Why We Shouldn’t Date Non-Christians

Kyle Skaggs examines theological and sociological reasons why it’s a bad idea for Christ-followers to date unbelievers.

Should you date a non-Christian? The world tells us, “Why not? You can’t help who you are attracted to. As long as you don’t force your beliefs on the person you’re dating, there won’t be a problem.” But what do we say? To provide a biblical answer to this question, let’s assume that you, the hypothetical Christian single, are dating with the purpose of marriage.

According to the Christian worldview, believers are to seek out a marriage that honors God. We are to leave our parents and join as one flesh with our spouse (Genesis 2:24), being faithful by reserving sex and romantic attention for that one person and only that one person (Exodus 20:14, Proverbs 6:20-35, Matthew 5:27). This way, a marriage that honors God places His will above your own desires. In order to best do this, your marriage needs to be religiously homogamous. In other words, you need to marry another Christian.

The scripture concerning marrying a non-Christian is straightforward. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 warns against doing it because being unequally yoked will cause us to stumble in our walk with Christ. While there is no verse that explicitly mentions dating non-Christians, what applies to marriage clearly applies to dating as well. Dating is courtship, an intentional step on the road to marriage. How you go about dating will affect how you go about marriage. There are three areas of concern when it comes to dating non-Christians. The first is your personal walk with Christ. The second is loving and honoring your spouse. Third is raising your children as Christians.

Therefore, I find it's good to explore why we are told not to be unequally yoked beyond "because the Bible says so," as well as the practical concerns of courting non-believers. There are some who would argue that it is fine to date non-Christians. Some of the arguments they give are decent. Others are not so good. I will be paraphrasing some arguments I've personally heard. For context, we must first explore why we are told not to marry unbelievers.

When the people of Israel were preparing to enter the promised land, God commanded them multiple times not to marry or intermingle with the people they were being sent to drive out, because God was having Israel drive them out. They were marked for judgment because of their wickedness. The Lord makes the consequences of intermingling with the Canaanites clear:

> "…lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods." (Exodus 34:15-16 ESV)

Again in Deuteronomy, the Israelites were commanded to drive out the nations who inhabited the Promised Land, "…that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the Lord your God" (20:16-18 ESV).

"So the people of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And their daughters they took to themselves for wives, and their own daughters they gave to their sons, and they served their gods. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. They forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth." (Judges 3:5-7 ESV)

Yoking with unbelievers creates a stumbling block for you in

your relationship with God, and as you can see from Israel's history, marriage to unbelievers leads to sin because it is the believer who compromises their faith. Take Solomon as an example. He was a man of wisdom and integrity who built the temple in Jerusalem. Like his father David, he disobeyed the Lord's command to Israel's kings not to take many wives (Deuteronomy 17:17). Unlike his father, many of Solomon's wives were foreigners who evidently did not stop worshiping the gods of their homelands, since Solomon was convinced to build altars for those gods. Why did he marry all these pagan women? I can't say. He probably thought he could handle them.

This set Israel on a cycle of idolatry, oppression, and repentance much like the one in Judges.

To this, some might say, "But we aren't living in the Old Testament," or "that applied to the Hebrews in their particular context of taking the Promised Land.". Even later scripture contains the exact same message.

> Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? . . . What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."(2 Corinthians 6:14-18 ESV)

The believer and the unbeliever live in two different realities. One is light, with God revealing sin and calling the believer to be more like Christ, while the other is darkness, with an apathetic attitude towards God's values. The ungodly do not know or care for God's laws. As the believer pulls towards God, the unbeliever pulls away. They do this

because God intrudes more on the relationship as He changes the believer. Over time, the relationship will most likely become strained and bitter. The believer is forced to choose between pleasing God and pleasing the person they are dating. This conflict is amplified after marriage.

This is supported by scientific studies as well. Studies have found that couples belonging to differing religions have more frequent conflicts than those of the same faith.{1} In South Korea, a study found that Christian couples with similar attitudes towards religion and church attendance reported happier marriages.{2} The same trend was found in an American study.{3} Being unequally yoked has negative effects on your relationship with your spouse.

