

# DATING SEMINAR

*Ed Kang*

## Singleness

### *The Gift of Singleness*

When singleness is mentioned in the beginning of Scripture, God sees Adam's singleness and says, *"It is not good that the man should be alone"* (Gen 2:18). He says, *"I will make him a helper fit for him"* and creates Eve to give Adam in marriage. So at the start of the Bible, singleness is viewed unfavorably that marriage is **needed** to fix that issue. However, in the NT, in Matt 22, Jesus makes it clear that in the bodily resurrection with Christ, we will neither marry nor be given in marriage, but we'll be like angels in heaven (Matt 22:30). Where before God intervened and fixed this singleness issue with the institution of marriage; in heaven, we will now suddenly revert to this state of "singleness." What gives? Why does God take such a remarkably different stance toward singleness in heaven? It's because of our spiritual marriage with Christ. Eph 5 frames our messy, sinful, horizontal marriages as husband and wife as a picture of our glorious, love-filled, vertical marriages with Christ and the church. That though she has been promiscuous like Gomer, the faithful husband, like Hosea, has pursued His bride, even when it cost Him his life. On that final day, at that glorious wedding, we will sing, *"Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made her ready"* (Rev 19:7). This is the reason why this shift in singleness happens because everything that our horizontal marriages pointed to has been fulfilled in our marriages to Christ.

But this shift in the evaluation of singleness does not occur in heaven. It has already happened. Paul says so in 1 Corinthians 7, written to people in the same redemptive era as us, between the two comings of Christ. There are a couple of places where he remarkably notes the value of singleness:

- V7: *"I wish that all were as I myself am."* Meaning happily single for the Lord.
- V8: *"To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am."*
- V38: *"So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even **better**."*

Again, just note the stark contrast between Genesis' *"It is not good that the man should be alone"* to Paul's *"He who refrains from marriage will do even **better**."* And why is it better for Paul? You will be free from anxieties, he says. *"The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided"* (1 Cor 7:32-34). Have you ever noticed, if you've been to our Wednesday prayer meetings consistently, that it is mostly singles and a few married couples without kids? I'm literally guilty of this. I'm not saying that that's good or right, but it's just natural. Married people, especially with kids, are naturally divided and distracted because of their home duties. There is a unique value and privilege that a single person has in his/her capacity to serve the Lord.

Sam Allberry, a faithful pastor who models godly singleness, shared a story about how an elderly, ailing church member of his needed someone to live with him for a month and be his caretaker. The wife, his usual caretaker, needed to travel to attend to some other business. No one else could just drop everything at home and go and help this man, no one but Sam. So, Sam went and lived with the man, serving him and making the most of his flexibility and capacity to serve. This is a beautiful picture of how precious and effective singleness can be in the kingdom of God.

My whole point is that singleness is not automatically a **curse or a deficiency that immediately needs to be fixed with dating and marriage**. But so often, we treat it like a curse. There are different ways you could define biblical wisdom, but one that has been sticking with me as of late is that biblical wisdom is seeing the world, seeing life, the way that God sees life. It's such a simple premise, but helpful to challenge our cultural presuppositions. The risk of teaching a dating seminar is to potentially fall into the cultural trap that singleness is automatically bad, and so everyone here who is single better start going on dates to get married, have kids. I am by no means denigrating those things. I am pro-marriage and pro-family, of course. But I am also pro-singleness because the Bible is unapologetically pro-singleness. After all, Jesus, Paul, and John the Baptist were all single.

All that being said, 1 Cor 7 is not just a blanket statement of pro-singleness. Instead, it's pro- a very specific kind of singleness. To those verses above, here are the rest of the verses. Paul appears to encourage some singles to remain single, while others he encourages to marry. Who are those people? Those who struggle with self-control in sexual purity, who burn with passion. Those who are distracted in their singleness because they long for marriage. And I think that would be the majority of us.

