



Premarital
Relation-
ships

THE DATING GAME

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(Ruth 3:10-14)

Falling in love can be a dizzying experience. Once the spark of attraction catches flame, love can quickly turn into a raging fire of unreasonable passion. Engulfed by its heat, people sometimes sacrifice all sound judgment. The Song of Solomon says, "Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it" (Song 8:7). Love can cause some people to "lose their head," and they lose their capacity to think clearly. This is why Scripture admonishes people to seek wisdom: "Get wisdom, and in all your getting, get understanding" (Prov. 4:7).

The word *wisdom* often elicits images of old men with long beards, but wisdom does not necessarily come with age. If that were so, the Bible would not tell us to be wise right now. Neither is wisdom the result of a high IQ. Being brilliant does not necessarily mean being wise. Wisdom is defined as "a common-sense understanding of what is true, right, or lasting."

Wisdom is vital throughout life, but it is particularly important in the dating process. As people date, they usually put their best foot forward and are not completely genuine; they face temptation to sexual sin; they deal with many strong emotions—all while they are attempting to decide on the person with whom they will spend the rest of life, "for better or worse." Obviously, people who are in the process of dating are better off seeking God's discernment regarding the character of the people they date.

Wisdom helps people avoid embarrassing mistakes, to not jump to conclusions or make decisions without first gathering the facts. Some who are in the process of dating think that the exhilaration of infatuation will last forever. They need wisdom to guide them into a strong relationship based on more than exciting feelings. Romance focuses mostly on emotion; true love is

grounded in character; true character is discerned through wisdom.

DISCERNING A PERSON'S CHARACTER

Wisdom is not concerned with *doing* but with *being*, so it can be difficult to spot. But a wise person will have a steady demeanor and attitude over a long period of time that will reveal his or her wisdom (or the lack of it). That is why people generally date for many months. They need to see each other in a variety of situations across a span of time. Wisdom, or lack of wisdom, will emerge over time in hundreds of ways great and small. It will help, then, for people to have some idea what to look for as they date a person over a period of time.

Spiritual or Worldly?

Evangelist Billy Graham once said, "Knowledge is horizontal; wisdom is vertical—it comes down from above." Spiritual wisdom can only be given by the Holy Spirit. For this reason, Christians should only date other Christians. There cannot be a true spiritual dimension in a person who is not a believer. Even then, however, people must be discerning. Anyone can say the right words and act the right way for a time, but the genuine person will eventually be

revealed. Even if the other person is a believer, each person must still carefully consider the depth of that person's faith. Does the other have a heart for God? Does he or she possess true spiritual wisdom? Of course, everyone is a pilgrim on the path and no one will be perfect, but those who are dating must ask God for discernment and guidance as they consider this other person's personal relationship with God.

Humble or Self-centered?

Humility is an important attribute in a date. Proverbs 11:2 warns, "When pride comes, then comes shame; but with the humble is wisdom." A humble person seeks the other's good. A humble person can ask for help. Only a truly humble person will be able to love his or her spouse completely, according to the kind of love described in 1 Corinthians 13: "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; loves does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own . . ." (1 Cor. 13:4, 5). Such love is fundamental to a positive and lasting relationship.

Genuine or Deceptive?

Sincerity is a valuable virtue. Going on a date, however, is often a showcase, a place to conceal shortcomings. As they are dating, many people try to disguise their flaws and defects; others attempt to exaggerate their positive qualities, or even lie. This can cause people to obsess about how to look, what to say, how to eat. The whole routine is misleading. For this reason, it is particularly important to look beyond the veneer by dating over a period of time and by doing things together in a variety of situations. The real person will eventually emerge—for better or worse. But it would be better to discover that real person *before* making the "for better or worse" vow!

SO IS IT LOVE OR INFATUATION?

Even when a person is dating a spiritual, humble, and genuine person, how can real

love be distinguished from temporary infatuation? Several characteristics separate true love from infatuation. Infatuation is based on physical characteristics; love is based on the whole person. Infatuation is instant ("love at first sight"); love grows steadily over time. Infatuation can be lost in a moment, for it is based only on feelings; love is a commitment that remains as feelings come and go. Infatuation meets *my* needs; love meets *our* needs.

The decision you are making will last a lifetime. Take your time and make it wisely.

FURTHER MEDITATION:

Other passages to study about the issue of premarital relationships include:

- > 1 Kings 11:1-13
- > Proverbs 2; 5-9
- > Ecclesiastes 4:9-12
- > Amos 3:3
- > 1 Corinthians 13
- > 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on premarital relationships at Amos 3:3 on page 1151. See also the personality profile of Ruth and Boaz on page 336.

AUTHORITY OF THE PROPHET'S MESSAGE

3 Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying:

2 "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."

3 Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?

4 Will a lion roar in the forest, when he has no prey?
Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he has caught nothing?