Being unequally yoked affects more than your relationship with God. It affects your children as well. After you are married, your children will be taught conflicting ways to live, which will more often than not lead them away from Christ. “When couples belong to different faiths or have different levels of religiosity, their children cannot easily acquire a shared set of beliefs.”{4}

It also has a negative effect on your relationship with your children.{5} In a study by George Fox University based on a survey by Knowledge Works, religious discord in heterogamous marriages (marriages between spouses with religious differences) in turn affected the children. Fathers who were more religious than their wives felt less close to their children because of their differing attitudes towards faith. In a study by Petts and Knoester,{6} school-age children with unequally yoked parents are twice as likely to use alcohol and three times as likely to use marijuana than children with same-faith parents.” According to Petts’ study, children younger than school age in low income urban homes have been found to experience a negative correlation between their parents’ uneven religiosity and positive behaviors. In Bartkowski’s 2008 study,{7} the frequency of parental

arguments over religion is negatively associated with child development at kindergarten age. From these studies, it can be inferred that choosing to marry a fellow Christian will benefit your future children far more than yoking yourself to a non-believer.

Some Objections (Good and Bad)

Two objections I have heard after presenting the scriptural and scientific evidence are “I still don’t think it’s a big deal, because God has told people to be unequally yoked,” and “What if I use dating as an opportunity to witness to them?”

A possible third option is the “I don’t care” response, which is not an objection, because there is no argument being made. It is beyond frustrating, because it makes the conversation meaningless. If you find yourself saying something along those lines at this point in the article, then you’ve already made up your mind.

As a Christian, your first responsibility to nonbelievers is to live a Christlike life, showing the love of Jesus with the intent to introduce them to the Good News of the gospel of Christ. This especially extends to your dating. Christians are told to date and ultimately marry other believers because they are taught that marriage is holy before God.

One objection I’ve heard against what I’ve been saying goes: “But didn’t Hosea marry a whore on God’s command? What if God told me to date this person?” This was an attempt to argue that God’s singular exception justifies courting a non-Christian.

Yes, God did tell Hosea to marry a prostitute. No, it is not the same thing, because the woman Hosea married was a sinner, not a non-believer. First, this argument is too divorced from the context of scripture to be valid. Second, Hosea was a unique individual, one whom God raised up as a prophet. Third,

the purpose of this marriage was to show Israel how they were unfaithful to God when the woman inevitably slept with other men! It was certainly not a good marriage. So unless you're a prophet whom God is telling to use your horrible dating life as an object lesson, you can't say that it's good for you to date a non-Christian.

Missionary Dating: A Lukewarm Fantasy

Speaking of exceptions, there is one scenario people have been using to excuse being unevenly yoked for decades if not centuries: missionary dating. There's this prevailing idea among young Christians that you can date someone for the purpose of sharing the gospel with them.

This is the fiction of missionary dating. It is what Christians tell themselves to justify an unwise decision. First, it attempts to wed (pun intended) two activities that do not complement each other. Courtship involves getting to know someone in order to decide whether you will marry them, while evangelism involves getting to know someone as part of a discipleship process. Dating with the intent to bring someone to Christ tries to reconcile the equal power dynamic of courtship with the mentor-student power dynamic of discipleship. This is not a good plan.

Second, missionary dating leaves you as your date's only window into Christianity. Evangelism can require more than one person ministering to the unbeliever. It is a team effort even when we don't see it. Dating, on the other hand, is more exclusive.

Third, no one can serve two masters. You will love one and hate the other. You will favor either ministry or dating to the exclusion of the other. The temptation to stop ministering in favor of dating is stronger. The consequence of this is that you make compromises as all close relationships do, and present an imperfect picture of God's kingdom. If in your

date’s eyes, you live just like everyone else, they will not see what it means to give oneself up to Christ.

When you date someone, always be examining yourself. Pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal the contents of your heart to you. The Lord does not tell us to sin against Him. Anything contrary to what God commands us to do in Scripture is from the devil. To that end, missionary dating can only be effective for those who are able to use wisdom and discernment. It is inadvisable for those who are not spiritually mature. I’m sure Christians have been saved because of missionary dating, but they are few and far between.

