

Christian Courtship

I've had only one romantic relationship in my entire life. When I was twenty-four years old, I married a woman. She's the only person that I ever had a serious romantic relationship with and she's still the only one that I have a serious romantic relationship with. I never dated anybody until I was twenty-four years old and I married the only person I dated. Now this was not due to any great decision on my part to never date. It was simply that I was a chicken that I was kind of scared to ask a girl on a date so I ended up not having any dates until I was twenty-four. And then I married her.

Now, two of my daughters are now married and both of them have never dated anyone else but their husband. However for them it was not just a matter of being too chicken or nobody asking them. They were committed to Christian courtship. They were committed to dating until they were serious about finding a marriage partner. And so today, I'm going to talk with you a little bit about Christian courtship and think about that. I gave my own example to say I was no great thinker in Christian courtship. It just kind of happened to me that way. But for my daughters and for a growing number of other young people, they've committed themselves to a little different approach to romance and to finding a marriage partner than much of our culture does today.

As we think about Christian courtship, I want to focus on three main areas. First on picking a partner. How do you decide who would be a good marriage partner in the first place? Secondly, I want to talk about protecting purity during the courtship process. Thirdly, I want to talk about providing proximity so that people meet each other in the first place and have the possibility of forming a relationship.

Let's begin by thinking about what's involved in picking a partner. Christian courtship seeks a spouse who fits God's purposes for 3D marriage. What do I mean by 3D marriage? Well, first of all marriage is a matter of dramatizing the relationship between Christ and His bride, the church. Secondly, it's a matter of developing godly offspring, and thirdly, of delighting in each other's love. So let's think about each of those just a little bit more.

Scripture says that the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, His body, and is Himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up

for her. Marriage is designed by God to be a drama, a picture of the relationship between Jesus Christ and His church.

So if you are a Christian person looking for a potential spouse, you need to ask this question: Is this person that I'm considering a Christian and is this person committed to the Christ-church drama? If you're a woman, you're thinking to yourself, "Is this a man that I could really admire and submit to the way I ought to to Christ?" If you're a man, you're thinking, "Am I willing to sacrifice myself for this girl and ready to be a man who reflects the life of Christ?" Obviously both of you need to be committed Christians in order to be committed to dramatizing the Christ-church relationship in your marriage.

Secondly, marriage is about developing godly offspring and of course you need to be thinking about that before you ever start dating a person who would best be suited to raise godly offspring with me. It's not going to be someone who's worshipping a foreign god. Malachi 2 has God saying this, "Judah has been faithless" and Judah is God's people, "Judah has been faithless and has married the daughter of a foreign God." They were marrying girls who worship other gods. God was very upset about that. One of the reasons He was upset was this. What was God seeking? Godly offspring.

If you marry someone who is not committed to the Lord Jesus Christ, your likelihood of raising and bringing up godly offspring is rapidly reduced. So you need to ask yourself, "Would this person be somebody who would really help me instead of hinder me from bringing up godly offspring?" Scripture says of a woman. "She is free to be married to whom she wishes only in the Lord." So she can have her choice of husbands but he had better belong to the Lord if she's a Christian herself. Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

So as you're entering the process of looking for a spouse or if you're leading others in a congregation or if you're bringing up your own children, this is the question that needs to be asked: Will this person help me walk with God and partner with me in bringing up godly offspring in a covenant home? If the answer is no, you should not even begin a dating or romantic relationship with that person because God is seeking godly offspring.

It's just heartbreaking to me when I meet some young people who've been brought up in Christian churches and Christian homes. Some of them have had Christian education even—Christian schooling from kindergarten through college. Seventeen years of Christian schooling and they can't remember one foreword sentence. "Marry a believer." Oh, that's three words! Marry a believer. Whatever else you don't get and whatever else doesn't soak in in your Christian training education, get this. Marry a

believer because you need to develop godly offspring as well as dramatize the Christ-church relationship.

Oh, and there's a third thing that's very important. I don't put it first even though sometimes it's put first in the romantic notions of the world but it is still important that we delight in each other's love. Song of Songs has a woman saying, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth for your love is more delightful to me than wine. Your fruit is sweet to my taste. He's taken me to the banquet hall and his banner over me is love." She goes on in detail about her husband's physique and his body and all the things that she finds desirable and appealing about him.

