

## #129 “Purposeful Dating”

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Dating as the world defines it (and as many in the church have accepted it) is to play the field, explore yourself, figure out the type of person that you are compatible with, spend a lot of time, energy, and emotion to get close to them, and hope it works out. Some even think that the physical area must be explored to test compatibility and to be able to make good relational decisions. This process is plain and simply one self-interested person interacting selfishly with another self-interested person where both are trying to find out what works for them and get what they want. Dating as the world defines it and does it is fundamentally selfish, self-seeking, and self-centered. It is all about "me." This is really a tragedy when a person who is not approaching things selfishly but who is desiring a permanent commitment, i.e. marriage, is played by a person who is just exploring themselves and testing the field. Emotions experienced, physical intimacy gained, and hearts pulled into devotion cannot be easily undone. We can avoid a lot of unnecessary pain by doing things in a God-honoring way, as we date to seek a mate for life, and not just any mate, but a mate whose life is built upon the same foundation of Christ.

Let us consider three areas in brief. First, how do we meet a mate? Ultimately, we must trust God for paths to cross as we obey Him and seek His will, but that does not mean that we are not proactive. Just as it is wrong to take an approach to evangelism where we exclusively wait for God to bring people to us rather than taking the gospel to them, in dating, we should put ourselves in positions to meet other believers of a similar age. We are the ones to blame if we isolate ourselves and never mix and mingle with believers. Second, how does dating work? Song of Solomon presents what we call dating as being the most natural of events. Solomon is going about his business and he sees a beautiful young girl. He is attracted to her, and she happens to be attracted to him as well. She doesn't initiate the relationship, but she calls out in her heart to him, just hoping that he will want her. She says in 1:7 that she doesn't want to act like a prostitute, veiling herself, trying to draw him in to her by illicit means. She waits for him to make the first move, and he speaks to her, declaring his love to her. Likely, the song comes in after a few events have happened. Perhaps they have had an interaction or two or a conversation or two. Perhaps they know of each other through some mutual friends or acquaintances. Perhaps they see each other often, and they have made eyes at each other. The point is that it is a natural process as God-given desires and feelings draw a Christian man and a Christian woman toward one another. So dating doesn't as much "work" as it just "happens." Third, what is essential to keeping dating honorable before God? Song of Solomon teaches that love must not be awakened until it can please, that is, that sex comes after marriage. Full romance happens in the marriage bed, but some romance and certainly some physical affection and words of love are expressed from near the beginning of the relationship. This is the case with Solomon and the Shullamite woman. They speak love to one another right off the bat in chapter one. But their love is pure, not self-seeking, and not defiling. There is also an understanding that there is purpose to what they are doing. They are allowing their hearts to be gradually given to the other with increasing trust and love and commitment because they are both interested in marriage,

not just casually playing around. They are not thinking "one night stand" or "make out session" or something else selfish and temporary. They are thinking about being with their beloved forever after. *Christian "dating" is to be founded upon the truth of seeking marriage and a permanent relationship.* Those who have this mindset will be looking for qualities that are godly and will enable a marriage to endure for a lifetime.

Dating is not rocket science, though with enough confusing teaching out there mixed with a severe void of sound teaching, it can become overly and unnecessarily complex and confusing. Combine this confusion with poor family advice and expectations or legalistic schemes set up by churches or fellowships, and things can really get weird. The Bible cuts through the confusion and tells us what to look for in a mate. Of women, we learn that charm and external beauty of itself is not sufficient to being a woman of excellence, but an understanding of cultivating inward beauty and a respect of her husband driven by a fear of the Lord is the call. Of men, we learn that they cannot be double-tongued, arrogant, or unable to gently love their wives, but rather they must learn to lovingly lead. When the foundation is built upon Christ and His timeless principles, a marriage can last, and it is possible to see through the fog of Satan's lies that could otherwise make us look for the wrong type of person. But beyond the checklists of what defines integrity and Biblical living, we must let God lead as He leads us to the person we desire. There was something about Solomon's lover that was more than just a Biblically defined list of characteristics, though the foundation was absolutely necessary. There was passion, romance, and a sense of being enraptured with the other on all levels, physical, emotional, intellectual, and certainly spiritual. When we meet someone with whom this bond develops and draws us in and when it is done God's way, we can enjoy the dating experience.

A final piece of advice: do not settle or compromise, but believe that God is faithful to do more than we can ask or imagine. Ephesians 3:20 says, "Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us."