

Vol. XXXVIII, No. 4



# YOUTH

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LET GOD *Write* YOUR LOVE STORY

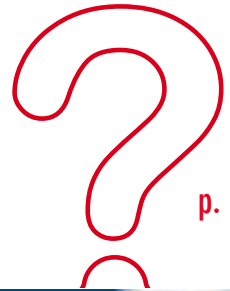


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# Principles for a Lasting Love Story

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**H**ave you ever made a list of all the qualities you wanted in a mate? I think most of us have done that. However, did you realize that no matter how many lists you make, lists don't create godly or good relationships? If you're ready for a lasting romance, begin by discovering the joy of a daily intimate relationship with the King of kings! He will then lead you each step of the way.

God has a plan for your life and your future. He says, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end" (Jeremiah 29:11).

God-written love stories are not common today because most of us like to be in control of our love life. As long as we are, God doesn't have a chance to show us what He can do for us. Hollywood can't even touch the version of love that is alive in the heart and mind of God.

Perhaps you have felt that if you give God your life, He would ask you to marry someone you were not attracted to. You don't need to worry about that because God knows you better than you know yourself. He knows your character, your likes, your dislikes, your strengths and weaknesses (Psalm 139:1-4), and He will give you the best match.

This issue of the *Youth Messenger* is the second of three that deals with the topic of courtship and preparation for marriage. In this magazine you will discover:

- The basic principles for a lasting love story
- Who is your counseling team
- How God led different couples in their relationships

You will also read thought-provoking courtship questions that our young people around the world have asked. You will be educated and encouraged by the wise and practical answers given by our team of pastors. Happy reading! Happy learning! Happy courtship as you let God write your love story!

—Liliane Balbach



BY NATHAN TYLER

# PRINCIPLES FOR A LASTING LOVE STORY

It was a balmy summer day. We found our seats along with the other waiting guests of the bride and groom. The bride was on time and looked lovely. The pastor gave an eloquent sermon. The couple exchanged their vows, and soloists sang special wedding music. Joyful music played as the happy couple walked out of the church. It was yet another beautiful wedding of a childhood friend.

Fast-forward a couple of years—they got a divorce, and now our friend is a single mom. What had happened? Was there anything she and her husband could have done to start their marriage on a better foundation?

## ANALYZE YOUR VIEWS OF LOVE

We have a relative who was charming and good looking, and he knew it. He relished the attention of numerous girls. It was hard to keep up with who was his latest gal. The poor girls were bitterly disappointed because they didn't understand what true love is.

Many young people choose a spouse based on looks and attraction. It feels good to be with that person, but they don't think about the important questions they should be asking so they can determine if that relationship will work long-term.

The important question is how do you define love? Is love a warm, fuzzy feeling that you have for a person of the opposite sex? Let's see how Inspiration defines true love:

“Love is a precious gift, which we receive from Jesus. Pure and holy affection is not a feeling, but a principle.”—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 358.

“True love is a high and holy principle, altogether different in character from that love which is awakened by impulse, and which suddenly dies when severely tested.”—*Adventist Home*, p. 50.

“Love is a sentiment so sacred that but few know what it is. It is a term used but not understood. The warm glow of impulse, the fascination of one young person for another, is not love; it does not deserve the name. True love has an intellectual basis, a deep, thorough knowledge of the object loved.”—*Testimonies on Sexual Behavior, Adultery and Divorce*, pp. 21, 22.

Notice that true love is: a) a principle not a feeling; b) it is a gift from God; c) it has an intellectual foundation, meaning you will be rational and logical when you love the person you are considering to marry. You will have a thorough knowledge of their character and love them for who they are not so much for how they look.

Have you thought about how real life will be, day after day, learning to work and live together and love the other person, even though you are two very different people?

The second question to consider would be, what are your ideas about marriage and your expectations for marriage? Do you just want a mate to be with romantically, or do you understand the entire marriage relationship and the family unit that you will become? Have you thought about how real life will be, day after day, learning to work and live together and love the other person, even though you are two very different people?

## FINDING THE “ONE”

How do you find the one? There are two approaches young people take to find a mate. One is to look at everyone as a potential girlfriend or boyfriend until you are in a relationship. For some youth this starts early, before they even know how to drive a car. The opposite extreme is when a young person refuses to talk to anyone unless they are “the potential one.” They're so idealistic that they don't allow themselves to just be friendly with everyone.

The right balance is that you know your own mission in life, and that you are pursuing it. You form appropriate friendships with everyone and seek to be a blessing to them. When you meet someone, you take time to get to know them genuinely without the awkwardness of looking at them as a potential spouse.

One day, you may meet someone new at church. Take the time to be friendly with them and become acquainted. In the course of making friends with everyone in your circle, you will most likely feel drawn to one of those people. Because you are casual friends already, you will more likely know how compatible you are. One day Janet realized that Gavin, a friend she hadn't even considered, was actually all she had ever wanted. A friendship that started casually grew and blossomed into a romance once they got to know each other.

Don't be all focused on finding someone to date. It is better to get on with life, and focus on your life goals. Along the way, you will meet someone who is walking the same path as you. Together, you will reach your goals.

## GET TO KNOW THE FAMILY

Ideally, before you begin a courtship, become acquainted with his/her family. You will learn a lot about your prospective lover by observing his/her family. Abraham understood the importance of a godly family. He sent his trusted servant, under oath, to select a wife from a specific family for his son Isaac. (Genesis 24:1-4, 9.)

