

Dating and Courtship Part 1 of 7

The American Way

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The following sermon was delivered at a dating and courting seminar which was held at the Trinity Baptist Church in Montville, New Jersey in September of 1999. The preacher is Pastor Mitch Lush from the Grace Covenant Baptist Church in West Chester, Pennsylvania. This is the first in a series of sermons and is entitled "What's Wrong with the American Way of Dating?"

Pastor Albert Martin: Now, for any of you who don't know me, I am Pastor Albert Martin, one of the elders here at Trinity and on behalf of my fellow elders and the deacons, it is my privilege to welcome all of you to this first session of this seminar on dating and courtship, and I want to take just a few minutes at the front end of this first session to address several things that I hope will be helpful as we enter in together to this time of instruction.

First of all, just a word about the circumstances that led to the planning of this seminar. Some of you, perhaps many of you, may be aware that in evangelical circles in recent years, a number of God's people have begun seriously to question what is a kind of an indispensable part of Americana, namely the idea of dating; that when you enter into puberty and fellows go from the yuck to the hm to the yummy stage when they think of girls and girls the same, that then a part of their lives, a vital part is beginning to socialize one-on-one in the practice called dating. And many have begun to question that phenomenon which is a relatively recent one, as Mitch will allude to it, and as they have questioned it and begun to react against it, as so often happens, some of us judge that there has been an imbalanced overreaction and have been concerned that that in turn would not produce a reaction to the overreaction and land us back in something worse than the thing we were running away from. That so often is the pattern in human experience.

And in our own assembly, it seems like yesterday when a number of those who are in that age bracket were just little gurgling thumbsucking boys and girls, trying to say the words "mommy and daddy" and now here they are, not only teenagers and at an age where most of them are in the yummy stage as they think of the opposite sex, but in a few years will be making that very vital choice of a life's partner and we were concerned as pastors that we should provide some clear definitive biblical instruction to our own parents and young

people in this area. And as some of us were concerned about this, in the providence of God I became aware of the fact that my fellow pastor, Pastor Mitch Lush, who had been urging me to do something in this area, had done something with his own people and his own young people in his own congregation, and I listened to those tapes and was so thankful for the balance and the biblical substance in them and shared my enthusiasm with my fellow elders and said that I felt it would be a real service to our church and then to a couple of our sister churches in the area who might want to come and sit at the table of God's word with us were we to have such a seminar.

So that gives you an idea of the background for this. I do want to say just a word about our goal. We do not hold this seminar believing we have all the answers on the issue of courtship and dating. Certainly Pastor Lush does not come to us feeling he's some kind of an expert on this issue, but we do trust that you will come with the spirit of the Bereans described in Acts 17:11, "that they received the word with eagerness, searching the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." And we ask that you receive these things with a spirit of readiness and with biblical and Spirit-assisted discernment that we might together grow in our understanding of the word of God in this very crucial area.

Then I do want to say a word about the availability of these materials. They are being audiotaped and videotaped and perhaps, I don't know is there some kind of a form...no, but perhaps before tomorrow is over we'll have some kind of an order form for those of you who may want these materials on a more permanent basis. Any of the materials that we make available that way are still subsidized in terms of the overall cost of production and personnel; they are not a moneymaking enterprise by Trinity Baptist Church but a service rendered to God's people.

And then finally, just a word of introduction concerning Pastor Lush. Mitch and his wife, Nancy, that's before they had the two daughters that they now have, came into our lives a number of years ago when Mitch was sent to us by his home church to enter the Trinity Ministerial Academy and he and Nancy entered into the life of the church, endeared themselves to many of God's people and subsequently we were delighted to see God's hand upon Mitch as he led him into a church planting endeavor in Pennsylvania where he has labored for how many years now, Mitch? Since 1981. And we have sustained close ties over those years and are very thankful to God as we have seen his growth as a servant of God and a minister to his people.

So with that background information before us and introducing Pastor Lush from the sister church there in West Chester, Pennsylvania, let's prayed together and ask God's blessing upon our time and then, Mitch, what we'll do is just add 20 minutes to the way the schedule appears, alright, and we'll just push everything 20 minutes ahead, behind, whatever we call it.

