

Vol. XXXIX, No. 1

Youth messenger



LET GOD *Finish* YOUR LOVE STORY

How to Find True Love

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It was the fall of 1973 and I was attending my first year at Santa Monica City College. Among the classes I took was German IV. The professor liked me because my German was fluent, and she asked me to be a tutor for her students. One of my first students was a young man named Jason. As I tutored him in German each week, he became very friendly and one week he told me that he liked me and wanted me to be his girlfriend. I was shocked! Without a doubt, I knew this was a trap of the enemy.

I asked him, "Why would you want to date a 'plain Jane' girl like me? I wear long skirts. I don't wear mini-skirts and the latest styles, and I don't use jewelry or make-up."

He said to me something I will never forget, "The girls you describe are easy to get. They display their bodies for all to see. I don't want a girl like that. You are modest and mysterious. I want a girl like you."

I told Jason, "I am sorry, but I can't date you. I am a Christian, a Seventh Day Adventist, and I can only date young men who have the same Biblical beliefs as I, and who are members of my church."

"That's great," he said. "It doesn't matter that you're a Christian. I'd like to have a girl just like you."

I learned two things from that experience. The devil is on the tracks of each young person, trying to get them to compromise and make a partnership with an unbeliever. But notice how he also made it sound like Jason wanted a modest Christian girl. I could have thought, "Oh wow! Maybe I could convert him to my church." But thank God, I had no such thoughts. I later learned that my German professor knew he liked me, and she had arranged for me to tutor him. After learning this information, I decided to quit my job. I thank God for the guidelines He has given us in His word whom we should and should not date. (Read 1 Corinthians 6:14.)

Dear youth, it is our wish and prayer that you allow Jesus Christ, the lover of your soul, to be the Captain of your life ship, and you will sail safely through the calm seas and the storms of life!

"Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

—Liliane Balbach

A romantic couple embracing at sunset. The woman is wearing a polka-dot top and the man is wearing a dark sweater. The background is a warm, golden sunset over a landscape.

HOW TO
FIND

TRUE

Love

BY TINA AND CALIN ALEXA

Let's picture ourselves preparing to participate in a nationwide bread-making contest, and we are looking for the best bread-making school. After some research, we find two of the most prominent culinary baking schools owned by the finest artisan bakers in the country.

The first artisan baker is by far the most popular. He insists that his bread-baking method is the most known and says that he has fed thousands of people using his special bread recipe. He is not very strict in measuring his ingredients, stating that he likes to be free when he creates his loaves of bread. He says, "Just follow your heart when you bake bread.

Your bread doesn't have to be perfect; you can improve it as you go as long as you are having fun. There may be times when you'll need to start your bread over until you get it right." I was confused by his method, so I went to observe his students. Their motto was having fun, they had sprinkles of flour, yeast, and salt all over the kitchen, some burned the bread, others baked it only halfway. The bread samples didn't look very appealing, but the master baker replied, "The next batch will turn out better." I could see some of his older students leaving the school disappointed with tears in their eyes, regretting that they took his class.

I also was disappointed, but I still went to meet the second Master Baker. He impressed me from the start because He emphasized the importance of following his recipe precisely. This Baker told his students that if they want to be successful, they must follow the recipe that he created and perfected to the letter. If they did that and also accepted his assistance, success was guaranteed. Each ingredient had to be carefully measured and every student was dressed in a white uniform provided by the Master Baker. The oven had to be at the right temperature. The students worked diligently and followed every step given by the Master Baker. I noticed His smile as each loaf of bread was presented for His final inspection, and the satisfaction and joy experienced by each student. As I observed everything, I was awed by His methods. He looked at me smiling and said, "Life is too short and precious to try your recipe for happiness or to use one without any proven success, and then hope that your life, your relationship, your marriage will turn out well in the end. You can have My recipe; It will

turn good every time. Then He looked straight into my eyes and asked me, "Would you like to be part of My team?"

We are all baking bread in the bakery of life. The question is whose recipe are you following? Your own and that of our friends in the world? Are you doing whatever feels good for the moment? Are you having relationships with one person after another, and then are heartbroken again and again? Or are you following the precise recipe of Jesus Christ, the Master Baker who wants to give you lasting happiness? Jesus says to you, "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). When we come to Jesus and follow His plan for our life and relationships, we will not be hungry but will be full, happy, and satisfied.





From generation to generation both Christians and non-Christians alike have been fascinated by the “pursuit of happiness.” Volumes of songs, poems, and books have been written on the subject, yet young people and older people are perplexed about how to find true happiness. Although we may not like to admit it, each of us is naturally selfish, and almost every time we start a relationship, friendship, or even a business endeavor, we begin with the premise, “What can I get out of this? What’s in it for me?”

Everyone is looking for happiness and true love, and for a good marriage although all around us marriages are falling apart. Hollywood’s love stories promise

much, but they don’t deliver on their promises. While many of us have hundreds of friends on social media, yet we may still be lonely and depressed. One question our young people want answered is, “Will I find true love? Will my marriage last under the pressures of problems, trials, and time?”

HE TOUCHED MY HEART

Tina’s and my story began back in Romania in the summer of 1999 when we met there at a youth conference. Both of us grew up in Christian families that were doing their best but were not perfect. Both of my grandparents were Seventh Day Adventist Reformers and so was Tina’s grandmother.

One day as I was reading the book *Messages to Young People*, the Holy Spirit touched my heart and I surrendered my life to the Lord. Soon after my conversion, I was baptized. Immediately after, I quit my full-time job and joined the church canvassing team as a volunteer. My decision was not understood by my family or friends, but I made my choice based on what I felt the Lord wanted me to do. At that time, I was studying the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy daily; besides that, I was giving Bible studies to others, and that helped me to mature as a Christian young man much faster.

