commit adultery after marriage! How true are the Bible’s words: “Fornication....take(s) away good motive” (Hosea 4:11).

Therefore, “you will reap what you sow” (Galatians 6:7-8). Sow passion and reap a bumper crop of doubts and insecurities. But if you sow self-control, you will reap a harvest of fidelity and security. Mary, mentioned earlier, has since been happily married for several years now. Says her husband, “It’s an indescribable joy to come home to my wife and know that we belong only to each other. Nothing can replace this feeling of

confidence.”

Those who wait until marriage also enjoy peace of mind, knowing they are pleasing to God. Still, staying chaste these days is far from easy.

Notes to remember:

- * By having premarital sex, a couple cross a line over which they can never go back!
- * In the wake of immoral sex, a young person often feels exploited or even humiliated.
- * Sexually transmitted diseases often result from premarital sex.
- * Excessive displays of affection can expose a couple to immoral dangers and curtail meaningful communication.
- * Marital happiness depends upon more than a couple’s physical relationship.

Chapter Two

How Can I Say No To Premarital Sex?

A Nationwide survey by “Teen Magazine revealed that many of its young readers wanted information on the following question: “How to say no to sexual pressure.”

In Psalms 119:9, the psalmist posed a similar question: “How will a young man (or woman) cleanse his path?” The answer: “By keeping on guard according to your (God’s) word.” But more is needed than head knowledge. “You know in your mind what the Bible says about immoral sex,” confessed one young woman. “But your heart keeps pushing these reasons into the back of your mind.” Appropriately, the psalmist continued: “In my heart I have treasured up your saying, in order that I may not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11).

Safeguard the Heart.

To treasure God’s sayings in your heart requires first that you read and study the Scriptures and the Bible-based literature. This can help convince you of the value of God’s laws. On the other hand, reading, listening to, or viewing sexually simulating material, whether it be on the T.V. or the Internet, whips up the “sexual appetite” (Colossians 3:5). So strictly avoid such material! Ponder instead on things that are chaste pure and clean.

Research has further shown that one’s close friends can have a great influence on whether one stays chaste. Said the psalmist: “A partner I am of all those who do fear you (God), and of those keeping your orders” (Psalms 119:63).

Are your friends those who are really striving to “keep God’s orders?” A young woman named Joanna makes this observation regarding choice of friends” “If you are around people who love God, you will find that, as you talk about morals, you start to feel the same way they do. For instance, if you hear them say that immorality is

disgusting, you begin to feel likewise. On the other hand, if you are with someone that doesn't care, pretty soon you will become just like them" (Proverbs 13:20).

It is dating and courtship, however, that often present the greatest challenge to remaining chaste. Consider a nationwide study by Robert Sorensen. He found that 56 percent of the young men and 82 per cent of the women surveyed who had experienced sexual relations, did so for the first time with someone with whom they were going steady, or at least knew well and liked a lot. What, then, if you are old enough to pursue marriage and are dating someone? How can you get better acquainted with that person and still keep chaste?

Avoiding Pitfalls When Courting.

The Bible warns: "The heart is trickier than anything and in a desperate state; who understands it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). One may feel a perfectly normal attraction toward someone of the opposite sex. But the more you are around each other, the greater the attraction. And this normal desire can lead your heart astray. "Out of the heart come wicked reasonings...fornications," said Jesus Christ (Matthew 15:19).

Often young couples do not plan to have sexual intercourse. In most cases, this happened because a couple engaged in petting, or stimulating touching, of intimate body parts. Confessed one unwed mother: "To me and to most of the kids I know, it just kind of went a little bit further each time, and finally you aren't a virgin anymore. You start out to do a little petting, and before you realize what is happening, you can't stop it."

To avoid falling into sexual immorality yourself, you must lead your heart, rather than it lead you (Proverbs 23:19). How can you do this?

Set Limits.

A young man may feel that his girlfriend expects him to initiate kissing and petting, when in reality she may not. "By presumptuousness one only causes a struggle, but

with those consulting together there is wisdom” (Proverbs 13:10). So, if you are dating, let the other person know how you feel about the matter by “consulting together.” Wisely set limits on expressions of affection. At the same time, don’t give out mixed signals. Wearing tight, revealing, sexy clothing can give your partner the wrong message.

Avoid Tempting Situations.

The Bible tells us about a young virgin who was invited by her boyfriend to hike with him to a secluded spot in the mountains. His motive? So they could enjoy the beauties of early spring. However, the girl’s brothers found out about the planned excursion and indignantly put a stop to it. Was it because they felt she was immorally inclined? Not at all! But they well knew the power of temptation under such circumstances (Song of Solomon 1:6; 2:8-15). Likewise, you should avoid circumstances that could lead to temptation, such as being alone in a house, an apartment, or a parked automobile with someone you are dating.

Know Your Limitations.

There are times when you may be more vulnerable to sexual enticements than at other times. For example, you may be discouraged because of some personal failure or a disagreement with your parents. Whatever the case, during such times you will have to be especially cautious (Proverbs 24:10). Also, be careful about the use of alcoholic beverages. Under the influence of these, you can lose your inhibitions. “Wine and sweet wine are what take away good motive” (Hosea 4:11).

Say No And Mean It.

What can a couple do when emotions escalate and they find themselves becoming dangerously intimate? One of them has to say or do something that breaks that mood. Debra found herself alone with her date, who stopped the car in a lonely place to “talk.” When the emotions began to escalate, Debra said to her date: “Isn’t this necking? Shouldn’t we stop?” That broke the mood. Her date immediately drove her home. To say no under these circumstances may be the hardest thing you have ever had to do.

But as one 20 year old woman who gave in to having sexual relations said: “If you don’t walk away, you will be sorry.”

Have a Chaperon.

Though viewed as old-fashioned by some, having a chaperon to accompany you on a date is still a good idea. “It looks as if we can’t be trusted,” complain some couples. Perhaps. But is it wise to trust oneself? Proverbs 28:26 bluntly states: “He that is trusting in his own heart is stupid, but he that is walking in wisdom is the one that will escape.” Walk wisely by having someone else join you on a date. “I really respect the fellow who brings his own chaperon. I know he is as interested as I am in being chaste,” revealed Debra. “It works no hardship, for when we want to say something privately, we just step out of earshot of others. The protection it affords is worth any inconvenience.”

Friendship With God.

Above all, developing a close friendship with God, will help you avoid conduct that offends Him. Pouring out your heart to Him about specific problems draws you close to Him. Many couples wishing to remain chaste have even prayed together God during emotionally charged situations, asking God’s help and blessing, it is possible to say no to sexual immorality.

Notes to remember.

- * When courting, avoid immorality by not isolating yourselves.
- * If a situation becomes too “heated,” have the sense to say no! and mean it!
- * Avoid situations that could lead to necking and petting.
- * Date in groups or have a chaperon.
- * From the start, let your partner know your attitude regarding limits on expressions of affection.
- * Dress modestly and avoid provocative actions.
- * Ask to be taken home if you feel your chastity is in jeopardy.
- * Refrain from long “good-nights.”

* Keep an early curfew.

Chapter Three

Dating, Love, And The Opposite Sex.