Sending the Wrong Message

Finally, choosing to date a non-Christian instead of ministering to them is foolish because of the message you send. When you date someone like this, you are telling them that you either don’t care about God or you don’t care they are going to hell. It is more important to you that they pour themselves into a relationship with you then it is for them to come to know Christ. On the other hand, prioritizing evangelism and discipleship shows them you want them to share in the kingdom of God.

In conclusion, dating a non-Christian is counterproductive to your walk with Christ. Scripture warns us against marrying non-believers, so why risk falling in love with one? We see time and time again just how easily it can indirectly damage your relationship with God. They do not know your God, nor do they honor Him. The excuses for dating non-believers are logically unsound at worst, and at best cannot stand the test of God’s word. Dating a non-Christian will also cause unneeded drama, and should you choose to tie the knot, that conflict will become worse. This will make the lives of your future children needlessly complicated, their development will be hindered because of you and your spouse’s fighting, and they

will not be shown what a stable and godly family looks like, nor will you be able to effectively raise them to love and fear God. Missionary dating is counterproductive for both dating and evangelism. The people I know who were successful in it admitted that they went through a lot of unnecessary hardship. It is better to remain as friends at least until they come to know Christ. This shows that you care more for the state of their relationship with God than your own wants, and enables you to minister to them through your relationship.

Notes

1. Meyers, Scott M. Religious Homogamy and Marital Quality: Historical and Generational Patterns, 1980-1997. *Journal of Marriage and Family,*
2. Lee, S. and Lee, M.-J. (2023), Religious Homogamy and Marital Satisfaction in South Korea: Exploring Variations across Religious Groups. *J Sci Study Relig.,* 62: 672-693. doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12861
3. Meyers, op. cit.
4. Kim, Young-Il, and Isaak Swan. 2019. "Religious Heterogamy, Marital Quality, and Paternal Engagement" *Religions* 10, no. 2: 102. doi.org/10.3390/rel10020102
5. Ibid.
6. Richard J. Petts, Parental Religiosity, Religious Homogamy, and Young Children's Well-Being, *Sociology of Religion*, Volume 72, Issue 4, Winter 2011, Pages 389-414, doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srr021. Cited in Kim and Swan, 2019.
7. John P. Bartkowski, Xiaohe Xu, Martin L. Levin, Religion and child development: Evidence from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, *Social Science Research*, Volume 37, Issue 1, 2008, Pages 18-36, ISSN 0049-089X, doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2007.02.001. Cited in Kim and Swan, 2019.

Further Reading: Vaughn R. A. Call and Tim B. Heaton, Religious Influence on Marital Stability, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* Vol. 36, No. 3 (Sep., 1997), pp.

382-392
(11 pages)

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Interracial Dating

July 21, 2011

Dear Renea,

We are a strong, white, Christian family. Our 22 year old daughter is dating a black boy. He is very nice, kind, well-mannered. However, we just are not in favor of this inter-racial relationship. We never envisioned one of daughters dating a black boy. We know all the biblical verses pertaining to this. We're just not sure what to say to her. Need some thoughts on this situation. Your thoughts are so welcome. Thanks.

Dear E,

Thank you for writing in with your question.

I'm surprised to hear you mention knowing the scriptures pertaining to interracial relationships because I confess, I am wholly unaware of any verse which addresses the subject. Old Testament passages speak about the importance of Hebrews marrying Hebrews and not pagans who worship false gods and idols, but that has to do with a person's relationship with God rather than his or her nationality. We know this to be the case when we consider heroes of the faith such as Rahab and Ruth, neither of whom were Hebrews, both of whom came to fear (know) the Lord better than many natural Hebrews and were used by God in significant ways, most significantly as women in the

lineage of Christ! This is the same vein which runs through the New Testament command not to be unequally yoked in 2 Corinthians 6. Biblical warnings against marrying certain types of people have everything to do with their relationship with the Holy One (and ours) and nothing to do with nationality, ethnicity or race.