LOOKING FOR THE RIGHT ONE

At the beginning of my Christian experience, the subject of courtship and marriage was not a priority to me since I devoted most of my time to canvassing and giving Bible studies. But the more I read God's word, the more I was impacted by the principles that our Creator set up for our benefit and happiness.

Growing up in Eastern Europe in a small community, I witnessed from an early age how various families treated each other. Regrettably, the majority of them were cold and distant; they lacked love and respect, they had an abrasive vocabulary and were abusive and violent.

Early on, I decided I did not want to establish such a marriage and family. I wished to have a marriage that would be "almost a paradise" on this earth just as I read from this inspired quote:

"Self-control on the part of all the members of the family will make home almost a paradise.

"A house with love in it, where love is expressed in words and looks and deeds, is a place where angels love to manifest their presence and hallow the scene by rays of light from glory. . . . Love should be seen in the looks and manners and heard in the tones of the voice."—*My Life Today*, p. 84.

So, we see that God's recipe for happiness is LOVE. We show our love to family members, friends, and girlfriends/boyfriends

in words, looks, and actions, and even in the tones of our voice. Having this kind of love will take self-control, but Christ promises to help us if we ask Him. To have this genuine love that brings true happiness, we need to follow God's ten principles for success. (See Exodus 20:1-17.)

"The happiness of human beings is in their obedience to the laws of God. In their obedience to God's law they are surrounded as with a hedge and kept from the evil. No one can be happy and depart from God's specified requirements, and set up a standard of their own, which they decide they can safely follow."—*Christ Triumphant*, p. 24. [Emphasis added.]

I decided that before I would show any affection toward a young lady I would have to practice as many of God's principles for a happy relationship in my own life. I will share with you a few principles I found in my study.



When you are in the process of choosing a person to be your girlfriend/boyfriend, asking him/her, “Do you love Jesus?” will not be enough because this question is too general. Instead, you can ask them these questions:

- Is he/she old enough to begin a relationship?
- Is his/her family relationship strong and balanced?
- Is his/her conversion genuine?
- Does she/he have a missionary spirit?
- Does she/he live a healthy lifestyle?
- Is he/she following a plant-based diet part of her/his core belief?
- Is she/he a good provider and a wise steward of his/her money?
- Does she/he have the attitude of a learner?

But before looking for the above qualities in a young lady, I thought, “Why not cultivate these traits in my own life and character? Then once I cultivate and identify them in my life, I will easily see them in others.

The second principle that I learned is that I must get counsel on courtship. According to the latest research, the male’s frontal lobe is not fully developed and does not reach its full potential until around 30 years of age. So young men and young ladies, get as much frontal lobe computing power as you possibly can by asking God for wisdom and guidance as you begin a new relationship. Ask the counsel of your wise parents: “Wise parents will never select companions for their children without respect to their wishes” (*The Adventist Home*, p. 75). Let your God, your godly

parents and your pastor help you. “Be not wise in thine own eyes” (Proverbs 3:7). Remember, “In the multitude of counsellors there is safety” (Proverbs 11:14).

After some time, I started noticing potential young ladies in our church whom I could date. I took this matter seriously and started praying twice as much as before. Since I tried to follow God’s principles of courtship, it was relatively easy for me to see the character of the different girls and not to enter into relationships with those that God would not approve of. I also realized that I couldn’t trust myself once I got emotionally involved with a girl. One of my mother’s best counsels was, “Don’t give any young lady a false hope.” If she’s not someone you’d want to be your wife, don’t spend your time with her; do not play with a girl’s sentiments.

TINA'S STORY

I was born and raised in an Orthodox home in Romania where I lived during my childhood. I loved to go to church every Sunday even if it meant walking to church by myself. My parents were often busy and would let me walk to church every Sunday which was just across the street. When my family and I moved to the United States, we started attending the Seventh Day Adventist Reform church every Sabbath. At the age of 16, I was baptized in that Sabbath-keeping church and that brought joy to my life. After my baptism, I was afraid to fall in love with someone who was not part of our church, especially since I was attending a public school. Each day I dedicated my life to God and prayed, and He helped me overcome that fear.

When I was ready to begin a relationship with a young man, I had certain criteria. First, the young man had to be consecrated to God, and possibly be a missionary or Bible worker. I also wanted to marry someone who would be a loving father and a good role model for my children when that time would come. I did not want to throw myself into a relationship if I was not 100% sure that I was ready to possibly marry that young man. Although I was not raised in the Adventist church, my parents still had high standards for us as children. They would tell me that it is important to find a young man who is loyal, faithful,

and hardworking. In the last issue of the *Youth Messenger*, you can read the questions a young woman should ask about the young man she wishes to marry. (See *The Adventist Home*, p. 47.)

In the summer of 1999, I went to visit Romania with my mom and brother and on that first weekend there was a youth conference that I wanted to attend. At the time, Calin was doing colporteur work with three other people in my hometown. I met him at the conference and was able to see him actively involved in the program, sharing his experiences in the missionary field, and then, I wanted to know him more. Although several other young men were interested in me, I desired to have a relationship with a young man who had a true love for our Savior. Hearing the experiences and sacrifices of Calin and his coworkers touched my heart.