Why is it important to know the family your boyfriend/girlfriend is coming from? Unless the person you're dating is truly converted, they will be like their family in habits and character. If you come from a godly family, determine by God's grace to continue the godly line with your choice of a faithful partner.

Before beginning courtship, the young man should ask the girl's father for full permission. If a young man begins courting a girl without parental approval, he will be guilty of "stealing her affections." (See *Adventist Home*, p. 58.)

## BEGINNING A HEALTHY COURTSHIP

Let's discover how to develop a healthy courtship without stifling or smothering one another. As God



leads you, begin your courtship thoughtfully and prayerfully on your knees. Allow your relationship to develop slowly and naturally. Relationships that begin in a frenzy are hot for a while but then fizzle out. If you want your relationship to last, take it one step at a time. The strongest relationships are those that begin as friendships. Always treat each other with love and respect at every step of the journey.

Your potential spouse should be a fully committed Christian who is of your church denomination. We can't find anywhere in the Bible the idea of "evangelistic dating," where you date a girl or guy who is an unbeliever while you're trying to convert them to your faith. Make a sacred vow not to date or marry a person who is not an active Christian of your faith, who prays and has daily devotions, and is actively involved in his/her church.

### **OBSERVE CHARACTER**

Think you've found the one? Just wait a little. Give yourself adequate time to observe the character of the one you wish to date. Ask your mother and father, who know you and love you to "make critical observations of the one you feel inclined to favor [like]. Trust not to your own judgment and marry no one whom you feel will not be an honor to your

Make a sacred vow not to date or marry a person who is not an active Christian of your faith, who prays and has daily devotions, and is actively involved in his/her church.

father and mother, one who has intelligence and moral worth."—*Letters to Young Lovers*, pp. 36, 37.

"Weigh every sentiment [attitude, thought, feeling], and watch every development of character in the one with whom you think to link your life destiny. The step you are about to take is one of the most important in your life, and should not be taken hastily. While you may love, do not love blindly."—*Adventist Home*, p. 45.

### **ASK JESUS AT EVERY STEP**

"Be cautious every step that you advance; you need Jesus at every step. Your life is too precious a thing to be treated as of little worth. Calvary testifies to you of the value of your soul. . . . Be sure that you do not follow the imagination of your own heart, but move in the fear of God."—*Letters to Young Lovers*, p. 26.

If you have someone in mind already, here are some questions you can ask yourself. It would even be good to write or type out your answers.

## **IS HE/SHE OLD ENOUGH TO BEGIN COURTSHIP?**

If both of you are still teenagers, it's a good idea to slow down and ask for some advice and counsel. Your teenage brain is still developing and that can cause you to make some unwise decisions.

“A youth not out of his teens is a poor judge of the fitness of a person as young as himself to be his companion for life.”—*Messages to Young People*, p. 452.

## **DOES HE/SHE LOVE JESUS MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE?**

Both of you should love and serve God, and have made a commitment to Him by baptism. You should both have the same faith. If the other person does not share your beliefs and has not been baptized, he/she is an unbeliever and the Bible forbids this relationship. (See 2 Corinthians 6:14.)

## **ARE YOU COMPATIBLE?**

Take time to get to know each other and prayerfully consider whether you are suitable for each other. Do you have common values and interests? In my courtship, our interests were health, true education, country living, finances, serving others and working for their salvation. Our separate dreams for the future combined perfectly into one common vision.

What strengths and weaknesses do you see in his/her family? Watch how he treats his mother and sisters, or how she relates to her father and brothers.

“Has my lover a mother? What is the stamp of her character? Does he recognize his obligations to her? Is he mindful of her wishes and happiness? If he does not respect and honor his mother, will he manifest respect and love, kindness and attention, toward his wife? When the novelty of marriage is over, will he love me still? Will he be patient with my mistakes, or will he be critical, overbearing, and dictatorial?”—*Messages to Young People*, p. 450.

## **ARE HIS/HER PARENTS SUPPORTIVE?**

Ideally, both sets of parents should be involved. Others you trust in your family and church can help give you good advice and guide you.

## **ARE YOU RESPECTING EACH OTHER AND SETTING APPROPRIATE BOUNDARIES?**

My wife and I chose to have certain boundaries with each other during courtship and engagement. We waited until our wedding day for our first kiss. Having a commitment to boundaries makes you able to think clearly at each step of the way, and tests the strength and unselfishness of your love for each other.





## QUESTIONS ABOUT HIM

For a young woman, thinking about marriage is very exciting. Early in life girls start dreaming of their beautiful wedding day. It's true that all weddings seem to be happy, but it's what happens after that really makes true happiness. Here are some questions a young lady should think about when considering a young man to be her future husband.



### **HAS HE FINISHED COLLEGE OR BEEN TRAINED IN A TRADE?**



### **WHAT KIND OF WORK DOES HE DO? WHAT IS HIS WORK ETHIC? COULD HE BE A LAZY HUSBAND?**

He might be handsome young man and work out at the gym, but does he put his heart into his work?



### **HOW DOES HE TREAT PEOPLE? IS HE PATIENT AND KIND? DOES HE LOSE HIS TEMPER?**



### **DOES HE TREAT YOU AS AN EQUAL AND RESPECT YOUR JUDGMENT?**

Men who want to control and think for you will not make you happy during your marriage.



### **DOES HE VIEW PORNOGRAPHY?**

Young men who have this problem need help, as it can create serious difficulties in marriage. Please do not even think of marrying if he practices such devastating, soul-destroying habits.