While Scripture is pro-singleness, it is also clear that the biblical norm is to be married. In the pastoral qualifications for elders, they always say, "*husband of one wife*," not that marriage is an explicit requirement for eldership, but that it was just naturally assumed that men would be married. In Matt 19, after Jesus raises the bar for divorce and remarriage, the disciples said to him, "*If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.*" And Jesus said to them, "*Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given.*" The reality is that I think most of the singles in our church should pray/seek to be married. Given that the Bible teaches that singleness is the exceptional and honorable calling for those who can receive it, but that marriage is the norm, most of us should probably think about getting married. I put together this decision tree to help you understand.

It starts with simple diagnostic questions to determine whether you might have the gift of singleness. Do you want to be married? Andreas Köstenberger, NT scholar, said that if you fear that you have the gift of singleness, that probably means that you don't have it. I agree with him. Are you self-controlled in your singleness? Are you taking advantage of your singleness in serving the Lord and his people? Simply put, do you have little to no desire to get married? If **yes**, then great! It seems like you might have the gift of singleness. We need faithful examples like you in our church. You are a living example of what we all will be like in heaven, faithfully and happily married to Christ. Remain faithful to the Lord in your singleness until things change. If you're **not sure**, let's say that you're generally self-controlled in your battle against lust, you're generally taking advantage of your singleness in serving the Lord, but you're not very sure if you want to be single for the rest of your life. Because again, Paul says it's better to remain single, I think you ought to tend toward that direction. Try pursuing faithfulness in singleness to see if you could continue to live that life in contentment and self-control. Over time, God should provide more clarity. If **no**, let's say you're not content in your singleness, you're struggling to be self-controlled, and you're positive you want to be married, let it be! Though contented, servant-oriented singleness is better than being married, it is no sin to marry. In fact, Paul rebukes false teachers who prohibited marriage. It is a good thing to get married.

If you know you do not have the gift of singleness, which again I do think is most Christians today, then you ought to do two things: fight for contentment and self-control, and pursue marriage. Just because you might not have the gift of singleness is no excuse not to be content in Jesus Christ. You might need to fight harder for it, but contentment and self-control are made available to all people, even in unwanted singleness. With Jesus, we can learn the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. We can do all things through him who strengthens us (Phil 4:12-13).

But even while you are content in the Lord, you can still work toward marriage. Contentment isn't a spiritual exercise in kidding yourself. Contentment doesn't destroy your ability to distinguish what you want from what you don't want. When Paul said he learned how to be content, it's not like he pretended that hunger and need are good places to be. It's possible to be content in the Lord in the midst of persecution, but that doesn't mean that you should stay there.

### Dating

#### *Pursue Marriage*

So then pursue marriage! In our specific time and culture, this is typically done through **dating**. By definition, the purpose of dating is to seek clarity on one simple question: *"Am I going to get married to this person?"* It's not to follow the pattern of this world by dating just to have fun, to find our ultimate joy in another person, or to create these pseudo-marriages that actually have no commitment.

If dating is all about marriage, realistically, you ought to wait to date until you are ready to get married. So the first step in pursuing marriage is to evaluate: *"Am I realistically ready to handle everything marriage entails right now? Do I see myself getting married within the next 18 months?"* That might seem quick for some of you, and that is by no means a legalistic rule. Every couple is different; some will date shorter or longer; some engagements will be shorter or longer. But I think you can absolutely determine whether you're going to marry someone and plan a wedding within 18 months.

When you self-evaluate your readiness for marriage, understand that none of us will ever arrive at a place of perfect readiness for marriage. The bar is **not sinless perfection**. Yet there are wise and concrete questions you can ask yourself to evaluate whether you are prepared to step toward it.

- *"Can I provide financially for a family? Am I independent from my parents?"* Given that marriage means that you leave from your parents and cleave to one another and start a new independent family, your ability to provide for a family matters. I think this question applies more to the guy, given the Bible's consistent teaching on male headship of the family. This doesn't mean you need to make a lot of money to take your family on fancy vacations. That also doesn't mean you can't marry while you're in grad school. But you should have the means and/or a plan to provide the basic provisions for a family, including the prospect of kids.
- *"Am I a recent convert?"* I generally would advise newly converted Christians to wait before immediately jumping into dating and marriage. There is value in your singleness to devote your time to growing in your relationship with the Lord.
- *"Am I a member of a church in good standing?"* If you're a member not in good standing, i.e., under church discipline, there are more important issues at hand than for you to get

married. Address those areas in your life first before you introduce someone else into the equation.

