



“Man cannot live without love.” JPII

Q. What's the difference between dating and courtship?

A. The concept of dating is about eighty years old – as old as the automobile. Nowadays we are so used to it that we might not be able to imagine any other approach to relationships. But back before the car, the purpose of investing time with a young man or woman was to see if he or she was a potential marriage partner. The reason you expressed romantic interest was to woo the person toward that lifelong commitment. This process usually took place within the context of family activities. When the car was invented, this courting could be divorced from spending time with family because the couple could leave the family behind. Soon, the whole point of spending time together shifted from discernment of marriage to wooing for the sake of wooing. People would begin a relationship simply because they found the other to be cute and fun.



This put a new spin on the focus of relationships, and short-term relationships became commonplace. With this mentality, a person who dates successfully breaks up with everyone in his life except for one person (and this is supposed to be good preparation for a successful marriage). Of course, the majority of relationships do not end in marriage, but some become so intimate and intense that the couple might as well be married. If a breakup occurs, then they experience a sort of emotional divorce. It is not uncommon that by the time a person is married, he feels like he has already been through five divorces.

You may ask, “Well, what is the alternative? Am I supposed to shelter myself, put walls around my heart, and forget having a social life?” Not at all. The alternative is to rethink the way we approach relationships. Whether we admit it or not, the world has molded our views of preparing for marriage. We need to seriously ask ourselves: “What is the godly approach to relationships?” What would God have us do? Perhaps his ways are a 180-degree change from everything you’ve experienced. Perhaps you are burned out from the dating scene anyway, and could use a breath of fresh air.

Either way, I suggest a return to the principles of courtship. When I first heard of the resurgence of Christian courtship, I was skeptical. I remember thinking: “Oh, courtship. So if I want to spend time with a girl, I have to arrange for our families to go to a pumpkin patch together, followed by an exciting evening of board games, and then go home by seven. Woo hoo – real practical for a guy just out of college, living in Southern California.” I had heard a great deal about courtship, but when I began reading books on the subject I ended up liking the idea more than I hoped I would. There was a great deal of wisdom that I had never tapped into.

Many books propose different forms of biblical dating, but the fact is that no one ever dated in the Bible. In some passages the parents arranged the marriage, and in other places we read of men going to foreign countries to capture their wives. The idea of traveling overseas and capturing a wife is appealing, but the Bible does provide guidelines that are more practical. Just because the concept of dating was unknown to those before the twentieth century, that doesn’t mean that Scripture cannot help us understand the mind of God on the matter.

In Psalm 78:8 we read of a generation that had no firm purpose and their hearts were not fixed steadfastly on God. If that is a good description of our relationships, they need some reworking. We should be intent on finding out if it is the Lord’s will for us to be with a certain person, and until we are ready to move in the direction of marriage, what is the point of committing to another?

Some may retort that this is all too serious, but should we be giving our hearts away to people who are in no position to make a real commitment? I am not proposing that you build an impenetrable wall around your heart, but that you guard it with prudence. We can wrestle over the terms “courtship” and “dating,” but the essential thing is to glorify God and act wisely. The time spent prior to marriage must be a school of love where two young people learn the art of forgetting self for the good of the other.

While there is nothing wrong with becoming friends and spending time with members of the opposite sex, committed relationships should be entered into for the sake of discerning marriage. When we do enter into relationships, we should allow wisdom to chaperone romance. This involves having the humility to become accountable to others. Find a member of the same sex that you look up to, and go to him or her for guidance in your relationships. As Proverbs says, “Without counsel plans go wrong, but with many advisers they succeed” (Prov. 15:22).

There is also a great deal of wisdom in spending time together with the other person’s family. Not only does it honor the parents, it also helps you get to know the family that you may one day join. Finally – and this may be a real eye-opener: How this person treats his or her family will likely be how he or she treats you when the feelings taper off. For example, if you are a young woman dating a guy who is disrespectful toward his mother and sisters, but is a perfect gentleman around you, guess what you have to look forward to if you settle down with him.

