

God's Design for Scriptural Romance

Part 6: How to Marry - The Courtship Stage

by John W. Thompson

Nearly all of us – dads, moms and children – have observed a house being built. Some of us have even had a hand in a construction project or two. So we can all relate well to our Lord's warning NOT to build our house (life) on the shifting sand of man's flawed values (Matt. 7:24-27). Christ wants us to construct marriages that are sturdy dream mansions, not shaky sand castles.

Consequently, in our last article we explored in a very practical way HOW God's five fundamental principles of scriptural romance should be applied to the "friendship stage" of relationship building. Under the analogy of house building, we poured a concrete foundation of piety, erected protective walls of patriarchy, constructed a surrounding moat of purity, built interior rooms of spiritual and vocational preparation, and finally landscaped our dream house with long-growing trees of patience in God's perfect timing.

But how do we know for certain that our dream mansion (our future marriage) is built to God's exacting standards? How can we be sure that it will stand up to the howling winds of adversity and the torrential storms of life? Well, of course, we call in the building inspector to examine and verify its most critical parts. Isn't that what you would do before moving in your fine furniture and beloved family? Wouldn't you want to be positive that this mansion won't collapse and injure you and your loved ones? Let's talk about what building inspectors do, both for houses and for marriages.

First, the builder doesn't even call the building inspector to issue a "certificate of occupancy" until he believes the house is completed and ready to be occupied. He knows that the inspector will examine the house based on an objective set of standards, and not just "go with his feelings." He will conscientiously analyze not only the outside of the house but the inside as well, even the various hidden components. And if he finds something wrong, he won't simply ignore it but will require it to be fixed prior to the house being inhabited.

Likewise, a father should not even consider courtship (the stage for investigating marriage) until he is convinced that his son or daughter has fulfilled the goals of the "friendship stage" of marriage preparation: the development of selfless devotion to Christ, trust in the protection and provision of their father, physical and emotional faithfulness to their future spouse, spiritual and vocational preparation for adulthood, and prayerful confidence in God's perfect plan (see article #5 for a full explanation of these

goals). Only after these goals have been attained should a father pursue the stage of courtship for his son or daughter. Otherwise an inspection will find much unfinished work which makes a future marriage “unfit for occupancy.”

UNDERSTANDING COURTSHIP

What exactly is courtship? Let me summarize what I said in a previous article. Often the terms “courtship” and “betrothal” are used nearly synonymously to refer to the biblical process of pursuing a man-woman relationship under the careful and caring oversight of parents and for the sole purpose of marriage, not recreation. But in addition to this general use, the words “courtship” and “betrothal” have specific, technical meanings that distinguish them from each other. Indeed, they are two separate and sequential stages in the fourfold process that leads to marriage, a process composed of friendship, courtship, betrothal and wedding. Friendship (a cordial relationship of mutual esteem) and wedding (the ceremony and covenant that join a man and woman in marriage) are well understood by all. But what is courtship, and how is it distinct from betrothal?

Like the word “trinity,” the term “courtship” is not found in the Bible, but the idea surely is. In brief, courtship is the process of investigating (i.e., getting to know) a person with marriage in mind. It is the time period, after spiritual and vocational preparation for marriage has been completed, for evaluating a suitor’s inward character, values, beliefs, practices, interests and life purpose to ensure that a godly match occurs. The term “courtship” is derived from the words court and ship. “Court” means a trial of law for evaluating evidence; and “ship” refers to boundaries (such as in the word township, meaning the boundaries of a town). So the term “courtship” may be used to speak of the boundaries, or the proper approach, for evaluating evidence of a person’s true character, just as in a court of law. We see this investigative process in several scriptural marriages (e.g., Isaac and Rebekah, Gen. 24) as well as in various biblical principles, such as 1 Thessalonians 5:21, “Examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good.”

