

God's Plan for Christian Guy-Girl Relationships

Dating and Discipleship

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I wonder if Isaac Watts in heaven has any idea of the untold millions who he's blessed by writing such wonderful hymns. What a blessing the great hymn writers are to the saints of God.

We come to our second installment. I used to call this “Dating and Discipleship” or “Christian Courtship” following God's plan for Christian guy-girl relationships. I formulated it this way. It's not absolute, you don't have to but I sort of view the progress as first young people preferably once they've reached maybe teenage years or a little on into teenage years and begin to get to know someone that interests them of the opposite sex and they form what I call a Christian guy-girl relationship. That's what we're going to talk about here exhaustively. If God leads further and they feel like that God is leading them to develop a relationship toward engagement, then I would call that Christian courtship, the season of time to determine, to discern, is this God's will for us to go further. Then after a season of what I call Christian courtship, then there is, of course, a Christian engagement that's followed by marriage. I believe that's a healthy way. Good sound biblical principles. You don't have to use my terms nor my structure but I would encourage that process and that viewpoint.

When Brother Tom called me, it made me think of something. He said, “You know, Emily's in south Alabama in a rural area with another girl her age and the car is overheated, evidently the radiator is broken.” It won't hold water and you have these two young girls alone and he didn't have to call me for permission, he knows that he needs to take care of his family and he's free to go. But I said, “Man, don't you worry about us. We'll be fine. You take care of Emily.” It reminded me of something that I've always told my daughters and as my youngest is now praying about college and God has given her some pretty neat opportunities that have come her way of substantial full scholarships but I told her, I said, “Look, if you're ever at a place, ever at a place, and you're with a young man in some setting or group and things get evil and things concern you and you're uncomfortable, all you've got to do is call me and I will come immediately. It doesn't matter what kind of plane ticket I have to buy; it doesn't matter the circumstance.” I said, “If you're playing with the team or something and you find out they're getting into wickedness, you're uncomfortable in that setting, I'll come get you and we'll go to the local college and forget the whole thing and they can have their money.”

Us Dads need to have that kind of relationship with our children that we're serious about our commitment to them and our protection for them and our care for them. I said in the letter I sent to all the parents with children 16 years of age or younger, that Satan has without question been engaged and is engaged in an all-out unrelenting attack to destroy our children. An unrelenting attack and as I teach these principles to you tonight, I don't want them to be cold legalistic rules but I do want you to ingest the principles. How many of you here are grandparents? Raise your hand tonight. Grandparents like Pastor Jeff? Have you got your pens out? Are you ready? It's a new day, I'm a grandparent so everything's changing. Us grandparents have got to get with it, man, we've got to do it right. Amen? We've got to honor God.

By the way, I am officially discouraging a lot of real formal training in the home. There can be some of that and it's not bad, don't misunderstand me, but what we really need is to talk of these things when we rise up in the morning; to talk of these things when we walk along the way; to talk of these things when we sit at the table side; to talk about these things as we lay down at night. Make it a part of your day. I would rather that you learn these principles and just get them in your mind and keep the Scriptural principles here. I don't mean all 20 or whatever of them and all the subpoints, just the general principles. Remember some of the Scriptures so that when you're with that grandchild or that great-grandchild and they mention something, a topic comes up, without being forceful, without being legalistic in tone, you can say, "Well, you know the Bible says...and that's why we approach this this way." Boy, how many times raising my girls would I see a couple or I'd see a young lady or a young man and obviously they had a spirit of rebellion and they had a spirit of worldliness and we would just talk about, "Hey, where do you think that came from? Why do you think they're like that?" I was so thankful when my girls would say, "Well, they must not have a family that loves them." Or, "They must have serious insecurity," which is really a pride problem. I wanted them to see the principles of the heart that was usually involved in these things.

Then you say, "Pastor, if I'm supposed to learn these things and kind of graft them into my thinking so that I'm ready when my children or grandchildren or great-grandchildren kind of bring the topic up when we see something in life..." By the way, though we screen a bunch of ours, television programs are a great place to bring biblical principles in. Even the Andy Griffith show, something we watch all the time. There is great opportunity to say, "You notice how they approached that problem. What does the Scripture say there?" It would really be wise if they did that this way, just teaching as you go along. Anyway, you may say, "Pastor, if I've got to learn that, well, that's a lot of work." Well, so how valuable is it to you that your Lord is honored by your succeeding generations? Amen? Let me ask you something else: how valuable is that precious child or grandchild to you? It might be worth you taking some notes and sticking it in your Bible and putting in your quiet times maybe once or twice a week, pulling them things out and saying, "Well, they're getting to that age." By the way, the age is not 15, the age is 3. The age is 4. The age is 5 when you begin to talk about these things to your children and your children's children.