If we spend every waking hour tucked away in private gazing into our sweetheart’s eyes, we will never find out who they are. The type of time a guy and girl spend together is essential if they wish to ground their relationship in reality. Spending time in service, with family, and even playing sports will help reveal who the person really is.

These are some of the principles of courtship: ask God’s blessing at the beginning of a relationship; enter it with direction, toward discerning marriage; involve the families; be accountable to others; pace yourselves as you spend time together; and always listen for the Lord’s guidance.

Q. Isn’t using birth control better than having unwanted teen pregnancies and abortions?

A. Look at both of these issues and judge for yourself if contraception is part of the solution or part of the problem.

Because of the widespread use of birth control, more people than ever have sex without intending to have children. Sex out of wedlock has become far more common, and more sex means more babies. Some argue that teaching people how to use contraceptives will alleviate the problem. But research shows that “programs in safer sex education and condom distribution have not reduced the out-of-

wedlock birth rates among sexually experienced teens...

The fact is, increased condom use by teens is associated with increased out-of-wedlock birth rates.”¹

A few years ago in Colorado, one school began passing out condoms to the students. Within three years the birth rate rose 31 percent above the national average, and in one school year one hundred births were expected among the twelve hundred students. The administrators were described as “searching for explanations.”²

When unwanted pregnancies occur, many turn to abortion as a solution. In fact, studies show that about half of all unintended pregnancies end in abortion.³ Some argue that increased use of contraception could have lowered these abortion rates. However, the research institute of the nation’s largest abortion provider admits that most women who receive abortions had been using birth control during the month they became pregnant!⁴ Such couples feel that the “fault” of the pregnancy can be blamed on the failed contraception, but by contracepting they have already set their wills against new life. Since contraception treats pregnancy as if it were a disease, many people conclude that abortion must be the cure.

I once saw a condom advertisement that called pregnancy “the mother of all nightmares.” With this mentality it is no surprise that the sex researcher Alfred Kinsey said, “At the risk of being repetitious, I would remind the group that we have found the highest frequency of induced abortion in the group which, in general, most frequently used contraceptives.”⁵ Even a former medical director of Planned Parenthood admitted in 1973, “As people turn to contraception, there will be a rise, not a fall, in the abortion rate.”⁶ Fifty million abortions later, no one can dispute his prediction.

Mother Teresa did not need to see the statistics. She was well aware of the connection between contraception and abortion when she said in a speech in the presence of Bill and Hillary Clinton.

“The way to plan the family is Natural Family Planning, not contraception. In destroying the power of giving life, through contraception, a husband or wife is doing something to self. This turns the attention to self and so destroys the gift of love in him or her. In loving, the husband and wife must turn the attention to each other. Once that living love is destroyed by contraception, abortion follows very easily.”⁷

1. The Consortium of State Physicians Resource Councils, “New Study Shows Higher Unwed Birthrates Among Sexually Experienced Teens Despite Increased Condom Use” (10 February 1999).

2. Jana Mazanee, “Birth Rate Soars at Colorado School,” USA Today, May 19, 1992, 3A.

3. Stanley Henshaw, “Unintended Pregnancy in the United States,” Family Planning Perspectives 30:1 (1998): 24–29, 46.

4. Rachel Jones, et al., “Contraceptive Use Among U.S. Women Having Abortions in 2000–2001,” Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health 34:6 (November/December 2002): 296.

5. Mary S. Calderone, ed., Abortion in the United States: A Conference Sponsored by the Planned Parenthood Federation of America and the New York Academy of Medicine (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), 157.

6. Malcolm Potts, Cambridge Evening News, 7 February 1973, as quoted in “The Connection: Abortion, Permissive Sex Instruction, and Family Planning,” Life Research Institute (January 2000).

7. Mother Teresa, 5 February 1994, National Prayer Breakfast, Washington, D.C.

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