You have begun to notice the opposite sex, perhaps even one person in particular. New feelings and emotions surge through your body. But just what is it that you are feeling? Is it love, the kind that lasts forever, or something else? And just what should you do about those feelings? Let us now examine some sensible answers to these questions on the subject of romance in this course.

How Can I Get Over a Crush?

“For most teens,” wrote one youth-oriented magazine, “crushes are as common as colds.” Almost all youths experience them, and almost all manage to survive to adulthood, with their pride and sense of humor intact. However, when you are caught in the grip of a crush, there is little to laugh about. “I was frustrated,” recalls one youth, “because I couldn’t do anything about it. I knew she was too old for me, but I liked her. I was really bent out of shape over the whole thing.”

The Anatomy Of a Crush.

It is no sin to have strong feelings for someone, provided such are not immoral or improper (such as for someone married), (Proverbs 5:15-18). When you are young, though, “desires incidental to youth” often rule your thoughts and actions (2 Timothy 2:22). Still learning to control the new and potent desires unleashed by puberty, a youth can be full of whipped-up romantic feelings, and have no one to lavish them on.

Furthermore, “girls become poised and socially at ease at an earlier age than boys.” As a result, “they often find their male classmates immature and unexciting compared to teachers” or other older, unattainable men (Seventeen Magazine). A girl might thus imagine that a favorite teacher, pop singer, or some older acquaintance is the “ideal” man. Boys often become similarly infatuated. However, the love felt for such distant figures is obviously rooted more in fantasy than reality.

Crushes - Why They Can Be Harmful.

While most crushes are amazingly short-lived, still they can do a lot of damage to a young person. For one thing, many objects of teenage affection are simply not worthy of esteem. A wise man said: "Foolishness has been put in many high positions" (Ecclesiastes 10:6). Thus, a singer is idolized because he has a smooth voice or striking looks. But are his morals worth praising? Is he or she "in the Lord" as a dedicated Christian? (I Corinthians 7:39).

The Bible also warns: "Friendship with the world is enmity with God" (James 4:4). Would it not jeopardize your friendship with God if you set your heart on a person whose conduct God condemns?

Some youths even allow their fantasies to override reason. One young woman says: "Whenever I ask him how he feels, he always denies having any feelings for me. But I can tell by the way he looks and acts that this isn't true." The young man in question has tried to be kind in expressing his disinterest, but she just won't take no for an answer.

Writes another girl of her infatuation with a popular singer: "I want him to be my boyfriend, and I have prayed that it come true! I used to sleep with his album because that was the closest I could get to him. I'm at the point where if I can't have him, I'll kill myself." Could such mindless passion be pleasing to God, who commands us to serve Him with "a sound mind?" (Romans 12:3).

The Bible says in Proverbs 13:12, "Expectation postponed is making the heart sick." Cultivating romantic expectations for an impossible relationship is thus unhealthy, unrequited love being cited by doctors as a cause of "depression, anxiety, and general distress, sleeplessness or lethargy, chest pains or breathlessness" (Compare 2 Samuel 13:1-2). One infatuated girl confesses: "I can't eat...I can't study anymore. I daydream about him...I'm miserable."

Think of the havoc you wreak when you allow a fantasy to dominate your life. “I’m embarrassed to admit this,” said one man, “But I behaved like a buffoon during my crush on Judy.” Long after the crush has dissipated, memories of your following someone around, making a scene in public, and in general making a fool of yourself can linger.

Facing Reality.

King Solomon, one of the wisest men who ever lived, fell desperately in love with a girl who did not return his feelings. He poured upon her some of the most beautiful poetry ever written, telling her she was “beautiful like the full moon, pure like the glowing sun,” and got absolutely nowhere with her! (Song of Solomon 6:10).

Nevertheless, Solomon eventually quit his attempts to win her over. How can you, too, regain control of your feelings? “He that is trusting in his own heart is stupid,” says the Bible (Proverbs 28:26). This is particularly true when you are caught up in a romantic fantasy. However, “he that is walking in wisdom is the one that will escape.” This means seeing things the way they are.

“How do you tell legitimate hope from unfounded hope?” asks Dr. Howard Halprn. “By looking carefully and coldly at the facts.” Consider; How much of a chance is there of a real romance developing with this person? If the person is a celebrity, the odds are you will never even meet this person! Your chances are equally dim when some older person, such as a teacher, is involved.

Furthermore, has the person you like thus far shown any interest in you at all? If not, is there any real reason to believe that things will change in the future? Or are you simply reading romantic interest into innocent words and actions on his or her part? Incidentally, in most lands it is customary for men to take the initiative in romance.

Besides, what would you do if the person actually returned your affections? Are you

ready for the responsibilities of marriage? If not, then “remove vexation from your heart” by refusing to dwell on fantasy. There is “a time to love,” and that might be years later when you are older (Ecclesiastes 3:8; 11:10).

Analyzing Your Feelings.

Dr. Charles Zastrow observes: “Infatuation occurs when a person idealizes the person he or she is infatuated with as being a “perfect lover;” that is, concludes that the other person has all of the characteristics desired in a mate.” However, no such “perfect lover” exists. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” says the Bible (Romans 3:23).

So, ask yourself: How well do I really know this person I have set my heart on? Am I in love with an image, or a picture? Am I blinding myself to this person’s flaws? One objective look at your dream lover may be enough to pull you out of your romantic stupor! It is also helpful to analyze the kind of love you feel for this person. Says writer Kathy McCoy: “*Immature love* can come and go in a moment....The focus is on you, and you’re simply in love with the idea of being in love.....*Immature love* is clinging, possessive, and jealous.....*Immature love* demands perfection.” Contrast with I Corinthians 13:4-5.

Getting Him Or Her Off Of Your Mind.

Admittedly, all the reasoning in the world does not entirely erase how you feel. But you can avoid feeding the problem. Reading sexy romance novels, watching T.V. love stories, or just listening to certain kinds of music can worsen your feelings of loneliness. So refuse to dwell on the situation. “Where there is no wood the fires goes out” (Proverbs 26:20).

A fantasy romance is no substitute for people who really love you and care for you. Do not “isolate yourself” (Proverbs 18:1). You’ll probably find that your parents can be quite helpful. For all your attempts to conceal your feelings, they have probably already discerned that something is eating away at you. Why not approach them and give your

heart to them? A mature Christian may also prove to have a good listening ear.

“Keep busy,” exhorts the writer Esther David. Take up a hobby, do some exercise, study a language, begin a Bible study or a research project. Staying engrossed in useful activities can ease the withdrawal symptoms quite a bit.

Getting over a crush is not easy. But, with the passage of time, the pain will subside. You will have learned much about yourself and your feelings, and you will be better prepared to deal with *real love* should it come in the future!

Chapter Four

Am I Ready To Date

In many lands, dating is viewed as a means of romantic entertainment, a fun activity. Dating thus takes many forms. For some, a date is a formal, structured affair - flowers, a lovely dinner, and a good-night kiss are all part of the agenda. For others, a date simply means spending time together with someone you like of the opposite sex. There are even couples who are constantly seen together but who claim to be “just friends.” Well, whether you call it dating, going together, or just seeing each other, it usually amounts to the same thing; a man and a woman spending a lot of time together socially.

Dating was not the custom in Bible times. Nevertheless, when carried out intelligently, cautiously, and honorably, dating is a legitimate way for two people to get to know each other. And, yes, it can be enjoyable. But does this mean that you should date?