Now, I don't think I nor my family is the model to follow. I'm going to say that every week because I don't want you to think that. I don't believe that I am. As a matter of fact, my oldest daughter told me I was slipping as I've grown older, that it was more structured for her than it is for the other ones. I didn't tell her, "Well, you had more of a rebel heart than the other two so I had to bear down on you," which is not true at all, by the way, but you know what? She's right. I realize that thought I hadn't abandoned anything but I'm not quite as diligent and I thought now I'm a grandparent and I've just got to suck it up and get with it. Gird up the loins, decide this family and these generations are going to honor God.

Now, should I say the other thing that's an absolute pre-requisite? The real key here is not the rules, it's not the guidelines, it's not even the principles: it's a new heart. That's what we pray for the most, Amen? That's what we teach on the most: the need for a Savior. That's what we preach to them, in a sense of the word, the most. Look, that's the one thing we must emphasize and then all these principles make beautiful sense but only to the redeemed heart. If you teach a bunch of rules and the heart has not been born-again, they will become a cold harsh legalist and cold harsh legalism – listen to me – always breeds immoralities because the law is an imperfect dam to bottle up the passions and lusts that are in the heart of the fallen man. Only a changed heart and can rejoice and joy in these beautiful truths.

Following God's plan for Christian guy-girl relationships: I have six points here we're talk about. 1. Young people, moms and dads, grandmothers and granddads, we should be encouraging this, we should encourage them as they're young to focus on becoming a godly person. Here's the point young people: if your focus is you being Christ-like, then you're likely to find someone who also wants to be Christ-like. If your focus is on finding a guy or finding a girl, then typically they'll become an idol, they become too important and you can very easily miss God's best. Ecclesiastes 12:1, "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth." Now, why does it say that? It just means that's there 1,001 things pulling on, driving, natural impulses, interests, desires and then, of course, the world's bombardment to seduce us and lure us away so the young person, there is all of this stuff combating them and coming against them and trying to draw them away. So we need to have an exhortation and a strong encouragement: let's remember the Creator in the days of our youth. Let's put that first. Let's make that the priority of our lives, after all, Proverbs 19:14 says, "A prudent wife is," where? She's "from the Lord."

So it is God that provides that special spouse for you. In Psalm 62:5, "My soul, wait in silence for God only, for my hope is in him." I always like to talk about mine and Pam's history here. The first time we ever kind of were together in any way, it was a rainy day and I had parked my car on a side street outside the University of North Alabama and I looked over there and there's Pam walking down the sidewalk across the road under an umbrella. Well, I didn't have an umbrella. Now, she remembers it differently than I remember it. She says I ran over there and got under her umbrella and she just looked around and I was there. I remember her yelling at me, "Hey, come over here and get under my umbrella!" She's probably remembers it a little more accurately than I do but we were together under that umbrella and I just remember that she, and still is, is quite

intoxicating in her beauty but she was attractive, to say the least. I think she thought I was also but at that point, past tense verb, is that okay? I think, though, that we didn't really hit it off. I had not been kind in my thoughts and attitudes about her and she had not been walking with the Lord as she needed to but I got those things right with her in the weeks that followed, somewhere in there. God had given her a great spiritual revival in her heart while she was beauty queen. That was kind of interesting, both these things were happening and we weren't even around each other at all.

On day, young people, she was sitting probably about where that camera is and you don't look anything like her, by the way, but that's right where she was sitting and we were in the old auditorium and this was after God had really brought a season of brokenness. She had no external sins that you could identify as a worldly girl but heart sins can be just as wicked as doing all the outward things. I looked back there and saw Pam from the pulpit and thought, "Wow, she looks different." She was always pretty but her countenance was so resounding with the character of Christ. You know, you show Christ in your countenance. Now, pretty girls who go to church are a dime a dozen but girls in church that love God are quite rare. I think she saw in me a changed countenance and we were very attracted to each other on a new level. Yes, attracted physically, you ought to be, that's normal. Perversion is when you're attracted to someone of the same sex. This is natural and normal, God given to be attracted. But it was beyond that and that's why I say, young people, I don't want you to miss what I've enjoyed for these 27, going on 28, years. I want you to have God's best so focus on becoming a godly person and you will attract a godly person.