Betrothal, on the other hand, refers to the stage that comes after a positively concluded courtship investigation. Betrothal may be defined as a binding commitment to marry, sought by a young man, agreed to by a young woman, approved and supervised by the fathers of both, and attested by a bridal provision (bride price/dowry) and by witnesses and/or a document. In Scripture, the terms “betrothal,” “engagement” and “espousal” come from the same Hebrew and Greek words meaning, basically, “a promise to marry.” This will be the subject of our next article, but we mention it here to clearly distinguish it from courtship since history has muddled the two in the minds of many.

As we mentioned in our last article, biblical courtship is rooted in a natural attraction toward another for the purpose of marriage, an attraction based on inward character more than outward beauty and charm. In stark contrast, worldly dating is generally pursued for the purpose of pleasure rather than

marriage. In consumer terms, modern dating is equivalent to window shopping, while biblical courtship is shopping with cash in hand, under the direction of an experienced buyer (parents).

Each of the four relational steps toward marriage – friendship, courtship, betrothal and wedding – finds its ultimate validity in Christ’s own marriage to the church as our prototype (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:22ff). We ought therefore to ask, How does Christ’s relationship with the church illustrate courtship? And when did this courtship occur? If courtship is the process of investigating (evaluating, examining, testing) a suitor’s inward character, values, beliefs, practices, interests and life purpose, then Christ’s time of testing before the Cross – from His wilderness temptation by Satan to the garden of Gethsemane – parallels the courtship stage of relationships, the stage of inspecting the vessel to prove its worthiness for habitation.

In the courtship stage of Christ’s “marriage preparation,” He came “to seek” His bride (Lk. 19:10), but only such as the Father had chosen for Him (Jn. 6:37). During this time our Lord was tested in His godly character and shown to be without sin, “...tempted (tested) in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). It was character that was evident to all, even as Pilate declared, “...having examined Him, I have found no guilt in this man” (Lk. 23:14).

Just as our Lord proved himself prior to the Cross to be an acceptable sacrifice according to God’s standards, likewise young men and women must demonstrate themselves prior to betrothal to be acceptable spouses according to God’s standards. The courtship stage, then, is the time period for investigating the qualifications of a suitor to be an acceptable spouse. But how do we go about investigating a person with marriage in mind? How do we practice courtship in a biblical fashion?

WISDOM GUIDANCE

God’s “minimum requirement” is that a Christian’s marriage partner must be another true believer: “...she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord” (1 Cor. 7:39). But what should spiritually-minded Christians desire in a spouse? What ought to direct our “wishes” in a mate? God has added three provisions for wisdom in choosing a spouse: the Scriptures, outside research and wise counselors.

Wisdom, of course, begins with the Scriptures which give God’s job description for husbands and wives. Just as you would be grossly unwise to consider a job without first studying the job description, so also with marriage. So be sure to understand God’s reasons and responsibilities for wedlock, namely (1) to partner together for dominion (Gen. 1:28), (2) to propagate a godly seed (Mal. 2:15) and (3) to portray Christ’s relationship with His church (Eph. 5:22ff): loving leadership by the husband as family pastor, provider and protector; and reverent submission by the wife as devoted helper and “worker at home” (Gen. 2:18; Tit. 2:5).

It would be wise, for instance, for a man to select a spouse with whom he could most easily and completely fulfill his unique life purpose (i.e., his peculiar dominion work) and his responsibilities as a husband. This would surely begin with like-mindedness in biblical beliefs and lifestyle convictions. And he would want to choose a woman whose first priority (after God) is the fulfillment of her God-ordained functions as a wife and mother, rather than having a separate occupation or ministry. Now that may sound obvious, but many Christians have come to grief in their marriage because they did not choose wisely, but married rather for romantic reasons.