- *"Are there any destructive addictions/patterns in my life that control me?"* Uncontrolled addictions to things like pornography, gambling, alcohol, drugs, and/or shopping ought to be addressed before you jump into dating. I do think that marriage is a provision from the Lord to help in our battle against lust, and I don't think you need to wait until you're at a point where you're 100% lust-free and that you never struggle with lust, but if you're watching porn **regularly**, if you're enslaved to it, it would be wise to pursue freedom before inviting someone else into your life.

At the end of the day, it is both impossible and unwise to lay down exacting, determinative parameters on what it means to be ready for marriage. So much of it is case by case. This is where the community around you is so helpful. Ask your friends, parents, pastors, and Christian mentors whether they see you getting married. If you're single and seeking to be married, you would do well to seek their brutally honest feedback. Humbly receive that feedback and be open to their challenges and encouragements.

#### *Starting to Date*

Let's say that you're willing and able to get married. What's next? Well, I want to try to do something interactive and read together the best book written about dating together. It's the Bible. The Bible has a lot to tell us about how we ought to date. So I want us to form some groups, read through Genesis 24:1-33, and see if you can identify some applications from this story to apply to how we should date today. I want you to try to follow the OIA method: observation, interpretation, application, again specifically on the focus of dating.

#### *Principles from Genesis 24*

What do you see in the text? I'm going to ask each group just to share one OIA that they had about dating, and I'll type them up.

- Be selective about who you choose to marry.
  - o **Observation:** Abraham advised the servant very clearly not to find a wife for Isaac from the daughters of the Canaanites (**Interpretation**) lest he be drawn away from the Promised Land, settle in a foreign land, and ultimately forfeit the promises of God. You see that kind of warning consistently through the Old Testament, the warning to Israel not to marry idolaters, lest they draw you away to worship false gods.
  - o **Application:** In the same way, we should avoid being unequally yoked with unbelievers in marriage (2 Cor 6:14). If that is a current temptation for you, part of why dating/marriage with an unbeliever might seem tolerable is because you may not have followed that decision to the full logical conclusion. You might not have considered what life in marriage, 5, 10, 20 years down the road, might look like.
    - There are two real possibilities:
      1. In order to conform to the unbeliever, you will need to push Christ to the margins of life to keep the peace at home. Slowly, but surely, all things faith become less and less important to you. You might not actually reject

Christ explicitly altogether, but functionally, your life is no different from any unbeliever. You stop reading your Bible, attending small groups, giving to missionaries, or raising your kids in the faith, to avoid isolating the other spouse.

2. Let's say you keep the faith and stay involved in the church, but your spouse refuses to engage. That will naturally pull you apart. Imagine going to church alone, never praying together, not sharing the load in raising your kids in the Lord, or facing tragedy without being able to comfort one another with the truths of Scripture. If Christ is your whole life, marriage to someone who does not share that will likely lead to two separate lives.

Neither of those two realities is desirable. If you are single and considering a relationship with an unbeliever, I encourage you to slow down and think through things. Men, do not seek led astray by being unequally yoked (2 Cor 6:14). Women, if a non-Christian pursues you, don't even give him an inch in your mind. He doesn't share an ounce of what you love most in this life, of what is most important to you.

- Go to the right place.
  - **Observation:** Abraham very clearly sends his servant to a specific place to find a wife. He knows that if the servant searches among Canaan, he probably will not find someone from his kindred.
  - **Application:** We, too, ought to look in the right places to find our kindred. If I want to find a native Bostonian with that thick accent, the first place I obviously should look is Boston! If you're looking for someone to marry, a good Christian man or woman, the first place you ought to look is a place full of Christians, the church.
    - A brief word on dating apps. I don't doubt that dating apps can be a means to find a solid life partner. There are godly ways to go about it. I know an increasing number of marriages that started on dating websites. But two words of caution with apps:
      1. Surfing these apps, frankly, plummets your chances of finding a solid, like-minded Christian. Anyone can put anything on their profile, and even if they say they're Christian, what does that really mean for them? It could be all sorts of things, and they can be under all sorts of teaching.
      2. More importantly, I think dating apps can create the illusion that there's always someone better out there for me. You're not satisfied with the direct people you know, and so you hop online to peruse who else is out there. But consumeristically shopping for the maximally optimal guy or girl out there doesn't seem to be a healthy pattern for dating. I'm sure that there are eligible men and women out there, but you might be missing out on what's