Calin and I went back to my hometown where we could get to know each other better. We were able to find things that we had in common. The two most important points for both of us were to love Jesus and to practice the health reform message. After my visit to Romania, we continued to remain in touch by phone or letters. We started a serious courtship and we prayed two to three times a day and fasted weekly. We both wanted to make sure we were right for each other, especially with a long-distance relationship. Our relationship grew stronger

and I was able to go back to Romania in December. While I was there, we were able to see and feel that we wanted to spend the rest of our lives together. Next year in January we were engaged, and in April we had our wedding.

Now it has been almost 20 years since we were married. We are thankful that the Lord has blessed our lives and given us two beautiful girls. "Marriage, instead of being the end of love, will be only its beginning."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 176.

CALIN'S STORY

Tina was visiting Romania with her mother and brother from the United States. I noticed her and was observing her from a distance. It was not hard for me to see that she was living by the principles I had learned from studying God's word. God helped us by creating circumstances for us to get closer and to learn more about each other during her short summer visit to Romania.

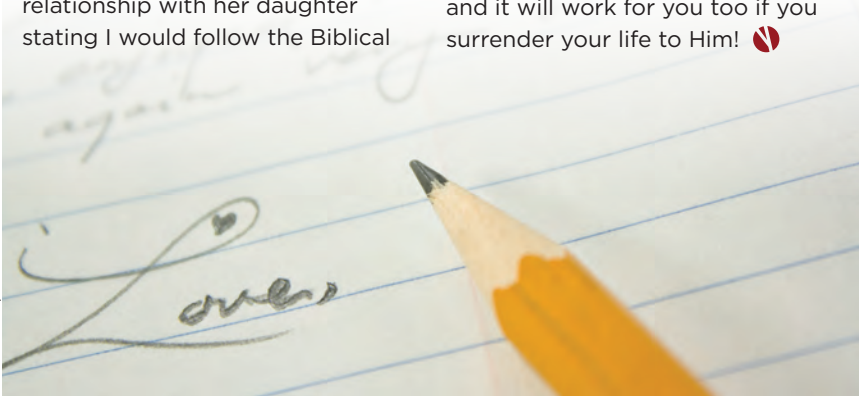
Just before Tina departed to the U.S., I was sure that I would like to know her better so I approached her mother and asked permission to enter into relationship with her daughter stating I would follow the Biblical

guidelines. After receiving her blessing, Tina left back to the U.S., and our relationship developed mostly by phone, with a few letters in between. Since we were not able to be physically close, we learned a lot about each other by talking.

After about 10 months of friendship and courtship, we were married in our church among family and friends. We are so thankful that God and His principles guided us for almost 20 years of marriage.

True love, a fulfilling marriage, and real happiness, is not only possible for you and me, but it is worth striving for. God is more than willing to give you even on this earth your own "piece of paradise" if you will follow His principles and guidance. This question about how to be happy we all must answer, not only by our words but more with our own lives and actions. By the way we live and act we cast a vote if God's recipe for happiness is true or false.

Dear young friend, if you are at the beginning of your journey, I seriously invite you to consider Jesus' recipe for love and happiness. It has worked for us, and it will work for you too if you surrender your life to Him! 🍎



Your Courtship Questions ANSWERED

BY PAUL CHAPMAN



1. WHAT IS AN APPROPRIATE TIME TO START COURTSHIP?

The appropriate time to start courtship is when you have serious intentions of marriage. Courtship is an opportunity to get to know each other better and see whether the person you think may be for you is a good choice of a marriage partner for life. Sometimes after courting it is evident to the two people that they are not suited to each other. This is why you should not feel pressured to marry the person with whom you begin your courtship. It is better to break off the courtship and remain single than to be unhappily married for life.

Not only should you have intentions to marry, you should also be at a point in your life where you are ready mentally, physically, and spiritually to get married. If you or the other person are not in a position to get married within a year or two, then you probably should wait to begin courtship.

2. IS THERE ROOM FOR PERSISTENCE IN COURTSHIP? IS IT APPROPRIATE?

Always remember that “no” means no. If the person you have set your heart on had told you he/she is not interested in pursuing a courtship, it is far better to accept their “no” than to persist in continuing the courtship. This shows them that you respect them as a person. It will also help you to at least be on friendly terms in the future—not that you are to hope that they will change their mind. It will just help you to deal with them as a brother or a sister in the future. It may be in God’s providence for you to be together with the person, but you need to let God sort that out in His time and way. Remember, Abraham suffered greatly for trying, in his own way, to bring about God’s plan for his life. It’s far better to learn the lesson of trust in God than to force a relationship into a place God never intended for you to go.

3. HOW SHOULD A GUY PROPOSE TO A GIRL? SHOULD HE GIVE HER A RING? ISN'T A WATCH THE SAME THING AS A RING?



Before discussing whether or not the young man should give his fiancée a ring, let us look at where the use of an engagement ring came

from. In pagan cultures, the ring was given or accepted as a pledge to marry. The Visigoths codified its use in their marriage laws making the ring a part of their betrothal ceremony—a legally binding contract to marry even though nothing had been put in writing. Once engaged, the promise to marry could not be broken. The ring's use served to show that the woman was committed to the man who gave her the ring and thus was no longer “available” for marriage to another.

Today, wearing a ring serves no legal purpose nor does it necessarily guarantee that the wearer is no longer “available.” Engagements can be broken, and rings removed. As Christians, our commitment to our fiancé or spouse is shown by our conduct. When we are committed, we behave in a way that demonstrates the promise we've made, and which does not encourage advances by the opposite sex. No ring is needed.

