

Things to Consider Before Courting

Via GotAnswers.org

Question: How young is too young to be in a romantic relationship?

Answer: How young is "too young" to start a relationship depends on the individual's level of maturity, goals, and beliefs. Often, the younger we are, the less mature we are due to a lack of life experience. When we are just beginning to figure out who we are, we may not be firmly grounded enough spiritually to form solid romantic attachments and may be more prone to making unwise decisions that can leave us with emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual damage.

Being in a relationship puts one in almost constant temptation, especially as emotions begin to develop and the attraction to the other person deepens. Young teens "even older teens" are besieged by hormonal and societal pressures that seem at times almost unbearable. Each day brings new feelings "doubts, fears, and confusion coupled with joys and exhilaration" which can be very confusing. Young people spend much of their time just figuring out who they are and how they relate to the world and the people around them. To add the pressure of a relationship at this stage seems almost too much to ask, especially when the other person is experiencing the same upheaval. Such early relationships make it more difficult to avoid damage to the delicate and still-forming self-image, not to mention the problem of resisting temptation. If being marriage-minded is still far off, it is probably too early to begin dating or courtship. Much safer for all concerned are group activities where young people can develop social skills and friendships without the pressure and inherent difficulties of romantic attachments.

No matter when a person decides to begin a romantic relationship, this should be a time of building on the foundation of faith that he or she has been taught, of growing and figuring out what God wants him or her to do. We are never too young to begin this exciting process. "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12).

Question: What is the difference between dating and courting?

Answer: Dating and courtship are two methods of beginning relationships with the opposite sex. While there are non-Christians who date with the intention of having a series of intimate physical relationships, for the Christian this is not acceptable and should never be the reason for dating. Many Christians see dating as little more than friendship and maintain the friendship aspect of their dating until both people are ready to commit to each another as potential marriage partners. First and foremost, dating is a time when a Christian finds out if his or her potential marriage partner is also a believer in Christ. The Bible warns us that believers and unbelievers should not marry each other, because those living in the light (of Christ) and those living in the darkness cannot live in harmony (2 Corinthians 6:14-15). As stated before, during this time there should be little or no physical contact, as this is something that should wait until marriage (1 Corinthians 6:18-20).

Courtship takes the position that the two people have no physical contact at all (no touching, no hand-holding, no kissing) until marriage. Many in a courtship relationship will not spend any

time together unless family members, preferably parents, are present at all times. In addition, courting couples state up front that their intentions are to see if the other person is a suitable potential marriage partner. Courtship advocates claim that courtship allows for the two people to truly get to know each other in a more platonic setting without the pressures of physical intimacy or emotions clouding their view.

There are problems inherent with both styles. For daters, spending time alone with a member of the opposite sex whom we find attractive can present temptations that can be very hard to resist. The Christian dating couple must have boundaries in place and be committed to not crossing them. If they find this hard to do, they must take steps to ensure that Christ will always be honored during their time together and that sin is never given a chance to take hold of their relationship. Just as with the courting couple, the parents of the dating couple should be involved in the relationship, getting to know their child's companion and being a source of wise and discerning advice and guidance for both of them.

Of course, the courtship style presents its own set of difficulties. While many courtship advocates see it as the only choice for finding a mate, others find it oppressive and overly controlling. In addition, it can be hard to find the "real" person behind the public face presented in front of the entire family. No one is the same in a group setting as he or she is one-on-one. If a couple is never alone together, they never have that one-on-one opportunity to relate and get to know one another in emotional and spiritual intimacy. In addition, some courtship situations have led to borderline "arranged marriages" by the parents and have resulted in resentment in one or both of the young people.

It is important to remember that neither dating nor courtship is mandated in Scripture. In the end, the Christian character and spiritual maturity of the couple is far more important than the exact nature of how and when they spend time together. Scripturally speaking, the result of the process "godly Christian men and women marrying and raising families to the glory of God" is far more important than the method they use to achieve that result. "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31, NKJV).

Finally, care must be taken to avoid the pitfall of believing one's personal preference "dating or courting" is the "only way" and looking down upon those who make the opposite choice. As in all things, the unity of the body of Christ should be of utmost importance in our minds, regardless of personal choices others make pertaining to issues on which the Bible is silent.