## QUESTIONS ABOUT HER

We notice young men get all excited about a girl who has a pretty face and a fun personality. But there are some other important things to think about. Often a young man will go for what is easy to get—a girl that is hanging around to get his attention and flirting with him. Dear young man, think carefully about what kind of girl you wish to be your wife.



### **WILL THE GIRL I MARRY BRING HAPPINESS OR UNHAPPINESS TO MY HOME? IN WHICH WAYS?**



### **HOW DOES SHE TREAT HER PARENTS? HOW DOES SHE INTERACT WITH CHILDREN AND THE ELDERLY? HOW DOES SHE TREAT THOSE WITH DISABILITIES? IS SHE KIND? DOES SHE NOTICE THE NEEDS OF OTHERS?**

**WILL SHE LOVE MY PARENTS?** [*The Adventist Home*, p. 46.]

**IS SHE HARDWORKING AND INDUSTRIOUS? DOES SHE KNOW HOW TO PREPARE TASTY, NUTRITIOUS MEALS AND TO KEEP A TIDY HOUSE? DOES SHE HAVE THE SKILLS TO MEET THE DIFFICULT SITUATIONS THAT MAY ARISE?**

These skills will have a huge effect on the happiness of the home.

**IS SHE PATIENT AND METICULOUS?**

**DOES SHE MANAGE MONEY WISELY OR IS SHE EXTRAVAGANT? DOES SHE USE ALL HER EARNINGS TO BEAUTIFY HER APPEARANCE AND GRATIFY HER VANITY?**

When we got engaged, one brother said to us, “It is not how much money you make, but how much she saves.”

## LOVE THAT LASTS

Recently, we heard the story of a couple who were seen at a nursing home. Approaching the sunset of life, the wife was slowly fading into the fog of dementia. He was spending his days visiting her and attending to her needs.

This day he came in cheerfully, sat beside her and whispered sweet endearments while gently stroking her hand. Leading her to the window, he showed her the beautiful view and reminded her of how much he loved her. You could see that these two shared a very special relationship, and a love that could not be dimmed by age or disease. This is the kind of love that God creates.

Above anything else, you can trust God to guide you in such an important decision as marriage, if you will give Him all your heart and be willing to follow His plan for you.

“Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass” (Psalm 37:3-5). 🙏



# Your Courtship Questions ANSWERED

BY PAUL CHAPMAN



## HOW DO I KNOW IF SOMEONE IS THE RIGHT PERSON FOR ME?

You can begin to find out who is the right person for you by first making a commitment to yourself not to lower your Christian values to please anyone, no matter who they are. If a person respects you for who you are as a person, including your values, then you are on the right track. Next, ask yourself the following questions regarding the person whom you are considering as a future spouse:

**Does this person have similar values to mine? Decide on those values that are important to you both. Discuss them openly. Don't think you need to compromise principle for love. If this person is making you feel like that would be necessary, then that is not the right one for you.**

**Will this person increase my love for God? Are you both spiritually minded? Do you both have a consistent devotional life? Do you both put God first in everything? If the answer is yes, then you are on the right track.**

**Can we be more useful serving God together than alone? This is about glorifying God in our life, developing a character after the likeness of Christ, and being a blessing to those around you. This person must be a help to you in this regard and not a hindrance.**

**Are our goals in life compatible?**

**Do your personalities match or do they clash? It is normal to have disagreements, but if you are always in conflict, that could be an indicator that this relationship is not going to work out.**

**Do you feel comfortable being who you really are around him/her? This is important. In a marriage relationship, each of you needs to be able to be yourself. This means accepting each other for who you are, faults and all. Sure, you may not like what you see in each other, and if you want to change yourself by the grace of God for the better, that's great. But if you feel like you must be someone who you are not when you are with that person, then he/she is not the right one for you.**

**Will the other person love and respect you? Do they respect their parents? If they have difficulty respecting their parents, particularly if their parents are Christians, then it is questionable whether they will end up loving and respecting you.**

Along with these questions, ask advice of those who know you well and who are godly people. "In the multitude of counsellors there is safety" (Proverbs 11:14).

Above all else, go to God until you know for yourself that He is leading in the matter. Ask counsel of the Source of wisdom. He has promised: "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not" (Jeremiah 33:3). How will God answer? Through His Word, through His providence, and through the promptings of His Spirit.

I remember in my early twenties I was struggling with finding a life partner. I had just ended a friendship with someone whom I thought was "the one." So, I prayed to the Lord a simple prayer: "Dear Father, please find me someone who loves You, who will love me, and whom I can love." After praying that prayer, I just left it all with Him, trusting that He heard me. And He did. About 18 months later, my future wife and I crossed paths in a way that was quite unexpected, but which was an answer to my prayer. Knowing that I could answer yes to all the important questions gave me confidence that God was indeed leading us together. By making spiritual considerations the priority, our relationship was built on a solid foundation that has carried us through all the trials of life. Remember, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mark 10:9). Let God join you, and nothing can separate you.

## WHAT ARE THE THINGS I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT SOMEONE BEFORE I COMMIT TO THEM?

**SPIRITUAL LIFE:** Do they love Jesus? Do they have a personal relationship with Him? What are their most important Christian values? Do they have morning and evening worship? Do they have an active devotional life? Do they love Bible study? Do they share their Christian experience with others?

**FAMILY ASPIRATIONS:** What are their thoughts in regard to children—do they want to have a family or not? If so, how many children? Would adoption be an option? Things like this are important for you to know about someone before you get married.

**FINANCES:** What is their attitude toward money? Are they able to save money? Can they manage their money well? Do they want a joint bank account, or do they want to keep their own finances separate from yours?

