

## ROMANCE & CHRISTIANITY

One of the most exciting times of a person's life is when they meet the person they eventually marry. As romance blossoms, life is turned upside down. Nothing else is important and nothing bothers you. Three hours of sleep is more than enough provided you're waking up to meet your beloved for breakfast. You bound out of bed with enthusiasm as though you had 12 hours sleep and not a thought is given to catching up on the sleep you've missed.

The first time you take her hand you feel electrified as you feel her soft skin and your heart beat quickens. You feel more alive than ever before and when the date is over all you can think about is your next encounter with your beloved.

This is just as God has created it to be. Romance is meant to be exciting and passionate. In Song of Songs the lover is describing his beloved: "How beautiful are your sandaled feet, O prince's daughter! Your legs are like jewels, the work of a craftsman's hands. Your navel is a rounded goblet that never lacks blended wine. Your waist is a mound of wheat encircled by lilies..." The description goes for pages.

Though romance can be the most incredible thing, it can also be the most destructive thing. Romance can be likened to fire. Most people use fire every day. We cook with fire, we stay warm with fire and we purify metal with fire. Though fire is infinitely useful, when it is out of control it is infinitely destructive. Homes, forests, and people have been destroyed by fire that is out of control. Romance when it is controlled is an incredible experience as well as keeping the human race from extinction. When romance is out of control it can devastate the lives of those involved as well as the lives of generations to come.

### Before You Begin

The first step in cultivating romances that are successful is self evaluation. Before you can pursue someone of the opposite sex you need to ask yourself some questions. Why do I want a 'girlfriend' or 'boyfriend?' Is it because you want to fit in? Is it because you want to be seen with someone of the opposite sex? Is it because you want attention? Is it because you want to feel better about yourself? If you are not comfortable with yourself before you begin a relationship, you won't solve anything by starting one.

You have to break the myth that you're 'incomplete' until you have found your 'soul mate'. If you're not a complete person before you begin a relationship, you won't be 'complete' even with a 'partner.'

It's like taking a drive in a car that is out of oil. You can get in and drive away but as soon as the engine gets hot, it will seize up and will probably require a

tow truck to get you home as well as costing you a small fortune to see your car repaired.

If you're just desperate to get into a relationship, chances are you'll settle for someone you're not really happy with and in three months time when you can't convince yourself that you're happy, you'll break up and be back to square one.

The balance is that there is a difference between 'complete' and being over 'independent.' Incomplete or insecure people become 'high maintenance' partners which in most cases lead to a short relationship. Over independent people often can't get into a relationship because a potential partner will feel that that the 'overly independent' person is not interested in a relationship or has no need for a partner.

### Beginning a Relationship

Once you have the right motive for a romance, the second step is to begin a relationship. It's not hard for most people to work out who they are attracted to but how they go about advancing the relationship is the issue. These days many relationships start with a kiss and then the couple begin to get to know each other. They eat the icing before they bake the cake. It's completely back-to-front. The first step in beginning a romance is to become friends with the person you are interested in. You need to know whether you connect with the person emotionally. Do you understand each other? Can you have long and honest conversations about who you are and how you are going? Are you on the same wave length? Your intention for a relationship must be, in the long term, marriage. If you haven't got a strong friendship with the person, the only motivation for the relationship is physical attraction which in this context is self-fulfilling and has little to do with love and respect.

The reason we see so many short term relationships is because this deep friendship is not developed before the relationship becomes physical. Usually after the excitement of kissing etc. wears off, the couple finds that they don't connect on any other level and the romance is over. This is commonly known as a 'fling.'

It is unrealistic to think that this friendship can be built without spending time together or 'dating,' but it is important that a foundational friendship is built before the relationship becomes physical. It is also unrealistic to think you can build that level of friendship in less than three months.

Once a deep level of friendship is built and both parties feel that there is potential for a long term relationship it is time to go to the next 'level.' This is the boyfriend/ girlfriend stage commonly known as 'going out.' If you think

you've built a friendship foundation in two weeks, you're kidding yourself. The difference between this stage and the 'friendship' stage is that now there is some level of commitment from both parties. It means neither party can 'date' someone else unless the existing romance is nullified. It also commonly means some level of physical contact.

### **Boundaries?**

It is the physical contact that often creates the biggest problems in relationships. The Bible says sex is for marriage but there are many things a couple can do that don't necessarily constitute sex. So what is an acceptable level of physical contact before marriage?