Another factor that should discourage the use of a ring is the cost. Typical engagement rings are not cheap. In 2017 the most popular engagement ring from one famous jeweler started at a price of \$13,000 U.S. dollars. In Australia, the average amount of money people spend on an engagement ring is three months of an average salary. Considering that, the Bible exhorts us not to let our adorning be of wearing of “gold, or pearls or costly array” (1 Timothy 2:9; 1 Peter 3:3).

Unlike the ring, however, a watch is a useful gift. If someone wants to give an engagement gift to their fiancée, there is no harm in giving them a watch. But we should not make it the symbol of the commitment, neither assume if someone has a new watch that they are engaged. We need to follow the principles of Christian simplicity in choosing watches as well. Some watches have become more like jewelry than time-keeping devices. Keep in mind, when Jacob and his family renewed their covenant with God at Bethel (Genesis 35:1-4), they got rid of all their jewelry. For this reason, simplicity, practicality, modesty, and economy should be practiced in the purchase of a watch.

WHETHER YOU ARE SINGLE OR MARRIED, GOD HAS A SPECIAL PLACE AND PLAN WHERE YOU CAN WORK FOR HIM.

4. HOW LONG SHOULD YOU COURT BEFORE YOU GET MARRIED?


That can depend on several factors: firstly, the age of each person; secondly, the distance they live from one another; and thirdly, their financial situation. A courtship period of six months to one year would not be uncommon. However, long, extended courtships are not advisable.

5. WHAT HAPPENS IF I DON'T WANT TO GET MARRIED?

When we see the terrible consequences of broken marriages and dysfunctional families, this is not an uncommon desire to have. If you have come to that point, what you should always keep in mind is that it is perfectly okay to live a single life. Not everyone, however, can. The desire for companionship, for wanting a family of their own, gets the better of them. In such cases, "it is better to marry than to burn" (1 Corinthians 7:9), provided you are marrying in the Lord.

Nevertheless, whether you are single or married, God has a special place and plan where you can work for Him. He has a work for single people which those who are married cannot do. He also has a work for the married person which the single person cannot do. In God's plan both are as important as each other. The main thing is to commit your all to God and let Him lead you in whatever work He has for you.

6. WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN HEAVEN TO PEOPLE THAT MARRY TWICE ON EARTH?

Jesus when upon this earth was asked a similar question. In response he said, "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven" (Matthew 22:30). In heaven there will be no marrying or giving in marriage. We will all be as friends. 

WHAT I LEARNED FROM DATING AN UNBELIEVER



Letting Go AND Letting God

BY RENATA CHAPMAN

One of the greatest challenges facing our youth today is the temptation to enter into a relationship with a person who does not share their faith. I know this both from personal experience and from hearing and seeing the experiences of other youth in the church. I would like to share my experience, along with lessons I have learned from dating an unbeliever, and how God blessed me when I surrendered and fully trusted Him to find the right person for me.

When I was beginning my freshman year of high school, I didn't have very many friends and I was determined not to fall into the wrong crowd. Then one day, I met him! He was a very amiable young man, tall and handsome, and he seemed to be genuinely interested in me. He was the first guy that had ever taken a serious

interest in me, which was part of the reason I was so intrigued. Being a very self-conscious person, I was flattered that someone would like me in that way. He asked me if I would go to the school dance with him, and I responded by telling him that I didn't dance. He was surprised and wanted to know why I didn't dance, which allowed me to explain a little about my faith.

Although he was also a Christian, I knew I couldn't be his girlfriend, knowing that he didn't share the same beliefs as me. I was surprised that someone liked me! At church, it felt like nobody thought of me as being relationship material, and it felt good knowing that someone liked me in that way. These feelings eventually led me to start a relationship with him which continued on and off through most of my high school years.

My parents slowly found out about this relationship, and for obvious reasons, they were concerned. I knew that their concerns were valid. Although I felt frustrated with them at the time, I knew the relationship was wrong. But I had trouble letting go of him and ending the relationship. When I graduated from high school and started college, I thought it would be easy to get out of the relationship, but he was very persistent and persuasive, and I was not able to end it. I spent the next three years of my college life with him. It was hard and stressful. At times I felt like I would never be happy again. I wanted him to attend our church and accept my beliefs, but when he would visit, I would feel uncomfortable and wished he had not come.

He promised that he would join my church but he said, "If I compromise and join, you'll have to compromise on your beliefs as well." "Compromise!" I hated that word! To me, it meant that I would have to give up something, but deep down inside I didn't believe my faith could be compromised. I would try to go through our doctrines and discuss the similarities between my beliefs and his beliefs, but we would never come to any agreement. Sometimes we would pray together, but I didn't feel that it made any difference.

I couldn't wait to get out the door every day so I could get

away from my family. Slowly I started to realize that I was losing all my church friends and my relationship with my family became very contentious. I tried to reason with myself, "What's the big deal? Plenty of people get married to unbelievers and their families work out. Maybe I can go to church and he can just stay home, but I would have to make sure our kids come to church!" I struggled! I cried a lot! I was under a lot of pressure. I used to beg him to come to church on Sabbath, to study with my pastor. But he always questioned so much and never wanted to study with my pastor. He only wanted to study with me so he could confuse me and make me compromise.

I finally realized that I needed to end this relationship. It just wasn't going to work, but I didn't have the strength to do it by myself. I had tried so many times before to end it, but I couldn't. Little did I know that a whole army of people was praying for me and pleading with God to make me willing to break up and to give me the strength to do it. Finally, after many prayers and the realization that I didn't need a boyfriend to be happy, I surrendered my will



to God and broke up with my boyfriend. He left and I never saw him again. It was one of the hardest things I have done, but I could never have done it without the prayers and support from my family and friends. God gave me such peace and assurance about my decision and I did not feel alone or unhappy because I was convicted that I made the right decision. I also learned many lessons about why I should never have begun a relationship with an unbeliever and how God always had a special plan for my life if only I let Him be in charge. Let me share with you some of the lessons I learned:

WHY SHOULDN'T WE DATE AN UNBELIEVER?