A woman, observing that Scripture requires her to respect and submit to her husband, should be asking in advance, "With what kind of man would submission come easily?" In the most general terms, that would be the most spiritually mature person who is willing to marry her. This principle is repeatedly underscored in the Old Testament. In fact, the segment of Proverbs that specifically addresses the issue of selecting a spouse emphasizes spiritual excellence as the primary marriage qualification: "An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels" (Prov. 31:10). And when Boaz told Ruth he wanted her for a wife, he explained why: "for all my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence" (Ruth 3:11).

In addition to getting wisdom from the Word of God, we are to study outside research just as Nehemiah did when he planned to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem (Neh. 2:11-16). Outside research related to marriage might include such areas as age, finances, employment, education, personality traits, health, hobbies, family background, cultural background and much more. The fewer the potholes in the pathway of adjustment, the smoother will be the journey to marital unity.

The third and final source of wisdom God has provided for choosing a spouse is wise counselors. In our day we have been blessed with an abundance of wise (and not so wise) counsel through books, cassette tapes, videos and seminars. Still, there is no substitute for personal counsel from the godly men and women who know you best, particularly your own parents. How very sad when Christian young people and even Christian adults neglect the counsel of their spiritual family. Proverbs tells us they do so to their own great peril!

Now, just as we did in the friendship stage (see article #5), let's look more particularly at how God's five fundamental principles of scriptural romance - piety, patriarchy, purity, preparedness and patience - apply to the courtship stage of marriage preparation.

APPLYING PIETY

As we have noted before, piety refers to our general godliness and righteousness in attitudes and conduct. But HOW, specifically, are we to apply piety in the evaluation of a potential spouse?

Foremost, I think, is that we have our focus on inward character, not on outward beauty, wealth or popularity. For example, King Lemuel was taught

in Proverbs 31 to seek “a virtuous wife”; and godly Ruth desired Boaz for a husband because he was a man of character and kindness, even though he was old enough to be her father (Ruth 2:9, 15-16; 3:10).

Consider again the biblical reasons and responsibilities of marriage: to partner together for dominion, to propagate godly children and to portray Christ’s relationship with His bride, the church. Christ-like character in both husband and wife is absolutely essential for achieving these three God-ordained purposes. Without godly character in a spouse, there will be no one-mindedness for dominion, no consistent training of children, and no testimony of Christ in your relationship. In short, you will be an utter failure in realizing God’s preplanned design for marriage. That’s how important inward character is in the choice of a mate.

So what would be included in the evaluation of a suitor’s character and convictions? Here we are looking for “direction, not perfection.” If a young man or woman is not acceptable in any of these areas, don’t dismiss them immediately since they may be teachable, especially if they show a submissive spirit to their parents and elders. Note also that in courtship we are concerned about issues of “conviction” not “preference.” A conviction is something you are “convinced” from the Bible is God-ordered, and that to ignore it would be sin. Thus, to marry someone with different convictions would pose grave problems of compromise or conflict. Most matters of “preference” (except those that are very significant to you) should await discussion until betrothal since these issues can create emotional bonding, something that would be premature during the courtship stage.

First, assess a suitor’s general spiritual maturity. Does he show a genuine love for Christ and His church, as evidenced by a life of joyful obedience? Does he demonstrate an honoring attitude toward his parents and siblings? (How he honors his family trains him for how he will honor a wife.) Will he happily submit to parental oversight in courtship and betrothal? Since discipline is necessary for godliness, is he self-disciplined in his spending, eating, orderliness, working, studying and spiritual life? Does he make decisions and resolve problems with open communication and an open Bible, seeking God’s answer? Is he a kindly, selfless leader, pursuing the character of an elder in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1? Is she a cheerful, submissive helper, pursuing the qualities of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31 and Titus 2?

Second, compare areas of personal conviction, beginning with one’s major theological understanding. A person with liberal leanings will not make a good marriage with someone of conservative beliefs. A Calvinist won’t match well with an Arminian, nor will a Reformed with a Dispensationalist. In today’s “evolving” spiritual climate, one must even be sure of their potential spouse’s view on creationism (the traditional literal six-day view versus theistic evolution, progressive creationism or framework hypothesis).

