

Choosing Your Life Partner

Initial draft prepared by John C. Lalgee on April 28, 2007

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INTRODUCTION

Over the years, we have had the joy and privilege of working with a great number of singles. The purpose of this paper is to clarify our position and practice as a leadership in bringing counsel in the development of romantic relationships. Our aim is to communicate the clear, biblical instruction and practical wisdom that we have gleaned through years of leading those whom God has entrusted to our care.

BIBLICAL CULTURE

One of the greatest challenges we have in addressing this subject is that our cultural norms of social interaction, engagement, and marriage are quite different in a number of ways to that of biblical history. Subsequently, many of the questions asked today are not directly addressed in Scripture. For example, it is evident in Scripture that the family structure conveyed a measure of protection and provision far exceeding that of our cultural norm. This is perhaps most apparent when we consider the fact that most of Scripture was written in cultural contexts where marriages were typically arranged by the parents. In these settings, the children often had little or no choice in the matter at all. Therefore, in the Early Church, a paper like this would have been quite irrelevant, unless very much changed in content and addressed to parents rather than singles. Suffice it to say, in biblical times the measure of governing authority over the lives of individuals was far weightier and more clearly defined than in our culture. Generally, Christians from the Western tradition would consider our freedom of choice a wonderful liberty, although some have argued for the benefits and merits of the historic model (usually those already married to the partner of their choice!). However, that discussion lies outside the scope of this paper. Our focus is finding and applying the wisdom of God within our current culture, rather than in making comparisons with another.

WESTERN WORLD CULTURE

From puberty onwards (and for some, even prior to this) most people experience a transition from nonchalance to keen interest in the opposite sex. In Western culture, we have been enormously influenced in this regard by the media. From infancy, we are constantly bombarded by images and concepts of physical beauty, romance, and sexuality. We must not be naïve to the massive effect this has on our thinking. Though not an exhaustive list, we believe the media has affected much of Western thinking in at least the following ways:

- We believe that most modern thought as portrayed in the media stands in direct opposition to the wisdom of God. This is evident in the devastation produced in so many lives.
- We do not believe the world has answers for God's people, and we are not seeking to conform to the pattern of this world. When the Word of the Lord and Godly wisdom cuts across our modern mind-set, we are committed to aligning ourselves with His Word.

WESTERN CHURCH CULTURE

It is an appalling oversight that so many churches have no clear instructional direction to help their singles find a path of righteousness in the minefield of romantic relationships. It seems that single people in many church settings are left to their own instincts and experimentation when it comes to developing relationships. This is surely a recipe for disaster! As a leadership that does bring clear direction to singles, we have, at times, been accused of being controlling, restrictive, legalistic, etc. We believe this accusation is unfounded, but are willing to bear it rather than accept a chaotic and visionless alternative.

We are certainly not alone in our passion for this subject, and it is refreshing to see that many different streams of the Church seem to have awakened to this issue. There are large conferences taking place throughout our nations that have an emphasis on subjects like: "Called to Be Single", "Sexual and Romantic Purity", etc. As well as this, a number of excellent books have been published in recent years, some of which we will be happy to recommend at the end of this paper.

THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

For many, the issue of finding a romantic relationship is obsessive and becomes the recurring, dominant passion of their lives. Whereas it is only natural and right to have a healthy interest in finding one's future life partner, for many single people this has become an issue which desperately needs to be submitted to the Lordship of Christ. It is tragic that so many Christians do not grasp the fact that it is sin to allow something to become the central thought and desire of their lives in place of God Himself. This is what the Scripture calls idolatry, and it is addressed in the very first commandment which teaches that we should not have any other gods before Him. Many single people are unable to enjoy their freedom in Christ because they find themselves enslaved to a desire for a partner, not realizing that starting a relationship in this condition is destined to be fraught with many problems. We would encourage all single people to start with an honest assessment of their own heart and attitude towards singleness. In doing this, we can have confidence that the Holy Spirit will bring conviction in areas where we may need to repent. Only in submission to the Lordship of Christ will true freedom be found and wise decisions made.

HOW SHOULD SINGLES RELATE TOGETHER?