God does not want His sons and daughters marrying an unconverted or unbelieving person even if they have a pretty face, the sweetest disposition, and the most generous heart. The apostle Paul warns us, "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).

The problem with pursuing a relationship with an unbeliever and eventually marrying them is that you and he/she serve two different masters. You serve the Lord Jesus Christ and he/she serves the world.



You are walking in the path of God's commandments, preparing for heaven; he/she is following the path of pleasure, prosperity, and self-pleasing. These paths are opposite from each other and this is why you'll have conflict. The Bible says, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). This is why many faithful youth give up their principles and compromise their beliefs to avoid conflict with that person.

God's principles of success in a courtship and marriage relationship depend on unity, not compromise. "The happiness and prosperity of the marriage relation depends upon the unity of the parties; but between the believer and the unbeliever there is a *radical difference of tastes, inclinations, and purposes*. . . . However pure and correct one's principles may be, the influence of an unbelieving companion will tend to lead away from God" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 174). [Emphasis added.]

Dating and marrying an unbeliever has eternal consequences! "To connect with an unbeliever is to *place yourself on Satan's ground*. You grieve

the Spirit of God and forfeit His protection. Can you afford to have such terrible odds against you in fighting the battle for everlasting life?" (*Messages to Young People*, p. 441). [Emphasis added.]

ONE DAY MY PARTNER WILL JOIN MY CHURCH

I often hear the argument, "One day my partner will join my church." I also used to tell myself this all the time. Others will say, "He or she is already a Christian. We share many similar beliefs and he/she agrees to come with me to church on Sabbath. How can you classify a person like that as an unbeliever?" The reality is that if "the companion of your choice were in all other respects worthy. . . yet he *has not accepted the truth for this time; he is an unbeliever, and you are forbidden of heaven* to unite yourself with him. You cannot, without peril to your soul, disregard this divine injunction" (*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 364). [Emphasis added.]

As we see from God's word, the person you're dating may be a sincere Christian, yet if he/she does not accept the present truth which you believe, you would be unequally yoked if you were to marry him or her. Heaven forbids you to unite with that person. Those are strong words! Sometimes we can be so infatuated and blinded by love that we cannot see anything wrong with joining ourselves together with an unbeliever, but the Bible says, "Charm [favour] is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman [or man] that feareth the Lord she [or he] shall be praised" (Proverbs 31:30).

GOD HAS A SPECIAL PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE!

While dating an unbeliever, I often felt that there was no young man in the church for me, which was why I clung to my relationship for so long. It was not until I broke up with him that God opened my eyes and made me understand



that I did not need to get married to be happy. What I needed was to get to know Jesus first. He had other plans for my life, “For surely I know the plans I have for you, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope” (Jeremiah 29:11) [NRSV].

After my breakup, I began to immerse myself in reading God’s Word. It was then that my friendship with Christ grew. I finally realized that happiness is only found through a fulfilling relationship with Jesus Christ. As I began to trust God more each day, I committed my daily plans into His hands. If it meant that I would never find a young man in the church to marry, I wasn’t worried because God had big plans for my life.

It was during this time of complete surrender to Christ that I made friends with a young man from our church. We began a beautiful friendship with Christ at the center. After getting to know each other for some time, we realized that God had brought us together for a reason and that by

getting married we could be an even bigger blessing to others. Today, I am blessed to be married with the love of my life, a godly young man, who shares the same beliefs, goals, and love for God as I do. It is truly a beautiful thing when two God-fearing people get married. “Marriage affects the afterlife both in this world and in the world to come. A sincere Christian will make no plans that God cannot approve.”—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 359.

I will be forever grateful that I surrendered my relationship with an unbeliever to God and allowed Him to choose a godly mate for me. If you are currently struggling in a relationship with an unbeliever or contemplating one, make God first, ask Him to be your Counselor, and you will find that this brings true happiness! Even if you think you will never find someone in the church, as I thought, let Christ be the One who brings fulfillment and companionship into your life! “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass” (Psalm 37:5). 🌿



Your Questions **ANSWERED**



BY GHENNADY MELNYCHUK

- 1 Can you hold hands or kiss before marriage? How much touching is too much touching? Given today's times, what are the physical boundaries for courtship?**
- 2 Should the courtship relationship be "no touching" and where do you draw the line? Like holding hands leads to touching a little further on the arms . . . maybe kissing follows soon after . . . and hugging tightly—you can feel everything on the body. . . Isn't that a temptation and an appearance of evil? Like, Jesus clearly says no sex before marriage—does that include kissing, touching, and hugging as well?**

To talk about moral standards and about keeping boundaries of physical contact between a young man and woman sounds old-fashioned in today's sex-saturated society. Although the general principles of moral standards are clearly depicted in the Word of God, the passions of the human heart crave for more intimacy in a relationship with the opposite sex, while begging for a definite answer, "How far can I go, and still be safe?"

Let me ask you, "How fast would you drive your car if there would be no speed limit?" My next question is, "How quickly could you stop a vehicle if you were driving over 100 mph and suddenly you needed to break?" I'm sure most of you haven't had this as the first thought after reading the previous question.

