

Dating:

Dating is a concept that most young people don't really need any introduction to, which is not really all that surprising. In any circle of young people, one of the most important (and sometimes stressful) dynamics is that of who 'likes' who, whether they have told them, whether they want to go out, and so on. There always seems to be someone who is trying to get someone else interested in them, someone who is upset because the object of their affection isn't interested, someone who is upset because they have been 'dumped', and many others in various stages of relationships.

Probably most parents would prefer it if their kids showed no interest whatever in the opposite sex until they turned 18 or so, got a job, left home, and in due time got married. But we all know that that's not going to happen, don't we? The fact is, God has designed men and women to be attractive to each other – it's something that is inbuilt. When you are a teenager, those feelings of attraction are happening to you, it's not like you really choose them. They're just there. In addition, young people are not only experiencing these feelings of attraction, they are also in many ways at the peak of their physical attractiveness – so it seems pretty clear that you are designed that way, and that you are supposed to be attracted to each other.

The real issue, however, is what are you going to do about it? Some immediately try to date as many girls (or guys, as the case may be) as they can, usually with the objective of physical intimacy of some sort. They tend to go through a large number of such relationships, and leave behind them a string of break ups, with all their associated heartbreaks and stresses. Is that really the best way to go, the best way to treat one another? Is that the reason that God made you this way, just to seek shallow relationships and physical intimacy with anyone and everyone? Or is there something more?

Well, there is. The Bible doesn't really talk about the concept of 'dating' at all. Instead, what we see there is courtship, an altogether different thing. I suppose you could call it 'dating with intent' – spending time and growing to love someone because you want to be with them, not just for a shallow and fleeting relationship but for your whole life. It might take a while, and it means waiting for that right person instead of squandering your time in relationships you know are going nowhere. In the Bible we can read about Jacob, who had to serve Laban for seven years before he could marry Rachel, the woman he loved. He did it, and as the Bible tells us:

And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her (Genesis 29: 20).

Well that's just ridiculous, isn't it? Or is it? Guys, don't you think that you would do that for the right girl? Girls, don't you think you are worth that? Well, you are! That's what the concept of courtship is – you look for the person that you want to spend your life with, not just for a shallow and empty fling but forever.

A lot of people would say that this idea is impossibly romantic, it just doesn't work in this world today. Well romantic it certainly is, but it's not impossible. It's not just a fairy story; it can be YOUR story. Make it your story! As usual, it depends on whether you are just going to follow the crowd, or whether you are going to make your own choices and take your own decisions. There aren't many more important decisions than this one: do it right.

You all have friends of the opposite sex, and that's great. You might feel attracted to some of them from time to time, in fact you almost certainly will. That's fine too, that's the way God made you. But instead of diving head first into pointless relationships that centre around little but physical attraction and shallow physical intimacy, why not wait for the right one? Enjoy your friendships, have a great time with each other, laugh together and cry together – sooner or later someone will start to stand out, they will be different to the others. The attraction you have for them will be more than just physical, it will be mental, emotional, everything. It might take a while for that to develop, but that's fine. It mightn't happen to you tomorrow, or next week, or even next year. That's fine too. One day there will be someone – someone you would serve seven years for. The right one. The real one. Wait for them. Do what it takes to get them. Court them, then win them, and then marry them. It will take effort, it will take dedication, it will take time and that's the way it should be. Something worth having like that isn't just going to fall into your lap.

Happily ever after isn't just something that you read in stories. It can, and should, be your