It is vital that our single people have revelation from God regarding the value and significance of being single. As with every aspect of life, God has purposed to demonstrate through the Church His manifold wisdom. In Paul's first letter to Timothy, he spells out in the simplest terms how Timothy, as a young, single man, should relate to the different groups within the Church. In this statement, we have the condensed wisdom of God:

"Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity." 1 Timothy 5:1-2

Absolute purity! J.B. Phillip's translation says, "treat younger women as sisters and nothing else". For some, this scripture might sound so far beyond their current thinking that it may seem an impossible notion, but it is not. God wants us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, and by His grace real change can be our experience. It is interesting that in John's letter encouraging the Church, he commends the young men twice for "overcoming the evil one" - specifically because they were strong and the Word of God lived in them (**1 John 2**).

So the Word of God gives us the pattern of family as an example of how we should relate together. This is contrary to a monastic separation of singles. Instead, it implies developing genuine, deep friendships, and loving involvement in each other's lives without the complication of romance and sexuality. In the awkwardness and confusion that stems from an overwhelming desire for a romantic relationship, these brotherly and sisterly relationships can never grow. But, when single men and women, filled with the Holy Spirit, find the grace of God to build in this way, we shine a tremendous light in both the darkened world and the compromised and confused Church.

It should be abundantly clear to us from the Scripture that sexual intimacy and intense physical affection are totally inappropriate between brothers and sisters who are "treating each other with absolute purity". However, the area which is often much more confusing is that of emotional intimacy.

DATING

An example of a worldly cultural concept becoming almost universally accepted in the Church is the concept of "dating" or "going out with someone". This is understood to mean some type of exclusive and committed one-on-one relationship. In many cases, it is entered into without much real knowledge of the other person and little or no thought of future marriage (often dating couples are too young to consider such things!). These dating relationships are accepted as normal - even necessary - as a means of meeting immediate needs born out of loneliness and a hunger for emotional, and in some cases, physical intimacy. This is what we would describe as "casual dating"; the practice of which has been tremendously harmful for many. Where these types of dating relationships are acceptable, you will often find young men and women entering into a series of experimental, romantic relationships resulting in totally inappropriate physical intimacy and emotional injury.

Sadly today, many young couples start their married life damaged by a series of heart-breaking experiences which they have received themselves or inflicted upon others. This history doesn't just go away, and in many cases follows them into their marriages causing great problems in the realms of trust, forgiveness, and sexual intimacy. As a leadership, we reject this form of casual dating and we do not consider it to be trustworthy as an initial means of exploring one's compatibility with a potential partner. So often we have found individuals suffer great regret and embarrassment when they act on the initial fervor of first attractions. It pays to take the time to get to know a person as well as possible before becoming romantically involved. Even if someone has more serious intentions, we would say that the decision to launch into a dating relationship should not be rushed. Three times in Song of Solomon the warning not to "awaken love before it so desires" is solemnly given to the young maidens.

LIFE'S BIGGEST DECISIONS!

The biggest decision we will ever make is that of submitting our lives to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. If we live in faithful commitment to that first and greatest of all decisions, all other decisions will fall into their right place. When Jesus was addressing His disciples about the practical needs of life, He said, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well!" **Matthew 6:33**

After our decision for Christ, the second biggest decision we will ever make pertains to marriage. Not just who to marry, but whether to marry at all! It is wise for all single people to give careful consideration to what the Scriptures have to say regarding the advantages of serving God as a single person. Once someone has a real revelation of this, marriage is no longer a foregone conclusion. Both marriage and singleness are described as a gift by Paul. We are either given one or the other, but in the end, it's all about serving God. Before we look at marriage, let us briefly look at the subject of being single.

SINGLENESS

"The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'"
Genesis 2:18

Since God says, “be alone” and not “lonely”, we would challenge the common myth of our day that we are incomplete in life without a partner. The truth is that we are only incomplete without the Lord Jesus Christ’s rightful centrality in our lives. One of the primary attractions of romance is its promise to remedy the sense of incompleteness that so many people feel. However, a partner will only temporarily meet this need, for it is the Lord Himself in whom we are to find our sense of completeness.