directly in front of you. Call me old-fashioned, but I think there is something to running after God wholeheartedly, and from time to time glancing directly to your right and left to see who's keeping up with you, people who are directly in your life, and linking up with them.

- Put the onus on God.
  - **Observation:** Notice how much the servant prays throughout this journey.
  - **Interpretation:** That demonstrates how much the servant trusted the Lord in finding a spouse for Isaac.
  - **Application:** That same kind of dependence on the Lord is needed from us, too. If you want to be married, your first instinct should be to get on your knees and pray to the Lord for that blessing.
    - Does that peace that surpasses understanding control your mind and conduct? Or do you try to control everything, making sure that you always leave a good impression on anyone of the opposite gender, on the chance that he/she might be the one? Or you're always anxious about whether your dating relationship may or may not end in marriage? Put the onus on God.
  - Every married person has had an arranged marriage. Some by their family, but all by the sovereign God of the Universe. The LORD orchestrated every detail of this story in Gen 24, and He is doing the same for you. Place the burden completely onto God in your desire for marriage.
- Male-led, risk-taking initiative
  - **Observation:** But that doesn't mean we don't take any action and expect marriage to just plop into our laps. In this passage, you see a male-led, risk-taking initiative when Abraham sends his servant to go and get the girl for Isaac.
    - **Interpretation:** To show this fully from Scripture would take more time than we have, but the Bible teaches that in marriage the man leads and the woman submits. Male headship is the normative pattern throughout Scripture, and I think those roles should shape the dating relationship as well.
    - **Application:** Generally, that means men should initiate dating. That said, it is not sinful for a woman to ask a man out. In Scripture, **Ruth** boldly initiates her relationship with **Boaz**, but such examples are the exception rather than the norm.
  - And Abraham and the servant's initiative involves real effort and real risk. Abraham sends his servant on a quest with no guarantee of success. But he nonetheless acts without knowing how it'll turn out.
    - That means that the man shouldn't play games with the girl, flirting with her, trying to get her to reveal as many cards as possible before he plays his hand. The guy should never selfishly try to just protect himself by minimizing the chances of being rejected. Leadership means going first. The man is the

first one to lay his cards out on the table, making his intentions as clear as possible, making himself entirely vulnerable. In v17, the servant runs to her—he makes the first move.

- To those who are “discerning” endlessly, who are praying to God for a pie-in-the-sky vision in the clouds, we have to learn to take risks. So when you have intentions, as soon as possible, you ought to make that clear to the woman. If that sounds scary, this is what leadership is all about!
- Actions speak louder than words.
  - **Observation:** Now, I don’t think that this is prescriptive of how we should be praying for a spouse, being this specific, but there is stuff to observe about what he is looking for. Yes, Rebekah was very attractive in appearance, but the prayer didn’t focus on her appearance or her earthly status at all. It was about her character. Notice, too, the servant doesn’t go anywhere to the city of Nahor, but he goes specifically to the well, where he might find an industrious, servant-minded woman working.
    - And Rebekah fits that bill of the generous, industrious Proverbs 31 wife. She not only serves the servant by giving him a drink **quickly**, without suspicion or hesitancy, but she goes above and beyond by giving the camels a drink as well. She **quickly** (there’s that word again in v20) and **ran again** to draw water. There’s a whole lot of running in this passage.
  - **Application:** I do think physical attraction is an important piece to marriage, but that physical attraction is much more dynamic than we tend to think. It’s not static, only based on superficial looks; the more we learn about another person, for better or worse, our attraction changes.
  - The point is that godly character is truly attractive—qualities like hospitality, generosity, a servant-hearted posture, grace, and love. As we grow in sanctification, our desires are increasingly shaped by what Scripture values. That means that, more than net worth, physical appearance, career success, or family background, we should ask ourselves a crucial diagnostic question: **Is godliness what I find most attractive?** Proverbs 31:30 captures this well: *“Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.”*
  - One other thing: compare and contrast Rebekah with Laban. We see the opportunistic, greedy character of Laban in v30, when it says, *“As soon as he saw the ring and the bracelets... he went to the man.”* A foreshadowing of his love for money, Laban sees those things first and then extends hospitality. In contrast, there is no indication that Rebekah paid any attention to those things. She’s the anti-gold digger, but served because that’s who she is. That’s the kind of person you should both strive to be and to look for.
- You’re marrying a sinner (cf. Gen 27)
  - I’m cheating here because I’m drawing on another chapter, but I think it’s important. In Gen 24, Rebekah is this perfect maiden. She’s attractive, industrious, and bold. Not a single flaw. But three chapters later, when Jacob steals Esau’s blessing, who’s at the