II. Seek the authority and protection of your parents. Notice the word "seek," that's a key word. Ephesians 6, I think they'll have that on the screen, but Ephesians 6 teaches young people, 6:1-3, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." You know, the apostle wrote there and could have stopped there, that's enough, that's the clear truth of God: honor your parents period. Then he adds that there's wisdom in this, "Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth." Here's what I'm saying, young people: grow to where you really believe God is wise. Did you hear that? Do you really believe he's wise? And your really grasp and you hold to the truth that he loves me more than even my mom and dad could possibly love me. So, since God's wise, he's given me these parents. You see, parents are given to you as something, Bill Gothard calls it an umbrella of protection that guards you from satanic influences and diversions that could destroy your life and so you want to stay under that umbrella of parental authority and protection. You don't want to reluctantly view, "Well, I'm a Christian. I go to that conservative evangelical church. Brother Jeff is so strict and he's got my parents brainwashed and so I just have to go along with this. I have to yield to these things." That's not the spirit God's looking for. Don't be reluctant and don't manipulate your parents into doing things that they don't feel is wisest and best. But look to your parents as God's wisdom for your life and God's protection for your life so you will never, ever seek a relationship with a young person your parents do not feel good about because when you do that, if you kind of arm-twist, manipulate, whine, beg, fuss, pitch a fit, and the parents give in even though they saw dangers, here's what you're saying, "I was

protected and now I walk out from under God's protection and I'll say, Satan, give me all you've got." You make yourself vulnerable to the wiles and the allurings of satanic forces. I believe there is actually a demonic oppression. Did you hear that? I believe there is actually a demonic oppression that comes upon everyone who functions out from under God-ordained authority.

By the way, that includes dads who don't honor the authority of church elders. Dads, you can't teach your children that God works through your authority and protects you if you don't model for your children that you honor those he's placed you under. Amen. You need it just like they need it. You see, God has given fathers an ability to see improper motives, girls, in the boys that you may like or the boys you may bring around the house. Fathers can just see through things that maybe even mom can't see through. Oh, moms sometimes can be charmed off their feet by the little teenage boys who want to spend time with their daughters but dads sometimes can see, "Ah-ha, I see what's going on here." And this whole thing of, "Well, we're just friends." Not true, not until God ceases to give sex hormones. You can't just be friends with somebody of the opposite sex. If you spend time and you start getting close, it's going to become more than friendship. Mothers on the other hand, can see improper motives in girls so you need your parents' involvement, you need their discernment. You need to ask them, "Mom and Dad, what are you seeing? What's going on here? Do you see anything I need to be concerned about here?"

Some young people, I don't think that's too common in our church today, I know when I was doing the youth work 25+ years ago or so here, that it was very, very common that most parents had no concept of these principles. I mean, totally. Generally speaking, your kid gets 14, maybe 15, certainly by 16, you just kind of throw them out there, meet people, do things, go on dates and may the best man win. Terrible situation we put our children in. Terrible. They are not able to protect themselves in that environment. God gave children parents to protect them from the evil one, not to throw them into the arms and wiles of the evil one. Amen.

Young people, sometimes you have to help educate your parents. If you love Christ and maybe your parents aren't walking with God as strongly as they ought to. That doesn't mean you can disrespect them or dishonor them, by the way. Nevertheless, you can respectfully and honorably and humbly go to your mom or dad and say, "Look, I want your serious protection in my life as I learn or get to know young men or as I get to know young ladies. I need you active. Would you help me learn these things and help hold me accountable?" I've had a lot of young people in my youth group do that. You may have to give them sermons like this or books on Christian courtship.

Another thing that we saw happening quite a lot, it was my experience even and that is that sometimes you have completely lost parents or completely disinterested parents. Very often, I think, the parents aren't really disinterested, they just feel guilty and disqualified. They know they're not godly, they know they're not walking with God and so to them it's just easier to disengage. Sometimes you have to find maybe a godly couple in your church. By the way, Justin or whoever, if there's ever a young person that says,

“You know, I’d like for somebody to hold me accountable. I’d like to be in a relationship with an older, maybe a senior adult couple that loves God and they would be that person for me in my life. They would talk to me about my relationships. They would give me some accountability and they’d give me some guidance.” We had some men on staff in my early courting years who I went to and said, “Do you see a problem with this girl?” Or, “Can you give me guidance? Will you hold me accountable?” Because my parents, I believe my mother genuinely cared but she was real sick from the time really I was at least in a relationship with Pam and unable. My father was completely disinterested so I’m so thankful for some other godly men who played that role in my life of protection and authority in those vulnerable seasons.