So, let’s look at some scriptures that convey something of God’s heart on the subject of being single:

*"Now for the matters you wrote about: **It is good for a man not to marry.** But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. I say this as a concession, not as a command. **I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.** Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: **It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am.** But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion."
1 Corinthians 7:1-8*

*Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. **Because of the present crisis,** I think that it is good for you to remain as you are. Are you married? Do not seek a divorce. Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this. What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away. I would like you to be free from concern. **An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.**
1 Corinthians 7:25-35*

Having said all this about those called to be single, the majority of Christians today (not “living in the present crisis” to which Paul refers) do feel very clear in their desire to be married at some point and believe this is God’s will for their lives. Let’s imagine that someone who has been faithful until now in treating members of the opposite sex as brothers and sisters begins to become more ‘aware’ of one particular person, and despite their best effort, has found it increasingly difficult to think of this person like the rest of the family of God. This could happen for any number of reasons, e.g., a word from God, an exceptional friendship, or just tremendous attraction. Whatever the origin of the feelings, the issue of how to proceed in developing the relationship becomes paramount at this point.

MOVING FORWARD IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

The first thing we would counsel is usually the last thing someone in this state wants to hear, which is: slow down, take your time. At this stage, it is important to remember that in most cases your heart is very much governing your head and this is dangerous. **Jeremiah 17:9** states, *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”* The first experiences of falling in love are both mysterious and wonderful, look at what Solomon has to say:

“There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a maiden.”

Proverbs 30:18-19

When you are beginning to be drawn romantically towards someone, you should begin by earnestly seeking God in prayer. Rather than engaging in many in-depth, heart-sharing conversations, or hours spent in late night phone calls, texts, and e-mails, we would recommend the wisdom of stepping back and devoting time to prayer. It is important to realize that as emotionally intoxicating as this time can be, it is also a time where you are tremendously prone to being deceived. We would recommend following the specific course of action listed below before making your feelings known to the object of your affection.

- Submit the whole thing to God and commit yourself to laying down your feelings and the potential of this relationship if God’s direction to do so becomes clear.
- In faith, ask God for wisdom.
- Talk to the person to whom you are accountable, this should be your parents, or one of the elders in the church, or a home group leader representing eldership care towards you.
- Consider the following searching questions:

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER when thinking of starting a romantic relationship:

- 1. What are your primary motivations for starting this relationship?** Are they needs that should be met in God Himself or the Church in general?
- 2. Are you practically and emotionally ready to be in a committed relationship leading to marriage?** This is not to suggest that you should be ready to be married immediately, but that over a reasonable period of time for a romantic relationship (e.g., 12 months) you and your intended partner would be ready to be married, provided all goes well. Are you emotionally ready for this or have you come out of a number of romantic relationships? Are you rebounding from a particularly serious previous relationship? Are you practically ready for this or are you in the middle of a very demanding educational process that requires your full focus? Have you given serious consideration to your financial stability in starting this kind of relationship? Obviously, these types of questions honestly answered by most teenagers would result in the wise decision to postpone romantic involvement until later in life. When teenagers join the church and are already in such a relationship, we would typically encourage them to adjust their involvement to friendship only and begin to socialize within a group context again.

- 3. Has God communicated anything to you that specifically relates to this relationship?** It is important that we are prayerful and attentive to God when considering a romantic relationship. That said, the truth is for most it is very difficult to hear God once romantic feelings emerge because of our tendency to hear what our hearts want to hear. The key is being honest with ourselves and quieting our hearts to really listen to God. It is amazing how often we have heard people coming out of relationships that have not worked out well, saying that from the start God had made it clear to them in one way or another that the relationship was wrong! If you do believe that God has spoken to you about the relationship, write it down and have those with discernment and objectivity help you weigh the word before you accept it as “the word of the Lord.”
- 4. Is the person you are interested in clearly born again, baptized in water, and filled with the Holy Spirit?** “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?” **2 Corinthians 6:14** To be clear, we see a romantic relationship as a very definite yoking or joining of life. Therefore, we would say that the Scripture clearly prohibits entering into a romantic relationship with an unbeliever. The reason we have included the issues of water baptism and being filled with the Holy Spirit is that they are, according to Scripture, part of the authentic conversion experience (**Acts 2:38**). We must not compromise on these issues; many have faked Christianity to win the heart of a believer. We are aware at this point that some will now recount a situation they have encountered whereby a Christian became romantically involved with an unbeliever who ended up getting saved. We feel it is important that no one draws the wrong conclusion from this; it is an expression of the enormous mercy of God that He has determined to bring good from bad. It would be most foolish for us to conclude that this type of exceptional outcome to the rejection of biblical instruction represents God’s endorsement of this practice. For every relationship of this type that appears to work out, there are dozens that end in disaster. Romantic involvement is not a legitimate means of evangelism!
- 5. Does this potential partner demonstrate in word and deed a genuine love for God and a “Kingdom first” attitude?** When starting a romantic relationship, what we often long to hear is an expression of our partner’s love for us. However, we would do better to look for the way they express their love for God and others. In time, the initial intensity of the feelings of “falling in love” will settle down and you will find yourself interacting with the real person. If you have eyes to see it, their love, faithfulness, and commitment to God and other people can give you a tremendous insight into the type of partner they will prove to be!
- 6. Do you share the same vision and passion for spiritual priorities?** There is more to being “unequally yoked” than just the most obvious believer/unbeliever issue. Two believers, each with real passion for God, can have a completely different sense of call and direction in life, which if not talked through and reconciled can lead to years of frustration and conflict.
- 7. How does he or she submit to authority?** Sadly, independence and rebellion is glamorized in Western culture, and therefore, the “bad boy/girl” image has become attractive. Many a young Christian has been drawn by some type of missionary zeal and the delusion that the irresistible force of their romantic love has the power to somehow tame the rebel heart. This is the height of romantic foolishness. What do you think your romantic notions will accomplish when the immensity of God’s love towards this individual has not produced a submissive and obedient heart? A rebellious spirit might be an exciting initial concept, but anyone who has ended up married to such an individual will have a very different story to tell.
- 8. Does this person build good friendships?** Romantic feelings are intoxicating, and like excessive alcohol, they can cause us to behave quite differently to how we might in a sober state. Often, romantic feelings can cause a normally inexpressive, guarded individual to open up and share feelings and thoughts that they