Let's pray together and ask God's help upon our time.

Our Father, we are peculiarly aware of your great mercies to us as our eyes have seen in the past hours the devastation that has come to many parts of the state in which we live.

We thank you that this night we are not found housed in temporary shelters, driven from our homes by floodwaters. We thank you that you have enabled us all to gather here. We thank you for the privilege of sitting together before your word and we earnestly pray that from this very first session through to our final time tomorrow should you spare us, that we may be conscious of having deep heart dealings with you. We pray for every parent who is here, that his or her mind may be open to your word, willing to be challenged, willing to be instructed, willing to unlearn and to relearn all that your word demands of us. We thank you for the many young people who are here and pray that their minds as well will be open and joyfully disposed to embrace your truth, knowing that your ways are good, acceptable and perfect. Come to us then with the blessing of your Holy Spirit and own this time for your glory and for our profit. We ask through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Mitch Lush: This will be an unusual videotape presentation. Those videotaping have agreed with me that they would keep the videotape off of the pulpit and so it is simply going to be scanning the back of your heads. I feel much more comfortable with that arrangement.

The fair young maiden sees a lone rider far across the plain galloping toward her father's castle. She has waited a long time. Her eyes scanning the distant horizon, the faint glimmer of hope growing brighter with each passing day and here he was, as the horseman spurred his fine white Arabian charger closer, the sun glinted off his shining armor. Self-assured, obviously victorious, the knight was at last coming to claim his bride. The white charger's nostrils flared as his master urged him on in eager advance. It seemed like an eternity but at last the confident rider reined in his mount underneath her window. The fair maiden nearly fainted as she anticipated hearing his golden voice oozing with romantic vigor. The fair maiden would soon be a beautiful princess.

As the knight slowly lifted his face shield, his fine features were illuminated by the setting sun. "Like, hey babe," he said, sounding somewhat bored. "Hey babe, what kind of greeting is that?" she thought startled. "Like, I have just arrived from the 20th century, you know," he said in a flat voice. "They have a different way of doing things there, you know. It's like different, you know." "What do you mean it's like different?" she queried, her faint voice quivering. "Yeah, I mean, why don't we just skip all this knight's a-courting biz? It's just like too old-fashioned." "What do you have in mind?" The poor girl was now utterly beside herself. "Well, okay, like okay, you know, your dad doesn't have to know or anything but I was thinking we just grab a pizza and a movie and see how things go from there. Who knows, like eventually we might get the right vibes, you know, and move in together and maybe if it works out, maybe, you know." "You know what?" "Well, we might get m-m-married."

These opening lines from the book "Of Knights and Fair Maidens" imaginatively illustrates for us something of the change that has taken place in the practice of dating. Now, I am not suggesting by this introduction that the old is necessarily good and the old is necessarily pure. Human nature has not fundamentally changed, however, Peter speaks

to us in his second epistle of having "escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." Paul urges us to "not be conformed to this present world but rather to be transformed by the renewing of our minds that we may prove that which is good and acceptable and the perfect will of God."

Now, at the outset of our study, of our seminar on dating and courtship, I want to acknowledge the help that has come in a very real way from Pastors Dave Merrick, Mark Chansky, Jim Sovastio, Jeff Smith, Douglas Wilson and as well authors Joshua Harris, Elizabeth Elliot and Benny and Sheree Phillips and I do so because I will not always be pausing to tell you who I am borrowing from along the way.

This evening, with our fair maiden being offered pizza and a movie and whatever else may follow, we want to come to a critique, a sixfold critique of contemporary American dating, and our intention simply this evening is to ask the question as to whether or not the way things are presently being done is a way that we can just embrace and take them for ourselves. We must ask whether or not this is the best way for the formation of godly marriages. Now, I may or may not always be describing something of what you as parents went through as dating and I may not always be dealing with your experience, but I am seeking to interact with that which is something of the common dating practices today.