That being said, your feelings and your conflict are real and no doubt a significant part of how you were raised. Based on your letter, it seems you and your husband probably grew up in Bible-believing churches and/or homes which taught against interracial marriages. You certainly grew up in a time in our culture when such relationships were anathema. Your situation reminds me of what the Disciples must have experienced upon seeing Jesus conversing with, not only a *woman* one-on-one, but a *Samaritan* woman. That's not how they grew up! That's not how a good Jewish man was to behave, yet here was their Master, their Teacher, their Messiah breaking all the rules about race-relations (and gender-relations). I'm sure it was a shock. I'm sure it was quite unsettling, perhaps even unacceptable at first. And I appreciate that what I am saying might be just as jarring, just as maddening perhaps, just difficult to accept.

And so it's okay to need time to wrestle with this radical biblical truth that goes against everything you've been taught just as Christ's first followers were constantly having to do. Since Christ's Loving-Truth sets us free, I beg you to wrestle with it, to try to accept it; but even if you cannot, I appeal now to your love for your daughter, a love that has no doubt grown from parent-child love to also include friend-love now that she is an adult. Support your daughter, love your daughter, respect her (decisions) as the adult she is. Don't let your preferences—reasoned as they may be considering the difficulties that can still come as a part of interracial relationships—drive a wedge between you, driving your daughter away from you. Don't give the Enemy a foothold to break down

and breakup your family, your love for one another. I implore you with familial affection in Christ our Lord.

Dear E, may our great God give you grace and bless your family in this scary step of faith we call life.

With love and respect,
Renea

This blog post originally appeared at
reneamac.com/2011/07/21/interracial-dating/

Expectations in Dating: Part One

Mar. 20, 2009

Today we're going to talk about boundaries and expectations. Both of which cause us to be selective.

I have to thank Brad Paisley for a song of his which has provided me with this metaphor: dating is a lot like shopping for new clothes. The line from the song goes like this:

> *When you go out shopping, you try on brand new clothes.*
> *To see if something fits or not, there's just one way to know.*
> *Why's it any different when someone asks you out?*
> *You might as well just try me on before you turn me down.*

I appreciate this metaphor. I walk into a store – even ones I frequent – and sometimes I don't know how something is going to fit until I try it on. Other times I can tell simply by

looking at a piece that it isn't my style or is too big or too small. There are some stores I don't even have to go into because those clothes aren't for me: they might be too trashy or too preppy or whatever. Also, having friends with me whom I trust is helpful. They're honest with me and will encourage me to try things I might not otherwise; items they know will look good on me when I may be unsure – and they're almost always right! I also depend on them to tell me, "No, Renea. That dress doesn't do you right; that color is not for you. Renea, seriously; put that one back." 

You see where this is going don't you? Okay, so dating, well, living really, is about risk, but it's calculated risk – more or less. To say that it's important to take risks… in any relationship, dating or otherwise, is not to say we should be uncritical or haphazard. Not being selective about who you'll date is like letting a perfect stranger pick out all your clothes for you; whatever that person brings you, that's what you have to buy, take home, and wear. You wouldn't do that. Why would you be unbiased about who you date?

Okay. So let's talk about dating non-Christians. How many of you think it's probably okay to date unbelievers? You can be honest. Come on. Forget for a minute that you know what the right answers are supposed to be, or that you think you know what I want you to say. 'Cuz let's be real, if you're unconvinced about what the church has to say about dating unbelievers, chances are we're dropping the ball in some way. And hey, we aren't right about everything; that's impossible; maybe we're wrong about this. So if you think we are, let's talk about it.

Worldview. Whole persons. Intimacy. (Sorry, I did this part extemporaneously.)

The author of our book* puts it this way: "If you aim for nothing, you'll hit it. Is that how you want to aim for your husband – with an open, blank slate? Or do you want to dream

of someone who is just right for you, who complements your weaknesses, and who fulfills your hopes and desires" (63)?

And the point she's making is the same one Brad and I were making with the shopping illustration. If we don't have certain standards, goals, ideas and expectations for our lives, including our love-lives, we'll be directionless. We'll zig and zag here and there following any story about sex and romance that's compelling in the moment. And that makes us incredibly vulnerable to believing the lies and distorted views the world has about who we are and how we should live, distorted views about who we are sexually and how we should live our romantic lives.