**HOUSEHOLD MANAGEMENT:** What is their attitude towards running a household? Do they see their role as complementary to yours? How will the household duties be divided? Who will take care of maintenance and repairs? Who will take out the trash or do the dishes? There is no right or wrong answer here, but you both need to be clear about your expectations.

**HOME LOCATION:** Where do they want to live? City or country? Near to their family and relatives or far away?

**HEALTH CHECK:** Do they have any health problems or a family history of them? This is especially important in consideration of congenital diseases and their possible bearing on any children you might decide to have.

**ANGER MANAGEMENT:** How do they deal with stress? If they do get angry, how do they express anger? Do they have self-control or are they easily agitated or impatient? Is their manner of expressing their anger appropriate for a Christian?

**CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS:** Does their cultural background blend with yours, or would it create a lot of tension in the home?

**VOCATIONAL LIFE:** Do they have any career plans or aspirations that might interfere with your goals as a family? Are they prepared to give them up for the sake of the marriage or what things would they still want to accomplish even if married?

**FAMILY RELATIONS:** What is their relationship with their parents like? Did they have a stable upbringing or was it a dysfunctional family life? How do they think this will impact their own relationship with you if you end up marrying them?

**SEXUAL PURITY:** What is their attitude towards sexual relations in marriage? Have they had a sexual relationship with anyone else? Are there any children from a prior relationship?



## IS FLIRTING OK?

Flirting is not acceptable. A person who flirts “plays” with the other person’s feelings. By definition of the word, he or she has no intentions of a serious relationship with the other person. Ellen White calls this type of conduct “stealing the affections” (*The Adventist Home*, p. 58). Flirting is actually breaking the eighth commandment. And how hurtful it is to the person who is the victim? Usually the person who is the flirt has no idea how badly the other party feels; otherwise he/she might have been more careful of their actions. Too often the flirt only thinks of himself/herself. Be careful to treat everyone the same, and don’t spend an excessive amount of time with one person in whom you have no special interest. 🚫



# The Perfect MATCHMAKER

BY DANICA TYLER

It almost feels like yesterday that I was a teenager, but the calendar assures me that it was much longer. Those confused thoughts and mixed feelings are still vivid in my memory. Part of the time, I was determined I would not get married, then at other times handsome guys caught my eye and I would wonder if that was really the right choice. Yet, one miserable fear troubled me. If or when I got married, I felt God would provide a husband that was “good” for me, just like an unpleasant medicine is. I felt destined to marry someone old, bad-looking and boring. Perhaps he would be like one of the men who were interested in me. I struggled to trust God with these doubts hanging over me.

The struggle worsened. Something had to give, and subconsciously, I knew what it was. I had to give all my fearful thoughts and feelings to God. Sinking to my knees, I whispered a painfully honest prayer. I relinquished my will to God. I gave Him permission to change my heart. Ever so slowly, I began to perceive God’s genuine love for me; I realized He wanted me to be happy also. Passages from Psalms 34, 37 and Proverbs 3 lifted my doubting spirits. My mental energy was now channelled into reading and seeking to understand more of my heavenly Father.

Growing out of your teens is such a challenging time. It’s the time when you are trying to figure out who you are and what life

is about. It's also the time when you have to make the biggest decisions—gaining independence behind the wheel, choosing a career, and thinking about a life partner are just a few of the challenges.

Then also there's the new-found sense of freedom which made "living it up and enjoying myself" more tempting. I felt that pull. But one thought, like a magnet, would always refocus my wandering wishes: Today's wild oats will grow a wild harvest. (Galatians 6:7.)

A smile involuntarily crept across my face as I glanced back in my mind's eye, upon the positive harvest. I have gone through my share of difficulties, but my anchor has been my commitment to God, allowing Him to guide me to the right young man!

In the last few days before the turn of the century into the new millennium, we had just arrived at the week-long youth convention in Sydney. Anticipation and excitement ran high among the young people. The campground was buzzing with activity and enthusiasm. During the convention, we were going to collectively portray our impressions of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

During the youth convention I noticed Nathan. He was a handsome, fun, energetic young man who was on fire for God. I noticed he sat near the front and took notes in the meetings. Yet,

in a moment of honest reflection, I realized that although he had stood out to me, he likely wouldn't even notice me, so I determined not to think of him anymore. After all, I had consciously decided not to be a flirty "in-your-face" kind of a girl.

After the youth convention, my sisters and I attended a two-week summer school program. I enjoyed the lectures and appreciated the skills I learned there. During this time, I was able to see more of Nathan's character, and I was smitten. Failing to put him out of my mind, I redirected my thoughts into prayers, not once a day, but three or more times a day. "If it is your will Lord, please would you make it happen? If not, take him from my mind."

The summer program was over, and we parted ways. I continued to pray. Prior to meeting Nathan, I had planned to go to the United States to complete a component of my Health Science degree there. Three months passed between that momentous youth convention and my first overseas flight. I was scheduled to start an Internship at a Lifestyle Center. Providentially, and unknown to me, I would be seeing Nathan every Sabbath. Although we had not communicated for three months, we became casual friends. We began writing weekly emails. Once, I checked daily for his email, but for a few weeks no reply came. "Did he like me or not, I wondered." I shared this pain and



uncertainty with God and again surrendered my hopes to Him. I let go of my hopes and surrendered my dreams to Him several times.