He says, "O beautiful you are, my darling. There's no flaw in you. You've stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes. How delightful is your love, my bride." And he goes on into detail about her beauty from head to toe. Now, these are two people who delight in each other, who are strongly attracted to each other. It is an important question to ask. Do we feel romantic attraction and physical desire for each other? Don't pretend that you should marry somebody just because you happen to be good Christian friends in the Lord. If there is no romantic attraction or if you just don't feel any physical interest in that person at all, they're probably not the person for you to marry.

So then, in picking a partner, seek a spouse who fits God's purposes for 3D marriage. Somebody who can help you dramatize the relationship between Christ and His bride, the church, somebody who can partner with you in developing godly offspring, and someone with whom you can delight in each other's love. This is so very important to keep in mind what's involved in choosing a possible marriage partner in the first place. Never date somebody that you couldn't consider as a marriage partner and who doesn't meet any of these criteria.

We need to take that to heart. We need to teach that to our children. We need to teach that to our congregations. I know we don't live in a perfect world and many people have not followed these guidelines. That's another matter and we need to deal with that in grace and forgiveness and helping people to live after their mistakes. But the fact remains that often an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure and to have some wisdom and how to pick a partner in the first place is very valuable.

Not only in picking a partner but then also in the process of a romantic relationship forming. In that process, we need to be very focused on protecting purity because God requires it. Scripture says, "This is the will of God, your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality, that each one of you know how to possess his own vessel in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do

not know God. “Let no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter for God has not called us for impurity but in holiness.”

Now when scripture says, “To possess your own vessel in holiness and honor,” that can mean one of two things or maybe both of them at the same time. Possessing your vessel might mean how to take a wife for yourself and some translations render it that way. Or it might mean how to control your own body in the process of your romantic relationships. Both are taught throughout the Bible of course that we must be pure in the manner in which we seek a wife and in the manner in which we control our own body. So it really doesn’t matter that much which of those two options you take. But possess your vessel in holiness and honor and not like the Gentiles, not like the world around you who don’t know God.

It’s important not to wrong your brother in this matter. It’s important to follow the Golden Rule. Do to others as you would have them do to you. Now, when you get married, do you hope that your future spouse will have slept with eighteen different people prior to your wedding and have had ample opportunity to keep breaking up with one after another after another and maybe a little practice for breaking up with you too? Is that the kind of spouse that you’re hoping to latch on to. Well, if you don’t want that to be the kind of spouse you want, then why would you treat other people’s prospective spouses that way?

That’s what the dating game sometimes does. You’re playing games with romance when somebody doesn’t belong to you. You are damaging them for any future relationships they might have and that’s what the scripture is talking about—wronging your brother or defrauding your brother, taking what is rightfully someone else’s. Most of us would prefer if we’re going to chew gum at all to take it fresh out of the pack and chew it, not to inherit the piece of gum that twenty other people have chewed first.

This is true also in romance and sexuality. God means us to enter a marriage as virgins and to be able to enjoy someone else without having them previously used in other relationships. So protecting purity is important and it’s got to be considered as we think about relating and forming romantic relationships that lead towards marriage. Now, this means we need to reject recreational romance. You say, “What’s that? Never heard of it.” It’s the basic common practice in western culture today.

Most dating is simply a temporary romantic relationship focused on current enjoyment. The purpose is not to move towards marriage or to find out whether this person is meant for marriage. In fact, it’s kind of a turn-off or a scare-off if a dating partner is too serious about marriage and thinking too much about marriage. We live in a culture which loves recreational romance, playing games with romance just for the sake of enjoying it right now. What’s the result?

Well, the average person experiences five real loves, they say, between ninth grade and the second year of college. This of course is not counting various quickie relationships or one night stands or whatever. But five real loves between grade nine and second year of college and then of course five real heart breaks when the relationships end. By the way, when polled, girls who were in those relationships, 80 percent of them expect to be married to the man they were dating. Twenty percent of the men expect to be married to the girl they're dating. Five percent actually end up getting married. So you do the math.

Thirty percent of people lose their virginity by age fifteen, 85 percent by age twenty. I want to say this very, very clearly. The percentages are not very different among churchgoers. Why aren't they very different among churchgoers? Because churchgoers are chasing recreational romance just like the world and they get the same results.

Douglas Wilson said that among evangelicals, very often the message of just say no to premarital sex but to go on with recreational romance is basically saying preheat the oven without cooking the roast. Well, it just doesn't work that way. The fact is that if you're going to follow the world's approach to recreational romance, you're going to get the world's results and that is almost everyone who follows that path is going to end up getting sexually involved outside of marriage.