So seek. Seek the authority and the protection of your parents. III. You should treat all boys as brothers in Christ and all girls as sisters in Christ. If you really think about that, that changes the ballgame, does it not? These people are not your objects to satisfy your desires. You don't go dating people and trying people on like clothing: put them on for a while, experience some things and then throw them off and then go to another one. As a child of God, when you develop a relationship with that young lady or that young man, you want to have in your heart, “This is a sister in Christ. I'm literally to lay down my life for them. This is a brother in Christ. I would never want to mislead them or be a cause for stumbling in their lives. I want to honor them and serve them as a brother or sister in Christ.” In 1 Timothy 5:1-2, as Paul is writing to the young single man, Timothy, he words it this way to Timothy, “I appeal to you to treat the younger women as sisters,” and he talks about treating them as sisters. Notice that last phrase “in all purity.” Timothy as a young man, as a single young man, make sure that until that wedding night, you viewed that person you're courting or even engaged to as a young lady who is your sister. Think about that. It changes everything. Your sister in Christ and certainly, of course, that young man as your brother in Christ.

I referred to this text in the earlier message but let me mention it again. 1 Thessalonians 4:4-6, “that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God,” notice that, not like those who don't know God, “and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter.” This text has a lot of disagreements about what it means: some argue that's talking about one's wife, that you're to take a spouse in marriage and therefore in your sexual relations you have sanctification and honor; some would say, no it's not talking about a wife, it's talking about your own body and the God-given sexual desires that are humanely and naturally ours that we are to exercise those in the marriage relationship in sanctification and in honor. But really the way the principle holds strong: either way, we're not to be involved in – and he gives us the parallel here – don't be like the Gentiles who don't know God and how does he word that there? “Not in lustful passion.” The Greek scholars say the phrase “lustful passion” literally means “a stronghold they can't break.” In other words he says, “They're so enslaved to sexual lust they can't stop the immoralities in their lives.” They can't stop it. They don't have lines they don't cross. But he says as a child of God, you have Christ in you. You have a new heart, you have the capacity not to live like you're in bondage to sexual immorality so he says to make sure you don't live that way.

Even though I said there could be no “real friendship” between a guy and a girl, once they get of any age of maturing physically and emotionally, that's not going to lead to a further type of attraction. I think that's true, however, when the world looks on what we call a Christian guy or girl relationship, they would call it a friendship. That's the way they would define it so expect that to come and expect that to be the delineation you might receive from the world. One thing is for certain: here the Gentiles, he says, those who don't know God, they find themselves in sinful bondage. Some of you sitting here, you don't know God yet and that's why you are completely enslaved by sexual immorality. You can't overcome it. Only God has the capacity to give you the ability to turn around and begin to fight the fight and walk in the victory of not being enslaved to sexual impurity. Listen to me: wrong doctrine always results in impurity. Wrong doctrine leads to impurity. It always has, always will.

IV. When we've talked about a whole lot through the years, spend time in group settings. I had on this quite a bit in the other message but as we look at this guideline for Christian guy-girl relationships, spend time in group settings. The Apostle Paul said in Romans 7:18, “For I know that nothing good dwells in my flesh.” Nothing good dwells in me. In other words, the Apostle Paul had the awareness and the acknowledgment that, “I am incapable of trusting myself.” Do you trust yourself? There's a Bible word for you: you're a fool. You see, wisdom is knowing your weakness and guarding yourself in those areas. Strength is not, I can put myself in tempting areas and overcome, no strength is, I know the areas and I'm not going there. What is it, Proverbs 7, where there is a curse in Proverbs is wise Solomon giving counsel to his young son and Solomon says to his son, “There is a harlot who lives on the corner,” and she's out there and he talks about her eyes and he talks about the way she dresses and talks about the way she perfumes her body. He talks about her seductive and alluring speech and here's what he says, “Son, don't go near her door.” He doesn't say when you go by her door, very strongly he says, “Don't go near the door.” That's what we're talking about here. If you get two young people in the prime of their maturation, God-given maturation where the sexual drive is wildly developed and you put them alone in any setting and very long, you're not going near the door, you're running in the house. That's why it's far more wise and brothers and sisters in Christ, it's so much easier not to start down that tunnel than to get down that tunnel, though there is grace. Amen? There is forgiveness.