Question: Should a Christian use a dating service to find a spouse?

Answer: The Bible doesn't tell us how to "date" or "court," whichever we call the process we use to get to know a potential mate. In the Bible times, neither of these existed in the same form that we see them today. Back then, families helped young women and men meet and become engaged and often chose their children's mates for them. Today, singles are more on their own to find a mate. Some singles don't bother to look for a spouse, believing God will bring the person to them, while others are forever on a feverish search for one, fearing they may miss him or her. There should be a balance, as we remember that God is perfectly loving (Ephesians 3:18; 1 John 3:16-18) and perfectly sovereign over every situation, desire and need (Psalm 109:21; Romans 8:38-39). Unless we are rebelling against God, we can be sure that He is not punishing us through our singleness and that He is very likely bringing the right man or woman our way"

eventually! God uses our choices, other people, and sometimes even modern technology, to bring about marriages.

Before a Christian single considers any of the "newer" methods of finding a spouse, it's helpful to consider whether we may be engaging in any self-defeating behavior. Is it possible we are being too picky, looking for the fairy-tale prince or princess, and by doing so, limiting the possibilities of what God may know is best for us and which we have not yet considered? Are we not being picky enough, forgetting that God calls all Christians to marry only other Christians (2 Corinthians 6:14), or are we considering someone who is stuck in a serious, life-altering sin that could endanger the marriage? A Christian man should take the lead in relationships, asking the woman out, calling her, and making sure their relationship glorifies Christ in all things. A Christian woman should let the man take the initiative as the leader God made him to be and resist the temptation to initiate the relationship. And, finally, as believers, we should be able to stand on our own two feet, relying on the Lord to fulfill us rather than feeling a need to be married in order to be whole. Once we have these common struggles sorted out, we can begin to pursue a woman, or be pursued by a man, with an eye towards marriage.

As in all decisions, we should ask God to direct us clearly. It can be difficult to meet single Christian men and women, especially if most of our friends have already married. We can put ourselves in a position to meet other Christians by looking for a church singles group. We may want to volunteer for a cause we care about or join other groups, being sure that we are doing it because we enjoy it, not just because we want to meet as many potential mates as possible. Some people prefer to meet their spouse through friends, family, or in a chance meeting out in the world, and many do just that. But others believe they are limited in the people they meet because of their profession, the size of their city, or the nature of their activities. For these people, it may be wise to consider other methods. Some of the modern methods of finding a mate include internet or online dating, professional matchmaking services, and speed dating. Each has its pros and cons, and none is right for everyone. Before beginning any of these methods, we should begin in prayer, asking God whether it is the step He wants us to take.

Internet dating is currently the most popular alternative way to meet singles. There are Christian dating websites, including www.togetherchristian.com. There are secular dating websites that allow you to limit your search to Christians, and they (like the Christian sites) often let you specify the denomination you are looking for as well. Some of the most popular websites are www.match.com, www.cupid.com, and www.eharmony.com. (Please note that GotQuestions Ministries does not personally endorse any particular dating site.) eHarmony is unique in that it uses an extensive personality test to provide customized matches to each person, though each user must only choose from the matches given to him or her they cannot communicate with anyone they choose. Most of the other sites (Christian and secular) provide various ways that men and women can quickly assess compatibility before beginning any form of communication. Most sites charge a monthly or yearly fee, ranging from a few dollars to twenty or thirty dollars a month. eHarmony requires that members proceed through several "steps" of communication before they are allowed to e-mail and exchange phone numbers. The other sites offer quicker communication. While it is easy to meet new people on all of the websites, anyone trying out internet dating must be very careful.

One major downfall of internet dating is that you can never be sure who is being honest and who is pretending to be someone they're not. The result of a deception can be humorous or

even deadly. It's a good idea to never answer any communication from someone from another country, unless you are able to conduct an extensive background check on him or her. Some of these people are trying to con the men and women they meet. Always begin by meeting the person in a public place never allow them to drive you anywhere or take you somewhere where you will be alone. It is wise to plan a double date, so that a close friend can offer his or her opinion on this (let's face it) complete stranger. Listen to your instincts and get away fast if you ever feel you are in any danger. Warnings aside, though, many happy Christian marriages have come out of internet dating.