Americans also have a very high divorce rate partly because they have so much pre-marriage practice at falling in love and then breaking up when you've spent years falling in love with this one and breaking up, then falling in love with that one and breaking up, then falling in love with that one and breaking up just because you went to altar and made a promise doesn't mean you're not going to find somebody else who captures your eye and think, "You know what? Breaking up is not so hard to do when there's a better prospect waiting."

We need to think very hard about dating as it is currently practiced. I'm not even going to go into all the details and statistics about date rape and about all the other sordid things that go along with that. I'm just saying that Christians need to take a very hard look at the contemporary culture of romantic relationships just for the sake of current enjoyment and we need to reject that. You can't just reject something. The question is what else is there?

Before I talk about what else is there and about pursuing romantic relationships in a proper context and preserving purity, let's just think about singleness for a moment. God calls a few people to serve him as singles for their entire lives. But God calls many people to a season of singleness, to a season of service and maturing before leading them to a spouse. We need for our own children and for those in

congregations that we serve or just anyone else we are communicating with about the Christian life to have a vision for sensible singleness for some who are called by God to be single for life and for many others to make the most of the season of singleness that they have rather than feeling compelled to pursue the romantic games.

My daughter has a friend. This friend will say, “Oh, I just feel so lousy about myself because I don’t have any boyfriend.” My daughter would say, “Well, I don’t have any boyfriend either.” Her friend said, “Well, yeah. You’re different” because she knows that my daughter doesn’t do the dating thing. Well, it’s best just to say, “Here’s the season of my life where I’m single and I’m not even going to play that dating game until I’m ready to get serious about getting married. So what do I do with singleness?” Well, for many people they are so pining for either a boyfriend or a girlfriend or a wife. Hey, get a life before a wife!

If you’re single and you’re not yet old enough or you’re not ready for marriage or God hasn’t yet brought that person your way, then make the most of your life. Don’t sit around waiting for Mr. or Ms. Right to come along. Get a life before a wife. Develop some wide range of interests. Broaden your mind. Do stuff that you can do when you’re single that you’re not going to be able to do as much when you’re married because you may have children and other obligations. Make the most of this season of singleness that you might have.

Do something daring. When I was single, I had an opportunity. From my seminary, they said, “Hey, Jews for Jesus has said that one of our students can go to Israel and stay there for nothing and study there for nothing and do street evangelism with them for two months next summer. Well, if I were married to just pick up and leave behind all of my children and my wife and everybody else and whatever other obligations I had, that wasn’t something that would have been as easy for me. But as a single, I can just go spend the whole summer. We got eggs thrown at us and fire hoses shot at us and got kicked a few times and had a lot of excitement and a wonderful time together in studying as well as sharing the gospel. But to just be able to pick up and go is something that you can do as a single that is not as easy when you’re married.

And then as we think about our own life and communicate with others about their own life, trust God’s timing. If He hasn’t brought the right person in yet, don’t get desperate and go after somebody that isn’t God’s person for you or isn’t a believer. Trust God’s timing. We need in order to protect purity to have a vision of sensible singleness and how to make the most of that season if singleness. And then we need a vision for common sense courtship, not recreational romance that just plays game with

romance where fifth graders and third graders are already in love and are kissing and by ninth grade they're in bed with each other. This is a calamity and a disaster.

We need a view of common sense courtship that does better than that. As Christians, we need to be teaching and encouraging each other to think differently and to act differently from the rest of the world. First of all, pair off in a romantic relationship only for one purpose: to find out whether the two of you are meant for marriage. That is the only reason for pairing off and spending extra time one on one in a romantic relationship—to find out whether you are going to marry this person. If it's not a person you would even consider, then do not start the relationship.

Also, don't start the relationship until you'd be in a position to get married if the relationship was the right one. So pair off only at marriageable age. That means dating by thirteen year olds is nuts. So is dating by fifteen or sixteen year olds for that matter even if they do like each other very much, even if they do think they should get married. They can't. And so what is the point? Common sense courtship will seek to pair off only at marriageable age, marriageable in terms of your maturity, marriageable in terms of having at least some financial path that you'd be able to support yourselves and of course readiness to commit to this person.

You can say, "I'm not ready to tie the knot. I'm not ready to make a commitment to anybody yet." Well then, you're not ready to date. You're not ready to get into a romantic relationship with anybody. I know this sounds extremely counter-cultural. It may sound downright weird to some of you. But the alternative has been a calamity. It has been a disaster and so we need to consider other ways of approaching these things.