I'd like to take this thought a bit further, if you'll let me. I'd like to suggest a bigger target. That instead of aiming for a husband who will fulfill the hopes you've pinned upon him, we aim for the Bridegroom of the Church, Jesus, and put our hope in him. As you release your arrow in the direction of the Kingdom, if you happen to snag a husband by the shirt collar, FAN-TASTIC! More to the point, if your arrow becomes intertwined with another going in the same direction, WONDERFUL!

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* Gresh, Dannah. *And the Bride Wore White*. Chicago: Moody, 2004.

Stay tuned for part two, and see where we go from here.

This blog post originally appeared at
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Expectations in Dating: Part Two

Mar. 20, 2009

(If you haven't already, see Part One.)

I want to really drive this idea home, so I'd like to read a story from – yep, you guessed it – Lauren Winner's *Real Sex*.*

> *I recently attended a women's retreat where one of the workshops was about singleness. The speaker, whom I'll call Myrtle, encouraged the single women in the audience to think carefully about what type of guy they're looking for. "You want a Prince Charming," Myrtle said, "and Prince Charmings are attracted to modest women. You might attract certain men by sporting skimpy skirts, but you won't attract the kind of man you really want to be with."*
>
> *It's encouraging to think that mature Christians are more interested in character than cleavage; yet there is something unsettling about this assurance that chastity will be the erotic mystery that will lead Mr. Right (or Miss Right) to our door. Prince Charming can begin to rival God as the object of our attentions. Myrtle ended her talk on this note: "What we single women have to do is no more and no less than faithfully pray that our perfect guy is out there. We don't need to hunt him down, we just need to wait for the Lord to deliver him to us. [Is he a pizza?] We don't need to worry about him. Instead we need to focus on ourselves, becoming the pure, modest woman that our Prince Charming will be on the lookout for. We need to devote ourselves to prayer, humility, and grace. We need to continue becoming godly women, so that when the time is right, we will have those godly characteristics that the godly man we dream about will love."*

> *[And that sounds right doesn't it? I mean, that does sound like what we ought to be doing: focusing on prayer, humility, and grace. But this is the point:] I'm not disputing the desirability of the chaste woman or man. It may well be that one of the benefits of practicing chastity is that you attract friends and admirers that admire chastity. But attracting others is not the goal of chastity. Indeed, if Myrtle is focused on catching the eye of the guy who likes chaste women, she may not be inhabiting chastity at all.*
>
> *Myrtle seems to be working toward becoming, principally, the kind of woman Prince Charming wants, which incidentally may be the kind of woman God wants. Her priorities, I would suggest, need to flip-flop. We are to become the persons of God, and this may bear the incidental fruit of attracting a great partner. The point of chastity is not that you turn your attention away from other people to make you more attractive to them, but that you turn your attention away from sexual and romantic entanglements with other people, and orient yourself toward God. (129-131, bracketed parentheticals mine)*

What does it mean to orient our lives toward God?

Right. It means we align ourselves with God's ways. Why would we do that?

[Silence.]

It's a tough question, I know, but an important one. Why does it matter? Why should we bother? Let me help you put words to what I suspect some of you know in that deep, unspeakable way. God's way is the way it's supposed to be. We talked last week about the physical reality of sex being evidence that God's creational intention for sex is good and right and true; how sexually transmitted diseases evidence the fact that when we misdirect our sex-lives, something isn't right. Look around you. Look around you and you'll see things aren't the way

they're supposed to be. There's so much hurting in the world. There's so much hurting sexually; things are no longer true – or straight – they're bent. Jesus came and he began the process of righting all the wrong and healing all the hurt. Those of us who believe are called to continue the work Christ began until he returns, when everything will be made right at long last! We do this by orienting our lives toward God.

Here's where I get back to why it's important to have standards concerning who you will and will not date. Because purity, sexual purity, is bigger than sets of dos and don'ts, rights and wrongs, standards and judgments; it's about shaping our lives to the themes of the Gospel, themes such as love, mercy, justice, healing, forgiveness; themes such as defending the oppressed and supporting the weak; themes that express God's way. Learning how to do this is a life-long process. Jesus promises in Matthew 6 that if we will orient our lives toward God's Kingdom, everything else will work out. In light of this promise, let me challenge you to commit the rest of your lives invested in communities dedicated to learning what it means to pray and live out, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Marry the man who has oriented his life toward God and journey toward the Kingdom together… for as long as you both shall live.