normally wouldn't. This, in turn, has caused many a young person to proclaim in delight, "We have become best friends," seemingly in a matter of days. Other statements often follow, such as: "I'm the only person he or she can really talk to..." or "They really understand me, we think just like one another." These comments are often expressed with a sense of mystery and wonder as though they confirm the miraculous orchestration of God Himself. In most cases, they are nothing more than the common effects of romantic love in its formative stage. This is why we would encourage you at this point to consider the other friendships active in the potential partner's life, those where romantic feelings are not involved. If your relationship with this person lasts, it will grow into far more of a committed friendship over time. Marriage is not being carried along on a continual wave of romantic intoxication until death! Granted, romance continues to play a part in the wonder of marriage, but its foundation is committed, genuine friendship. So, if you have become this individual's best friend, or even only true friend in a very short period of time, we would suggest that this is anything but a good sign. Rather than an indication of the wonder of your relationship, it should highlight the deficiency in friendship-building, which really should be examined before your relationship proceeds.

9. What have you seen in this person's character in terms of humility, servanthood, and love for others?

It's remarkably easy for even the most selfish and obnoxious of individuals to exercise servanthood and generosity when pursuing the object of their affection. One of the reasons it is so helpful to get to know a potential partner in a group setting prior to the introduction of romance is that it will give you a far more accurate idea of their character than the "falling in love" version will.

10. What do your friends think of this potential relationship?

With the emerging of a romantic relationship and its tendency towards exclusivity, previously trusted friends are often neglected. If these friends should dare to express reservation regarding this new romantic relationship, they are often totally rejected. Obviously, not all friends are trustworthy; some may be jealous or selfish in their counsel. However, this should not normally be the case with fellow believers who are true friends. Rather than stepping away from them, this is a time we would encourage you to give real attention to their thoughts. They love you and know you and usually have your best interests at heart, so give serious consideration to their observations.

11. Have you been able to build a substantial friendship with this person prior to introducing romantic involvement?

As already mentioned, friendship is one of the most foundational, enduring aspects of a long term relationship. If you end up married to this person it will be critical, and if not, friendship has the power to endure even after a break up. Romance greatly affects the purity of friendship, so we do well to build as strong a friendship as possible prior to introducing romance.

12. What can you learn from this person's history of romantic relationships?

Every new romantic relationship carries with it the promise of being different and better than anything that has gone on previously. A line from a famous 80's love song was "Darling, don't you know with you I'm born again?" The biblical answer to that question is, "No, you're not!" You might feel like a new creation when you're falling in love, but the reality is that your feelings will simmer down and you will find the strengths and weaknesses of your character will begin to emerge again. This is why it is stupid to ignore a potential partner's history of relationships, somehow thinking that it's going to be completely different with you. Don't be afraid to ask direct and tough questions. Remember, this is one of the biggest decisions you will ever make and it will affect the rest of your life, so don't enter into it blind and ignorant.