A third thing is involving families where appropriate. Before I got married, I talked to my future wife's father and asked for his blessing and for the permission of him and his wife on my marriage to Wendy. When my daughter was going to start dating a man, he came to me and he asked me if he could begin to court my daughter. The same thing happened with my next daughter who is being courted. When you're in a situation where the parents are nearby where they're part of a Christian community, involve families where appropriate and spend some time with them during the period of courtship.

We very much enjoyed having time with our future sons-in-law in our home, getting to know them better and better and they getting to know us and feeling comfortable around our family. Sometimes you don't have that opportunity where you can be more involved with wider families. But where it's appropriate, where it's possible, it definitely is helpful. It lays a foundation for marriage as well because one of the big challenges in marriage is in-law relationships. Where those relationships have been

handled respectfully and positively in the courtship period, they're much more likely to go well during the marriage period as well.

Here's another one. If you start courting someone and you discover this isn't the one for you, then don't drag it out. Don't lead them on. End it. End it promptly. Don't play any games. It may hurt but it's better to do that than to lead somebody further and cause even more pain. If you decide to get married, here's another suggestion when you're protecting purity. Avoid overly long engagement. Now, I just want to say very bluntly. To be engaged for years when you already know you're going to get married and being in close proximity with each other is just a huge temptation. That's all there is.

Once you've made up your mind that you want to get married, get married. Enjoy each other's bodies fully rather than putting yourself in a position where it's going to be excruciating to keep your hands off of each other. Once you know you're going to get married, then leave yourself enough time to plan the wedding and do what needs doing and get married and move forward with it. Wait until the honeymoon.

Avoid back seats and bedrooms and all the places where you get really, really physical until you're actually married. Have some pretty clear guidelines on how you're going to be accountable to each other and stay out of settings that are going to be too tempting for you. You say, "What do you mean common sense courtship? Nobody thinks that way." Well, actually there are some people who think that way. For a lot of history, this would have been a more common approach than our current approach to finding a spouse and to the process of how a romance unfolds.

Well, just to give you a little different perspective on pursuing romance, let's just talk for a moment about Masai marriage. The Masai in Africa have a particular approach and cows figure pretty prominently in their approach to courtship. In Masai marriage, women and cows are the most important parts of Masai society because they give birth to life. When a man gives cows to his prospective father-in-law, he's giving the most valuable gift he can give in exchange for the gift of the woman to his extended family. He and his extended family get a woman who is of immense value and the woman's value gets the cows. The more cows he gives, the more the young man values the marriage. So he tries to give as many cows as he can to show that his heart really beats for her or beefs for her as the case may be.

Now, as you move on toward marriage, how does this go? Well, the future groom, in order for the wedding to take place, has to raise money to buy cows or he's got to raise the cows himself and come up with some cows. Usually, a young man isn't going to have enough. He can get some but not enough

and so his father contributes some cows to the equation. He's got brothers and uncles and maybe some cousins and other relatives who maybe throw in a cow or two and they all add up to a nice number. Once he's got ten to twenty cows together, that's a good number where he's ready to move forward with marriage.

When the marriage happens, the bride's father keeps a pretty good number of the cows and the bride's brothers and uncles and cousins each get a little share of the cows. So there's all of this use of cows as their arranging the marriage and as the marriage takes place. If you leave your wife, it is a cow-tastrophe! It is a disaster of terrible proportions to display the woman's dignity after you've left her and to pay her bills. She gets all the cows that you gave to her family members. All those family members have to give those cows to her because she's been dishonored, and besides that she needs to make a living because her bone-headed husband bailed out on her.

Her family members are mad at you. They're mad at you for leaving her. They're also mad because they just lost the cows that they had because all those cows that they had had to go to her now. Your family members are mad that you wasted their cows by dumping your wife. Hey, you want to get another wife? You're on your own. We're not contributing any cows to any second marriage on your behalf. Divorce is very rare among the Masai.

I'm not necessarily recommending arranged marriages or that we all have cows involved although I did grow up in a ranch. I think it's kind of a nice idea. But you don't have to follow that part of it. I'm just saying there are different cultural approaches to preparation for marriage and degrees of family involvement. Some of them may actually make more sense than ours. We may think "Oh, that Masai, that cow. They're crazy!" Well, is contemporary western culture following a better way? Who happens to be tipsy in a singles' bar tonight? Let's go see what happens? What stranger in the classified ads or on the Internet seems like the best catch? Wow, we're really making progress here. If it feels good, do it.