To access this rationally it is important to think not from the boyfriend or girlfriend point of view but rather that you are going out with someone's future husband or wife. What level of physical contact is acceptable for your spouse to have had in previous relationships before she or he met you?

You may not marry the person you are going out with. Couples break up. You may at the moment be going out with someone else's future husband or wife! Your current 'girlfriend' may be your future wife's best friend. Imagine how your wife would feel knowing you had slept with her best friend years before. With these things in mind, you can now deal with the question from a rational view point. Though the Bible doesn't flesh this out for us we can still make some guidelines based on consequence. Here's one: **If you don't have it, don't touch it!**

Though it is unrealistic to say no hugging and kissing, you need to limit the amount that this occurs and make sure you're not horizontal! You must be honest about your sexual temptation. Keep the fire in the fire place!

In order to keep these boundaries, accountability is necessary. If you think you are in complete control of your sex drive at every moment you're probably the most likely to fall. Sexual temptation is in some ways like carving your way through a cane field. It is easiest to walk where you have already cut a track. That is to say, once you have gone too far it is very easy to go there again.

It is important to make reasonable boundaries for yourself. Don't stay out late at night. Many people make their biggest mistakes after 12 at night. Don't sleep in the same room. You're kidding yourself if you think you won't sneak into their bed for 'just a cuddle.' 'Just a cuddle' is usually just the beginning.

It's important to savor every stage of the relationship. That is to say, when you first held hands it felt amazing. The sooner you move on to hugging and then kissing, the sooner holding hands will become boring. Relax and enjoy the holding hands 'stage' for as long as you can. A kiss will mean so much more if you have waited for it.

The problem is, once you've had a good long kiss and cuddle, (commonly known as a 'snog') you can't go further until you are married. The sooner you've had a 'snog' the longer the wait will be and the harder the temptation becomes.

You may be thinking, 'what happens if these boundaries are broken?' The first natural consequence is guilt followed by the declaration 'I will never do that again.' This conviction usually lasts maybe two to four weeks until you find yourself walking down that same path and it's not until you've reached your destination that the guilt kicks in and you're back on your knees repenting. The gaps between the mistakes become smaller as you learn to live with yourself and what you are now doing regularly until crunch time comes.

Crunch time is when you realize that your relationship with your boyfriend or girlfriend is actually standing in between your relationship with God and you have to choose God or your 'romance.' Many Christian relationships have broken up because of this issue.

If you are a Christian, the best thing you can do to see your relationship last is to honor God with every aspect of your relationship. As the two of you grow closer to God, you will naturally draw closer to each other and you will feel at peace about God's hand on your relationship.

If you're in a relationship and you've broken the boundaries there is still hope. We serve a gracious God and with repentance always comes forgiveness. Remember that repentance means a change of mind, turning the other way. Genuine repentance requires future self control. One of the best ways to overcome future temptation is to meet regularly with someone you respect who can keep you accountable. Someone that you have to report to if you make a mistake. It's amazing what you won't do when you have to tell someone.

### Dealing with a breakup?

Another issue we must address while on the subject of going out is the 'breakup.' Breakups are sometimes unavoidable and can be very painful for both parties. The first lesson we must learn is that in many situations a break up is healthy! The moment you realize you could not marry the person you are going out with, the most loving thing you can do is break off the relationship as soon as possible. Nothing brings more shame on you than finding out that your partner has wanted to break up with you for the last three months and you were the last to find out. This is very wrong. The partner who is keeping the other in the dark is living a lie and leading their partner on. Though a break up is painful, a prolonged break up is always worse.

It is also very important that when you have 'broken up' with your partner that you give each other space. Three months of no communication can be the healthiest thing as it allows healing for both parties. In most situations, a break up is followed by loneliness and if you see your ex, chances are you will ignite

the old flame and end up lip locked. You're confusing your emotions. Are you missing your ex, or are you missing the company? Most times it's the latter. Once you have broken up, you need to heal without the 'help' of your ex so that you can get back on your feet and become emotionally independent. Breaking up is always hard whether you're on the initiating end or the receiving end. There is no way around this problem. The partner who does the breaking up will feel tremendous guilt as they have hurt a person they care dearly for. The person on the receiving end will feel hurt and often left wondering why. The important thing is that you're honest to each other, breakup properly, don't gossip about each other and seek God to heal your pain.