Professional matchmaking services are usually safer than internet dating, but are less popular, and don't always have a very large pool of people to choose from. They can also be more expensive, usually involve more extensive applications, and require some type of background check. Speed dating is where singles circulate systematically through a room of tables in order to assess a potential date in only a few minutes per rotation. At the end of the night, they turn in a card that indicates whom they would be willing to be matched up with. The couples who have mutual interest will receive each other's contact information. Professional matchmaking and speed dating can be just as dangerous as internet dating, but, if done safely and wisely, can potentially lead to a successful Christian marriage.

In all of the choices we make, though, it's crucial to remember that it is God "not us" who brings us together with a spouse. As simple as it may sound, we shouldn't have to work to find our spouse; we should be living out our lives with any desires for a spouse on the back burner and our desires for knowing God at the forefront of our hearts. Men do need to take the initiative in a relationship and pursue the woman, but God is still the one who brings the couple together. Seek God and He will fulfill (or change) your desires (Psalm 103:5; Romans 12:2) in His perfect way and His perfect time (Romans 5:6; Romans 8:26-27). Would we want it any other way? Look at the story of Isaac and Rebekah and how God brought them together (Genesis 24). It was sovereignly planned and controlled by God. The marriage of two people is nothing short of a miracle, but, then again, the same could be said of our birth and of even our living to see the next day. God holds our every moment in His hands (Psalm 31:15), and He will not let us slip through the cracks of His gentle fingers. He cradles our lives and our hearts in His hands, and He will not forget His children.

Question: What should I be looking for in a wife?

Answer: The most important personal relationship that a man can have, outside of his spiritual relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ, is his relationship with his wife. In the process of looking for a wife, the highest principle is to look for a woman with a personal faith in Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul tells us not to be "unequally yoked" with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14). Unless a man and woman are in full agreement on this most crucial issue, a godly and fulfilling marriage cannot take place.

However, marrying a fellow believer does not guarantee the full experience of being "equally yoked." The fact that a woman is a Christian does not mean she is necessarily a good match for you spiritually. Does she have the same spiritual goals as you? Does she have the same doctrinal beliefs? Does she have the same passion for God? The qualities of a potential wife are crucially important. Far too many men marry for emotional or physical attraction alone, and that can be a recipe for failure.

What are some godly qualities a man can look for in a wife? Scripture gives us some principles we can use to create a picture of a godly woman. She should first be surrendered in her own spiritual relationship with the Lord. The apostle Paul tells the wife that she is to submit to her husband as unto the Lord (Ephesians 5:22-24). If a woman is not surrendered to the Lord, she will not likely see submission to her husband as necessary to her own spiritual well-being. We cannot fulfill the expectations of anyone else without first allowing God to fill us with Himself. A woman with God at the center of her life is a good candidate for a wife.

Paul also gives some character traits for a woman in his instructions about leaders in the church. "In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything" (1 Timothy 3:11). In other words, this is a woman who is not overly proud, knows when to speak and when to be silent, and is able to take her place beside her husband in confidence. She is a woman whose first focus is upon her relationship with the Lord and her own spiritual growth.

The responsibilities of marriage are greater for the husband, for God's order places him as the head of his wife and his family. This headship is modeled after the relationship between Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:25-33). It is a relationship grounded in love. Just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it, the husband is to love his wife as he does his own body. Therefore, a man's personal spiritual relationship with the Lord is of supreme importance in the success of his marriage and his family. Willing sacrifice and the strength to choose to be a servant to the betterment of his marriage are the marks of a maturing spiritual man who honors God. Wisely choosing a wife based upon biblical qualities is important, but of equal importance is a man's own ongoing spiritual growth and his surrender to God's will in his life. A man who is seeking to be the man God wants him to be will be able to help his wife be the woman God desires her to be and will be able to build the marriage into the union God, he, and his wife desire it to be.

Question: What should I be looking for in a husband?