Now, on your handout sheet, I believe it will be I. on page 1, page 1 will take us through this evening. I. The first of the six, the relatively recent innovation of American dating. Here we begin our critique by noticing that it is relatively recent. Now, Benny and Sheree Phillips in their book, "Walking with the Wise," draw from an Ellen Rothman in her books, "Hearts and Hands: A History of Courtship in America. What your great grandparents never did." You may be surprised to know that dating is a recent event in American history. Before the "date," teens got to know each other through church or community activities. They served together in the neighborhood. The girls helped prepare food for guys when they were helping build a neighbor's house or barn. Sometimes they were introduced when a girl's dad hired a young man to help harvest the crops or they met at a community square dance or a church picnic. As the friendship developed into something more, it remained closely tied to the family, community and church. Young people had very little time alone without friends or adults around. There was no car for driving around on Friday night, no telephone for long talks after school, no movie theaters or rollerskating rinks where teens could hold hands. Couples would be allowed to talk alone in the parlor but parents were never very far away.

They go on further developing the thought of this Ellen Rothman in her book by telling us, "However as the cities spread and grew in the late 1800s, things began to change. More and more young women began attending high school and college. Both young men and women were working in shops, factories and classrooms. The home, church and community were no longer the hub of the social life. Teens met at school or work and parents were less and less involved in their children's relationships."

Then they go on to lay out something of the change that came with the streetcar, even with the bicycle, and then that fundamental change that came with the automobile. Then they develop that by the 1950s, going steady was common practice among American high schoolers. "Billy and Susie now spent regular time alone together and dated only one another. Being emotionally and physically affectionate with one another was okay because they were going together. That is, until Susie lost interest in Billy and started going with someone else."

But then secondly, B. under this recent innovation, if you'll notice with me that Pastor Dave Merrick summarizes in his book, drawing from Beth Bailey, "From Front Porch to Back Seat," there are several questions that are asked and answered as Pastor Merrick goes through something of the history of dating. First he asks: when did this change take place? The change began in the late 1890s and by the 1920s was when dating was much more in vogue. What was the previous practice? Here I quote, "Evidently it was termed 'calling.' Upon invitation, a young man would visit a young lady in her home. They would often be left together with a degree of privacy on the front porch or in the parlor but family members were close by. Also, a young man might accompany a young lady to and from community activities like church meetings, school programs and so on. Again, the watchful eye of a small local community was close at hand."

He further asks: why the change? And he speaks of how America was becoming more urbanized and as folks were moving into apartment buildings and crowded tenement buildings, there was no longer a porch, no longer the parlor. Further, he speaks of the urbanization that was heightened by a restless desire of young people for excitement and more freedom and less accountability to parents and local people. Thirdly, he speaks of a distant youth culture, a distinct youth culture that arose in our country during this period that had not existed before. In a sense, America's middle class redefined youth as a period in life demanding special institutions and protections from the evils of growing up. There was the greater length of time that children spent, that young people spent under education. The number of those that were now in high school and in college was significantly more as this century advanced.

Further was the increase in prosperity that led to more leisure time. Further, there was the spiritual and moral life of our country going down the drain. Apostasy from the Christian faith was sweeping major denominations. The Darwinian evolution was becoming more and more rampant.

And where are we today? Well, where we are today is with the arrival of the sexual revolution or sexual pollution as our brother writes it. There has been a serious degradation that brings us to a place where there is more of an emphasis where in the past it was the porch, it was the parlor, it was the home, now we think in terms of going out. You have to go out to have fun. You cannot have fun at home. And with that was the assumption as well that you must spend money in order to have fun.

Further, as we see something of the history of dating, see on your handout sheet Samuel Hopkins writes this concerning the practice of Jonathan Edwards. "If any gentleman

desired acquaintance with his daughters, after handsomely introducing himself by properly consulting the parents, he," that is the young man, "was allowed all proper opportunity for getting acquainted; a room and a fire if needed. But he must not intrude on the proper hours of rest and sleep and religion and order of the family." "You'd like to get to know one of my daughters? Come on in. Here's the room. If it's chilly, there is the pile of wood. That's all you need to get acquainted."