13. How well do you know this person's family background?

It is true that when we are "born again," we become "new creations." However, there remain many patterns of behavior and expectations that are influenced by our families of origin. It is also a reality that marriage is a union of families, not just individuals; therefore, we can gain great insights by exploring family background.

14. Are you spiritually, emotionally, and physically attracted to the person you would like to start a relationship with? The fact that God has allowed us choice in our life partner means that the responsibility of exercising wisdom now belongs to us. The blessing of God in our life is often directly linked to the wisdom of our choices. It would be most unwise to enter into this life commitment with the absence of spiritual, emotional, and physical attraction. You might find this a somewhat obvious statement, but many have conceded on one or more of these issues with great regret. Some have said, for example, ‘I’m extremely physically attracted to this person, but I’m emotionally unsure, as there is much in their personality that irritates me.’ Many spiritually strong women have conceded on the issue of leadership ability when choosing their future partners. We consider this to be one of the most unwise concessions for a woman to make, and tragically, it has led many Godly women to spiritual frustration. In contrast to this, it is extremely rare to find any who are truly willing to overlook the issue of physical attraction, which while obviously being an issue, is dwarfed in significance when compared to the aforementioned spiritual issue.

15. Is this person interested in starting a romantic relationship with you? If so, how have they expressed this to you? How much otherwise productive time has been spent on totally unrealistic romantic fantasy, God only knows. Everyone wants to feel that they have somehow ‘reached up’ in winning their partner; somehow capturing the man or woman of their dreams rather than simply having ‘settled’ for someone. On the other side of the equation, no one wants to feel that their partner ‘settled’ for them. When we add to this problem the fact that for many, it is very difficult to accurately assess their own personal level of attractiveness thus enabling them to consider realistic potential partners, it is a wonder that so many couples do find each other, but praise God, they do! In all this uncertainty and confusion, single people can spend large quantities of time wondering and even fantasizing about relationships that simply will never be. In extreme cases, this can lead to uncomfortable, obsessive behavior. One has to be very careful when feelings are developing towards someone who has not clearly expressed reciprocated feelings. “The heart sees what it wants to see and hears what it wants to hear.” Some of this can be avoided by simply finding out what the person feels about you before you go too far down the road in your own heart. If the person makes clear that they have no interest in developing a romantic relationship with you, the only safe way to deal with your feelings is severely and absolutely. Once the person has made their feelings clear, trust no other way. The person to whom you have been attracted to must become again a brother or sister and nothing else. In most cases, we would recommend giving the situation time and room to sort out. This will help to avoid any sense of awkwardness for you and the person to whom you are attracted, and will also allow you time to gather up and rule your own feelings.

16. Do you have the blessing and encouragement of the person to whom you are spiritually accountable in starting this relationship? Thankfully, God has not left you alone in making these enormous decisions. Although in the end your leaders don’t make these decisions for you, they will prove invaluable in bringing objective, Godly advice, and counsel. If ever there is a time to heed their counsel, this would be it.

17. What would your attitude be towards sacrificing or postponing the start of this relationship? The ultimate test of Lordship in our lives (even regarding good things) is our willingness to sacrifice them to the Lord. This is something so evidently seen in Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac. On that occasion, God stayed Abraham’s hand, but the willingness was there. Often, given a little time, perspectives will change and we can come to a very different place than we started in our feelings. If unsure, it is far better to give it some time than recklessly push ahead. When something is truly from God, we will inherit it through faith and patience.

NO AIMLESS WANDERING

Therefore, as is evident from these searching questions, we would encourage those in our care only to initiate a romantic relationship if they have a clear inclination towards marriage. This is not to say that we believe all of these relationships would or should conclude in marriage, but we do believe their only legitimate purpose is preparatory towards marriage. If the realistic goal of marriage is not in sight, we would raise the question, “What right have you to draw someone into an intimate, romantic relationship when he or she is quite likely to be someone else’s husband or wife in the future?” In short, we believe that romantic involvement should be considered a very serious step forward, upon which one should only embark at the positive conclusion of the things outlined above.