Answer: When a Christian woman is looking for a husband, she should seek a man "after God's own heart" (Acts 13:22). The most important relationship that any of us have is our personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. That relationship comes before all others. If our vertical relationship with the Lord is as it should be, then our horizontal relationships will reflect that reality. Therefore, a potential husband should be a man who has his focus upon walking in obedience to God's Word and who seeks to live so that his life brings glory to God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

What are some other qualities to look for? The apostle Paul gives us the qualities we should look for in a husband in 1 Timothy chapter 3. In this passage are the qualifications for a leader in the church body. However, these qualities should grace the lives of any man who walks "after God's heart." The qualities can be paraphrased as follows: a man should be patient and controlled in his demeanor, not filled with pride but of sober mental attitude, able to master his emotions, given to graciousness to others, able to patiently teach, not given to drunkenness or uncontrolled use of any of God's gifts, not prone to violence, not overly focused upon the details of life but focused upon God, not apt to be a hot-head or be thin-skinned so that he takes offense easily, and grateful for what God has given, rather than envious of what gifts others

have received.

The above qualities describe a man who is actively engaged in the process of becoming a mature believer. That is the type of man a woman should look for as a potential husband. Yes, physical attraction, similar interests, complementary strengths and weaknesses, and the desire for children are things to consider. These things, though, must be secondary to the spiritual qualities a woman should look for in a man. A man you can trust, respect, and follow in the path of godliness is of far greater value than a man of good looks, fame, power, or money.

Finally, when "looking" for a husband, we must be surrendered to God's will in our lives. Every woman wants to find her "prince charming," but the reality is that she will probably marry a man with as many flaws as she has. Then, by God's grace, they will spend the rest of their lives together learning how to be a partner to, and servant of, each other. We must enter into the second most-important relationship of our lives (marriage), not under an emotional cloud, but with eyes wide open. Our most important relationship, with our Lord and Savior, has to be the focus of our lives.

Question: How can I know if I am in love?

Answer: Love is a very powerful emotion. It motivates much of our lives. We make many important decisions based on this emotion, and even get married because we feel that we are "in love." This may be the reason about half of all first marriages end in divorce. The Bible teaches us that true love is not an emotion that can come or go, but a decision. We are not just to love those who love us; we should even love those who hate us, the same way that Christ loves the unlovable (Luke 6:35). "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

It can be very easy to "fall in love" with someone, but there are some questions to ask before deciding if what we are feeling is true love. First, is this person a Christian, meaning has he given his life to Christ? Is he/she trusting Christ alone for salvation? Also, if you are considering giving your heart and emotions to one person, you should ask yourself if you are willing to put that person above all other people and to put your relationship second only to God. The Bible tells us that when two people get married, they become one flesh (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5).

Another thing to consider is whether or not the loved one is a good candidate for being a mate. Has he/she already put God first and foremost in his/her life? Is he/she able to give his/her time and energy to building the relationship into a marriage that will last a lifetime? There is no measuring stick to determine when we are truly in love with someone, but it is important to discern whether we are following our emotions or following God's will for our lives. True love is a decision, not just an emotion. True biblical love is loving someone all of the time, not just when you feel "in love."

Question: What does the Bible say about sex before marriage / premarital sex?

Answer: There is no Hebrew or Greek word used in the Bible that precisely refers to sex before marriage. The Bible undeniably condemns adultery and sexual immorality, but is sex before

marriage considered sexually immoral? According to 1 Corinthians 7:2, "yes" is the clear answer: "But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband." In this verse, Paul states that marriage is the "cure" for sexual immorality. First Corinthians 7:2 is essentially saying that, because people cannot control themselves and so many are having immoral sex outside of marriage, people should get married. Then they can fulfill their passions in a moral way.

Since 1 Corinthians 7:2 clearly includes sex before marriage in the definition of sexual immorality, all of the Bible verses that condemn sexual immorality as being sinful also condemn sex before marriage as sinful. Sex before marriage is included in the biblical definition of sexual immorality. There are numerous Scriptures that declare sex before marriage to be a sin (Acts 15:20; 1 Corinthians 5:1; 6:13, 18; 10:8; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Jude 7). The Bible promotes complete abstinence before marriage. Sex between a husband and his wife is the only form of sexual relations of which God approves (Hebrews 13:4).