The Pressure To Date.

You may feel under pressure to date. Most of your peers probably date, and naturally you do not want to seem weird or different. Pressure to date may also come from well-meaning friends and relatives. When 16 year old Mary Ann was asked to go out on a date, her aunt advised: “Whether you want to marry the boy or not has nothing to do with it. Dating is just a part of your natural development as a person, after all, if you always turn guys down you will be unpopular, and no one will ask you out.” Mary Ann recalls: “Auntie’s words sunk down deep. Would I be cheating myself out of a good opportunity? The boy had his own car, lots of money, and I know he would show me a great time. Should I date him or not?”

For some young people the pressure comes from their own desires for warmth and affection. “I need to be loved and appreciated,” explained an 18 year old named Ann. “Since I was not close to my parents, I turned to my boyfriend to find closeness and to

have someone to whom I could pour out my feelings who would really understand.”

Nevertheless, a young person should not begin dating simply because he or she feels pressured to do so! For one thing, dating is serious business, a part of the process of selecting a marriage partner. *Marriage?* Admittedly, this may be the last thing on the minds of most young people who date. But really, what justification could there be for two people of the opposite sex to begin spending a lot of time together other than to investigate the possibility of marrying each other? In the long run, dating for any other reason is likely to result in anything but “fun. “Why so?

The Dark Side of Dating.

For one thing, young people are in the venerable period of life the Bible calls “the bloom of youth” (I Corinthians 7:36. During this time, you may feel powerful surges of sexual desire. There is nothing wrong with this, it is a part of growing up.

But therein lies the big problem with young people dating; Teenagers are just beginning to learn how to control sexual feelings. True, you may well know God’s laws regarding sex, and you may sincerely desire to remain chaste. Even so, a biological fact of life comes into play. The more you keep company with a member of the opposite sex, the more sexual desire can grow, whether you want it to or not. It is the way all of us are made! Until you are older and more in control of your feelings, dating may be simply too much for you to handle. Unfortunately, many young people have found this out the hard way.

“When we started dating, we didn’t even hold hands or kiss. I just wanted to enjoy the pleasure of her company and talk,” said one young man. “However, she was very affectionate and would sit very close to me. In time we did hold hands and kiss. This created in me an even stronger sex drive. It affected my thinking to the point that I wanted to be with her, not just to talk, but to hold her, touch her and kiss. I couldn’t get enough! I was literally going crazy with passion. At times I would feel cheap and ashamed.”

Little wonder, then, that dating often culminates in illicit sexual relations. A survey of several hundred young people found that 87 percent of the girls and 95 percent of the boys felt that sex was either “moderately important or very important” in dating. However, 65 percent of the girls and 43 percent of the boys admitted that there had been times on a date when they had sexual contact even though they did not feel like it!

Recalls 20 year old Loretta: “The more we saw each other, the more involved we became. Kissing soon grew stale and we began touching intimate body parts. I became a nervous wreck because I felt so dirty. My date also in time expected me to go all the way.” I was confused and bewildered. But all I could think of was, I don’t want to lose him.” I was miserable!”

True, not every couple end up having sexual relations; some let their displays of affection stop just short of it. But what results when one is worked up emotionally and has no honorable outlet for such feelings? Guaranteed frustration. And those frustrations are not limited to sexual feelings.

Torn Emotions.

Consider one young man’s dilemma: “I liked Kathy a lot at first. Well, I admit I talked her into doing some things she didn’t think was right. Now I feel dirty because I’ve lost interest. How can I ditch Kathy without hurting her feelings?” What a perplexing situation! And how would you feel if you were Kathy?

Heartbreak is a common malady. True, a young couple walking hand in hand may present an attractive picture. But what are the odds that the same couple will still be together a year from now, much less married to each other? Slim indeed. Teen romances are thus almost always doomed relationships, seldom culminating in marriage, often terminating in heartbreak.

Someone who interests you today may very well bore you tomorrow. But when

romantic feelings have been allowed to flourish, someone is bound to get hurt. Not surprisingly, several research studies have linked “a fight with a girl friend’ or “disappointment in love” as among the situations responsible for many suicides.

Am I ready?

God tells young people: “Rejoice, young man (or woman), in your youth, and let your heart do you good in the days of your young manhood, and walk in the ways of your heart and in the things seen by your eyes.” Young people do tend to “walk in the ways of their heart.” Yet so often these “ways,” which seem to be such fun, end up bringing vexation and calamity. The Bible thus urges in the following verse: “Remove vexation from your heart, and ward off calamity from your flesh; for youth and the prime of life are vanity” (Ecclesiastes 11:9-10). “Vexation” refers to being deeply troubled or sorely distressed. “Calamity” denotes a personal disaster. Both can make life miserable.

Does this mean, then, that dating itself is a source of vexation and calamity? Not necessarily. But it can be if you date for a wrong reason “for fun” or before you are ready for it! The following questions may, therefore, prove helpful in evaluating your own situation:

Would dating help or hinder my emotional growth?

Dating can limit you to a boy or girl relationship. Might it not benefit you, instead, to widen out in your association with others? A young woman named Susan says: “I learned to develop close friendships with older Christian women in the congregation. They needed companionship, and I needed their steadying influence. So, I would drop in for coffee. We would talk and laugh. I made real, lifelong friendships with them.”

By having many types of friends, old and young, single and married, male and female, you learn to be poised around people, including those of the opposite sex, with much less pressure than on a date. Furthermore, by associating with married couples, you gain a more realistic view of marriage. Later on, you will be better prepared to select a good mate and fulfill your own role in marriage (Proverbs 31:10). A young girl

named Gail thus concludes: “I am not ready to get married and settle down. I’m still getting to know myself, and I have many spiritual goals yet to achieve. So, I really don’t need to be too close to anyone of the opposite sex.”

Do I want to cause hurt feelings?

Both your feelings and those of the other person can be crushed if romantic bonds are forged with no prospect of marriage in sight. Really, is it fair to heap romantic attention upon someone in order to gain experience with the opposite sex? (Matthew 7:12).

What do my parents say?

Parents often see dangers to which you are blind. After all, they were young once. They know that real problems can develop when two young people of the opposite sex start spending a lot of time together! So, if your parents disapprove of you dating, do not rebel (Ephesians 6:1-3). Likely, they simply feel you should wait till you are older.

Will I be able to follow the Bible’s morality?

When one is “past the bloom of youth,” one can better deal with sexual impulses, and even then, it is not easy. Are you really ready at this point in life to handle a close relationship with someone of the opposite sex and keep it chaste?

Interestingly, many young people are asking themselves these questions and coming to the same conclusion reached by Mary Ann (quoted earlier). She said: “I determined that I was not going to be influenced about dating by the attitudes of others. I was not going to date until I was old enough and ready to get married and I saw someone with the qualities I wanted in a husband.” Mary Ann thus raises the critical question you must ask yourself before dating.

Notes to remember:

* Dating often puts young people under pressure to grant unwanted displays of affection.

* One can enjoy the company of the opposite sex in circumstances free of the pressures of dating.

* So-called platonic relationships often end in heartbreak.

Chapter Five

Am I Ready For Marriage?