Convictions about church life must also be explored for compatibility: issues like denominations, house churches, church organization, role of men and

women, significance of baptism and the Lord's Supper, the problem of Sunday school and youth groups (i.e., family-segregation) and Sabbatarianism (what day to worship and how to honor the Lord on that day).

Convictions about family life likewise require one-mindedness. These include intensely personal matters like the roles of husband and wife, view of biblical submission, wife working outside the home, importance of family worship, celebration of sacred days (Christmas, Easter), birth control, number of children, schooling of children, discipline of children (especially use of the rod), relationship to in-laws and friends, abortion, divorce, etc. Don't assume anything - ask!

Convictions about personal life can often bring serious trouble to a marriage. So be sure to investigate beliefs about the sufficiency of Scripture vs. psychology for solving problems, Scripture vs. feelings for discerning God's will, food issues (overeating, nutrition, vegetarianism), dress issues (modesty, gender-distinct, cost, jewelry), recreation issues (sports, movies, TV, rock music), medicine (traditional, alternative), money attitudes (giving, spending, saving, debt, gambling), use of alcohol or tobacco, personal morality (all areas, be specific), civil disobedience, anger or violence, lying or deception, past romantic relationships, past arrests or crimes. Once again, don't assume anything - ask!

Finally, review "significant preferences" that could be problematic to a marriage. Some individuals, for example, have very strong attitudes about where they want to live - north vs. south, city vs. country, etc. Others have passionate feelings about pets, hygiene, and various other matters.

In addition to evaluating inward character and convictions, a pious person will want a husband or wife with the same inward direction, life goal, or life purpose - where they complete one another as partners in Christ's kingdom work. A man should seek a spouse who is a "suitable (lit. corresponding) helper," as God created her to be in Genesis 2:18. That is, her talents, abilities, interests and direction ought to correspond to his so that she completes him in his life purpose. Otherwise he will be missing his "other half" and will be less able to accomplish God's goals for him. So what would be included in evaluating a suitor's inward direction?

First, assess his intended life work. Is he vocationally prepared with a family-centered occupation, a vocation that can include his wife as his helper? By God's design, unless a man is to be single, his life work is intended to involve his wife (Gen. 1:27f; 2:18), but the industrial world today greatly inhibits this (thus, family business is often the best choice). Is his life work something that you can support with your God-given talents? Second, compare your talents, abilities and interests with his. Do you fit together well? Third, review general strengths and weaknesses. Are you strong where he is weak and vice versa?

In summary, an application of the principle of piety will cause us to focus on a suitor's inward character, convictions and direction, rather than being star-

struck by outward beauty, wealth and popularity. It must also be pursued with fervent prayer. But who should direct this investigation of a potential spouse? Clearly, the principle of patriarchy indicates that the fathers (particularly the young lady's father) should take leadership during the courtship period. According to R. J. Rushdoony in his *Institutes of Biblical Law*, this leadership role of the bride's father is reinforced by the Hebrew word for bridegroom, which means "the circumcised," and the Hebrew word for father-in-law, which means "he who performs the circumcision." This refers not to physical circumcision but to spiritual circumcision. The father-in-law is responsible for ensuring the spiritual circumcision (i.e., the spiritual condition) of the groom in order to prevent a spiritually mixed or incompatible marriage with his daughter.

APPLYING PATRIARCHY

Patriarchy refers to a father's physical, moral and emotional oversight and protection of his children, as well as his provision of a spouse with the cooperation of a son or approval of a daughter. What is its application during the courtship stage of marriage preparation?

From the Scriptural examples, there seem to be two phases in the courtship stage of relationships. In the first phase, the parents alone are involved as they explore the field of potential spouses and weed out those who are clearly unsuitable. In this first phase, the son or daughter may not even be aware of any specific candidate's name. The goal, of course, is to reap the wisdom of the parents and to preserve the emotional purity of the son or daughter. So if a suitor were to directly approach a young lady, she should immediately refer him to her father as did Rebekah in Genesis 24. Once a potential spouse becomes a likely candidate, however, the son or daughter becomes personally involved in the investigative process under the careful and loving oversight of the father. Let's look now in greater depth at these two phases: the "inquiry" and the "consensus."