Far too often we focus on the "recreation" aspect of sex without recognizing that there is another aspect "procreation". Sex within marriage is pleasurable, and God designed it that way. God wants men and women to enjoy sexual activity within the confines of marriage. Song of Solomon and several other Bible passages (such as Proverbs 5:19) clearly describe the pleasure of sex. However, the couple must understand that God's intent for sex includes producing children. Thus, for a couple to engage in sex before marriage is doubly wrong they are enjoying pleasures not intended for them, and they are taking a chance of creating a human life outside of the family structure God intended for every child.

While practicality does not determine right from wrong, if the Bible's message on sex before marriage were obeyed, there would be far fewer sexually transmitted diseases, far fewer abortions, far fewer unwed mothers and unwanted pregnancies, and far fewer children growing up without both parents in their lives. Abstinence is God's only policy when it comes to sex before marriage. Abstinence saves lives, protects babies, gives sexual relations the proper value, and, most importantly, honors God.

Question: What is an appropriate level of intimacy before marriage?

Answer: Ephesians 5:3 tells us, "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity...because these are improper for God's holy people." Anything that even "hints" of sexual immorality is inappropriate for a Christian. The Bible does not give us a list of what qualifies as a "hint" or tell us what physical activities are approved for a couple to engage in before marriage. However, just because the Bible does not specifically address the issue does not mean God approves of "pre-sexual" activity before marriage. By essence, foreplay is designed to get one ready for sex. Logically then, foreplay should be restricted to married couples. Anything that can be considered foreplay should be avoided until marriage.

If there is any doubt whatsoever whether an activity is right for an unmarried couple, it should be avoided (Romans 14:23). Any and all sexual and pre-sexual activity should be restricted to married couples. An unmarried couple should avoid any activity that tempts them toward sex, that gives the appearance of immorality, or that could be considered foreplay. Many pastors

and Christian counselors strongly advise a couple to not go beyond holding hands, hugging, and light kissing before marriage. The more a married couple has to share exclusively between themselves, the more special and unique the sexual relationship in that marriage becomes.

Question: Are we supposed to be actively looking for a spouse, or waiting for God to bring a spouse to us?

Answer: The answer to both questions is "yes." There is an important balance between the two. We are not to frantically search for a spouse as if it depends solely on our own efforts. Neither are we to be passive, thinking that God will one day cause a spouse to arrive at our door. As Christians, once we have decided that it is time to start looking for a spouse, we should begin the process with prayer. Committing ourselves to God's will for our lives is the first step. "Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4). Delighting in the Lord means we find pleasure in knowing Him and trusting that He will delight us in return. He will put His desires into our hearts, and in the context of seeking a spouse, that means desiring for ourselves the type of spouse He desires for us and who He knows will delight us further. Proverbs 3:6 tells us, "In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." Acknowledging Him in the search for a spouse means submitting to His sovereign will and telling Him that whatever He decides is best is what you want.

After committing ourselves to God's will, we need to be clear on the characteristics of a godly husband or wife and be seeking someone who qualifies on a spiritual level. It is important to have a clear understanding of these qualities first and then to seek someone who fits them. To "fall in love" with someone and then discover he/she is not spiritually qualified to be our mate is to invite heartache and put ourselves in a very difficult position.

Once we know what the Bible says we should be looking for, we can begin actively looking for a spouse, understanding that God will bring him/her into our lives as we are in the process of looking, according to His perfect will and timing. If we pray, God will lead us to the person He has for us. If we wait for His timing, we will be given the person who fits best with our background, personality, and desires. We have to trust in Him and His timing (Proverbs 3:5), even when His timing is not our timing. Sometimes God calls people not to marry at all (1 Corinthians 7), but in those situations, He makes it clear by removing the desire for marriage. God's timing is perfect, and with faith and patience, we will receive His promises (Hebrews 6:12).

Question: What does the Bible say about age differences in relationships?

Answer: The Bible very rarely gives us age examples in marriage relationships (or in any other situation, for that matter). We do know that Abraham was 10 years older than Sarah (Genesis 17:17), but there are no other couples in the Bible where both individuals' ages are given. It is often assumed, for example, that Joseph was significantly older than Mary. However, there is absolutely nothing in the Bible that indicates this.