### Is there a 'one'?

Once a relationship is serious and looks to be long term, the next step is engagement and marriage. This usually leads to the question: Is there a 'one?' That is, is there only one person in the world who is my soul mate?

There is no question that some couples are more suited to each other than others and you naturally will find yourself attracted to some people more than others. However, to say that there is only one person out there who is your soul mate is not very realistic. It would mean that you have to go in search of the one mysterious person in amongst 20 million people in just Australia alone that is your soul mate. If this theory was correct the chances of finding your 'soul mate' would be very slim. What's more, if she's a 'one in a million' then there's six more in New South Wales alone.

So how do you know who you should marry? I have heard many people tell of how God has told them to marry a certain person. Interestingly, none of these people have married the person that God allegedly told them to marry. There were two girls who felt God had appointed me to be their husband and I didn't marry either of them. To say "God said" is to say "if this doesn't work out, it's God's fault not mine." It is simply a way of escaping the responsibility of using the sound mind God created you with, to make the right choice in finding a spouse. I have seen a number of couples marry prematurely under the premise that it was 'Gods will' only to be separated within months of the wedding. Sometimes we confuse the voice of God with our heart beating and our hormones heating.

### How do I know God's will?

So how do I choose a spouse? You'll find that without having to try, you'll be attracted to certain people. Once you've built a friendship and there is an emotional connection as well as a physical attraction, the relationship begins. You are in God's will while you are obedient to him and live within his boundaries. Pray for God's hand to be on your relationship, stay within the physical boundaries and use your God given brain to diagnose the future of the relationship.

Though love begins in a whirlwind of excitement and chemistry, it soon becomes a decision that both parties are required to make. That is, are you prepared to love this person for the rest of your life regardless of what may happen? Pray about your decision, make your decision and then live by your decision! Too many times people declare their undying love only to declare it to someone else months later. You cannot allow your emotions to determine love. You will never feel love all the time. It's the times when you don't 'feel' love that true love begins. It is when you don't 'feel' love that loving your partner becomes selfless and sacrificial. It is this type of love that sees marriages last a life time.

It is also important not to say the 'I love you' statement too early and don't make any references to marriage or engagement prematurely. Though this may be the goal, when you talk about these issues too early you put far too much unnecessary pressure on your relationship. Often the other partner will feel claustrophobic and break the relationship off. Wait and see how the romance evolves. Take it slowly and if the connection is there, engagement etc. will happen naturally. Don't create unreasonable expectations because it will hurt more when they're dashed.

### **Boundaries with people apart from your spouse?**

Another controversial issue is this problem: what level of relationship is acceptable with someone of the opposite sex who isn't your spouse? The first factor to take into consideration is that whatever you do with other people of the opposite sex means less to your spouse. That is, if you have coffee with lots of people of the opposite sex, your spouse won't feel special when you ask him or her to coffee. If you give many females a hug, your wife won't feel very special when you give her one. As well as this, to go from a kiss on the cheek to a kiss on the mouth is only just a turn of the head. You get very little warning time if you've built a mutual affection. If you never hug or kiss on the cheek, the moment you do, the alarm bells are ringing and you can stop something before it begins.

The second issue to be aware of is that a friendship with the purest motives can become romantic before you even realize. If you're regularly meeting with someone of the opposite sex who isn't your spouse the alarm bells should be ringing. Ask yourself why am I meeting with this person? Even as a single person you must take care with how much time you spend with one person of the opposite sex. I have seen many times a 'platonic' friendship that was never meant to be more, result in significant heartbreak. How? As you spend time with a person you connect with them emotionally. This in time will create a natural affection as more of your hearts are exposed to each other. The problem is exposed when one person declares their affection for the other and an affair is in the making or the other person is just not interested.

You must also be aware of people's perceptions. How does it look when you're seen out with ladies who aren't your wife or men who aren't your husband? You

can never underestimate the possibility of people misinterpreting your actions not to mention the person you're spending time with. You may just be trying to be friendly when the other person thinks you have intentions.

It is this mistake that has been the cause of thousands of affairs as well as thousands of broken hearts. If you think your friendship will always remain platonic you're closing your eyes to a clear and present danger.

### 'Yoked' with unbelievers?

The final issue that must be addressed is the question: can a Christian go out with, be engaged to, or marry someone who is not a Christian? This is quite a controversial issue as there are many different perspectives. The famous verse quoted regarding this issue is in 2 Corinthians 6:14: "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?" The issue we must resolve is; what does it mean to be 'yoked' together? Does yoked mean friends, dating, engaged or married?