Phase One: the Inquiry. Even before his children are ready for marriage, a wise father will be continually building wholesome relationships with other like-minded families, not only for present fellowship but also for future spouses. The significance of this early relationship building can't be stressed enough because long-term relationships give the greatest prospect for wise choices. You will have had the opportunity to observe these young men and women in all kinds of circumstances, giving you the safest judgment of their true character, convictions and direction in life.

But where might a father find like-minded families? The starting place, of course, is in your own local church. But since that will not satisfy all marital needs, we can look next at other like-minded churches, both near and far, which might be discovered through publications such as *Patriarch* magazine and *Quit You Like Men*, web sites like ChristianCourtship.com, and ministries such as Steve Schlissel's *Reformed Matchmaker* or *Reformed Singles* Facebook Forum. Beyond these resources, we can befriend other home-

schooling families that we meet at church conferences and state homeschool conventions. Another place to meet like-minded families is at Christian conferences on themes of interest to your family. For example, since our daughters desire husbands with a serious interest in music, we have attended Christian music conferences. Plus, since we are each looking for someone different, we parents can keep an eye out for one another as we travel around.

Now, when a father locates a potential spouse - i.e., one who seems worth exploring - he should contact that person's father to begin investigating their inward character, convictions and direction. And since God has given us a wife to be our "corresponding helper," we should involve her in the investigation, for she can often perceive character flaws that we may overlook. This "inquiry" phase would also include a father's interview with the potential spouse as well as a thorough investigation of the suitor's character references (his/her church elders, relatives, long-time family friends, etc.). This process may take up to a month, especially if there is some distance involved. After enough information is gathered, a "Compatibility Chart" should be developed listing similarities and differences in character, convictions and direction. If there is enough mutual interest and both fathers give their approval, it is time to transition to phase two of courtship which involves the young adults under their parents' oversight. Whereas "inquiry" focuses on data-gathering through questioning, "consensus" pursues like-mindedness through study and discussion about the areas of difference in convictions and significant preferences.

Phase Two: the Consensus. At this point, the young man and woman would likely review with each other nearly every area of inward character, convictions and direction that their fathers covered, much of it in the presence of parents and some of it in family gatherings, such as meals or other activities where character can "show." One author suggests "character windows" like yard work, evangelistic activities, church work projects and other ministry activities. The consensus seeking itself ought to involve mutual Bible study and the writing of position papers on important areas of difference (from the Compatibility Chart). The purpose of consensus is not for one party to win the other to his or her views, but for both parties to study the Word of God as the sole standard for our convictions. Both sides should have the liberty to recommend articles, tapes and books for studying out the areas of difference. Participants in study and discussion must include the parents, too, who can then disciple the young persons where necessary. Openness and honesty - not pressure and compromise - will move the discussions toward the ultimate goal of a better understanding God's truth.

During the courtship stage there is nothing that should be asked or said that is too private for parents to overhear. Remember, patriarchy involves protection, and a father cannot protect when he doesn't know. Every effort should be made to avoid emotional bonding since either party should be able to withdraw from the courtship without leaving a sense of rejection or hurt. Thus, I would allow absolutely no gifts, romantic words or private letters or phone calls since these tend to incite the emotions. Toward the end of the

courtship investigation, there may be a place for very limited private time together, say, in the family's parlor when parents are in the next room. But even this should have an agreed-upon agenda for discussion since Proverbs warns about the attraction of flattery in a conversation (Prov. 5:3; 7:5).