helm leading that scheme? It's Rebekah. This once-perfect, beautiful maiden is now actively trying to scheme her old, blind husband to give his blessing on her favorite child, not his.

- o My point is that you can try to find the most perfect person on paper, and he/she might look like that at first, but just three chapters later, you will find that this person is a bona fide sinner, through and through. When Christine and I started dating, I thought this girl was perfect, was an angel. She could do no wrong ever. I'm sad to report that that feeling has not stayed with me in our marriage. Not because Christine is especially bad or anything, but that she is a broken sinner like the rest of us, just like I am a broken sinner.
  - Don't worry, I asked Christine if I could share this and she said only on the condition I also share that when we were dating, she already knew I was a great sinner and that in marriage, she found out that I was an even greater sinner.
- o So when you date, go and try to find a godly person, but never expect that to translate to an automatically easy marriage. Related to that, I challenge any notion of "soulmates" because that idea makes it sound like once you find the one, you automatically and easily will sail off into marital bliss. Nothing is further from the truth. The marriage of two sinners is work; it's hard work, and you have to be willing to build up your marriage day after day, brick after brick.

#### *Practical Tips through the Stages of Dating*

Let's move on to more of the practicalities of dating.

Typically, a lot of dating relationships begin with friendship. Guys should gaze and learn about this girl's character and reputation from a distance, just like the servant in v21. Group hangouts could be a helpful way to do that. If there is interest, the guy should ask the girl on a date. Not a hangout, not a catch-up; if you have interest, just be open about it and call it a date.

To the girls in the room, if a godly man with a good reputation in the church asks you out on a date, I do generally think that you should try to give the guy a date or two. You're not obligated to say yes to him by any means; you owe him nothing. But to reject him on the spot assumes that you have comprehensive knowledge about who he is. Consider that God wired guys and girls differently as well. Guys tend to flare up in interest very quickly, but for girls, that interest tends to grow slowly over time. I'm sure you've heard stories of women who didn't initially see their husbands in that light, but over time, that interest grew.

And remember that it's one date. Guys, the bar is not that you're not head over heels in love with this girl, asking her to marry you; girls, he's not head over heels in love with you, asking you to marry him. Christians try to take dating very intentionally and try not to casually date, which is a great thing, but at times swing too far the other direction and exaggerate the meaning of one date. I generally think we can appropriately lower expectations for going on a date. If, after going on a date, you realize that you guys aren't going to work out, it's not the end of the world.

So if you guys end up not working out, seek to handle that in maturity. Key verse in all this: outdo one another in showing honor (Rom 12:10). Resist the temptation to gossip, but only speak highly about the other. I've sometimes heard that people are scared to date within the church out of fear of the messiness of breaking up. While there is some validity to that concern, if we carry ourselves with Christ-like love and maturity, I don't think that should outright prevent us from dating in the church but sober us to treat one another with grace, love, and respect.