Nine months passed. They were filled with prayer for each other as our casual friendship continued to grow. One day, I was visiting the home where Nathan

lived with the local minister. I was finishing cleaning the kitchen, when Nathan walked in and asked if we could talk. My heart skipped a beat. Duty bound and nervous, I first finished what I was doing, then sat down with him at the kitchen table. The son of the family came by and, when he saw us sitting across the table from each other, he suddenly decided he must iron his school clothes right there in the same room. Nathan offered to do his ironing for him if he would give us some private space. In shock, the young man raced out and told his dad he had figured out in whom Nathan was interested!

Nathan asked me if I was interested in him. In a state of shock and shyness, I admitted he had been in my prayers for nine months. This was the first time we talked about our interest in each



other. The next morning, I had to catch another flight to the other side of the country where I would work in a clinic. I treasured those weekly emails more than ever before.

After a few months, I returned back to the east coast. Nathan's parents invited me to their home where I stayed for a few weeks. While I was there, I began observing everything in earnest. No rose-coloured glasses for me! How did the family members treat each another? Especially, how did Nathan treat his mother? He wasn't present the whole time I was there. But on one of his visits home, he told me he loved me. Thrilled and startled, I instantly knew I loved him too. A few weeks later, he assured me, "It's not if we'll get engaged, but when we'll get engaged." He asked me to pray about that "when" part. We

consulted trusted mentors for counsel and guidance.

Some time passed and the next thing I knew, my best friend was on bended knee. My shock was followed by joy. All my fears were gone. We had approached our relationship cautiously and had been seeking God at every step. As a result of getting to know each other thoroughly, we knew we were compatible and on the same page regarding the important questions. We had common views on spiritual things, finances, health, where we would live, and how we viewed true education. Both of us had a love for people and an interest in their salvation. These mutual views solidified our relationship. Our separate dreams harmonized perfectly.

In the short time before my return to Australia, we made another decision regarding our relationship. We would save all physical aspects in our relationship for marriage. The following year was filled with reading *Adventist Home* together and with wedding preparations. I often felt like pinching myself in wonder at the way God had brought us together. Such a perfect Matchmaker was our God!!! He gave us the most delightful, pure romance, next to which, the world's version pales in comparison.

During the two years of our relationship we saw a beautiful pattern emerge. We were seeking God first, enjoying a time of

friendship and also sharing our spiritual journey together.

Once we were engaged, we then opened our hearts and emotions to each other more freely. At the culmination of our journey, we made our marriage solemn vows, at the altar, in front of God and our family and friends. It was there that we had our first kiss.

The calendar tells me, it has actually been 18 years now since that day. The principles we came to appreciate in our youth still guide us. Throughout these years, we have attended and been involved in many weddings. It's those couples that had built their marriage on a sure foundation that we feel the most hopeful about. For, although all weddings are happy, not all marriages are. Although it is rarely too late to choose the right foundation, it is much easier to begin with it. We can testify that God's principles truly work. We look forward to growing old together, following God's plan for our life, as long as time lasts.

This is our story. It is a unique story of how God had led us. It is not a formula or a pattern to follow. Your story will be different, but just as special. As you follow God's leading and His principles, I believe, you will also discover that He is the perfect Matchmaker! 🍷





# Your Courtship Questions **ANSWERED**

BY RADU IONITA

## **1 DOES COURTSHIP (DATING) ALWAYS HAVE TO BE SERIOUS WITH THE THOUGHT OF MARRIAGE IN MIND OR CAN YOU HAVE FUN WITH THE PERSON YOU WANT TO SPEND TIME WITH?**

Yes, courtship is a very serious matter, and we need to regard it as such! To have fun with a person, to play with his/her sentiments means to trifle (flirt). Inspiration says, “To trifle with hearts is a **crime** of no small magnitude in the sight of a holy God. And yet some will show preference for young ladies and call out their affections, and then go their way and forget all about the words they have spoken and their effect. A new face attracts them, and they repeat the same words.”—*The Adventist Home*, p. 57.

Imagine that after some fun of this type, the person finds one whom he/she would really like to marry. Will that new person trust him/her? Will not the previous flirting undermine the trust and the formation of a new relationship? This is the price one has to pay for playing around.

It would be far better, before you show any intention to the person you are interested in, to pray! Ask the Lord to clarify the matter to you! Pray for His guidance. Observe the person you’re interested in. Study his/her character. If the Lord encourages you on that path, then prudently take the next steps. Respect, and expect to be respected! It will be easier for both to understand the will of God with such an approach.

“Let every step toward a marriage alliance be characterized by modesty, simplicity, sincerity, and an earnest purpose to please and honor God.”—*Ibid.*, p. 49. If everything runs smooth and you get your confirmations from the Lord, you are in line for a happy courtship! Even in case you later find out that you are not fit for each other, you would have a good memory of your relationship, and be friendly as members of the church.

## 2 WHAT TYPE OF PHYSICAL CONTACT IS ACCEPTABLE BEFORE MARRIAGE?

It depends whom you ask! If you ask your college buddies, everything is acceptable. If you ask your dear Saviour, His answer may surprise you. Before we discuss what is acceptable contact, we have to understand the reasons. Physical contact with a beloved person is a means of communication which is higher than verbal communication. That means that you are communicating more deeply by that contact than by talking. This is unproductive! Courtship and engagement are times for getting to know each other, so that in the married life there are the least unpleasant surprises.