The faster you drive, the longer the distance you need before you can make a complete stop. The very same principle applies to our emotional drive. The more intimate the physical contact between two people of the opposite sex, the harder it becomes to stop before crossing the boundary of what is inappropriate and sinful. "Few temptations are more dangerous or more fatal to young men than the temptation to sensuality, and none if yielded to will prove so decidedly

ruinous to soul and body for time and eternity. The welfare of his entire future is suspended upon the decision of a moment.”—*Letters to Young Lovers*, p. 69.

But what if there are some complications while you’re trying to stop a vehicle, such as a road being wet or icy? Let’s apply that idea to a relationship. What if two young people who are in love are left alone, and it’s evening, and there is some nice, relaxing music in the background . . . ? The slower you drive, the safer you will be; the more restrained you are, the smaller the chance of becoming prey to Satan’s temptations.

Some people are just looking for an exact rule regarding every step of their relationship. Can we hold hands? Yes or no? If yes, for how long, and can it be above the wrist? And so on . . . The Bible does not give us exact instructions in this regard; it also doesn’t tell us not to smoke or go through a red light. This reminds me of a group of people in the time of Jesus, who always wanted more and more rules—the Pharisees. But Jesus left us with only one simple principle about this subject, “But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matthew 5:28). What that means is that young people of the opposite sex may commit adultery (in their thoughts) by not even standing close to each other. Conversely, a couple may remain pure walking hand in hand together.

Now, don’t rush and shout, “Hurray, we can hold hands.”

Young men, imagine you had married an outwardly beautiful girl. Later in life, she has an accident, and she gets a big scar on her face, or she simply becomes very overweight after her pregnancy. Her beauty is gone. What are you left with? Does she have a character that you will enjoy living with? Wouldn’t it be terrible to realize that you married a woman with an ugly character because you were driven by passion and were therefore blinded by her outward beauty?

Courtship is not for intimacy, but it is a time to discover what her/his character is like. When you enter the pre-marital (engagement) stage of your relationship, only then may holding hands be appropriate. But again, remember that physical contact tends to build up quickly, so “drive” carefully.

If marriage is not on your horizon yet, you need to be honest and restrain yourself from any physical contact. Remember that liking a person is not enough to make holding hands appropriate. For example, if a young man likes a girl and she likes him also, it does not mean that they will marry each other. So, in this case, any touching is not appropriate. To help you understand this principle more clearly, imagine your mom holding hands with another man, saying that they’re just friends. What would you think about it? So, unless you are in a relationship with a person (engaged), it is not appropriate to hold hands.




How about hugging and kissing? Are hugs of greeting forbidden? Is it okay to give a "goodbye" kiss on the cheek? The same principle applies here as in holding hands. Remember Christ's words that the sin of adultery begins in the heart. You'll need to be truly honest with yourself about hugging and kissing: When do you give them? How often, and how long they last? What is the difference in the length of a "goodbye" hug and kiss given in the presence of parents or other people, compared to kisses given in privacy? How far is too far? The surprising answer given by inspiration: "Do not see how close you can walk upon the brink of a precipice and be safe. Avoid the first approach to danger. . . . Moral purity, self-respect, a strong power of resistance, must be firmly and constantly cherished. There should not be one departure from reserve. One act of familiarity, one indiscretion, may jeopardize the soul, in opening the door to temptation, and the power of resistance becomes weakened."—*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 18, pp. 297, 298.

The Bible says, "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14). The general principle is that parts of the body that remain covered with clothes when in the presence of others, are not to be touched before marriage at all.

Unfortunately, all the above-written principles will only make sense to a converted person. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

The world laughs at Biblical moral principles, and if you believe we are descendants of monkeys, then definitely there is no sense to restrain yourself—just live as the animals do, driven by two main instincts: survival (food and drink), and reproduction. But if you believe that a loving God created you and redeemed you by His blood, then live and act accordingly.

"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). 

Surviving an LDR

BY LARISSA
GESSNER



When I was 4 years old, my family lived in Itu, Brazil. My father was the Youth Department leader of the South Brazilian Union, and we often spent time with the Gessner family. They had three sons; the eldest one was just a few months older than me. The four of us regularly played together until one day my family moved to the United States.

Ten years later, back when MSN* was a thing, I was online when a new chat window popped up. It was the Gessner's eldest son, Vinícius. He wanted to know about his aunt who had recently moved to a city near us. How was she

doing? I answered his questions, but the conversation lasted for another seven years through emails and social media with him living in Brazil and me in Canada.

In 2016, we got married and brought our LDR (long-distance relationship) to an end for good. Seriously, I think the years of distance traumatized us so that, since then we haven't spent a full 24 hours apart in almost 3 years!

*a social media platform that is now long gone.



The Truth

Long-distance is just terrible but it's also fabulous. There are moments of excruciating heart-torn-out-of-your-chest pain, but these teach you that the level of sadness you feel can be the level of happiness you can experience.

The Cons

MISSING OUT:

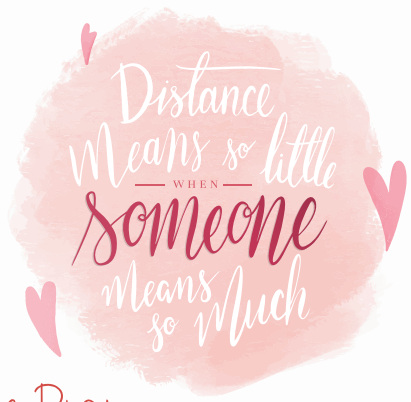
In most cases, the distance will mean that outside factors (ticket prices, work, and school schedules) dictate when you can see each other. This also means not being there for every birthday, graduation, or another milestone.