5 Will a bird fall into a snare on the earth, where there is no trap for it?

Will a snare spring up from the earth, if it has caught nothing at all?

6 If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid?
If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done it?

7 Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.

8 A lion has roared!
Who will not fear?
The Lord GOD has spoken!
Who can but prophesy?

PUNISHMENT OF ISRAEL'S SINS

9 "Proclaim in the palaces at Ashdod,^a
And in the palaces in the land of Egypt,
and say:

'Assemble on the mountains of Samaria;
See great tumults in her midst,
And the oppressed within her.

10 For they do not know to do right,'

Says the LORD,
'Who store up violence and robbery in
their palaces.'

11 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD:

"An adversary *shall be* all around the
land;
He shall sap your strength from you,
And your palaces shall be plundered."

12 Thus says the LORD:

3:9 ^aFollowing Masoretic Text; Septuagint reads *Assyria*.

KEY PASSAGE



Premarital
Relation-

WALKING IN AGREEMENT

(3:3)

Amos had received a prophecy from God; this meant that the predicted event would soon take place. Amos used some questions regarding interrelated events to prove that point. For example, Amos wrote, "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" When two people are walking together, we figure they have agreed about some things, like where and when to meet and where to go. The verse describes a general truth about relationships between people.

During a dating relationship, a couple should evaluate their agreements in various areas of life. They shouldn't "walk together" into a marriage covenant if they are not agreed in the most important issues of life—beliefs, values, and lifestyle. Paul gave the same advice when he said, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness?" (2 Cor. 6:14).

As Christians date, they should seek the company of other Christians. Then they should agree on the practical implications of their Christian faith. Such agreement will help them to walk through many years together.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about premarital relationships on pages 338, 339. See also the personality profile of Ruth and Boaz on page 336.

dealt very bitterly with me. ²¹I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?"

²²So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. Now they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

RUTH MEETS BOAZ

2 There was a relative of Naomi's husband, a man of great wealth, of the family of Elimelech. His name was Boaz. ²So Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Please let me go to the field, and glean heads of grain after *him* in whose sight I may find favor."

And she said to her, "Go, my daughter."

³Then she left, and went and gleaned in the field after the reapers. And she happened to come to the part of the field *belonging* to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.

⁴Now behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said to the reapers, "The LORD be with you!"

And they answered him, "The LORD bless you!"

⁵Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "Whose young woman is this?"

⁶So the servant who was in charge of the reapers answered and said, "It is the young Moabite woman who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. ⁷And she said, 'Please let me glean and gather after the reap-



Sexual Integrity

PERSONALITY PROFILE

RUTH & BOAZ — SEXUAL INTEGRITY IN PREMARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

(RUTH 2—3)

The way in which a couple meets and the story of their courtship reveals much about their marriage prospects. Ruth and Boaz lived one of the Bible's most romantic love stories. As in every true love story, Ruth and Boaz had their share of sorrow, difficulty, adventure, and victory. Where fools rush in, Ruth and Boaz walked wisely.

Boaz met Ruth shortly after she arrived in Bethlehem with Naomi, her mother-in-law, who was returning home. Both women were widows. They were also friends. Naomi's God had become Ruth's. The lovely Moabitess graciously assumed the role of resourceful provider for the two women, never guessing what surprises God had in store.

Ruth showed up during the harvest of Boaz's fields, gleaning the leftovers to feed Naomi and herself. Boaz noticed her. A few tactful questions later, Boaz began to demonstrate special attention toward Ruth. He encouraged her to stay with his work crew. He informed her that she was under his guarantee of safety because of her special care for his relative Naomi.

During the harvest days, mutual respect and appreciation became special affection between Ruth and Boaz. Under Naomi's guidance, Ruth let Boaz know she was open to his role as kinsman-redeemer, meaning that he would marry her, care for her, and perhaps carry on the family line. Boaz praised her character and promised to take action. When it was all said and done, their marriage made them part of the ancestry of Jesus.

Sexual possibilities were undoubtedly part of Ruth and Boaz's story, but they did not use sex to determine their relationship. They are a romantic tribute to the power of sexual integrity before marriage.

To Learn More: Turn to the articles about sexual integrity on pages 1608, 1609 and premarital relationships on pages 338, 339. See also the key passage note on sexual integrity at 1 Corinthians 6:15 on page 1499, and the key passage note on premarital relationships at Amos 3:3 on page 1151.

¹⁰Then he said, "Blessed *are* you of the LORD, my daughter! For you have shown more kindness at the end than at the beginning, in that you did not go after young men, whether poor or rich. ¹¹And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you request, for all the people of my town know that you *are* a virtuous woman. ¹²Now it is true that I *am* a close relative; however, there is a relative closer than I. ¹³Stay this night, and in the morning it shall be *that* if he will perform the duty of a close relative for you—good; let him do it. But if he does not want to perform the duty for you, then I will perform the duty for you, as the LORD lives! Lie down until morning."