Further, we recognize there must be some way of young people meeting but the question before us this evening is should we uncritically accept that which is going on around us? God would have us not to be conformed to this present age. Shall we simply float along with our culture that critically is failing to critically look at the whole dating practice? Consider with me that the current American dating patterns are not as old as the hills. It's a relatively recent tradition. It is not divinely ordained and while we want to avoid being weird for the sake of being weird, we must not blindly follow the patterns of the Canaanites. Ephesians 4:17, "we should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them." 1 Peter 1:14, "not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, in ignorance."

You see, there is a danger on the part of parents sitting here this evening. "Well, we dated. It worked for us. We're still married. What's the big deal?" Well, I think that if we are honest with ourselves, many many of us as parents will look back and see that there was significant problems with our dating and we "ought not conform ourselves to the former lusts but we ought to be holy even as our Father is holy." It is time for the sinful patterns to be critiqued. It is time for us to establish something of a more godly pattern in having young people come together. We might note that the divorce rate today is 250% worse than what it was in 1940, and it is at least a striking parallel to see that as something of the new traditions of dating were arising, there is this significant increase in divorce as well.

Young person, why am I addressing this topic? Well, because I got constrained to come here. Why did I address this topic at West Chester? It is because I want the young people at West Chester, I want you dear young people, to be happy. I want you to be happy through the rest of your days here on the earth and one of the key components of your lifelong happiness is that you be happily married.

Some would argue that the very history of dating proves the failure of this American system. Young person, I don't know where you're coming from as you walk through those doors and come take your seat this evening. It may be that you have something of a budding romance and your emotions are already wrapped up and it may be that you're sitting here emotionally disposed against anything I have to say tonight. Perhaps there has even been an argument with dad and mom and you have come in convinced that you're not going to lose the argument. I plead with you at the outset of our seminar, take a couple of steps back. I want you to be happy, you want to be happy, and following the things of the Scriptures is going to make you lastingly happy. Forget about the argument, what does God want me to do? What will be the way that I can most glorify God in these issues?

Well, secondly this evening in our six-fold critique, not only the relatively recent innovation but, secondly: the characteristic parental abdication in American dating. The characteristic parental abdication. Parents have left their place. This is illustrated, first of all, A. Its illustration. There is a postcard in an advertisement for a new car. There in the slick magazine is the car and there is just a little postcard on the slant and here is the content of that card. "Dear Mom and Dad, I met a guy. He plays bass in a band. Stayed up all night on the beach and watched the sunrise, then we rode to Venice on his motorcycle. Can't wait for you to meet him. Love, Julie." Now obviously that little postcard is there to get your and my attention and pull us in, but there is something that is there that is a commentary upon American dating and part of that commentary is that the young lady is way out there in the relationship, way out there emotionally involved, and dad and mom haven't even met this guy who plays bass in the band and has his motorcycle. Parents are significantly removed.

Now, we can note it's error. B. It's error because of simply the example of Abraham towards Isaac. "Eleazar, I want you to go get a wife for my son, Isaac." The mother of Lemuel, Proverbs 31:3, we'll look at these passages in more detail in another session, but the mother of King Lemuel says that, "Here are the guidelines that I want you to have." But if you'll turn with me to 1 Corinthians 7:37, we'll notice here something of the error in seeing the father's involvement. 1 Corinthians 7:37, in a time of persecution in the church, there is the father of the virgin daughter. We read, "Nevertheless he who stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his own will, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well. So then he who gives her in marriage does well, but he who does not give her in marriage does better." Now, surely without any theonomic reading of the Old Testament into this New Testament passage, even after cultural adaptation arguments are heard, there is something of parental involvement. There is something of a dad who is at least giving advice regarding the giving of his daughter in marriage or not giving his daughter in marriage. It is something more than the mere mechanical routine at the wedding vows, "Who gives this woman to this man?" "I do. Her mother and I." This passage is something much more than the mere mechanics.

There is the error, there is biblically involvement on the part of the parents, but notice the twofold clause of the parents abdicating their responsibility. First of all, the parents' neglect. There was in the embrace of our culture, portrayal of the irrelevant parent. You're not to raise your children, you are not to intrude in your children's lives, you are simply to bring them into existence, give them little pep talks along the way from time to time but you step back. Let them raise themselves. Is that which is more appropriate and fitting?