Let's follow a growing relationship. So you guys go on a few dates. Here, I make a distinction between going on dates and being in a dating relationship. I do think that you have to make a transition from the former to the latter, with the guy again initiating and leading, clearly and openly setting expectations for the dating relationship.

Now, you both are finally in the official dating phase. Once again, the goal that you both should be pressing toward is clarity around that simple question: are we getting married to one another? You should always be pressing for clarity with that question over intimacy. "Yes" is a good answer. "No" is a good answer. An indefinite, lengthy "maybe" is not a good answer. That does not mean that you need to know within three weeks whether you're getting married. But you should be making real progress toward that answer.

In your dating, try to determine your compatibility with these things that I call the seven F's. As you progress in your dating, your relationship will look different from the fifth date to the fifteenth date to the fiftieth date. Your conversations will naturally progress from surface level to more intimate details. I tried to order these in terms of the progression of a relationship.

- Fun
  - See if you guys have fun with one another. Do you talk well with one another? 99% of your marriage will be just talking. Does conversation flow? Or is it like talking to the wall? If your enjoyment of one another isn't growing over time, it probably makes sense to call it quits.
- Future
  - What are your career goals? What are your ministry goals? If one of you wants to go into full-time ministry, even full-time missions work, and the other, for the life of them, cannot be open to that life, then why keep dating? You have clarity on your future compatibility.
- Faith
  - What do you believe about everything? Some topics include gender roles in church and marriage, spiritual gifts, doctrines of grace, and baby baptism. If you guys are completely on the different ends of the spectrum theologically, you have to expect that this will cause conflict. If you believe in baby baptism, but your boyfriend doesn't, what are you going to do? Split the difference and baptize **half the baby**? What will you do if you pray in tongues and your girlfriend thinks it's total **gobbledygook**? These are the issues you need to understand sooner rather than later.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For those of you who feel like you're still growing theologically, to encourage you, I don't think you need to be rigidly set on all your positions to date, but dating is an opportunity to share where your honest thoughts are. Certainly, I've grown and changed many of my positions in marriage.

- Finances
  - How do you manage your finances? What kind of lifestyle do you expect? Are you expecting a luxury car, or are you content with a beat-up junker? How much do you want to tithe? Who manages the finances?
- Family
  - What do you envision your future family to look like? Number of kids, adoption.
  - If you want kids, who's taking care of the kids?
  - What was your family like growing up? What models of marriage have you seen in your life? Perhaps more than you know, your parents' marriage can have a heavy influence on your marriage.
- Fighting
  - How do you resolve conflict? Are you a rager or a brooder? Share examples of how you have tried to resolve conflicts in the past with others.
  - Beyond sharing examples, I generally recommend—though it's not required—that couples date long enough to experience conflict. It helps to move past the honeymoon phase and get to the real stuff. For some couples, this happens quickly; for others it takes time. Conflict itself is not a sign that you shouldn't get married. A healthy marriage isn't marked by the absence of conflict, but by handling conflict well. Learning to fight well and resolve issues in a healthy way is a strong foundation for marriage.
- Flaws
  - There's a reason why I put this last. These should be where the most personal, intimate details of your failures, foolishness, and fears should come out. Remember, in dating, there is no ring. Remember that at any point, either party has 100% liberty to pull out of the relationship. Be wise about sharing the most personal stuff until you have more traction in your dating.
  - But ultimately before you get engaged, you shouldn't hold back anything, even the most painful memories or regretful choices. You don't need to share in fine detail, but you do need to share so the other person has a full picture of what he/she is signing up for.

All throughout that process, **involve the church**. If you think about it, hardly anything in this life comes with a lifelong commitment like marriage. You will move to another city, find another church, work another job, meet other friends, but you can never break the vow of marriage you make with your spouse. Through sickness or health, for richer or poorer, you are committed to this person. This one decision is one of the most important decisions you will ever make in your life because your marriage will absolutely change you.

That can all be scary, then, to think about choosing your spouse, when we think about the massive implications of the decision we're about to make. What is so reassuring is that we don't have to choose a spouse on our own. Our trusted brothers and sisters, our mentors and disciples at church, our parents and siblings, they all can speak into your life, counsel you with their aged, experienced perspective, and model what a godly marriage/family looks like.