Marriage is not a game. God intended for husbands and wives to forge a permanent bond, closer than that with any other human (Genesis 2:24). A marriage partner is thus someone you will stick to, or be stuck with, for the rest of your life.

Any marriage is sure to suffer some “pain and grief” (I Corinthians 7:28, *The New English Bible*). But Marcia Lasswell, who is a professor of behavior science, warns: “If there is one unchallenged bit of information we have concerning whether or not a marriage will last, it is that those who are very young when they marry have three strikes against them.”

Why do so many young marriages fail? The answer to this may have a strong bearing on determining whether you are ready for marriage or not.

Great Expectations.

“We had a very poor idea of what marriage was,” admits one teenage girl. “We thought we could come and go, do as we pleased, do or not do the dishes, but it isn’t that way.” Many young people nurture such immature views of marriage. They imagine it to be romantic fantasy. Or they head for the altar because they want the status of appearing grown up. Yet others simply want to escape a bad situation at home, at school, or in their community. Confided one girl to her fiancé: “I’ll be so glad when we get married. Then I won’t ever have to make any more decisions!”

But marriage is neither a fantasy nor a cure-all for problems. If anything, it presents a whole new set of problems to deal with. “Many young people get married to play house,” says Vicky, who had her first child at 20 years of age. “Oh, it looks like such fun! You think of a child as a little doll, something that is so cute and that you can just play with, but that’s not the way it is.”

Many young people also have unrealistic expectations regarding sexual relations. Said one young man who married at the age of 18: “After I got married I found out that the great thrill of sex wears off very soon, and then we started having some real problems.” One study of young couples found that second to financial problems, most arguments were over sexual relations. Doubtless this is because satisfying marital relations result from unselfishness and self-control, qualities young couples have often failed to cultivate (I Corinthians 7:3-4).

Wisely, the Bible encourages Christians to marry when they are “past the bloom of youth” (I Corinthians 7:36). Marrying when passion is at high tide can distort your thinking and blind you to a prospective partner’s flaws.

Unready For Their Roles.

One young bride says of her husband: “Now that we are married, the only time he acts interested in me is when he wants sex. He thinks his boyfriends are just as important to be with as I am.....I thought I was going to be his one and only, but was I fooled.” This highlights a misconception that is common among young men. They think that as husbands, they can still live the life-style of single men.

A 19 year old bride points to a problem common among young wives: “I’d rather watch T.V. and sleep than clean house and fix meals. I’m ashamed when my husband’s parents visit because they keep a nice house and mine is always a mess. I’m a lousy cook, too.” What stress it can add to a marriage when a girl is incompetent domestically! “Marriage really takes commitment,” stated Vicky. “This isn’t a game. The fun of the wedding is over. It soon becomes day-to-day living and that isn’t easy.”

And what about the day-to-day grind of supporting a family? Vicky’s husband, Mark says: ‘I remember that for my first job I had to get up at 6:00 A.M, I kept thinking: “This is hard work. Will I ever get some relief?” And then when I got home I felt that Vicky didn’t understand what I was going through.’

Money Problems.

This brings us to another cause of marital discord for young married couples: money. Forty eight young couples admitted that after three months of marriage, their biggest problem was “spending family income.” After nearly three years, 37 of these couples were asked the same question. Money problems were number one again, and their anguish was even worse! “What fun can you get out of life,” asked Bill, “when you never have enough money to buy the things you need to make you content? When you don’t have enough to last from one payday to another, it can start lots of fights and unhappiness.”

Money problems are common among young people, as they often have the highest rate of unemployment and the lowest wages. “Because I couldn’t provide for my family, we had to live with my parents,” admitted Roy. “This created real tension, especially since we had a child as well.” Proverbs 24:27 advises: “Prepare your work out of doors, and make it ready for yourself in the field. Afterward you must also build up your household.” In Bible times, men worked hard to be in a position later to support a family. Having failed to make such adequate preparations, many young husbands today find the role of provider a burdensome one.

But even a good size paycheck will not end money problems if a couple have a childish view of material things. One study revealed that “Teenagers expected to be able to purchase immediately for their projected family units many of the items that probably had taken their parents years to acquire.” Determined to enjoy these material things now, many plunged into debt. Lacking the maturity to be content with “sustenance and covering,” they increased stress in their marriage (I Timothy 6:8-10).

“Miles Apart.”

Linda recalls: “I was in love with Don. He was so handsome, so strong, such a good athlete and very popular.....Our marriage *had* to work.” But it did not. Resentment built up to the point where, as Linda says, “Everything Don did irritated me, even the way he

smacked his lips when we ate. Finally, we both couldn't take it anymore." Their marriage collapsed within two years.

The problem? "Our life goals were miles apart," explained Linda. "I now realized that I needed someone I could relate to intellectually. But Don's whole life was sports. The things that I thought were so important at 18 suddenly meant nothing to me." Young people often have a childish view of what they want in a marriage partner, making good looks a priority. Proverbs 31:30 warns: "Charm may be false, and prettiness may be vain."

Making a Self-Examination.

The Bible calls rash the person who makes a solemn vow to God, but only "*after* vows is he disposed to make examination" (Proverbs 20:25). Would it not, then, make sense to examine yourself in the light of the Scriptures *before* you enter into something as serious as a vow of marriage? Just what are your goals in life? How will these be affected by marriage? Do you want to get married simply to experience sexual relations or to escape problems?

Also, to what extent are you prepared to take on the role of husband or wife? Are you capable of managing a household or making a living? If you find yourself in constant conflict with your parents, will you be able to get along with a marriage partner? Can you withstand the trials and tribulations that come with marriage? Have you truly put away "the traits of a babe" when it comes to handling money? (I Corinthians 13:11).

Marriage can be a source of rich happiness or of most bitter pain. Much depends upon how ready you are for it. If you are still a teenager, why not wait a while before you begin dating? Waiting will not harm you. It will simply give you the time you need to be truly ready if and when you take that serious, and permanent step of marriage.

Chapter Six.

How Do I Know If It's Real Love?

LOVE - to starry-eyed romantics it is a mysterious visitation that seizes you, a once-in-a-lifetime feeling of sheer ecstasy. Love, they believe, is strictly an affair of the heart, something that cannot be understood, just experienced. Love conquers all and lasts forever.....

So, go the romantic cliches. And no doubt about it, falling in love can be a uniquely beautiful experience. But just what is real love?

Love At First Sight?

David met Janet for the first time at a party. He was immediately attracted to her shapely figure and the way her hair tumbled over her eye when she laughed. Janet was enchanted by his deep brown eyes and his witty conversation. It seemed like a case of mutual love at first sight!

During the next three weeks; David and Janet were inseparable. Then one night, Janet received a devastating phone call from a former boyfriend. She called David for comfort. But David, feeling threatened and confused, responded coldly. The love they thought would last forever died that night.

Movies, books, and television shows would have you believe that love at first sight lasts forever. Granted, physical attractiveness is usually what makes two people notice each other in the first place. As one young man put it: "It is hard to "see" a person's personality." But what is it that one "loves" when a relationship is but a few hours or days old? Is it not the image that person projects? Really, you don't know much about that person's thoughts, hopes, fears, plans, habits, skills, or abilities. You've met only the outside shell, not "the secret person of the heart" (I Peter 3:4). How enduring could such love be?