Doug Wilson in his book speaks of a daughter who is out on the date, "Moreover the modern dating system also leaves the father of the young girl almost entirely out of the picture. The father who ought to be protecting his daughter's sexual purity sends her off into the dark with some highly interested young man and then does what he thinks is his job which is to worry. 'Well, dear,'" he says to his wife, "'we can only pray.'" It is sad that

it has come to that. All that dad can do is worry and perhaps pray. Dad is fearful to step in. "If I step in and give a word of caution or of counsel, I may lose her. My son may resent it and shut me out." Well, there is the first of the twofold cause, the parents' neglect.

But there is the child's refusal. Now, young people, I as a dad of a 17-year-old and a 14-year-old, recognize something of the emerging independence of our teens. I recognize that as parents we are to be working ourselves out of a job; that we are to mold their character. But there is something of a difference in the way that we respond to the 10-year-old as the way that we respond to the 15-year-old. Young person, it may be that you are pulling back from the care and counsel of your parents. Be careful about that. It may be way uncool to have dad and mom know anything of your romance life but think of this: one of the greatest decisions that you will make is who you're going to marry and why would we take one of these greatest decisions that we're ever going to make in life, make it in our relative youth in the dark, shut out from any counselors? But you know the answer to that. Why we do need counsel? I mean, when you see the guy, "I just knew that he was the one that I was going to marry."

And that brings us to III. The dominant emotional subjectivity in American dating. The dominant emotional subjectivity in American dating and here is the danger of emotional infatuation. Dwight Harvey Small writes, "Romantic infatuation is the ground upon which is erected America's greatest cult, the romance cult. Its adherents number in the millions. The entertainment and advertising worlds promote the great American worship of romance. It makes up the colossal fairytale at the heart of our culture. The fairytale goes something like this: I am a very attractive and lovable person, fascinating and desirable in every way, but I have managed to go unnoticed for a long time and the reason is that the one and only person in this universe for me has not yet come my way. There was just one made for me and no other and the moment he has come into my life, there he was suddenly appearing and at that moment when our eyes met, then I knew that he was for me. He was my dream and my inspiration. He had everything. He was tall, tan and terrific. We kissed and I knew that I could not live without him. This was love because I was tingling all over with excitement. Nothing mattered now except that we were together. How could anything else be important but this? We would only live for each other in perfect bliss. If there had been any doubt, all doubt vanished when he held me close. This is what I've longed for all my life. He made me feel so good. Love brought to me my ideal. But there could be no reason to wait even a minute longer. With his scintillating sense of humor, I knew that we would never disagree about anything. Brought together by the hand of fate, we must obey and marry before it is too late."

Now, that may sound like it's out there somewhere but it is sad that a mother of a young man who was in one of our Midwestern sister churches, a young man, 20-years-old eloped with a 17-year-old young lady from another sister church, and the comment of the mother as this took place was, "They're in love and there is nothing that we can do about it." There is this dominant emotional subjectivity.

But consider with me, B. The biblical emphasis on observable character. Under III. A. The danger of emotional infatuation. Now B. The biblical emphasis on observable character. Lemuel's mother in Proverbs 31:3 and again 10 and following, Lemuel's mother does not say, "Tell me, Lemuel, about your tingles." She says, "Tell me about her character, her diligence, her financial savvy, her family focus, her smiling confidence in God, her speech." It's a very objective standard there in Proverbs 31. Twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet, like our A, B, C, D's, the first one begins with Aleph, then Bet, Gimel, Daleth and down through the alphabet, 22 so that the young man would have it memorized and stuck in his mind. He's not going for tingles, "She's the one." He's going through point 1, point B, C, D, E, F and G. She fits the bill of an observable, discernible character.