You can start over if you've blown it in that area. There are difficulties. There is baggage. There is emotional challenges that come with going down that tunnel of sexual immorality and trying to come back out of it but we can be a strong help to young people by having guidelines where they are chiefly, if not only, in group settings and not alone together in tempting situations. Only a fool would trust his flesh in the area of sexual desire. There are things that you can do together in church settings, things you can do together in school settings or things you can do together in family settings. You know, I think you'll find if you would raise your children with this teaching and this understanding, they're just kind of there. It's not odd to them especially if you have a church where a good percentage of the families follow some type of standard like this. So they're not weird and that's what I love about Grace Life. My daughters never felt like they were the complete odd-ball. I wish more families did better but at least many of you

are trying to walk in these truths and it's not a language that's foreign to you nor a practice that's foreign to you and I appreciate that very much and I praise the Lord for that.

Your parents, young people, should know when you're together with anyone and what you're up to and what you're doing. You know what, guys? If you're spending time with a young lady, a young girl somewhere and her father and/or her mother are not really actively involved in when you're with their daughter, you need to run. You don't need to go near that door. You need to get out of that relationship and find a young lady whose parents are somebody that is active in their life protecting them. That sounds kind of harsh but you're not capable of helping a young lady. Somebody else needs to help her and disciple her, not you.

I think that what we need to have done and we'll talk about this as we end the final session next Sunday night, Lord willing, is that there needs to be a time in a child's life when dad sits down with them and they have something of a covenant agreement that dad along with mom, of course accompanying him, will be very involved in guiding and protecting you from the wiles of this world and the ungodly influences that this world presents. As a matter of fact, guys, listen to what I'm going to tell you: if you're starting to see a young lady, you should go to her father and you should obviously ask his permission. I'll touch on that again also. And then you should say this, "You can ask me anything you want about our relationship any time you desire." Tell that father that. Look, be honest, say, "Hey, I'm a young guy. I'm human. I'm attracted to your daughter but I don't want to sin against you. I don't want to sin against my God. I don't want to sin against this young lady and you can ask me anything you want about our relationship at any time." How many of you dads with daughters would like to hear that from a guy? Amen?

V. Be accountable to your peer group at church, your youth group, your student group. Again, I don't want to chase this rabbit very far but I'm amused at the people who think having any kind of peer group in the church is not a good thing. I'm going to tell you, it's been a great thing for my children to have lots of friends who are on the same page or are trying to go in the same direction. That's a wonderful strengthening thing. Proverbs 27:17 says, "Iron sharpens iron and one man sharpens another." We need the sharpening of each other.

I suppose it still happens some, but I used to always teach our young people to check on each other and boy, some people would get upset about that. I had parents that said, "I'll tell you what, I don't want those other kids at church checking on my daughter or my son and asking them are they remaining pure in their relationships." Well, I do. I absolutely do. That's what the church does. That's not being committed, that's being normal. If other churches are radically sub-normal, so be it but I want a student group where at least the strong core of kids feel the freedom and have the conviction to lovingly and compassionately check on each other.

The first time I saw this was many, many years ago in Romania. The Romanian believers had gone through awful persecution under Ceausescu's communist regime but God meant it for good. The evil persecution the communists brought against the church just purified the church. The churches were absolutely packed. You would not believe how systematically and how structured they could be about getting every square inch of the church filled because their buildings wouldn't hold the people who wanted to come and hear the gospel. The pastor, ?? was the pastor and he said, "You know, in our student group, if kids start getting together, the others will go to them and say, Wait a minute, we don't think this is wise. We don't think this is a good thing in the way you're just getting alone together. You all need to look at this a little bit differently." I think that's a wonderful thing and a good thing.

Proverbs 9:8, "Reprove a wise man and he will love you." I don't want anybody to check me. I don't want anybody to hold me accountable. The Bible says if you're wise you'll love it. "Reprove" means "shine the light." Help them to see something, maybe they're not seeing this the way they ought to see it. Show them what they need to see that maybe they're getting into something that's damaging and dishonoring to the Lord. Well, reprove a wise man and he'll be wiser.

Proverbs 12:1, "He who hates reproof is stupid." Wow, that's strong. I used that word this morning. I felt a little guilty about it but I don't anymore. Stupid. If you hate reproof, the Bible simply uses the Hebrew word that means you're a stupid one. If you go to a church and there's not some willingness of brothers and sisters in the church to check on each other, correct each other, encourage each other to stay on the way, you're in a non-church. That's just normal to a church as breathing is to life and it ought to be normal in the student group.