Looks Are Deceiving.

Furthermore, outward appearances can be deceiving. The Bible says: “Charm may be false, and prettiness may be vain.” The glittering wrappings of a gift tell you nothing of what’s inside. In fact, the most elegant wrappings may cover a useless gift (Proverbs 31:30).

The book of Proverbs say: “As a gold nose ring in the snout of a pig, so is a woman that is pretty but that is turning away from sensibleness” (Proverbs 11:22). Nose rings were a popular adornment during Bible times. They were exquisite, often made of solid gold. Naturally, such a ring would be the first piece of jewelry you would notice on a woman.

Appropriately, the proverb compares an outwardly beautiful woman who lacks “sensibleness” to a “nose ring in the snout of a pig.” Beauty simply does not befit a senseless woman; it is a useless ornament on her. In the long run, it no more makes her appealing than would a gorgeous nose ring beautify a pig! What a mistake it is, then, to fall in love with the way someone looks, and ignore what that person is inside.

The Most Deceitful Thing There Is.

Some, however, feel that the human heart has infallible romantic judgment. “Just listen to your heart,” they argue. “You will know when it’s real love!” Unfortunately, the facts contradict this notion.

The tragedy is that thousands of couples every year marry under the illusion of being “in love,” only to find out shortly thereafter that they have seriously erred. Infatuation “lures unsuspecting men and women into poor marriages like lambs to the slaughter,” says Ray Short in his book *Sex, or Infatuation*.

“He that is trusting in his own heart is stupid: (Proverbs 28:26). Far too often, the judgment of our heart is misguided or misdirected. In fact, the Bible says: “The heart is

the most deceitful thing there is” (Jeremiah 17:9). Yet, the aforementioned proverb continues: “But he that is walking in wisdom is the one that will escape.” You too can escape the dangers and frustrations other young people have suffered if you learn the difference between infatuation and the love described in the Bible, the love that never fails.

Love Verses Infatuation.

“Infatuation is blind and it likes to stay that way. It doesn’t like to look at reality,” admits 24 year old Calvin. A 17 year old girl, Kenya, added, “When you’re infatuated with a person, you think that everything they do is just perfect.”

Infatuation is counterfeit love. It is unrealistic and self-centered. Infatuated persons have a tendency to say: “I really feel important when I am with him. I can’t sleep. I can’t believe how fantastic this is” or, “she really makes me feel good.” Notice how many times either “I” or “me” is used? A relationship based on selfishness is bound to fail! Note, however, the Bible’s de-scription of true love: “Love is long-suffering and kind. Love is not jealous, it does not brag, does not get puffed up, does not behave indecently, does not look for its own interests, does not become provoked. It does not keep account of the injury” (I Corinthians 13:4-5).

Since it “does not look for its own interests,” love based on Bible principle is neither self-centered nor selfish. True, a couple may have strong romantic feelings and mutual attraction. But these feelings are balanced by reason and deep respect for the other person. When you are really in love, you care just as much for the other person’s welfare and happiness as you do for your own. You do not let overpowering emotion destroy good judgment.

An Example Of Real Love.

The Biblical account of Jacob and Rachel vividly illustrates this. This couple met at a well where Rachel had come to water her father’s sheep. Jacob was immediately attracted to her not only because she was “beautiful in form and beautiful of

countenance,” but because she was a worshipper of God (Genesis 29:1-12, 17).

After spending a full month living in the home of Rachel’s family, Jacob made it known that he was in love with Rachel and wanted to marry her. Mere romantic infatuation? Not at all! During that month, he had seen Rachel in her natural setting, how she treated her parents and others, how she went about her work as a shepherdess, how seriously she took God’s worship. Undoubtedly Jacob saw her at both her “best” and her “worst.” His love for her was therefore was not unbridled emotion, but an unselfish love based on reason and deep respect.

Such being the case, Jacob could declare that he was willing to work for her father seven years to be able to have her as a wife. Certainly, no infatuation would have lasted that long! Only genuine love, an unselfish interest in the other, would have made those years seem “like some few days.” Because of that genuine love, they were able to maintain their chastity during that period (Genesis 29:20-21).

It Takes Time!

True love is therefore not hurt by time. Indeed, often the best way to test out your feelings for someone is to let some time pass. Furthermore, as a young woman named Sandra observed: “A person just doesn’t hand out to you his personality by simply saying: “This is what I am. Now you know all about me.” No, it also takes time to get to know someone you are interested in.

Time also allows you to examine your romantic interest in the light of the Bible. Remember, love “does not behave indecently, does not look for its own interests.” Is your companion eager for the success of your plans, or only for his or her own? Does he or she show respect for your viewpoint, your feelings? Has he or she pressured you to do things that are really “indecent” in order to satisfy selfish passions? Does this person tend to put you down or build you up in front of others? Asking questions like these can help you appraise your feelings more objectively.

Rushing romance invites disaster. “I just fell in love fast and deep,” explained 20 year old Jill. After a whirlwind romance of two months, she married. But previously concealed faults began to emerge. Jill began to display some of her insecurity and self-centeredness. Her husband, Rick, lost his romantic charm and became selfish. After being married for about two years, Jill one day screamed that her husband was “cheap,” “lazy,” and a “flop” as a husband. Rick responded by striking her in the face with his fist. In tears, Jill dashed out of their house and out of their marriage.

Following the council of the Bible would no doubt have helped them preserve their marriage (Ephesians 5:22-33). But how different things might have been had they become better acquainted with each other before marriage! Their love would have been not of an “image” but of a real personality, one with both flaws and strengths. Their expectations would have been more realistic.

Real love does not happen overnight. Nor is the person who would make you a good marriage partner necessarily someone you find overwhelmingly attractive. Barbra, for example, met a young man whom she admits she was not overly attracted to at first. “But as I got to know him better, things changed. I saw Stephen’s concern for other people and how he always put the interests of other before himself. These were the qualities I knew would make a good husband. I was drawn to him and began to love him.” A solid marriage resulted.

So how can you know true love? Your heart may speak, but trust your Bible trained mind. Get to know more than the person’s external “image.” Give the relationship time to blossom. Remember, infatuation reaches a fever pitch in a short time but then fades. Genuine love grows stronger with time and becomes “a perfect bond of union” (Colossians 3:14).

Chapter Seven

How Can I Carry On a Successful Courtship?

“MOST marriage failures are courtship failures. This point cannot too often be repeated.” So, said Paul H. Landis, a researcher on the subject of family life. Louise can vouch for the accuracy of this statement. She explains: “My biggest mistake was getting attached affectionately to Andy before I allowed myself to see what he was like as a person. Our courtship had been pretty much limited to one-on-one settings. I never saw how he reacted outside these “ideal” situations.” Their marriage was shattered by divorce. The key to avoiding such a tragedy? Carrying on a successful courtship!

Before dating.

“The prudent man (or woman) looks and considers well where he (or she) is going” (Proverbs 14:15). Developing romantic feelings for someone whom you hardly know invites disaster, even if that one seems appealing. It can lead to a marriage with a person whose emotions and goals are miles apart from yours! It is therefore prudent first to observe that one in a group setting, perhaps while you are enjoying some form of reaction.