Age can be important in a marriage, but it is far less important than other issues such as salvation, spiritual maturity, compatibility, etc. As people get older, age difference means less and less. Obviously, a 40-year-old marrying a 20-year-old will be questioned, while no one will think twice about an 80-year-old marrying a 60-year-old. The only warning regarding age in

marriage is to avoid marrying someone young for lustful purposes, and avoid marrying someone older for money. The best course of action is to pray to God for wisdom concerning any prospective relationship (James 1:5).

Question: When is the right time for marriage?

Answer: The right time for marriage is different for each person and unique to each situation. Maturity levels and life experiences are varying factors; some people are ready for marriage at 18, and some are never prepared for it. As the U.S. divorce rate exceeds 50 percent, it is obvious that much of our society does not view marriage as an everlasting commitment. However, this is the world's view, which will usually contradict God's (1 Corinthians 3:18).

A strong foundation is imperative for a successful marriage and should be settled before one even begins to date or court a potential life mate. Our Christian walk should include much more than just attending church on Sundays and being involved in Bible study. We must have a personal relationship with God that comes only through trusting in and obeying Jesus Christ. We must educate ourselves about marriage, seeking God's view on it, before diving in. A person must know what the Bible says about love, commitment, sexual relations, the role of a husband and wife, and His expectations of us before committing to marriage. Having at least one Christian married couple as a role model is also important. An older couple can answer questions about what goes into a successful marriage, how to create intimacy (beyond the physical), how faith is invaluable, etc.

A prospective married couple also needs to make sure that they know each other well. They should know each other's views on marriage, finances, in-laws, child-rearing, discipline, duties of a husband and wife, whether only one of them or both will be working outside the home, and they should know the level of the other person's spiritual maturity. Many people get married taking their partner's word for it that they are a Christian, only to find out later that it was merely lip service. Every couple considering marriage should go through counseling with a Christian marriage counselor or pastor. In fact, many pastors will not perform weddings unless they have met several times with the couple in a counseling setting.

Marriage is not only a commitment, but a covenant with God. It is the promise to remain with that other person for the remainder of your life, no matter whether your spouse is rich, poor, healthy, sick, overweight, underweight, or boring. A Christian marriage should endure through every circumstance, including fighting, anger, devastation, disaster, depression, bitterness, addiction, and loneliness. Marriage should never be entered into with the idea that divorce is an option not even as the last straw. The Bible tells us that through God all things are possible (Luke 18:27), and this certainly includes marriage. If a couple makes the decision at the beginning to stay committed and to put God first, divorce will not be the inevitable solution to a miserable situation.

It is important to remember that God wants to give us the desires of our heart, but that is only possible if our desires match His. People often get married because it just "feels right." In the early stages of dating, and even of marriage, you see the other person coming, and you get butterflies in your stomach. Romance is at its peak, and you know the feeling of being "in love." Many expect that this feeling will remain forever. The reality is that it does not. The result can be disappointment and even divorce as those feelings fade, but those in successful marriages

know that the excitement of being with the other person does not have to end. Instead, the butterflies give way to a deeper love, a stronger commitment, a more solid foundation, and an unbreakable security.

The Bible is clear that love does not rely on feelings. This is evident when we are told to love our enemies (Luke 6:35). True love is possible only when we allow the Holy Spirit to work through us, cultivating the fruit of our salvation (Galatians 5:22-23). It is a decision we make on a daily basis to die to ourselves and our selfishness, and to let God shine through us. Paul tells us how to love others in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." When we are ready to love another person as 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 describes, that is the right time for marriage.

Question: Why is premarital counseling important?

Answer: Premarital counseling usually falls under the office of the pastor or leader of a local congregation. In some congregations, the pastor will not undertake to perform a marriage ceremony unless the engaged couple submits to a series of counseling sessions. Pastors are aware of the divorce rate, even in "Christian" marriages, and they are concerned that those they join in marriage have the best chance of remaining so. They see premarital counseling as an important part of getting a young couple off on the right foot.