This one has a number of subpoints and if you don't get them all, maybe you can get them later if you want them but VI. Plan to enter a courtship relationship. That would be in my thinking, the next phase of relationship. If there's a Christian guy-girl relationship, you've allowed some time together in family settings, some group settings where they could get to know each other better. Again, this old argument, "Well, they need to be alone together so they can learn about each other." That's hogwash and slop. That is not true. You learn that boy better, especially in family settings and group settings, than you'll ever learn anything about him alone because if you get alone with him, he's only got one thing on his mind anyway. But if things progress and you're of the age and the time to enter a courtship, the courtship phase is a serious commitment between two people designed to determine whether or not it's God will that they should become engaged in marriage. You're just taking this thing a step further.

Now, during this courtship period here are the things that you need to be confirming. I use the word "confirm" here, you might use the word "consider." We'll begin with the first one: A. Should begin with a meeting between the young man and the girl's father or seeking the parent's blessing. It should begin with a serious meeting with the young man with both sets of parents and saying, "Do you see it okay in your heart that I begin to know your daughter in a more serious way?" What I would call a Christian courtship.

Seek their direction. Young man, be available for any discipleship, that father may ask you to do some things, to write some things, to study some things. I've done some of that. Make sure you tell him, "I'm open to accountability." All you young guys look at your pastor right quick: that girl is not your property. She belongs to God and she belongs to another man until you become man enough to win her hand in marriage and he gives her to you in marriage. Don't you steal or misuse another man's property. She's precious beyond anything you can imagine and so a formal and serious nature is important. In other words, be a man. We've got all kind of boys running around here with their hormones raging and acting like idiots, little punk idiots. Be a man about this. Go to the girl's father, tell him you want to be accountable, tell him you want to be disciplined if he sees fit because you want to begin spending time with his daughter to see if it's God's will for engagement and for marriage.

Secondly, you want to confirm that both of you are growing in Christ. I would use the phrase "progressive sanctification" but that's kind of big words. Just that you want to know that we're both growing spiritually, we're advancing in our spirituality and you want to confirm that our relationship together encourages us to grow closer to the Lord. If you're in a relationship with somebody and look, there's temptations, there's some struggle time, I understand that. This is not a perfect thing until we get glorified bodies but overall that relationship should be one that encourages you to progress in your growth in the Lord. That young man and that young lady should bring up challenging things and challenge each other about their quiet times, about their Scripture memorization, about being faithful to church, about honoring their moms and dads, all things which are pretty good indications that you're a growing Christian. One of my daughters met a young man one time and I was wondering, "Is this guy for real? Is this guy genuine?" and then after a little while she said, "Well, Daddy, time will tell." Do you know what? Time told. She was watching to see if there was going to be enough spiritual growth where we really know this is genuine in their hearts.

Thirdly, this is the courtship, this is seeing if the courtship to continue and go to the stage of engagement: a unity of calling. If you're certain God's called you to study a certain thing and God has led you to go into a certain vocation. Of course, that was real easy for me, called to preach. Man, you've got to know you've got a wife that's geared for that and I believe the wife has to be called to be a pastor's wife. You're very fortunate, your pastor has a wife who just feels called to be a pastor's wife and she's a wonderful, wonderful blessing. I have referred to her as the first lady of Grace Life Church. Not to exalt her above others but pastor's wives have challenges and heartaches that almost are unparalleled, I believe, out there in the world and they need to know that. So, here you are, you're with one lady and you're courting her and you're thinking about engagement but you continually find yourself as far as what you want to do the rest of your life and where you're going in two opposite directions. I courted a girl early on after I was first converted and I had a number of godly men say, "She doesn't fit a call into the ministry." It wasn't that she was ungodly, she was a sweet Christian girl but our callings were different so look for compatibility there.

Fourthly, compatibility of families. Now, I'm not saying that everything has to be perfect here and I'm not saying there's not some exceptions so, again, don't take this as cold and hard fast laws, okay? But at least if there's some real challenges in the families, these need to be well looked at and prayed through and understood. Sometimes the families can be at such odds about values and convictions and what's important that you just have to say, "You know, I believe God is closing this door." You've got to understand something, those of you who have been married awhile know what I'm going to say is true: you don't marry a person, you marry their families. You marry their families and that needs to be a consideration and an understanding that if it's going to be tough and challenging and there's going to be a lot of intrusion and domineering spirit of the families involved, then you had better know that well before you go further in the courtship.