“I knew that if I got too close at first, my emotions would cloud my judgment,” explained Dave, now happily married for ten years. “So, I viewed Rose from a distance without her knowing I was interested. I could see how she treated others, or whether she was a flirt. In casual talks, I found out her circumstances and goals.” It also helps to find out what kind of reputation he or she has by talking with someone who knows the person well. It may also be a good idea to observe the person’s immediate family.

The First Dates.

Having decided that someone might be a suitable marriage partner for you, you could approach the person and express a desire to get to know that one better. Assuming

there is a positive response, your first date need not be some elaborate affair. Perhaps a lunch date or even being part of a group date will enable you to become better acquainted so as to decide whether you want to take the relationship any further. Keeping things somewhat informal helps ease some of the nervousness both might feel initially. And by avoiding premature expressions of commitment, you can minimize feelings of rejection, or embarrassment, if one of you loses interest.

Regardless of the type of date planned, show up on time, neatly and appropriately dressed. Display the skills of a good conversationalist. Be an active listener (James 1:19). Though there are no hard-and-fast rules in such matters, a young man will want to follow local rules of etiquette. These may include opening a door for the young lady or helping her into her seat. A young woman, while not expecting to be treated like a princess, should cooperate modestly with her date's efforts. By treating each other with mutual respect, a couple can set a pattern for the future. A husband is commanded to "honor his wife as the weaker vessel." And a wife is to have "deep respect for her husband" (1 Peter 3:7, Ephesians 5:33).

Is holding hands, kissing, or embracing appropriate, and if so, when? Displays of affection, when performed as genuine expressions of endearment and not selfish passion, can be both clean and appropriate. The Bible book The Song of Solomon indicates that some fitting expressions of endearment have been exchanged between the Shulammitte maiden and the shepherd boy she loved and would soon marry (Song of Solomon 1:2; 2:6; 8-5). But as with that chaste pair, a couple would further take care that displays of affection do not become unclean or lead to sexual immorality (Galatians 5:19-21). Logically, such expressions of endearment should be made only when the relationship has reached a point where mutual commitment has developed and marriage seems imminent. By showing self-control, you can avoid being distracted from a primary aim of successful courtship, namely.....

Getting To Know "The Secret Person Of The Heart."

A research team reported in the May 1980 issue of *The Journal Of Marriage And*

The Family. “Marriages seem more likely to survive and prosper if people enter them with relatively full knowledge of one another’s inner selves.” Yes, getting to know “the secret person of the heart” of your partner is essential (1 Peter 3:4).

Yet, “drawing up” the intentions of the heart of another takes effort and discernment (Proverbs 20:5). So, plan activities that are more likely to help you see your partner’s inner self. While going to a concert may suffice at the start, engaging in activities that better lend themselves to conversation can do more to help you become better acquainted.

To get a glimpse of your partner’s feelings, try using open-ended questions, such as, “How do you spend your free time?” “If money were no object, what would you like to do?” “What feature of our worship of God do you like the best?” These allow in-depth responses that help you to learn what your partner treasures.

As the relationship deepens and the two of you more seriously consider marriage, there is need for serious talk about important issues such as your values, where and how you will live; financial matters, including whether both will work outside the home; children; birth control; concepts of each other’s role in marriage; and both immediate and long-range goals and how you plan to achieve these. Many young Christians become full time evangelists after finishing school and desire to continue serving in that way after marriage. Now is the time for the two of you to make sure your spiritual goals are compatible. It is also a time to reveal things, perhaps in your past, that may affect the marriage. These might include any major debts, or obligations. Health matters, such as any serious disease, and their consequences should also be frankly discussed.

In such discussions, follow the example of Elihu, who said: “I talk straight from my heart and speak sincerely” (Job 33:3). In explaining how her courtship prepared her for what proved to be a happy marriage, Esther said: “I never tried to “put on” or say I agreed with Jaye when I felt differently. I still don’t. I try always to be honest.”

Do not evade or gloss over sensitive subjects out of fear of putting your partner on the spot. Beth made this mistake during her courtship with John. Both said she believed in saving for the future and not wasting money. John said he agreed. Beth probed no further, imagining they saw eye to eye on matters of finance. But it turned out that John's idea of saving for the future meant saving for a new sports car! After marriage their lack of agreement on how to spend money became painfully evident.

Such misunderstandings can be prevented. Louise, mentioned previously, says in retrospect of her courtship: "I should have asked a lot more questions, such as, "What if I got pregnant and you didn't want to have a baby, what would you do?" Or, "If we were in debt and I wanted to stay home and care for our child, how would you handle matters?" I would have carefully noted his reaction." Such discussions can bring to the surface qualities of the heart that should best be seen before marriage.

See Him Or Her In Action!

"A person can be very nice with you on a one-to-one basis," exclaimed Esther. "But when others are around, they are often put into an unexpected situation. One of your friends might say something to your partner that he might not like. Now you get to see how he reacts under pressure. Will he tell the person off, or be sarcastic?" "Being around each other's friends and family during our courtship helped tremendously."

In addition to reaction, spend time working together. Share in Christian works, including the study of the Bible and the Christian ministry. Also, take on some of the daily chores that after marriage will become a way of life, shopping for food, preparing a meal, washing the dishes, and house cleaning. By being together under real-life circumstances, when your partner may even be at his or her worst, you can see behind any display window mask.

The shepherd boy of The Song of Solomon saw how the girl he loved acted when she was disappointed or while she was laboring under the scorching sun, sweaty and tired (Song of Solomon 1:5-6; 2:15). After also beholding how she loyally resisted the

enticements of rich King Solomon, he exclaimed: “You are altogether beautiful, O girl companion of mine, and there is no defect in you” (Song of Solomon 4:7). Surely, he did not mean that she was perfect, but that she had no basic moral defect or blemish. Her physical beauty was enhanced by her moral strength, which outweighed any weaknesses on her part.

To make a similar assessment takes time. So, avoid a hasty courtship (Proverbs 21:5). Usually a man and a woman will go all out to win each other’s love. But if given enough time, unpleasant habits and tendencies have a way of revealing themselves. A couple who not only take time but also make the best use of it during courtship will likely find an easier adjustment after marriage. With eyes wide open, they can enter marriage confident of being able to work out disagreements that will arise. Successful courtship has prepared them for a successful and happy marriage.

Chapter Eight

The Trap Of Drugs And Alcohol.

Marijuana, cocaine, crack, booze. These have become a part of some young people's lives as rock music. But regardless of what your peers may tell you, drugs and alcohol are a lethal trap. Why have alarming numbers of young people and adults fallen into it? What can you do to avoid falling in this trap yourself?

Drinking, Why Not?

Is it wrong to drink? Is it really harmful? Or is it wrong only for me but all right for adults? These questions may very well go through your mind. After all, you and your parents may indulge. Many young people are drinking alcoholic beverages today! T.V. shows and movies make it look appealing.

The Bible acknowledges that wine can make the heart merry or can enhance the taste of a meal (Ecclesiastes 9:7). When misused, however, alcohol creates serious problems ranging from run-ins with parents, teachers, and the police, to premature death. As the Bible says: "Wine is a ridiculer, intoxicating liquor is boisterous, and everyone going astray by it is not wise" (Proverbs 20:1). It is important that you make a responsible decision about drinking.