Dating that is detached though from the family is often very synthetic, very unreal. Joshua Harris in his book writes, "Dating creates an artificial environment that doesn't demand a person to accurately portray his or her positive and negative characteristics. On a date, a person can charm his or her way into a date's heart. He drives a nice car and pays for everything. She looks great. But who cares?" Josh Harris writes. "Being fun on a date doesn't say anything about a person's character or ability to be a good husband or wife." The point is this: we're not saying that humor has no place, but we're saying that that guy at the sports bar who is very charming may turn out to be a wife beater; when you meet someone in a very artificial environment where they are planning on showing you what they are planning on showing you. That's what you see in more of the dating environment. We are arguing for something broader than that, we are looking more for that observable character but too often it is, "Forget about the objective character. If I can score by making a good impression on this young lady's feelings, then I've won the first round in the dating game."

Fourthly this evening, the recreational nature of American dating. Here is a common emphasis. A. "Whatcha doing Friday night?" is the title to the Phillips's chapter on dating and they go on to illustrate that dating is just one more item in the recreational life of that teen or that one in the early 20s. "Whatcha doing Friday night?" "Oh, I'm going to a football game." "Whatcha doing Friday night?" "Oh, I'm going to the mall." "Whatcha doing Friday night?" "I'm going bowling. We're spending the day at the amusement park." "Whatcha doing Friday night?" "Oh, I've got a date." It's just one more thing that you do to amuse yourself. It emphasizes the pleasure of the moment as opposed to a plan for the future and this represents a change from past generations where you meet in the context of responsibilities, working together on this or that within the community.

And having mentioned something of that common emphasis, A., notice with me B. A biblical caution. In Scripture, the young man and the young woman spending time together are looking towards marriage. For the young man who is spending time with a young lady, it ought not be hard for him to say m-m-marriage. He ought to be able to spit it out. Now, please, I'm not saying that he spit it out on the first date regarding pizza and as well the movie, but I am suggesting it ought to be in his mind. When marriage is not the self-conscious goal, there is trouble brewing. Samson and Delilah, Judges 16. Amnon

and Tamar. Amnon wanted to be with Tamar but he would not marry her and trouble was brewing.

Romans 13 teaches us to "make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts." And parents, young people, we must ask ourselves: is it wise to throw a young man and a single young woman together for the stated and the ultimate purpose of them having fun together as a single young man and as a single young woman? I mean, they can go play basketball, they can go to the mall, but here they can just couple and pair off and have fun together. If they seek pleasure from one another, they open themselves to tremendous emotional trouble. Where there is intimacy without commitment. "I spill my guts to you, you spill your guts to me but three weeks from now, we may not even be talking to one another," because they are is not a context of commitment between the two.

Worse yet, they open themselves to physical temptation. We cannot be naïve about these things. Young people, this perhaps fits in another heading but I think the whole point here of the dangers of the temptations of becoming emotionally involved needs to be highlighted. I still remember one of my college friends talking to me in pain and expressing that whenever he and his wife, then very young, this is going back, you know, a couple of ages ago when I was in college, that when they would come together for physical intimacy, the wife would start crying and do you know why? It was because years before, she had been emotionally involved with someone else and opened herself up to temptation and so whenever it came to that which ought to be beautiful, she was in tears. We cannot minimize the emotional scars, the memories and the guilt. They simply are not worth the risk of a careless uncritical attitude. I would suggest to you that defending recreational dating is kind of like defending recreational drug abuse. If you're going to use drugs, this damage may come, this addiction may come, this death may come. It's silly to defend that. And we are all for dating, we are all for healthy marriages, but simply doing it for the fun of it is setting yourself up for trouble.

Fifthly this evening, fifthly: the irresponsibly premature timing in American dating. First of all, notice with me there are requirements of age and maturity for marriage. There needs to be that perspective. You need to be able to look back and be able to say, "Whenever I dated, I always had marriage on my mind. I was not dating merely for fun. I think I'm going to date this girl this weekend, date her for a couple of weeks, then I'm going to drop her and go over here." Marriage needs to be there in the mind and part of the premature timing in American dating is found when we simply ask ourselves the question: is a 15-year-old ready to marry? Spiritually? Emotionally? Hormonally? Vocationally? Financially? Educationally? Is a 15-year-old ready to get married? Certainly you would agree with me that 10-year-olds ought not to marry? At 15, are you ready to leave father and mother and establish a new household in a new social unit? "I can date." Are you ready to be the breadwinner, Mr. 15-year-old? Are you ready to be the spiritual leader? Parents, are they ready to be raising children when they are pretty close to that category yet themselves?