Fifthly, of course, parental confirmation. I didn't put this in any order but I'm saying the parent – now listen, we've asked the parents' blessing to go from Christian guy-girl relationships to courtship, now we're asking the parents' blessing from courtship to engagement. You're asking both parents, "Do you have a peace? Can you give your blessing that we proceed forward to engagement?" I get a lot of free work out at my dear camp at this point when guys want to court my daughters because I'll say, "Well, if you want to move that way, let's go work a few days," and we dig water lines and chop wood. Well, he does it and I watch and give instructions. I know that's kind of an old-fashioned thing but there's some good in that. If the guy can't work, if he can't chop wood and dig water lines and put up tree stands, I just wonder if he's a man at all. Some physical labor is good. Parental time of seeking that blessing and a whole of lot the time, dads, you just have to say, "I'm not sure yet. I'm not sure. You need to stay where you are. Let's keep things where they are. Let's stay accountable and let's keep praying." That's not a slam on the person, it's not a personal thing. Sometimes your own son or your own daughter is the one that you're not sure about so you don't want it to go any further.

The next one, 6. Education. Again, I'm not saying this is a deal breaker, I'm not trying to be absolute here but somebody wants to marry your daughter and they want to provide for them and they've got eight more years of school left before they're going to have any reasonable income at all, that's a consideration. That might be a time you'd say, "You know, I don't know if this ought to go very fast right now." So what are the educational goals, how far along are they, that's an important aspect of confirming in this whole thing.

Next, 7. Finances. There needs to be a cold hard look at has God enabled the young man to be at the place financially that he could take care of a family. Young couples have some struggles, I'm not saying that but look, are you listening to your pastor? If you're going to marry a girl, you take care of her. Don't come to my house looking for a hand-out. Don't go to your daddy. You're not ready if you can't take care of her. It's not God's will yet. Again, you all can be happy in a little one bedroom apartment and that's fine with me. Some precious times and some great growth times are in that but I'm just saying it's a consideration that ought to be looked at.

8. Pastoral confirmation. I think this is so important. I talked to several pastors before I asked Pam to marry me and I meant with all my heart that if they saw something that I wasn't seeing...it's kind of funny tying into your parents, again, my Dad was pretty much totally uninvolved but when my Mom first heard about Pam, all she heard was beauty queen and she didn't like it. You'd have to know my Mom. My friends called my Mom "Sergeant Geraldine." That was her nickname. She just didn't know about this girl, this beauty queen girl, and then she met Pam and within an hour or so she and Pam were teaming up against me. That's how much they hit it off. She really loved her heart. She loved her conviction. She loved her view of marriage. She loved the way she looked at me. But I was committed, if my Mom said, "Jeff, I don't think it's right," I would have waited because I think God is wise. I think God is wise. I remember sitting down with Bob. P. and asking his blessing, "Do you see anything?" And I had courted a girl years earlier that some pastors had told me, "I don't see that working." But with Pam, they were enthusiastic about, "Yes, we believe that's God's will."

Our last one, 9. It's a time to confirm character qualities. Character qualities. Usually in this courtship stage things have gone along far enough and you've been in enough settings and environments, group settings, where you begin to learn, "Is this a person who is dependable? Is this a person who has determination? When they have a goal they're determined to see their way through and get it accomplished? Is this a person that takes responsibility or do they excuse things away and always make excuses for their irresponsibility? Is this a person that yeah, they may have a bad moment or two if their mom or dad or their pastor or whoever their authority figures are but at the end of the day, they make things right and they really honor God-ordained authority?" Young people, look for that. You don't want to marry somebody who's not dependable. You don't want to marry somebody who's not trustworthy. You don't want to marry somebody that's disloyal. You don't want to marry somebody that doesn't have determination to get tasks accomplished. See, that's why the group thing is so important because if you're in group settings and you're not getting too involved emotionally or sexually, then you don't have that bondage to them already, that part of yourself is not with them already and should you see things that are clearly God showing you this is not the right person, you can step out of the relationship with a lot less pain and difficulty. As a matter of fact, it's very common among young people I know that sure, there's heartbreak and sure, there's disappointment sometimes but they learn to be respectful friends in Christ even after the break-up and that's the way it ought to be. Part of that is due to the fact that they have not sinned in their intimacy to that point.