We need to realize that ignorance regarding alcohol can be deadly. The Bible warns us that improperly used, alcohol "bites just like a serpent, and it secretes poison just like a viper" (Proverbs 23:32).

John, for example, married as a teenager. One night, after a fight with his young wife, he stormed out of the house, determined to get drunk. After gulping down a whole pint of vodka, he fell into a coma. Were it not for the efforts of doctors and nurses, John could have died. Evidently, he didn't realize that rapidly gulping down a large amount of alcohol can even be fatal. His ignorance almost cost him his life.

The Rebound Effect.

This is one of alcohol's most insidious effects. Alcohol is a depressant, not a stimulant. The seeming uplift you feel after you drink occurs because alcohol depresses, or brings down, your anxiety level. You feel relaxed, less anxious, less worried than before you drank. Taken in moderate quantities, alcohol can thus, to a small extent, help a person "forget their troubles" (Proverbs 31:6-7). A young person named Paul, drank to escape from family problems. "I learned very early that drinking was a way to relieve the pressure I was under," he recalls. "It relaxed my mind."

No harm done, right? Wrong! Alcohol has a rebound effect. After a couple of hours, when the sedative effect of the alcohol wears off, your anxiety level bounces back, but not back to normal. It jumps up to a higher level than before you drank! You feel more anxious or more tense than ever. Alcohol withdrawal may last for up to 12 hours. True, if you have another drink, your anxiety level will again go down. But a couple of hours later, it will rise, this time higher than before! And so, it goes in a vicious spiral of artificial highs and ever-lower lows.

So, in the long run, alcohol will not really reduce your anxiety. It may very well increase it. And when the alcohol wears off, your problems are still there.

Emotionally Stunted.

Others claim that alcohol helps them to function better. Dennis, for example, was extremely shy and found it difficult to hold even a simple conversation. But then he made a discovery. "After a few drinks I would loosen up," he said.

The problem is that one matures, not by running from difficult situations, as Dennis did, but by facing them. Learning to cope with the problems you face as a young person is just a rehearsal for the trials of adulthood. Dennis thus found that, in the long run, the temporary effects of alcohol did not help him to overcome his shyness. "When the alcohol wore off, I went back into my shell," he reports. What about now, years

later? Dennis continues: 'I never really learned how to communicate with people on my own true level. I think I was stunted in this way.'

The same is true of using alcohol as a crutch in dealing with stress. Joan, who did so as a teenager, admits: "Recently, in a stressful situation, I thought: "It would be nice to have a *drink* right now. You think that you can handle a situation better with a drink." Not so!

An article published in the *New York State Journal of Medicine* says: "When drugs (including alcohol) become the means of easing difficult situations, academic, social, or interpersonal, the necessity for learning healthy coping skills is removed. Effects may not be felt until adulthood, when establishing close personal relationships then often proves difficult, leaving the individual emotionally isolated." It is far better to meet and deal with problems and difficult situations directly!

"He Would Not Take It."

Consider the example of Jesus Christ. On the final night of His earthly life, Jesus endured a terribly stressful ordeal. Betrayed, then arrested, Jesus endured a series of interrogations in which lying accusations were made against Him. Finally, after having been up all night, He was handed over to be impaled (Mark 14:43; 15:15; Luke 22:47; 23:25).

Jesus was then offered something that would dull His senses, a mood-altering substance that would make it easier for Him to cope with this difficult situation. The Bible explains: "They tried to give Him wine drugged with myrrh, but He would not take it" (Mark 15:22-23). Jesus wanted to be in possession of all His faculties. He wanted to face this difficult situation squarely. He was no escapist! Later, though, when offered evidently a moderate amount of *unrigged* wine to quench His thirst, Jesus accepted (John 19:28-30.).

In comparison, your problems, pressures, or stresses pale into insignificance. But

you can still learn a valuable lesson from Jesus' experience. Instead of using a mood-altering substance (such as alcohol) to cope with problems, pressures, and uncomfortable situations, you are much better off if you deal with them directly. The more experience you gain in facing life's problems, the better you will become at solving them. You will grow to have a healthy emotional makeup.

Notes to remember:

- * Drinking and driving often leads to death.
- * Never get into a car with a driver who's been drinking, and never let a friend drive if they are drinking.
- * Alcohol, when misused, can "bite like a snake."

Chapter Nine.

Why Say No To Drugs?

“I am an emotional child,” says Mike, a young man 24 years old. “At times I’m afraid and even intimidated by others my own age. I suffer from depression, insecurity, and at times I’ve even considered suicide.”

Ann, 36 years old, describes herself as “emotionally very young,” having “low self-esteem.” She adds: “I find it very difficult to live a normal life.”

Mike and Ann are reaping the consequences of a decision they made when they were quite young, that is, to experiment with drugs. Millions of young people today are doing likewise, injecting, swallowing, sniffing, and smoking everything from cocaine to marijuana. For some young people, “doing drugs” is a way to escape problems. Others get involved to satisfy their curiosity. Yet many others use drugs to ease depression or boredom. And once started, many continue using drugs for the sheer pleasure of it. Says 17 year old Grant: “I smoke marijuana only for its effects. Not to be cool or for social reasons.....I never smoked because of peer pressure, but just because I wanted to.”

At any rate, the chances are good that sooner or later you will be exposed to or directly offered drugs. “Even the guards at our school are selling pot,” says one youth. Drug paraphernalia is openly displayed and sold. In spite of their popularity, though, there is good reason for you to say *no* to drugs. How so?

Drugs Hinder Growth.

Consider youths who use drugs to escape problems, like Mike and Ann. As was shown in our previous chapter, emotional growth comes from facing life’s challenges, handling success, surviving failure. Youths who rely on a chemical refuge from problems hinder their emotional development. They fail to develop the skills needed for

coping with problems.

As with any other skill, the ability to cope requires practice. To illustrate: Have you ever watched a skilled soccer player? He is able to use his head and feet in ways that are nothing short of amazing! Yet, how did this player develop such skill? By years of practice. He learned to kick the ball, run with it, feint, and so on, until he became proficient at the game.

Developing coping skills is very similar. It takes practice, experience! Yet, at Proverbs 1:22 the Bible asks: “How long will you inexperienced ones keep loving inexperience,....and how long will you stupid ones keep hating knowledge?” The youth that hides behind a drug-induced euphoria “loves inexperience:” they fail to develop the knowledge and coping skills needed to deal with life.

Ann, who used drugs as an escape, thus confesses: “For 14 years I haven’t dealt with my problems.” Mike expressed a similar thought saying: “I had used drugs since I was 11 years old. When I stopped at the age of 22, I felt like a child. I latched onto others, trying to find security. I came to realize that my emotional development stopped when I started using drugs.”

“I wasted all those years of development,” adds Frank, who abused drugs from age 13. “When I stopped, I came to the painful realization that I was totally unprepared to deal with life. I was a 13 year old all over again with the same emotional turmoil that faces any other adolescent.”

Can Drugs Ruin My Health?

This is another area of concern. Most young people realize that the so-called hard drugs can kill you. But what about so-called soft drugs, such as marijuana? Are all the warnings you hear about them mere scare tactics? In answer, let us focus on the drug marijuana.

