

Dear Friend,

This month we are going to begin to think through some of the practical applications that come from the biblical principles we've discussed that relate to this question: Does God have anything to say about dating? It is in discussing these practical applications that it will quickly become apparent that people who are in complete agreement about the biblical principles involved disagree over how those principles should be applied in their case or in the case of their children. What I would like to do is to share some of the application principles that we have worked out as a family and that I have shared with hundreds of young single people over the past 31 years of ministry. This is the counsel I would give to any parent with teenagers or any single person who came to me wanting to know how they should direct their teenager or how they should conduct themselves in relationship to other unmarried people of the opposite sex. I will try to show how I am applying the relevant biblical principles but want to state quite clearly that if you disagree with my application you are not disagreeing with God. This is how Jane and I have worked these things out in our ministry and in our family but that does not mean that this is the only way to work out these principles.

There is another "background" issue that I need to address prior to beginning. There is a strong controversy raging within the broader evangelical church about whether or not Christians can "date" or whether every Christian must only pursue the "courtship" model of finding a marriage partner. Most people when they use these two terms mean by "dating" the process of forming exclusive romantic relationships that eventually end when one or both of the "committed" members of the relationship either "fall out of love" with each other or "fall in love" with someone else. Then "courtship" generally refers to the process whereby a boy who is interested in a girl, prior to or coincidentally with expressing his interest to the girl goes to the young woman's father and asks permission to "court" his daughter for the purpose of ascertaining whether or not they should be married. This "courtship" then takes place entirely within the home and family of the young woman with increasing experiences in the home and family of the young man as the relationship becomes more serious. The young couple are then always chaperoned and never left out of the sight of a family member. I'm not going to try to defend either of these positions. What I have sought to do in my counseling of others and in my own home is to set forth some principles that are firm enough to guide young people but yet flexible enough to fit into the wide variety of circumstances within which single people relate to one another.

I want to list some of the basic principles I have counseled to young people, including my own children, and parents. Next month I will try to share some of the ways we've sought to apply these to various situations.

- Unless you are prepared emotionally, spiritually and financially to be married within a year to two years there is no point to being involved in an exclusive, romantic relationship with a member of the opposite sex.
- Men and women, boys and girls, who are not married to each other or not investigating the possibility of marriage to each other cannot be good friends.

- The formation of exclusive male/female relationships must always take place with marriage viewed as the purpose for all such relationships. In other words, you don't form exclusive relationships just for the "fun of it" or to satisfy emotional or social or sexual wants and desires.
- The main thing in finding a marriage partner is not to concentrate on finding the "right" person but on becoming the right kind of person; a person who is able to love and remain faithful to another sinner for a lifetime.
- Children, no matter their age, should always invite the participation of their parents in the process of their choosing of a marriage partner. Children should, as much as possible, get to know their prospective marriage partner in the context of both of their families. When biological families are absent or not able to provide this kind of involvement then the couple should work very hard to conduct their relationship in the company of a caring group of Christian friends that includes mature adults.
- Parents of teenagers must be prepared to aggressively help their children maintain the appropriate boundaries between themselves and members of the opposite sex. They must maintain active involvement in the lives of their adult children, always prepared to offer counsel but also showing their confidence in and respect for their children's judgment.

If you have particular "practical" questions that you would like me to address in the next newsletter please write them down and give them to me or mail them to the church or email them to: swany@riverhillsonline.org. There are also a number of helpful books and audio resources in our library. These are a few of them: "I Kissed Dating Goodbye" and "Boy Meets Girl", both by Josh Harris; "Wandering Toward the Altar: The Decline of Courtship in America" by Mars Hill Audio.

In the mercy,