THE DISTANCE:

Time zones force you to schedule conversations for a time when you're both available and awake. And sometimes the moment when you most need to talk or be reassured by your loved one happens to be when he/she can't be there.

HIDING THE CRAZY:

Social media offers a highlight reel. We can edit photos, angle the camera to show the clean half of the room, polish our texts, consult Google to help us come off smarter. It's also easy to project and interpret a written text to say what we would like it to say and begin forming an ideal person. Then when we finally meet the person, they aren't everything we imagined them to be.



The Pros

ROOM FOR PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Believe it or not, distance can be a healthy and useful tool for a relationship, especially when both parties are young. Vini and I were 18 when we officially started dating. We were both starting university, working at entry-level jobs, and still very much growing up. The distance was hard, but in the seven years we talked, we grew so much as individuals. We made mistakes apart from each other. We took risks and pushed each other from far away to be better versions of ourselves.

The distance allowed us the time and space to blossom into individuals. We have several memories together from those years, but we also have memories of our own, with friends and family. Being yourself is crucial to a long-lasting relationship, and LDRs allow you to explore who you are so you can enter a life of commitment with greater self-reflection. Conventional relationships can and should allow this as well.

BEFORE YOU EVER BEGIN A RELATIONSHIP, PRAY DAILY FOR THAT SPECIAL PERSON GOD HAS FOR YOU.

LEAN ON JESUS:

Before you ever begin a relationship, pray daily for that special person God has for you. Your Creator knows all about your personality, your wants, and your needs. “O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways” (Psalm 139:1-3).

Keep the communication line open between you and Jesus by

continual prayer and study of His Word. At those moments when your loved one cannot be there for you, go to Jesus. Use that time to strengthen your bond with Him. He is the Third Person in your relationship. Pour out to Him your sorrows, fears, and concerns. Tell Him your joys. When you have a bad day, but your beloved is already asleep or at work, tell Jesus about it. When something wonderful happens and you're spilling joy, but your significant other is not there to listen, tell it all to Jesus.

Talking to friends and family is important too, but there's a danger in confiding to someone outside your relationship. In those moments, use discernment. Take it to the best relationship Counselor and no one else. Jesus Christ is our “Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). Make it a habit to always go first to Him and you will lay a strong foundation for your marriage.



More Insights

FIND YOURSELF FIRST:

A relationship should never be about finding yourself in another person. You should be able to be happy on your own before you enter any relationship, but especially a long-distance one.

HAVE A GOAL:

Set short term goals for when you will see each other again. Vini and I knew we'd see each other twice a year and having those days to countdown made all the difference. Save to make those trips possible. Suffering is tolerable if you can keep the end in sight. Also, make long term goals. Will you get married someday? Long-distance works better if a further commitment is the goal. Will one of you move closer? Who and when? Establishing and clarifying these goals early on are fundamental to "making it."

TRUE COMMUNICATION:

Long distance relationships place an enormous value on communication. You will hone your communication skills as well as strengthen and develop them. You might spend plenty of time talking about the mundane, but you will also have deep conversations that build trust and set a foundation for a durable relationship.



OBSERVE AND TALK TO OTHERS:

Most LDR couples, with whom I'm familiar, knew each other before they began their relationship, but that isn't the case for everyone. If you have met each other only a few times in person, let me give you some serious advice:

Talk to that person's pastor.

Don't lend your ear to gossip but do listen to advice. Seek out the people near your boyfriend/girlfriend who can give a truthful report of their character. You are precious. You are loved. You are worthy of the best God has in mind for you. Your time is valuable. LDRs require investment. Make sure you are investing wisely.

When you do see each other, observe how that person treats other people. How does he treat the other women in his life? How does she treat the other men in her life? That's a good indicator of how he/she will treat you.

What do their family relationships look like? That may be a good indicator of what your future family may be like. Are there any familial relationship traumas that you need to be aware of and which may cast a shadow on your relationship?

If you are serious about committing your life to someone, make sure you can do so with wide-open eyes and heart. Actions speak louder than the words they have spoken or written to you. Observe with God-given prudence—not an infatuated gaze.



This is not to say that relationships, where individuals come from completely different cultures or backgrounds, are doomed to failure. Considerable differences can always be overcome by God's grace. The main thing is that both are aware of the differences and have a resolution in mind to which both parties can agree.

PRAY, LISTEN, AND SURRENDER TO GOD:

The more you strengthen your relationship with God, the more understanding you will have about your relationship. Listen to God. Accept His guidance. If this is not the person for you, trust that God has some better plans for you, then let go. If this **is** *the person* for you, deepening your relationship with God will only make your relationship stronger with your significant other.

My husband and I will have been married for three years this summer. I still catch myself looking over at him sometimes and saying in happy disbelief, "Wow, I get to be with you forever now!" Those years apart taught me to not take a single day together for granted. After years of wishing to be near him without a good-bye looming overhead, every hug, face-to-face conversation, milestone, and even every difficulty we face together is that much sweeter. 🍷

One great piece of advice I received concerning dating came from an old book I once borrowed from my piano teacher. It said, "Find someone with a similar background to yours."

We are all unique individuals with peculiar experiences, but a relationship where both individuals have had similar life experiences often has a smoother path. Vini and I are both the oldest sibling in our families. We grew up as "pastor's kids" and moved every few years. Our families had similar financial backgrounds and attitudes towards money, and the Bible principles within our faith. Despite the many differences within that outline, those core similarities helped us avoid obstacles faced by many newlyweds.