Marijuana (also known as pot, reefer, grass, ganja, or weed) has been the focus of much controversy among experts. And admittedly, much is unknown regarding this popular drug. For one thing marijuana is extremely complex; a marijuana cigarette contains over 400 chemical compounds in its smoke. It took doctors over 60 years to realize cigarette smoke causes cancer. It may likewise take decades before anyone knows for sure just what marijuana's 400 compounds do to the human body.

Nevertheless, after studying thousands of research papers, a panel of experts of the prestigious U.S. Institute of Medicine concluded: "The scientific evidence published to date, indicates that marijuana has a broad range of psychological and biological effects, some of which, at least, under certain conditions, are harmful to human health." What are some of these harmful effects?

Marijuana, What It Does To Your Body.

Consider, for example, the lungs. Even marijuana's staunchest supporters admit that inhaling smoke cannot possibly be good for you. Marijuana smoke, like the smoke from tobacco consists of a number of toxic substances, such as tars.

Dr. Forest S. Tennant surveyed 492 U.S. Army soldiers who had used marijuana. Nearly 25 percent of them "suffered sore throats from smoking cannabis, and some 6 percent reported that they had suffered from bronchitis." In another study, 24 out of 30 marijuana users were found to have bronchial "lesions characteristic of the early stages of cancer."

True, no one can guarantee that such ones will actually develop cancer later on. But would you want to run that risk? Besides, the Bible says that God "gives to all person's life and breath" (Acts 17:25). Would you be showing respect for the Giver of life if you deliberately inhaled something that damages the lungs and the throat?

At Ecclesiastes 12:6, the human brain is poetically called "the golden bowl." Barely larger than your fist and weighing a scant three pounds, the brain is not only the

precious receptacle of your memories, but also the command center for your entire nervous system. With that in mind, note the warning of the Institute of Medicine: “We can say with confidence that marijuana produces acute effects on the brain, including chemical and electrophysiological changes.” At present, there is no conclusive proof that marijuana permanently damages the brain. Never-the-less, the possibility that marijuana might in any way do harm to “the golden bowl” should not be dismissed lightly.

And what about the prospect of your one day getting married and having children? The Institute of Medicine reported that marijuana is known “to cause birth defects when administered in large doses to experimental animals.” Whether it has the same effects on humans is thus far unproved. Remember, though, that birth defects (such as the one caused by the hormone DES) often takes years to manifest themselves. So, what the future holds for the children, and grandchildren, of marijuana smokers remains to be seen. Dr. Gabriel Nahas says that smoking marijuana may be “genetic roulette.” Could anyone who views children as “an inheritance from God “take such risks?” (Psalm 127:3).

Drugs - The Bible’s View.

Of course, marijuana is just one of many popular drugs. But it well illustrates that there is ample reason to avoid taking any mind-altering substances for pleasure. Says the Bible: “The beauty of young men is their power” (Proverbs 20:29). As a young person, you no doubt enjoy good health. Why even risk throwing it away?

More important, though, we have the Bible’s view on this matter. It tells us to “safeguard.....thinking ability,” not to ruin it through chemical abuse (Proverbs 3:21). It further exhorts: “Let us cleanse ourselves of every defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in God’s fear.” Really, it is only to those who have “cleansed themselves of defilement,” avoiding practices like drug abuse, that God promises: “I will take you in, And I shall be a father to you” (2 Corinthians 6:17; 7:1).

Nevertheless, turning down drugs may not be easy.

Peers And Their Pressure.

One cool summer evening Joe and Frank, cousins and close friends, made a pact. “No matter what anyone else does,” suggested Joe, the younger of the two, “let’s never fool around with drugs.” The two youths shook hands on the deal. Just five years later, Joe was found dead in his car as a result of a drug-related accident, and Frank was severely addicted to drugs.

What went wrong? The answer lies in this urgent warning found in the Bible: “Do not be misled. Bad associations spoil useful habits” (I Corinthians 15:33). Joe and Frank both got in with the wrong crowd. As they associated more and more with those who used drugs, they began experimenting with drugs themselves.

The book *Self-Destructive Behavior in Children and Adolescents* observes: “The youthful are most often introduced or “turned on” to the various drugs by a close friend.....their intentions may be to share an exciting or pleasurable experience.” Mike, mentioned at the outset in this course, confirms this saying: “peer pressure to me was one of the hardest things to deal with.....The first time I smoked marijuana, I did it because all the kids I was with did it, and I wanted to fit in.”

To put it bluntly, if your friends start using drugs, you will be under strong emotional pressure to conform, to fit in. If you do not change your circle of friends, in all likelihood you will eventually become a drug user too.

“Walking With Wise Persons.”

“He that is walking with wise persons will become wise, but he that is having dealings with the stupid ones will fare badly,” says Proverbs 13:20. To illustrate the point, if you were trying to avoid catching a cold, would you not avoid close contact with infected people? “In a similar way,” states the book *Adolescent Peer Pressure*, “If we are to preventdrug abuse....., we need to maintain healthy balanced conditions and

reduce exposure to harmful influences.”

So, do you want to say no to drugs? Then watch whom you associate with. Seek out the friendship of God-fearing Christians who will support your resolve to stay free of drugs. You must not follow after the crowd for evil ends.

Someone who unquestioningly follows their peers is nothing more than a slave. Says the Bible at Romans 6:16 (New International Version): “Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey?” That is why the Bible encourages young people to develop “thinking ability” (Proverbs 2:10-12). Learn to think for yourself, and you will not be inclined to follow wayward young people.

True, you may be curious about drugs and their effects. But you need not pollute your own mind and body to know what drugs do to people. Just observe drug abusers your age, especially those who have been abusers over a long period of time. Do they seem alert and sharp? Have they kept up their grades? Or are they dull and inattentive, at times even unaware of what is going on around them? A term was coined by drug users themselves to describe such ones: “burn-outs.” Yet, many “burn-outs” likely started using drugs out of curiosity. No wonder, then that the Bible urges Christians to suppress unhealthy curiosity and to “be babes as to badness” (I Corinthians 14:20).

You Can Say No!

A book published by the U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse reminds us: “Turning down the chance to use a drug....is your *right*. Any friends who lean on you about your decision are chipping away at your rights as a free individual.” What can you do if someone offers you drugs? *Have the courage to say no!* This does not necessarily mean giving a sermon on the evils of drug abuse. The same book suggested simply replying “No thanks, I don’t want to smoke” or, “Nope, don’t waste the hassle” or even quipping, “I’m not into body pollution.” If they persist in their offer, you might have to say

no, with conviction! Letting others know that you are a Christian may also prove to be a protection.

Growing up in this world today is not easy. But if you try to avoid growing pains by using drugs, you can seriously hinder your chances of becoming a responsible, mature adult. Learn to face problems head-on. If the pressures seem overwhelming, do not seek a chemical escape. Talk things over with a parent or other responsible adults who can help you to sort things out. Read your Bible and pray for God to help you. “Do not be anxious over anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication along with thanksgiving let your petitions be made known to God; and the peace of God that excels all thought will guard your hearts and your mental powers” (Philippians 4:6-7).

Yes, God will give you the strength to say *no*! Never let others pressure you to weaken in your resolve. Don't experiment with drugs! If you do, you will suffer the consequences for the rest of your life!

Notes to remember:

* If you try to escape your problems through drugs now, you will find it hard to face problems as an adult.

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