¹⁴So she lay at his feet until morning, and she arose before one could recognize another. Then he said, "Do not let it be known that the woman came to the threshing floor." ¹⁵Also he said, "Bring the shawl that *is* on you and hold it." And when she held it, he measured six *ephahs* of barley, and laid *it* on her. Then she^a went into the city.

¹⁶When she came to her mother-in-law, she said, "Is that you, my daughter?"

Then she told her all that the man had done for her. ¹⁷And she said, "These six *ephahs* of barley he gave me; for he said to me, 'Do not go empty-handed to your mother-in-law.'"

¹⁸Then she said, "Sit still, my daughter, until you know how the matter will turn out; for the man will not rest until he has concluded the matter this day."

BOAZ REDEEMS RUTH

4 Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there; and behold, the close relative of whom Boaz had spoken came by. So Boaz said, "Come aside, friend,^a sit down here." So he came aside and sat down. ²And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, "Sit

down here." So they sat down. ³Then he said to the close relative, "Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, sold the piece of land which *belonged* to our brother Elimelech. ⁴And I thought to inform you, saying, 'Buy *it* back in the presence of the inhabitants and the elders of my people. If you will redeem *it*, redeem *it*; but if you^a will not redeem *it*, then tell me, that I may know; for *there is* no one but you to redeem *it*, and I *am* next after you.'"

And he said, "I will redeem *it*."

⁵Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you must also buy *it* from Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to perpetuate^a the name of the dead through his inheritance."

⁶And the close relative said, "I cannot redeem *it* for myself, lest I ruin my own inheritance. You redeem my right of redemption for yourself, for I cannot redeem *it*."

⁷Now this *was the custom* in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging, to confirm anything; one man took off his sandal and gave *it* to the other, and this *was* a confirmation in Israel.

⁸Therefore the close relative said to Boaz, "Buy *it* for yourself." So he took off his sandal. ⁹And Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "You *are* witnesses this day that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that *was* Chilion's and Mahlon's, from the hand of Naomi. ¹⁰Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, I have acquired as my wife,

3:15 ^aMany Hebrew manuscripts, Syriac, and Vulgate read *she*; Masoretic Text, Septuagint, and Targum read *he*. 4:1 ^aHebrew *peloni almoni*; literally *so and so*. 4:4 ^aFollowing many Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate; Masoretic Text reads *he*. 4:5 ^aLiterally *raise up*

SOUL NOTE



People of Character (3:11) Marriages in this culture were generally arranged by a girl's parents. In Ruth's case, Naomi did the arranging by instructing her to approach Boaz, a near kinsman, whose duty it would be to marry her. Boaz had heard about Ruth (2:11, 12) and had great respect for her because she was known as "a virtuous woman" (3:11). Ruth appreciated Boaz's kindness to her and Naomi. Although our culture is very different, people who are dating should look at the other person's character before deciding whether to marry. In the long run, character is what will matter most. **Topic: Premarital Relationships**

own body. ¹⁹Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?* ²⁰For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body^a and in your spirit, which are God's.

band render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. ⁴The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*.

For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

1 CORINTHIANS 6:20

PRINCIPLES OF MARRIAGE

7 Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me:

It is good for a man not to touch a woman.

²Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. ³Let the hus-

band render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. ⁴The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*. ⁵Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. ⁶But I say this as a concession, not as

6:20 ^aNU-Text ends the verse at *body*.

KEY PASSAGE



Sexual Integrity

ONE FLESH

(6:15)

Sex is more than a physical act. When God created sex, He said that in that moment, the two people "become one flesh" (6:16; Gen. 2:24). Sex is meant by God to be a holy union in which a man and a woman share a deep bond. But in the Corinthian culture, sex outside of marriage was not viewed as evil. It was even part of their "worship," as the temple of Aphrodite employed thousands of temple prostitutes. Paul wanted the Corinthian believers to understand that because they had become the body of Christ, they needed to separate themselves from all forms of sexual immorality. This did not mean that married couples should become celibate—sex itself is not evil, for God created it. It is people who pervert it. Instead, believers must practice sexual integrity. God's people must abstain from sex outside of marriage; but within the bonds of marriage, a husband and wife should be faithful, always seeking to lovingly meet each other's needs (7:2–5).

To Learn More: Turn to the article about sexual integrity on pages 1608, 1609. See also the personality profile of Ruth and Boaz on page 336.

SOUL NOTE



Premarital Purity (6:18–20) Often movies and television shows portray couples having sex outside of marriage as normal and common. Often people seem to have no concern that this is sin according to God. He does not ask believers to "flee sexual immorality" because He wants to ruin their fun. Sex was God's idea; He created it as a holy union that binds two people together. Experiencing that union with many different people cheapens what God intends as a lifelong bond between a husband and wife. Believers must keep their premarital relationships pure. But if they have not done so, they can begin anew, knowing that God will forgive past sins.

Topic: Premarital Relationships