Open up! Speak about your expectations, about your dreams, about your fears, your likes and dislikes! Listen to your beloved telling you about himself/herself. Then, prayerfully evaluate your compatibility for each other. This is not the time to “feel” good in a physical kind of way. If you do, then you are just wasting your time. You start an emotional storm which rises higher and higher, and you almost stop the getting-to-know-each-other process. Then from touching you will pass to holding hands, and then holding shoulders, and then hugging, and then kissing, and then . . .! Such a course is an offense to your Lord, and “would make angels blush.” (See *Testimonies on Sexual Behavior, Adultery, and Divorce*, pp. 117–119 for context.) All these blessings of physical contact have been created as a wonderful gift for marriage. They are part of the process, of the act of becoming “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24)! Wait then for this type of intimacy after the wedding! You will have an entire life to enjoy it!

“They [women] should be more reserved, manifest less boldness, and encourage in themselves ‘shamefacedness and sobriety.’”—*The Adventist Home*, p. 332. The Greek word *aidos* used by Paul as shamefacedness means a *sense of shame or honor, modesty, bashfulness, reverence, respect*. Christian men will treat such a girl with an attitude of respect. True love includes high respect. Young men, a girl is not a toy, she is a daughter of the infinite God, a temple of His Spirit! Please respect her accordingly! If you cannot, don’t pretend you love her! Sisters, “shun those who are irreverent”—*Ibid.*, p. 47.

So, in summary, what is “acceptable” physical contact? Everything you would do in the presence of your/his/her parents! You are in the presence of the eternal Father, every moment (Psalm 139:1–12)! He delights to see true love growing among you! Make sure that you respect Him, His presence, and His child—your beloved! Then, you will be perfectly safe!



### **3 HOW DO I KNOW IF A GUY/GIRL IS COMING TO CHURCH FOR A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, OR JUST BECAUSE HE/SHE IS INTERESTED IN ME? COULD THIS BE A PROBLEM?**

For sure this is a problem, and not a small one! I remember the story of a young sister from our church who started a relationship with a very nice, well educated, unbelieving colleague. He liked her and became interested in our church. He started to attend our meetings, made friends with our youth and became active in our church. After he was baptized, the two of them were planning their marriage. Everyone believed his conversion was genuine.

On the wedding day, the bride's father entrusted his daughter into the young man's hand, and as the couple was turning toward the altar, the groom smiled and whispered into her ear, "Darling, enjoy today, because this will be the last day you'll step into this church!" The young lady was confused, terrified and started crying. When the pastor finished the sermon, he asked her, "Will you take this man to be your wedded husband?" she said, "I'm sorry, but I cannot marry this man." The bride then turned to her guests and explained what the groom had whispered to her. She concluded by saying, "Thank you for your love and support . . . but the wedding is cancelled!" The groom ran out of the church and never came back!

That day, the young man revealed that all his good works—his church attendance, his baptism, his professed love for God—were all pretense. Everything he did was only a sophisticated strategy to get a good Christian girl to become his wife! The young woman stood bravely for her Lord and dismissed this wretched young man.

Praise God for giving this young lady the wisdom and courage to choose God above the groom. Because her love for God was supreme, she was saved from a miserable marriage and a wretched husband-to-be!

If you see a young person, not of our faith, attending church, you assume that he/she is seeking God and the truth! Therefore, you think that he/she could be a potential companion for you. But if that guy/girl only likes you, and has no keen interest to know God first, this very fact makes him/her incompatible for you as a true Christian. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" (2 Corinthians 6:14, 15).

How can you know the true motive of a person who visits your church? Examine his/her "fruits." (See Matthew 7:16-20.) Does he/she seek a knowledge of God and His will? Is he/she willing to comply with it? Is he/she happy to make changes in their habits and lifestyle? What is the prayer-life of this person like? Does he/she regard the requirements of God as a privilege or burden?

But even after making the above examination, as we read in the incident above, you may not know for sure his/her sincerity! Then, the real key is prayer! God knows beyond all appearances. He knows the heart of that person. He knows the future! Pray! Ask Him! And He will reveal to you the reality. 🚫





# Ask Your Counseling TEAM

**S**he is the ONE! Every fiber of my being confirmed it! I wanted to scream it from the rooftops! Well, at least from the balcony of the church in Mogyorod, Hungary. I was there attending the 1999 World Youth Convention, and while I had not gone with the intention of finding a wife, I met a young lady I was sure would be the one for me. Anita had come to the convention with her brother, and her parents were also attending the weekend conference. I was the choir director for the international youth choir being assembled at the conference, and I found myself being distracted. I had to find out who she was. I wanted to speak with her, but there was so much going on. There were a few moments here and there, but not

enough. At the end of the youth convention, we had an outing along the Danube River and that was our first chance to really spend some time together. For me those moments, brief as they were, confirmed that this was a very special girl.

At a first meeting, you may be sure. At a first meeting, you may feel that everything had led you to this very moment, to this very spot, to find this very special person. And all of this may be later confirmed to be true, and yet wisdom tells you that you should not rush along without thought.

In matters of the heart, our mind seems to disconnect from reality, usually at the very moment when we need to think the clearest. We are making choices that will commit us for a lifetime,

to connect our happiness, our deepest desires, our aspirations, and our whole being with that other person. And while at that very moment we may be sure that everything will be amazing, the experience of many around us shows that we should think before jumping into a relationship commitment. It may seem right to me, but am I thinking clearly? “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise” (Proverbs 12:15).

Flying back to the United States I kept thinking about what to do next. Was this something I should seriously pursue? When you are single and you come back from a long trip, you call your mom. So, there I was talking with my mom on the phone, just wanting to tell her I arrived safely, but she wanted to know more. The conversation went something like this:

Mom asked, “Did you find someone nice?”

I replied, “I just wanted to say I got home safely.”

She asked, “Answer my question. Who is it?”

“I didn’t say I actually had found someone,” I responded.