The Apostle Paul in his pastoral instructions to Titus tells him to equip others to teach the younger generation (Titus 2:1-6). This is counseling which has at its core the idea of teaching biblical truth, standards or absolutes in one's relationship to others. This is especially important in a premarital situation because we cannot use what we do not know, and adulthood is not a guarantee of maturity. It is therefore important for the couple who intend to form a union making them one in God's eyes (Genesis 2:23-24; Mark 10:6-8) be instructed in God's viewpoint concerning marriage.

Premarital counseling based upon sound biblical principles outlines the roles of the husband and wife as they relate to each other and to their prospective children (Ephesians 5:22-6:4; Colossians 3:18-21). Pastoral counseling should be in addition to the nurturing and godly wisdom the couple has (hopefully) received from their own parents. Parents are responsible before God to prepare children for adulthood, and that includes marriage. Premarital counseling is an excellent way to clear the misconceptions about the roles we are to play in marriage and distinguish between God's standards and those of the world. Therefore, it is crucial that the pastor or elder doing the premarital counseling be doctrinally solid, secure in their own marriage and family relationships (1 Timothy 3:4-5; Titus 1:7), and in obedience to God's Word so that they are equipped to impart God's viewpoint clearly and without equivocation.

Solid, biblical premarital counseling may very well be the difference between a couple that seeks to put God's principles first in their marriage and a marriage based on human viewpoints and worldly standards that put relationships in jeopardy. Serious consideration on the part of the prospective bride and groom to commit to a time of spiritual premarital counseling and their agreement to model their marriage after God's order will bring clarity to how each views the other in their "oneness" in the eyes of God.

Question: How can I recover from heartbreak / a broken heart?

Answer: The dictionary defines heartbreak as "crushing grief, anguish, or distress." In today's world, the broken hearted usually describes someone who has suffered a failed relationship or loss of a loved one. A search of the internet makes it appear as though almost all heartbreak comes from divorce or a being dropped by a lover. But a broken heart may be brought on by a myriad of causes such as disappointment in a child's lifestyle, loss of possession, loss of job, etc. Whatever the cause, the pain of a broken heart can be enormous.

The world would assert that hope lies in psychoanalysis and medication. Advice may include taking an antidepressant, writing an angry letter and tearing it up, going on a shopping spree, getting a makeover, etc. Some would advocate the power of positive thinking. The most common "cure" is time. The world's focus is on feelings, but God looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). While the non-Christian may sense a waning in intensity of heartbreak, only a Christian can experience complete recovery because only the Christian has access to the power of the Spirit of God who alone "heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds" (Psalm 147:3).

The events in Job's life may be the earliest biblical record of heartbreak. In one day he lost his children, almost all worldly possessions, his health, and his means of livelihood. What was Job's response? "Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD'" (Job 1:20-21). Job grieved. Yet, he worshipped God and remained faithful. Although he had doubts as to God's goodness in these terrible events, through them he grew closer to God through God's revelation of Himself (Job 42:1-5). Job learned what all believers can learn through heartbreak God is faithful and good and trustworthy.

David, a man after God's own heart, suffered many heartbreaking circumstances. Each time he recovered and was an even stronger man of God. Psalm 34 gives an example of how David overcame heartbreak by calling on the Lord. Notice the first step: "I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears" (Psalm 34:4). David knew "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18). Finally, he expressed a confidence in the love of God that every believer should have: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all" (Psalm 34:19).

One might ask in a moment of despair, "He may have helped David but does God care about me?" The answer is He absolutely does! "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). What a comfort to know that God "will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). God is always near to comfort the believer. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction" (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). God, who cannot lie, has promised to go through our trials with us. "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you" (Isaiah 43:2).

God never failed one of His people when they cried out to Him, and He will not fail the heartbroken Christian who cries out to Him today. He may not always answer exactly in the way we would like, but He answers according to His perfect will and timing and, while we are waiting

for the answer, His grace is sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Finally, those who belong to Christ and are enduring heartbreak must know that God loves them and that His love is unconditional. Imagine the grief God the Father endured as he witnessed the crucifixion of his Son on the cross. What amazing love! That same God is there to comfort the broken hearted and restore the joy of their salvation.