'Yoked' actually refers to a piece of wood that holds two bullocks together when they are ploughing a field. Neither bullock can get out of the yoke. They are stuck together until their owner unties them. The truth is, you're not technically 'yoked' together until you are in a relationship that you can't get out of. Marriage obviously constitutes this type of relationship. It's a life long commitment. When you're merely going out, you have the power to break off the relationship at any time. This means that 'going out' would not constitute being yoked.

The problem is that when you're 'merely' going out, you're on the road towards marriage. As you become closer, your hearts become connected and you can become emotionally yoked without realizing it. This becomes evident when your partner rejects Christ and you are forced to choose between your will and God's will for you. If you have grown too close it can become very difficult to break off the connection. You're emotionally 'yoked.'

When I met my wife, she wasn't a Christian. After building a solid friendship, we started 'going out.' My perspective was that while she was open and interested in my faith, there was hope for our relationship. If at any point she had rejected Christianity, I would have had to break the relationship off. Our relationship would have had no future inside God's will. A Christian must recognize that God must always be number one in his or her life. This means that should your partner reject God, you will be forced to break up if you wish to keep God as number one in your life. If you don't break it off, you're choosing your partner over God.

In saying this, you must allow your partner time to learn about, understand, and accept Christian faith. You don't need to break up if they haven't given their life to Jesus after one church service. In my case, we met in August and she gave her life to Jesus in February the following year. She had been attending church etc for at least five months before making a decision.

This is a very difficult issue and generally speaking it is much safer **not** to go out with a 'non'- Christian. In most cases it ends up in heart break or a committed Christian becoming a nominal Christian in order to continue their relationship. It is real risk. It's like going down a road without knowing where it will lead. In some cases, as with mine, the road came out exactly where I wanted to be, but in most cases the road is a dead end and results in heart break. So though we cannot make a law out of this, we can look at consequence and follow wisdom which suggests that it is safer to date Christians.

### You just can't find a partner?

There are many people out there who would love to be in a relationship and just can't seem to find a partner. There can be many reasons for this but the most common reason is either a person is too 'keen' or too 'stand-off-ish.'

From a male perspective, most bloke's, enjoy the 'chase.' We enjoy taking the initiative and asking a girl on a date etc. If the girl is overly keen, the male will be bored with the girl before he even starts. He has achieved his goal before he begun trying and the 'thrill of the chase' is gone.

When a girl is 'stand-off-ish', often times a bloke won't try because he feels insulted by her disinterest.

The trick is to play it 'cool.' Show the right amount of interest to create opportunity without stifling it. It's a difficult thing to explain. Girls, you need to show enough interest for a bloke to feel comfortable asking you out without him knowing you're going to say yes. Blokes, you need to show enough interest in a girl so that she knows you're interested but not 'sold out.' If you're 'sold out,' you'll be too intense and she'll give you the cold shoulder.

Sometimes people remain single because they're not responding to opportunity. As the old story goes; a man was shipwrecked on an island. He prayed to God to be rescued. When a ship came by offering rescue, the man said to the ships captain, "no thanks, God is going to rescue me." Then a plane went by and offered rescue but the man gave the same reply. Yet another boat came by and the man gave the same response again. When the man finally died on the Island, he went to heaven and asked God: "why didn't you save me?" God replied, "I tried three times."

The point is, sometimes we're honoring God with our lives and we pray that God would bring a 'partner' into our lives. When he does, we say no without

even giving it a chance because the person wasn't what we expected. We have set ideas about who our partner is going to be, what they'll look like, how they'll act, what they'll do for work etc. When God brings someone that doesn't fit our expectations we miss the opportunity and continue praying for a partner when God has already provided.

For some people, none of these reasons are helpful. You can be doing all the right things and nothing seems to be happening. If this is you, continue to pray and seek God and his will for your life. Perhaps it's just not the right time for you. Whatever you do, don't settle for second best!

### Conclusion

Romance is a gift from God. It is one of the greatest things any two people can share and is undoubtedly the most exciting time in a person's life. We must recognize that like fire it can create warmth as well as great destruction. Misdirected romance is the cause of millions of broken lives as well as generations of single parent children. Honor God with your love life and you will save yourself heart break and regret. When you find that special person, you will enjoy incredible fulfillment in a faithful relationship with a person who remains your soul mate for the rest of your life!