The illustration of Pastor Chansky, I think is compelling. He asks, "Why get on the plane that is going to Alaska in January? Why get on the plane and you've got your short

sleeves, your little sleeveless muscle shirt and your Bermuda shorts and you've got your sandals on and you're going to Alaska?" "Well, I'm just going to be on the plane. The plane will be heated." But you don't have a parka, you don't have mittens, you don't have boots. Why are you going to Alaska? And that parallels here to the issue of dating. Why are you involved in dating when you say that you have no plans of getting married? It's premature in its timing. Why shop for something you can't afford?

Young person, what advice would you give to one of your friends that every time you see them, he's gravitated to the stereo store and there he is in the department store looking at the stereos and he's standing looking at the \$1,000 units, and then you come over to Circuit City and where is he but standing in front of the expensive stereos and you say, "Guy, why are you doing this? You don't even have a job. You don't have any money. What good is it going to do you to stand and pick out what system you're going to buy?" "I want it. I've got to have it." And then you're tempted to get it in an illegal way.

Well, is this a real problem of premature timing? I think we could ask the parents of the 17-year-old gal who eloped. Dad said, "You're not ready to be in a serious relationship." And they run off and get married. "A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, the simple pass on and are punished." There is the requirement of age and maturity.

But secondly, B. there is the requirement of preparation. The requirement of preparation. Again, Joshua Harris, "Dating in many cases distracts young adults from their primary responsibilities of preparing for the future. Neglecting our current obligations will disqualify us for tomorrow's responsibilities. One of the saddest tendencies of dating is to distract young adults from developing their God-given abilities and skill. Instead of equipping themselves with character, education and experience necessary to succeed in life, many allow themselves to be consumed by the present needs that dating emphasizes." Even if, even if we can guarantee that Billy and Susie can spend all of these hours together and never cross the line of physical violation, even when we can guarantee that, there was a huge waste of time and emotion.

Josh Harris again speaks and, by the way, for those of you who do not know, Joshua Harris' book, "I Kissed Dating Goodbye," was written when he was, what? About 19, 20 years of age, and so if I quote someone who is much younger than me, you'll know why I'm doing it and from what vantage point I do so.

He speaks of a Christopher and Stephanie who admit, "Maintaining a relationship takes a lot of time and energy. Christopher and Stephanie spent countless hours talking, writing, thinking, often worrying about their relationship." Doesn't that ring home? It's true, is it not? You spend all of this time worrying about where the relationship is. "The energy they exerted stole from their other pursuits. It's not an isolated incident. I am confident that if we opened up our meeting for discussion at this point, there would be a number of illustrations." "Yeah, my older brother, he dated this girl for two and half years, got into his first year of college and she dumped him and he really went into the emotional dumps."

"As teens mature a bit, their standards mature and they move on. Sure, they were going to get married here but just three years later they have so significantly changed they don't want to marry that person and it's mutual." We need to recognize that in those maturing years, there is a significant development that takes place. The standard and the desires change. They ought to be studying, working, saving, preparing, not phoning, fretting, dating and spending. If you're not prepared to shoot the rapids of marriage, then why are you even on the river of romance? You get on the river of romance and you know where it's going to lead and if you're not prepared for those rapids, then it's appropriate to ask: should I be on that river?

The sixth point this evening in our critique of American dating. We note, sixthly: the consideration of the widespread sexual participation in American dating. The widespread sexual participation in American dating. There is a documented deterioration of moral standards. That's A. on your handout sheet. I looked at a sampling of Hallmark cards from 1880 to 1996. In 1880, they had a picture of a knight on his horse speaking to the fair maiden upon the balcony. In 1935, there was a gal somewhat seductively dressed there in the car. All sorts of associations going with this Hallmark card. And in 1996, it was a picture of an internet dater. Things have radically changed. There was a documented deterioration of moral standards in our society. Back even in 1985, 70% of all unmarried males were non-virgins, 60% of all unmarried females were non-virgins.