Friends with benefits. Among some young people, there's not even dating anymore. They just go have sex because it feels good. They might not even know each other's names but they're friends with benefits for a few minutes. Wow, it's nice to be enlightened, isn't it? Well, if we get more enlightened, we're just going to burn up in that flame. And so we need to think of some alternative approach. If not the Masai approach then maybe something that at least protects purity and common sense courtship is a big part of that.

Pair off only to find out if you're meant for marriage. Pair off only at marriageable age. Where appropriate, involve your families. If you start courting and it's not meant to be, then end it right away.

When you've made up your mind, get married and don't delay it overly long. And wait for sex. Wait for the full physical involvement until the honeymoon.

That number six, most evangelicals will tell their young people just to say "No, don't get sexually involved." But if you say number six and ignore the other five, you are putting people in a position to fail. You're telling them "Rev up your hormones. Get your romantic desires all fired up. Get all excited about somebody but don't do that one thing. Don't have sexual intercourse together." We're setting people up for failure if we have a "Just say no" mentality but we're pursuing the dating game, the recreational romance like the rest of the world.

Christian courtship involves how you pick your partner. It involves protecting purity by rejecting recreational romance, by having a vision of sensible singleness, by having common sense courtship. Oh, and there's one other thing. You kind of need to meet somebody! It's really hard to get married without meeting somebody. And so providing proximity away for Christian young people to meet each other is a very important part of a courtship vision. I'm familiar with a number of people who really have caught a courtship vision and want to pursue that but they don't have much of an approach for actually meeting anybody.

Let's think about providing proximity. For starters, we need to cultivate community in a positive courtship culture where Christian young ladies and men can mingle and meet a good match. I'm just going to quickly run through some guidelines and then we'll look at them in a bit more detail. First, avoid extremes. You can go way overboard with a vision of courtship that is unhealthy. You need some flexibility, not just fixed formulas, because we're dealing with people here and people are mysterious.

We need to cultivate a community that has a shared vision. It's hard to do courtship on your own. It's hard to pursue some of these things unless there's somebody else who's pursuing it with you. We need to create context for boys and girls to mingle in group settings and to be comfortable with each other. For both young men and young women, sometimes standards of modesty are taken to mean you should just look as ugly as you can. Well, frumpiness is not godliness. And so that's an important guideline.

Sometimes, we're going to be disappointed. Sometimes you're going to ask to court somebody and they're going to decline and not want to court with you at all. Sometimes you're going to enter into a courtship and it's just not going to work. You're going to find out, "No, I don't think we're meant for marriage." It is not necessarily a disaster for that to happen. It's a disappointment. It's not a disaster and you need to be able to live with it. So let's look at those.

Avoid extremes. Some approaches to courtship focus on ensuring that nothing can possibly go wrong! And nothing goes. Nothing goes wrong but nothing goes either. There are some people who have had a vision of courtship they say but it's mostly don't, don't, don't, don't, don't. Their kids are getting to be twenty-six and thirty and they're not meeting anybody. The goal still is lots of godly marriages, not tons of people staying single into their thirties and pining for a special someone to miraculously materialize.

Now there are some people who have written about courtship or spoken about it at conferences. Sometimes they describe the perfect courtship and the people who read their books or listen to their conferences think that "My son have better have a hundred thousand dollars in the bank and a good-paying job before he even thinks of looking for a wife or dating anybody." Get a life. It's not always quite that clear-cut just because it happened in an ideal case. Sometimes, books and stories about courtship are more about the exceptions for an elite few and they won't work when pursued in a wider setting.

Here I'm speaking more to people who have gone down that courtship path. I realized that a lot if you're watching this, it's a totally new concept so these things I'm talking about proximity are not the first and most important you need to take to heart. You need to take to heart the other things that I've said in the earlier parts of this presentation. But for those of you who do believe that it would be better to follow an alternate approach and keep paying attention to these guidelines on providing proximity. Avoid just going way overboard in extremes.

Another extreme is some people want to ensure that no romance would ever fail, so they want the parents to just arrange and betroth a young man to a young woman. That young woman and that young man will just have to get married because their parents say so and that ensure that that young man and that young woman never have a relationship with anybody else. Well, yeah. But there's a downside to that. So avoid extremes like that.