APPROPRIATE CONDUCT WITHIN A ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP

It is of critical importance that any couple who has entered into a romantic relationship has good, regular input from those in leadership caring for them and to whom they are accountable. The following represents only a few thoughts with regard to how couples should outwork their relationship and is in no way an alternative to this care. Assuming a couple has followed the previous counsel outlined in this paper and still has faith to move forward, we would suggest the following guidelines:

Even though a lot further along in your feelings and the seriousness of your intentions than many who “casually date”, you still need to be faithful with regard to sexual purity. It is vital that clear boundaries are set between what is considered legitimate affection and what is deemed inappropriate, sexual involvement. Beware of any involvement with each other that ignites sexual passion. The question, “How far can we go?” is often raised. It might be helpful to put it this way: don’t do anything in private that you would feel uncomfortable doing in the presence of the person to whom you are accountable! All sexual involvement is reserved for marriage, so be practical in setting strict boundaries and be determined to be faithful to God and your partner in this. For example, avoid spending too much time alone together, particularly where privacy is likely and becoming intimate is easy. Call it a night at a reasonable time before you get too tired and your defenses begin to weaken. Be wary of excessive physical closeness: hugs, and comforting when your partner is upset, and massaging when they are tired are typical scenarios where many couples have found themselves in compromising positions. If alone together relaxing, watching a movie, etc., stay vertical! Getting horizontal will usually lead to trouble. Finally, keep your hands off each other; if there is nothing more than holding hands, you’re in pretty safe territory.

This might seem extreme or a little more specific than some would like, but we want to be very clear on this issue and leave no room for the enemy’s deception. Tragically, we have known many Christians that have been oblivious to the importance of sexual purity and the temptations of physical involvement before marriage. In their ignorance and carnality, some have eventually fallen into the sin of fornication, while many others have engaged in virtually every form of sexual intimacy apart from intercourse. While we are eternally grateful for the forgiveness of God and the fact that we are saved from the ultimate result of our sin, there are, nevertheless, consequences to these patterns of sin in our lives. We want to help couples in romantic relationships prepare for a God-glorifying marriage by honoring God in their pre-marriage relationship.

BREAKING UP WITHOUT REGRET

As mentioned earlier, not all romantic relationships will end in marriage even when they have been approached in a Godly way. However, when a couple has truly honored each other, put each other’s concerns before their own,

remained Christ-centered, kept prayer a significant feature, and stayed within the boundaries they have set with regard to sexual issues, then there is an ability to break up to the glory of God. We have known couples, even engaged couples, who have been able to break up and maintain an ongoing love and friendship for one another, their lives having been enriched by exploring the potential of marriage, but coming to the conclusion that this was not for them.

MARRIAGE BUILT ON A FIRM FOUNDATION

We are aware that by the grace of God many marriages have come together having somehow avoided many of the dangers outlined in this paper and as a result some might feel our position is unnecessary. However, we believe our teaching on this subject is appropriate to the day in which we live. The ultimate goal of our counsel is to avoid the enormous injury we have seen in Church life as a result of the lack of teaching on these issues. It has been our great joy over the years to see many couples enter into their marriages on a firm foundation, having established a real basis of love, commitment, trust, leadership, and integrity in their single days.

List of helpful books on this subject:

- *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* by Joshua Harris
- *Boy Meets Girl* by Joshua Harris
- *Sex is not the Problem (Lust is)* by Joshua Harris
- *The Purity Principle* by Randy Alcorn
- *Passion and Purity* by Elisabeth Elliot

CONCLUDING EXPLANATION OF THESE PAPERS

This is one of a series of papers that have been written by those responsible for establishing the practical outworking of biblical doctrine and wisdom for “One Church Ministries”. Although these papers are a result of much biblical study and many years of Christian leadership, they are neither designed to be comprehensive, nor the final word on any given subject. However, we have endeavored to succinctly outline our practice based on our current understanding of the Scriptures. It is not suggested that these papers be substituted in any way for individual continued study of these subjects, but we pray that they will serve the churches in bringing clarity regarding our current understanding and the resulting practical outworking of our care.

ABOUT ONE CHURCH MINISTRIES (OCM)

One Church Ministries administrates the care and equipping of local churches by Ephesians 4 ministries, currently led by the apostolic ministry of John C. Lalgee.

The goals of One Church Ministries

- To bring to maturity and effectively care for a God-determined number of local churches birthed through or adopted by OCM
- To influence the wider Church by way of resource and example.
- To raise up and release Ephesians 4 ministries.