There is something of the documentation but, further, we need to consider, B. The multiple stirring of wrong passions. This is why we have to be careful and not uncritically just jump into dating. The multiple stirring of wrong passions, the rise of Darwinian evolution. "We're just animals, after all. If it feels good, do it." Then add cable TV. Add the VCR. Add the availability of the pornographic magazines, the internet porn. Just look around in our society and seeing that many are indeed acting like animals with no restraint. Date rape is on the rise. It ought not surprise us. This is why we must critique the American dating.

But thirdly, C. under this sixth heading: the realistic influence of living in a godless society. "I profess Christ. I believe that I'm a Christian." Well, I ask you to reconsider the influence of living in our godless society. Do you suppose that righteous Lot's daughters were any way influenced by the Sodom in which they lived? Was Israel in the days of the judges influenced by the prevailing sentiment of their society that every man did what was right in his own eyes? Was the Corinthian church member who was involved in that gross sin of 1 Corinthians 5, do you think that he was influenced by the prevalent immorality of the first century Corinth? Which, by the way, there at Corinth they had this one temple to one of their deities and they had 1,000 temple prostitutes who worked at that. Do you think that had anything to do with the problems spoken of there in 1 Corinthians 5?

Again Joshua Harris, "Dating often mistakes a physical relationship for love. Just because lips have met does not mean that hearts have joined. When we consider that our culture as a whole regards the words 'love' and 'sex' as interchangeable, we shouldn't be surprised that many dating relationships mistake physical attraction and sexual intimacy for true

love." And what are the results of this grand experiment of dating in American society? What are the results? Fornication. Guilty conscience. Unwanted pregnancies. Abortions. Ill-advised marriages ending in divorces. Broken families. Single parents. Fatherless children. The results have produced a mess and the question before you this evening is: do you want to be a part of the greater mess?

But there is Gospel hope in a fallen world and as we close this first session, remember where we began with Paul in Romans 12. "I want you not to be conformed to this world," he says, "but transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God." As you look back over these points that we have just briefly touched on this evening: the recent innovation, parental abdication, emotional subjectivity, the recreational nature of dating, the irresponsibly premature time in American dating, 13-year-olds dating, the widespread sexual participation in American dating. As you simply listen to those heads, ask yourself the question: is it the good and acceptable perfect will of God for me as a young person to be involved in this at age 15, at age 16? I don't have any magic line, magic age to give you, any lines to draw, but ask yourself if it is the perfect will of God?

But further, I want to recognize what some of the authors have stated. They say that every place we go and deliver these lectures concerning dating purity, there is always a group that comes and says, "Is there any hope for me? I've already blown it. I've already been involved. I'm impure. Is there any hope for me?" Yes, there is always Gospel hope in a fallen world. 1 Corinthians 6:9, I'll read it from my notes, "Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you." There may be someone sitting here this evening who feels the sense of guilt of even taking up this topic of dating. You feel as though you have blown it. I hold out before you the Gospel hope, "such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." The Lord Jesus Christ has come and died on that Roman cross to take all kinds of sins to himself, including those sins related to a foolish and emotional involvement in dating.

Let's close our time in prayer.

Father, grant that in each of these sessions that we spend time together, that you would be pleased to guide us and direct us. We would pray that in this first session as we have been tearing down something of the structure, that you would be pleased to use something of these perspectives to let light into young and older minds as well tonight, that we would see that there is something sadly wrong and sadly deficient about that which just goes for dating among the world. We pray, our God, that you would help us to see that dating in all of its worldliness is indeed something of a corruption of the world that we need to escape. And we would pray, our God, that you would be pleased to help us even in these next sessions as we seek to build, as we seek to understand how it is that godly marriages are to be formed. Guide us, direct us, help us to build in a way that is pleasing in your sight. We would pray particularly, our God, as we come this night, this

Friday evening, and many of us are tired and even as we think of taking up another session here in the hour to come, we pray that you would be pleased to draw near by your Holy Spirit and bless us. We thank you for the privilege of considering your word together. In Jesus' name. Amen.