In early America, a "courtship candle" was used to limit the amount of time spent talking alone. When the candle burned down to the next mark, it was time for the young man to go home. As mentioned before, if a young man or woman is found unacceptable in any area, this becomes an opportunity for discipleship by either father. We can surely see the difficulty – if not impossibility – of achieving a biblical courtship when a young person (particularly a daughter) is sent off to college or is otherwise absent from the father's home (see the author's article "College at Home for the Glory of God").

We've already touched briefly on our third principle of scriptural romance, the principle of purity. But there is more to be said.

APPLYING PURITY

Purity refers to there being no physical affection or romantic emotions prior to God's approval in Scripture. Contrary to cultural expectations, the many Bible passages bearing on this topic reveal that neither romantic touching nor romantic emotions are permitted during the courtship stage of marriage preparation. Yet as the Bible and history affirm, this has always been a temptation and even more so in a promiscuous culture. It is principally for this reason that the fathers take leadership and oversight during the courtship stage to preserve and protect a son's or daughter's physical and emotional purity.

We see in Scripture both good and bad examples of purity during the courtship stage. Samson, of course, was a terrible example in Judges 14 when he allowed his emotional desire for a Philistine woman to cause him to disobey his father's godly pleading that he take a believing wife from Israel. Parents, if you allow your son or daughter to become emotionally involved like Samson, you will likely lose all authority and control in his or her life just as his father did. On the other hand, we have the good example of Naomi's counsel to Ruth where she directed her daughter-in-law to "wait until you know how the matter turns out" (Ruth 3:18). That is, don't let your emotions become involved with Boaz until you know that a betrothal covenant has been agreed upon.

This is such a problematic area that it bears repeating the scriptural support for the principle of absolute purity. Biblically, then, romantic touching – such as holding hands, hugging, kissing – is appropriate ONLY within marriage (Gen. 2:25; 26:8; Prov. 5:18f; 6:29; Song of Sol. 4-8; Matt. 1:24f; 2 Cor. 11:2; Heb. 13:4). It is "good for a man not to touch a woman" (1 Cor. 7:1; Gen. 20:4,6; 34:3; Ruth 2:9; 2 Sam. 11:1ff; etc.). God never intended any level of "limited" romantic touching prior to marriage. James describes this principle

of the “slippery slope” in James 1:14: “But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.” By God’s design for procreation, one touch leads to the next. So in Scripture, courting couples were generally in the company of their families or chaperoned (Gen. 2:22-24; Song of Sol. 1-3 – by “the daughters of Jerusalem”). And when not chaperoned, moral disasters occurred, such as Shechem with Dinah, Samson with Delilah and David with Bathsheba. “Lead me not into temptation,” a plea to the Heavenly Father, should likewise be heard by earthly fathers (Matt. 6:13; 26:41). “Make no provision (opportunity) for the flesh in regard to its lusts,” warns the Apostle Paul (Rom. 13:14). Aloneness is an opportunity for the flesh, even the aloneness of a public place away from one’s family. “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12; cf. Prov. 28:26).

But physical morality isn’t all that’s included under the purity principle. God also requires emotional purity in our relationships. Unrestrained romantic emotions lead to mental impurity, “adultery... in the heart” Jesus called it (Matt. 5:28). Consequently, romantic emotions (conveyed through romantic looks, acts, language and gifts) are appropriate ONLY after the betrothal covenant has been made (Song of Sol.1-3). Otherwise, emotional fraud will likely occur (1 Thess. 4:6). Yet even during the betrothal period, all anticipation of marital affection is to remain pure and undiscussed between the couple (Song of Sol.1:2; 2:6; 3:1), romantic language is to be moral and modest (1:10,15,16), and strict patience and self-control is to be a mutual commitment (2:7,15; 3:5).