You know, you want to fall in love with their character. I remember so clearly when Pam and I were, I don't know if we were engaged or about to get engaged and I believe it was her Mom that told me, she said, "You know what with Pam? When she commits to you, she will be fiercely loyal." Fiercely loyal. Now, there are a lot of wonderful character traits she has but that one just jumped off the page. I thought whatever else a man of God needs, he needs a wife that's determined to be on his team, to be dedicated to him, to be his biggest supporter and she has been for these 27 years. That was a character quality and you need to fall in love with their character. Now, physical attraction is God-given. If you're not loving them and you know, I teach all this and I want to say at this point, I'm

not teaching that you just get these cold rules down and then you have to marry somebody. No, all of these may line up and if at the end of the day when all of them line up, you're very free to say, "They just don't do nothing for me. All nine are there, boom, I'm not interested." That's okay. That's good. As a matter of fact, I might throw out 2-3 if they do something for me but be careful, when I say "throw out" it's a figure of speech. I mean, 2-3 may not line up just like you want to – this isn't math, okay? This isn't engineering, these are principles. There is something to that emotional love and that attraction that ought to be there but the best I've discerned, that changes. Not everyone is going to be ravishingly handsome after you've been married 27 years or intoxicatingly beautiful. My wife still is, but very few are. You're going to get old. It's going to sag, it's going to bag, it's going to drag but the person, if you love them for their character, that should even be more attractive.

I'm going to read you a little story. I don't ever do anything like this but I think a former church member gave this to me. I don't know that it's true but I'm going to read it and I want you to listen to it because I think it makes the point. A GI stood in Grand Central Station. He was looking for a woman who was to be wearing a red rose. Now, let's go back to the beginning of the story. John Blanchard was in Florida at a used bookstore in which he purchased a book. He began reading the book and found himself interested not only in the contents of the book but intrigued by the notes and the thoughts that someone before him had written within the pages. He thought to himself, "I must meet this person." So he went to the used bookstore, he found out who sold the book, he tracked her down. It was a Miss Hollis Maybelle and she lived in New York City. The GI contacted her and they set up a time in which they would meet but one week before he was to travel to New York, John Blanchard was given orders to go to Europe where he would be stationed for two years. So they wrote to each other and she was such an encouragement to him. At one point he wrote and asked for a picture but she wrote back and said, "What I look like is not important." Finally, the day came when he would be coming home and they agreed to meet at Grand Central Station in New York City and she was to be wearing a red rose.

Here's what happened in his own words: A young woman was coming towards me in Grand Central Station. Her figure long and slim. Her blond hair lay back in curls from her delicate ears. Her eyes were blue as a flower. Her lips and chin had a gentle firmness and in her pale green suit she was springtime come alive. I started toward her entirely forgetting to give notice that she was not wearing a rose. She said, "Going my way, soldier?" I almost uncontrollably made the step closer to her, she was so beautiful, and then suddenly I saw Hollis Maybelle standing directly behind the beautiful young lady. Hollie Maybelle was a woman way past 40. She had gray hair tucked under a worn hat. She was more than plump. Her thick ankle feet were turned into low heeled shoes. The girl in the green suit was now walking away quickly. I felt as though I was split in two. So keen was my desire to follow her and yet so deep was my longing for the woman whose spirit had truly compassioned me and helped me with my own and helped while I was there overseas.

There she stood, her pale, plump face was gentle and sensible. Her great eyes had a warm and kindly twinkle. I did not hesitate. My fingers gripped the small, worn, blue leather copy of the book that was to identify me to her. This would not be love but it might be something precious, something that might be better than love, perhaps a friendship that I had been and must forever be grateful for. I squared my shoulders, saluted, held out the book to the woman and even though while I spoke I felt choked by the bitterness of my disappointment, "Hello, I'm Lt. John Blanchard. You must be Miss Maybelle. I'm so glad you could meet me. Could I take you out to dinner?" The woman's face broadened into a tolerant smile, "I don't know what this is all about, Son, but the young lady in the green suit who you just went by, she begged me to wear this rose on my coat and she said if you were to ask me out to dinner, I was to tell you that she'd be waiting for you in the restaurant across the street. She said it was some kind of test."

Sometimes Christianity looks like a plump old lady in worn clothes and far too often we miss so much of the beauty of Christ out of a lack of love and respect for the relationship. But if John Blanchard had not respected the relationship, he would have missed the love of his life.

Let's stand together in prayer.