Your Courtship Questions ANSWERED

IF I'M IN A RELATIONSHIP BUT NOT ENGAGED, AND I FIND THAT BOYFRIEND/GIRLFRIEND HAS CHARACTER TRAITS THAT CLASH WITH MINE, WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO END THE RELATIONSHIP?

In this case, you are called to treat your loved one according to the golden rule: “As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise” (Luke 6:31). You would not like someone to tell you, “You are a terrible person! How could have I been so deceived to trust a person like you? You are a loser! You’ve wasted so many days of my life!” Don’t ever think like that. Focus on the good aspects of the relationship you are terminating. Be humble and be gentle with the heart of the other person. You may say: “It has been a privilege to know such a special person like you. I respect you for so many reasons! But I understand that I’m not the right person to make you happy. I see that we are not compatible. Thanks for all the beautiful moments with which you’ve gifted me. I wish for you to be happily married one day to a person better than myself. I will remember you as a great friend.” In other words, don’t make the other person feel guilty about the failure of the relationship. Be nice and gentle with his/her heart. Ending a relationship is extremely painful. Why add more to its bitterness? 🍷



Ref Bet

As I told my father of my hopes and plans of meeting a nice Christian lady whom I could court and eventually marry, he suggested that we first visit the island of his birth which was on the Adriatic Sea. On the way there, we stopped to spend the Sabbath in Rijeka which was a city on the shores of the Adriatic. We arrived on Friday and visited a brother's home where a family was vacationing. There I met for the first time Vesna, a young lady who was busy in the kitchen preparing food for the Sabbath. Since it was summertime, there were other visitors from our church vacationing in that city, and they also came to the services on the Sabbath. There were several girls at church that Sabbath, and in the afternoon we all went for a walk and got better acquainted.

After the close of the Sabbath, one brother wanted to go for a ride in the city, and he asked another sister, Vesna, and myself to come along. We accepted the

Some time ago I received a phone call from a friend and during the conversation she asked me to write about my courtship over four decades ago. Accepting the challenge, I reflected down memory lane and remembered it was the year 1973 when I was visiting my homeland in Croatia for the first time after an absence of 6 years. I was 25 years old at the time, and on this trip I was hoping to find a nice young lady with whom I could share the rest of my life. In Christian relationships, we definitely need to pray and ask the Lord to put us together with the right person. However, one cannot just pray, sit down and wait, hoping that the right one will come along. We are told that the good Lord will not do for us that which we can do for ourselves.

BY JOSIP ZIC, SR.

actions...

45 YEARS LATER

invitation and spent a beautiful evening walking along the shore of the Adriatic Sea.

Sunday was a clear but a windy day, and we visited the same brother we met on Friday. I asked Vesna, the girl I met on Friday, if she would like to go for a walk with me around the port of the city. She agreed, and we had a lovely walk around the harbor watching the passengers embarking ships that were sailing to the different islands, while others were disembarking the ships.

There is a hill on the side of that city, on top of which stands an old citadel from Roman times, and we decided to go there. From there we could see the beautiful Adriatic Sea and the scattered islands nearby. In the middle of that view was this beautiful girl by my side and the thought came to me, "It would be great if I could spend the rest of my life with her." So then and there I asked Vesna, "Will you marry me?" It was a few days before her 18th birthday and she replied that she needed to talk

to her father about it. I respected her decision. When she spoke to her father, he replied that it would be good to consult her mother who at the time was back home in the city of Sarajevo.

The dictionary defines courtship as a period of time during which a couple develops a romantic relationship with a view of marriage. My courtship didn't quite fit that definition because it didn't last that long. I did not court my wife for more than 10 days from the time we became acquainted and until we were married. But I can assure you, dear youth, that even today after 45 years I am still courting her. Our courtship has never stopped. Do you know what is our secret for a successful happy marriage? Here's the blueprint:

"Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine



house: thy children like olive
plants round about thy table. Behold,
that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord.

The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion: and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel" (Psalm 128:1-6).

People who hear our story are amazed that we are still happily married 45 years later. But following God's plan in relationships brings success. It's guaranteed! Both Vesna and I love and fear the Lord. We work as a team and are kind and helpful to each other. From the day I met Vesna preparing food on that Friday until today, she has been an excellent cook, a loving wife, mother and grandmother, a diligent worker, and a successful businesswoman. Vesna is my friend. Sure, we've had some challenges, but with God's help, there's nothing that He can't help us fix. The Lord had blessed us with two sons who are walking in the way of the Lord, and they also are happily married. And the frosting on the cake is the three grandchildren God gave us. So, as I read Psalm 128, I can truly say that God has blessed us abundantly, and fulfilled every one of His promises written there, and He WANTS to do that for you also.* 🍀

**I encourage you to follow the courtship guidelines given in these articles and take your time to go through the courtship process. Our short courtship was unusual, but it does show that with God's help, we can make our marriages successful even when they don't follow the guidelines perfectly.*

My Commitment

- [] With God's help I will follow God's recipe for a happy courtship, a successful marriage and a happy life.
- [] With God's help I choose to keep myself pure for the Lord and the man/woman that will be my future husband or wife.
- [] With God's help I chose not to date an unbeliever no matter how handsome, beautiful, sweet, persuasive or enticing that person may be.

Signature _____ Date _____

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“BEING CONFIDENT OF THIS
VERY THING, THAT HE WHICH HATH
BEGUN A GOOD WORK IN YOU
WILL PERFORM IT UNTIL THE
DAY OF JESUS CHRIST”

(PHILIPPIANS 1:6).