We need flexibility, not fixed formulas. Love is a mysterious marvel. It's not a mechanic's manual. Proverbs 30 speaks of things that are too amazing for me to understand. One of those things is the way of a man with a maid. Now, in some cases, parents or pastors or friends can kind of set people up or facilitate matchmaking. In other cases, young people definitely just kind of find each other on their own. It's not always the end of the world if a romance got started in a little different way that the pastor or the parents would have prescribed. We need some flexibility and not just fixed formulas.

We need to cultivate community. That means either to seek a church where the elders or the parents and the young people hold a shared vision for Christian marriage and for Christian courtship. It's

fairly rare yet. But if such a church isn't available, then seek out sub-groups of like-minded families within that church or across congregational boundaries that share that vision and then find ways for the young people to mingle appropriately but it needs to be in a community that's cultivated.

You need to create some context for mingling, for Christian boys and girls to mingle in some group settings even before they're old enough to pair off or consider marriage so that they can get comfortable with each other. I know some people have gone overboard on the courtship thing and they don't allow boys and girls to hardly talk to each other because it could lead to something. Well, we want it to lead to something eventually. And you do not want boys and girls to be just totally uncomfortable around members of the opposite sex.

They should learn to be friends with people of the opposite sex as long as there's a shared vision of courtship. Even if one kind of takes a liking to another, they know that okay, this isn't the time yet. So we should have context where young men and young women and boys and girls can get comfortable around each other. Obviously a lot of that happens in school life for those who are involved in schools. But it's not always Christian young people at that point.

So we need this to happen in groups that are intentional groups among Christians where young people and with as many parents possible can have kids having opportunities to meet each other. It can happen just when there's ordinary Christian hospitality. Have people over to your house. Have families get together in each other's homes for family fellowship. You can have groups from music or drama or sports and a variety of places, Bible studies for Christian young people to interact in a supervised setting and in groups.

Frumpiness isn't godliness. Beauty is not evil. The Bible speaks of a variety of people who are beautiful. Young ladies can adorn themselves to be attractive and they can still be modest. Now, shameless immodesty, dressing like a prostitute is a serious problem in the wider culture. But the solution to that is not to make girls as plain as possible so that nobody would ever look twice at them. If parents pressure their daughters to look homely, well, then home is probably where those daughters will remain indefinitely. So find the balance, not dressing up like a floozy but at the same time not dressing in a sack.

Disappointment is not disaster. We need to expect that some request for courtship are going to be declined either by the father or by the girl and we need to expect that some courtships aren't going to lead to marriage. The purpose of the courtship is to find out whether it's to lead to marriage. And it's painful when it doesn't but it's not the end of the world. An honorable courtship that's pursued in purity

and that doesn't end in marriage still achieves its purpose. The purpose was to find out to determine whether two people are meant for each other. It achieved that purpose. It was disappointing but it achieved that purpose. There's just a lot less pressure in courtship if we can all agree ahead of time that it's okay when the answer sometimes turns out to be no.

Well, those are just some of the guidelines for providing proximity so that Christian young ladies and men can mingle and meet a good match. Avoid the extremes. Flexibility and not just fixed formulas. Cultivate a community with shared vision, with context for boys and girls to mingle in group settings. Remembering to be modest but not necessarily frumpy and to realize that there are going to be disappointing results but that doesn't have to be the end of the world. We can rejoice that the Lord has given us a little bit different vision for treating each other honorably and pursuing purity and not defrauding our brother.

Where this is pursued, I've seen some wonderful fruit. Just to review again. When you pick your partner, make sure they are Christians who can dramatize with you the Christ-church relationship and who can develop godly offspring together that the Lord shall bless your children and who can just delight in each other's love and be attracted to each other and just have a sense of the joy and the electricity of love flowing between you.

Protect purity and that doesn't mean rejecting the recreational romance approach that's so common in our society to have a vision of sensible singleness and to have common sense courtship where you delay dating until you are at a marriageable age and where you date only for the purpose of finding out whether the two of you are meant to be together for life. And then once you have that as a vision, we as community leaders and as parents need to try to provide settings in proximity for young people to really meet each other and have that spark of love and that spark of unity in Christ be lit by the Lord.

If this sounds really strange to you, consider the alternative. The alternative is the mess we're currently in where fornication is occurring in over 80 percent of cases among singles and the percentage is almost the same among Christian singles. We need to think differently. We need to act differently. We need to set that vision and pursue it now. If you're a parent, it starts young with your children and teaching them to think and act differently. If you're a pastor, it involves patient teaching. It may involve getting laughed at or having people think you're weird or to just understand young people. But it's very important to let God's will and God's wisdom in our current situation guide us as we pursue Christian courtship.