“Tell me who,” Mom asked.

“Well I’m not sure, but you wouldn’t know her anyway,” was my response.

Mom said, “I know everyone. Who is it?”

Finally, I replied, “Well her name is Anita Filipovic . . .”

Before I could finish the sentence, Mom said, “I know who she is. I know her family. I approve.”

...

**I was silent! What are you supposed to say after your mom says that???**

Turns out that I had met Anita before—back when I was 3 years old. My family was traveling in Europe and my parents, who had known her parents from the “old country,” stopped to visit them in Munich. Twenty years later, we met once more.



## THE FIRST COUNSELOR

At that moment it seemed that everything was right. You get caught up in things of romance, but there is a difference between blind romance and true romance. You need to remember that every experience is unique. Your own experience will not be like mine or anyone else's. In these articles, you are reading experiences of others, and they can be an encouragement for you, but ultimately your experience will be your own. The relationship you will form will be special, and God intends it to be unique, and your own. At the same time, there are principles that are true for all relationships that have the blessing of the Lord. While it doesn't sound very romantic, the moment after that conversation with my mom, and a confirmation that I should go ahead, was not the moment to rush ahead. It was the moment to put myself on hold.

“Seek counsel of God in all these things, be so calm, so submissive to the will of God that you will not be in a fever of excitement and unqualified for His service by your attachments.”—*Letters to Young Lovers*, p. 37.

“Many who profess to love and fear God choose to follow the bent of their own minds rather than take counsel of Infinite Wisdom. In a matter which vitally concerns the happiness and well-being of both parties for this world and the next, reason, judgment, and the fear of God are set aside, and blind impulse, stubborn determination, is allowed to control.”—*The Adventist Home*, p. 61.

I started to pray more than usual. I sought Divine counsel by reading Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy more than before. My first and greatest counselor became the word of God, connected with the words of inspiration.

## YOUR SECOND COUNSELING TEAM

### YOUR PARENTS

The more I read, the more I realized that Scripture tells us to seek God-fearing guidance from those in our orbit of influence. When the principles found in the Word are in harmony with the experience you are having, then the next counselor given to us are our parents. I was blessed to be



born in the message of Present Truth, and my parents raised my brother and me to turn to God's Word for instruction. Now that Word was telling me to turn to them for instruction at this pivotal point in my life.

"If children would be more familiar with their parents, if they would confide in them, and unburden to them their joys and sorrows, they would save themselves many a future heartache. When perplexed to know what course is right, let them lay the matter just as they view it before their parents, and ask advice of them. Who are so well calculated to point out their dangers as godly parents? Who can understand their peculiar temperaments so well as they?"—*Ibid.*, p. 73.

While inspiration tells everyone to get counsel from their parents when considering marriage, I had the added privilege of faithful parents. "If you are blessed with God-fearing parents, seek counsel of them. . . . Children who are Christians will esteem above every earthly blessing the love and approbation of their God-fearing parents."—*Ibid.*

When I spoke with my parents, their counsel was not a critique of the young lady I was interested in, but rather of me. They spoke to me about my own preparation. This was a bit of a surprise to me, as I thought they would tell me if she was suited for me or not. Instead, they started by asking if

I was good enough for her. We spoke much about what it would mean to be a husband, and only when they were satisfied that I understood what this truly meant, did they counsel me about her.

### HIS/HER PARENTS

If I would proceed with this relationship, it was important for me to get counsel not only from my parents but also from hers. The instruction of inspiration for her was clear: "You have no right to place your affections on any young man without your father's and your mother's full sanction."—*Mind, Character, and Personality*, p. 302. Asking for their counsel was important. "A young man who enjoys the society and wins the friendship of a young lady unbeknown to her parents does not act a noble Christian part toward her or toward her parents."—*The Adventist Home*, p. 57.

I needed to get her father's permission if I would actually seek a relationship with Anita. That is not something people do very often in our time. They usually develop a relationship and only ask permission when they are going to get married. But I kept remembering all those youth conventions and hearing brother Peter Lausevic say, "You have to get her parent's permission for courtship." I had never taken that seriously until now.

It had been a little over a month since the youth convention and, by circumstance, we were

both going to attend the same wedding. This was a perfect opportunity for me to speak to Anita's father and ask his permission to begin a courtship. Her father, Milorad, is actually a very loving and caring man, but at that moment he just seemed like a giant in my mind. I kept having this vision of me asking him for permission to court his daughter and him not saying anything, just crushing me under his foot. Every time I thought about it, he grew another meter taller. "Maybe I shouldn't do it," I thought. "No one asks at this point in their relationship. Can't I just skip this?"

I felt that the Lord was giving me a chance to follow His instructions and I would not miss the opportunity. It was not a coincidence that we were meeting again in person. I swallowed my fear and went to speak with Anita's father. It all seemed a blur to me now. I know I probably

blabbered too much and made a fool of myself, but I am so glad that I did. His blessing at that moment was something that I will treasure forever.

Never neglect to get counsel from the parents of the person with whom you are entering into a relationship. They want the best for their child and can be wise counselors not only at this stage in your relationship but throughout your life.

If the person you are with does not want you to get counsel from their parents, you should seriously consider that they are not ready for a serious relationship. "Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise)" (Ephesians 6:2). If they are willing to enter into such a serious relationship without the counsel of their parents, then they will carry such a character into the marriage, and it will certainly end in heartache.



It is a complicated world, it may be that you do not have God-fearing parents to counsel with, or they live a great distance from you. Technology solves part of this problem. If you moved away from home for school or work, keep in touch with your parents and make sure that you are seeking their advice on the development of your new relationship.