GOD’S FENCES OF PROTECTION

RELATIONSHIP	TYPE OF BONDING
Friendship	Social
Courtship	Spiritual
*** STOP ***	*** STOP ***
Betrothal	Emotional
*** STOP ***	*** STOP ***
Wedding	Physical

Parents and young people, in 1 Thessalonians 4:6 God commands that “no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter of acquiring a wife.” The word “transgress” here means to exceed the boundaries by stealing the physical or emotional affections that belong to a woman’s future husband (see exposition in article #2). Notice in the accompanying diagram that God has set up boundaries, or fences, to avoid the emotional or physical bonding which He reserves for future stages in our relationships. During the friendship stage,

for example, we are allowed social bonding. And during the courtship stage, God intends us to spiritually bond as we agree with a potential spouse on personal convictions and inward direction. But there God sets up an emotional boundary, or fence, which we are not allowed to cross until we make the commitment of betrothal. God likewise sets up a physical boundary which we are not allowed to cross until we make the commitment of marriage through the wedding. These two boundaries are given by God for the protection and preservation of our hearts in what one author calls the “zones of vulnerability.” In the courtship zone, we will be tempted toward emotional bonding; and in the betrothal zone, we will be tempted toward physical bonding. But God says, don’t cross the fences – they’re put there to guard you for your one-and-only sweetheart. And it’s up to earthly fathers to make sure those fences stay in place.

APPLYING PREPAREDNESS & PATIENCE

Preparedness alludes to the spiritual, vocational and financial readiness for marriage by both the man and the woman. This fourth principle of scriptural romance should have been basically completed before courtship ever began. And indeed, the necessary questions must be asked of a potential spouse to ascertain his or her preparedness for marriage. The many issues mentioned above under “Applying Piety” will appraise a candidate’s spiritual readiness. But further questioning must address the vocational and financial areas.

Has the young man developed adequate marketable skills (not just a degree or a job) to support a wife and family, preferably through a family business that would allow him to achieve his God-ordained family priorities and include his wife as his “dominion helper” (Gen. 1:27f; 2:18)? Has he saved his money for marriage and avoided the slavery of debt? Has the young lady developed her skills and talents to be not only a “domestic helper” but also a “dominion helper” to assist her husband in his life work? If any spiritual or vocational shortcomings are discovered during courtship, they must be corrected before any further progress in the relationship.

Finally, how does the scriptural principle of patience apply to the courtship stage? Patience, an attitude of “walking by faith, not by sight,” involves trusting in our sovereign God to accomplish His perfect plan. It’s not easy to maintain patience when you think you have your target (“Mr. Right”) in your sights. But what if it doesn’t turn out, as Naomi cautioned Ruth? Foolish young people often fall into lusting rather than trusting during this crucial stage of investigating a spouse. So you must prepare yourself, young men and ladies, to say “No” to several second best choices while you patiently wait for God’s best.

Satan will surely try to hinder you from your present righteous path and your future godly service. He will try to spiritually neutralize both you and your future children by attracting you to a second best marriage through which it will be difficult to raise up a godly seed. As an angel of light, Satan can make those second best choices look really good on the surface. But remember how

after thirty years of preparation, Jesus Christ was just ready to win his bride at Calvary when Satan offered Him a sparkling substitute: all the kingdoms of the world. Aren't you glad our Lord rejected Satan's second best substitute? And so should YOU, if you want a dream marriage that will last a lifetime!

What we have said about biblical courtship may raise nearly as many questions as it answers. For example, What if the parents are unsaved, disinterested, uncooperative or even opposed to courtship? How do we do courtship if a son or daughter has already left home? If I'm already involved in a relationship, how do I make the transition to courtship? Can courtship be successful if the families live distant from each other? How do older singles court, especially if their parents are deceased? How long should a courtship last?

In our next article, Lord willing, we'll be dealing with "Courtship Questions" - the most frequently asked questions that have come to us through the ChristianCourtship.com web site, as well as a thorough list of the most critical questions to ask a courtship candidate and his references (i.e., pastor, relatives, friends). If you have any courtship questions after reading this issue, let us hear from you right away and we'll try to answer your question in our next article.

John Thompson is the director of Family Shepherd Ministries.