**Pursue purity and godliness.** There is not a single thing you can do that will make your relationship more messy, stressful, confused, and shameful than to cross physical boundaries that are only meant for the commitment of marriage. The **men**, again, should be the ones who set clear boundaries and keep them. In dating, the woman is looking to see in your leadership if you are a man of integrity, a man of your word. Do you say one thing and do a completely different thing? Are you trustworthy? The **women** should be the ones who follow the man's leadership. In dating, the man is looking to see if you follow and submit to his leadership well.

I've heard this argument from some guys before: *"You need to test drive the car before you decide to buy it. Shouldn't we explore our physical compatibility before I put a ring on it?"* I think that analogy is actually very illuminating. Who is the car in that scenario? Is sex with a precious man/woman made in the image of God something as casual as simply going to a car dealership and test-driving a car? Is that kind of language really what you want to hear from your future spouse, who is supposed to honor and respect you?

Glorify God together in your relationship. So set clear boundaries not to do anything that would be arousing and tempting for the other. Examples of boundaries could be committing not to spend one-on-one time together in private, especially late at night. If you're snuggling on the couch at 11pm watching a romantic movie, for most warm-blooded humans, you are playing with fire. Prov 6:27 says, *"Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned?"*

Understand that as you progress in your relationship, the temptation doesn't decrease but increases because we are wired that emotional intimacy naturally leads to physical intimacy. So flee! Scripture commands us to stand firm against the Devil, but flee from sexual sin. Be like Joseph, and run! Run hard. You will never regret taking obedience to the Lord seriously. Invite people to ask about your relationship. And if you guys only prove to be a continual source of sexual temptation, is it worth dating anymore? Is anything more precious than your personal holiness to the Lord? I'm sorry if that sounds harsh, but as we preached in Matthew, Jesus is uncompromising in Matt 5:29-30:

- *If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better should lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.*

### Engagement

Time only allows a brief address on the engagement phase. Only two things that I want to make clear:

- When you are engaged, you are **not yet married**. You have not yet made a clear, public vow of lifelong commitment to one another, and so you don't have the privileges to enjoy all the blessings that come with marriage. Continue to fight temptation. Don't mark your wedding day with any tinge of shame or regret.
- Speaking of weddings, while there are sometimes unforeseen circumstances and no two couples' stories are alike, I generally think we don't need two or three years to plan a wedding. It's our culture that tells us that we need to have a showy, expensive display of our unique love for one another. That's not something we need in Scripture. Invest more time in preparing not for the singular day of the wedding, but for the lifetime of marriage ahead of

you. The health of your marriage is not determined by the big dates on the calendar: weddings, anniversaries, Valentine's Day. Those can be important and helpful opportunities to invest in your marriage, but a healthy marriage is more determined by the love you share on an average Tuesday night.

### The Gospel

In the end, the Gospel is the best dating advice that you will ever hear. What do I mean by that? The Gospel of Jesus Christ is what distinguishes Christian dating from worldly dating.

- The Gospel is what you look for in dating. Has this other person been shaped by the Gospel? Does this person cherish the Gospel above all else?
- The Gospel is what you talk about in dating. Of course, it's not all that you talk about. But if you are a believer and Jesus Christ is your first love, the Gospel should be what connects you both.
- The Gospel shapes your motives in dating. You're not dating to fill a void, prove your worth, silence loneliness, or compete with others. The Gospel frees you from needing a relationship to justify you.
- The Gospel is what keeps you content in the world of dating. Whether you're single without a lot of prospects of marriage, just recently been through a breakup, or that you're close to getting married with your dream partner, all are equally equipped to be happy. The latter has no advantage over the former in their ability to contrive joy in this life.
- The Gospel reminds us of the grace we have in Jesus Christ. No one ever dates perfectly; no one is without sin when dealing with relationships of the opposite gender. Cling to the cross for the full redemption of your sins and let grace, over guilt, have the final say!
- So let the Gospel shape all of your life: in your singleness, in your dating, in your engagement, in your marriage.