### PERSONS OF EXPERIENCE

If your parents, or those of the person you are courting, are not God-fearing, you are still under obligation to go to them. But as they may not be able to give you full counsel based on God's word, the Lord will provide for you older persons of experience that you may consult with. Our God is a "father of the fatherless" (Psalm 68:5) and He will provide for you older, godly, experienced persons who know you and the person you think maybe your future marriage partner.

### THE THIRD COUNSELOR

When the principles of God and the counsel of parents has been received, there is still one more place to receive counsel, and that is from your pastor and his or her pastor. Your walk with God will be a reflection of your ability to establish a full relationship with your future spouse. A person who has not yet made a personal commitment with the Lord will make a poor choice for someone you wish to be committed to you and you only. (Matthew 19:6).

You should speak openly with your pastor about your spiritual fitness for marriage. "The majority of the marriages of our time and the way in which they are conducted make them one of the signs of the last days. Men and women are so persistent, so headstrong, that God is left out of the question. Religion is laid aside, as if it had no part to act in this solemn and important matter."—*Ibid.*, p. 71.

When you have spoken with your pastor and had an opportunity to assess your own spiritual condition and fitness for marriage, then speak with the pastor of the other person. This is not to receive a spiritual report card of the person. No man can judge the character of another. Only God can read the heart and know the true motives of a person. But their pastor can tell you of their spiritual involvement in the church and their interaction with other members of the congregation. This will give you an idea of how your beloved treats others, and thus how he/she will treat you once the initial courtship period has concluded.

While living in Virginia at the time, I was privileged to have good Christian pastors near me who gave me counsel. I thank them for their counsel, and that they helped me to see more clearly that I would soon be asking Anita the "question."

As the relationship progresses and becomes more serious, it

is time to ask for formal premarital counseling, usually with the pastor who will perform your marriage. Now it is my privilege as a pastor, to give these studies and help young couples prepare for marriage.



### **NEVER ASK THESE COUNSELORS**

There are two counselors we turn to which are not reliable in matters of the heart. The first is yourself, or more directly your own emotions. “The youth trust altogether too much to impulse. They should not give themselves away too easily, nor be captivated too readily by the winning exterior of the lover. Courtship, as carried on in this age, is a scheme of deception and hypocrisy, with which the enemy of souls has far more to do than the Lord. Good common sense is needed here if anywhere; but the fact is, it has little to do in the matter.”—*Ibid.*, p. 55.

The second counselor who should not be your counselor are friends of your own age. With little or no experience in the matter of courtship and marriage, even your best friends do not make good counselors. They can be your best

friends, but in this matter real-world experience, combined with a spiritual example, is key. Young people counseling young people on issues of marriage is truly the blind leading the blind.

### **HAPPINESS WITH A FOUNDATION**

With a knowledge of the word of God as my foundation, the counsel of my parents, and the advice of ministers, I knew that the blessing of the Lord was with me. In December of that year, I asked Anita to marry me. In just a few years I will have more years of life with her than without her. I thank the Lord with all my being for bringing her into my life! 🙏



## Your Courtship Questions **ANSWERED**

BY JOHN BAER


### WHAT ARE SOME ACCEPTABLE DATING ACTIVITIES?

The best dating or courting activities are those that are multi-dimensional in what they accomplish for the couple. These activities are not only enjoyable but also serve a higher good. Nothing brings more joy than service to others. Participating in a church or family work project or outreach is beneficial in two ways. It's a blessing to those they serve while allowing the couple to work together, problem-solve, and bask in the joy of mission accomplished. A lot can be learned about someone by working together with them.

Activities that relate to God's creation are also very satisfying. Doing activities in nature points to the Creator. Hiking a beautiful forest trail, visiting a botanic flower garden, viewing waterfalls, a sunset, the expanse of the heavens from a mountaintop, visiting a national park, exploring a wild animal preserve or zoo—all these glorify our Creator while allowing physical activity and a wonderful forum for the couple to get to know one another better.

Thirdly, activities that are intellectually or spiritually stimulating will prove challenging and are good communication builders. Mind-stimulating communication is rich and rewarding. Discuss good books that you've read together. Sharing understanding and thoughts about the content will allow each one to understand how the other thinks and perceives things in life. As one can see, dating activities are diverse and numerous.

In all dating activities, the principle to be carefully followed is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:21, 22:

“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil.” 

# My Commitment

- [ ] When choosing a mate, I will seek God's counsel if the person I wish to court is the right one.
- [ ] I will analyze my views of love and marriage to see if they are based on Biblical principles, and not on Hollywood's fictional portrayal of love and marriage.
- [ ] Before beginning courtship, I will ask her father's permission.
- [ ] Before beginning courtship, I will ask and follow the counsel of my parents regarding the person I wish to date and eventually marry.
- [ ] I will carefully observe the character of the one with whom I think to link my destiny.
- [ ] I will ask the counsel of my pastor and his/her pastor if he/she is spiritually ready for marriage.

By the grace of God, I will follow these guidelines, presented in His word, for a successful courtship and preparation for marriage.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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**"Love suffers long and is kind;  
love does not envy;  
love does not parade itself,  
is not puffed up;  
does not behave rudely,  
does not seek its own,  
is not provoked,  
thinks no evil;  
does not rejoice in iniquity,  
but rejoices in the truth;  
bears all things,  
believes all things,  
hopes all things,  
endures all things.  
Love never fails."**

—1 Corinthians 13:4-8, NKJV.