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* Winner, Lauren. *Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005.

This blog post originally appeared at http://reneamac.com/2009/03/20/expectations-in-dating-part-two/

To Live Is Christ: On Singleness and Waiting

Apr. 9, 2010

We live in the tension between contentment and craving. Whether you are married or single or widowed or divorced; dating, not dating, wanting to date, not wanting to date—for now, forever. If you are wondering about your sexuality or your sex-appeal, your marriage, the strength of your love or your hope. . . And if you can empathize with the faith-struggle of doubt and dashed or delayed dreams (because without empathy we are nothing but the annoying, repetitive clanging of construction in the city streets) . . . Angela Severson has bravely opened a vein to unleash the power that only life-blood has for the healing and cleansing of telling the truth.

This poem is so very well done. I've never seen anything like it. It's holistic and honest and inspiring and right on the money. The single life and the married life illustrate and teach us about life with Christ and the character of God. The story of "This Life" is one that all too often gets marginalized and left untold, or told unwell—But, we're doing better. When both stories are told (and listened to), all lives (and theologies) are enriched.

This Life

> We wait, we long for, we pine after, … we desire, we yearn. We wait.
>
> I wait
> I am thirteen
> Puberty explodes like a rash, an epidemic.
> My girlfriends hold hands with boys we only months ago

snickered at, turned up our noses at, as though their very essence was a disease. Now the disease appears to be, that my girlfriends can't stop gawking over these same specimen. I decide to play along and choose my crushes. I crush my way through high school, waiting to be asked out. Waiting by locker stalls during break, waiting for a nudge in the hall, a simple "hey," a nod. I wait, standing pressed against the wall, through all the slow songs on Friday nights in the darkened gymnasiums. I wait for an invitation to senior prom. I wait.
Through this waiting, I feel like it is not working, meaning me.
Something is not working with me…my friends acquire boyfriends, hold hands, kiss, and I acquire journals, stashed by my bedside, full of wonderings and waiting.

{Wait: as defined by Webster's: To be ready and available}

It is July.
I'm twenty-two.
My days of being a serial "crushest' are about to end.
I am standing in a parking lot surrounded by pigeons pecking at croissant crumbs. The aroma of Newman's fish-n-chips deep fat fryers heating up engulfs me. In the slant of the morning sun my current crush tells me, that he has a crush on me.
……finally! He likes me and I like him. So, this is what it's like to be loved, this is what I've been waiting for… this messy, dizzy, complicated, delicious, heart pounding love. We dance the dating dance for months and then on a quiet unexpected spring day he wants me to be his…asks me to be his, opens the door to the promise of forever and stamps soul-mate on my heart.

{Wait: as defined by Webster's: To stay in a place of expectation of}

I am twenty-six.

I am engaged to the same fellow.
I am still waiting.
I've waited through friends getting married, through showers and bridesmaids dresses, through banquets and bouquet tossing, through Martha Stewart Wedding Magazines and honeymoon trip photos. It is now my turn. I am next in line to run from the church doors dodging birdseed and blessings. However, love is delicate, as fragile as the blossoms of spring, opening in trust to the slanting sun and quick to close in the cool of the evening, so too was this promise, one that could not take hold, a love aborted, out of fear and wisdom, full of pain, and awe. Stunned with grief, the love in my heart shrinks, evaporates, dies and God becomes small, cruel and unkind.
Hope aborted.

For what do I wait?
Am I waiting for what I want, or what I need?
For that which I desire, or believe that I deserve?
Am I longing for wisdom? …opening myself to the God, who loves me into this deep-down empty sorrow…

{Romans Eight}
"In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."

I am 30 or 32 or somewhere in between.
I have dates that last 10 minutes or 2 years. I avoid answering calls from some and linger hours by the phone waiting for others. In and out of love, infatuation, intrigue…sometimes going through the motions, other times knowing he is.
….I'm into men, I'm tired of men. One day I'm free as a bird and content in my singleness, the next I am desperately

pining away for every male that crosses my path, searching his finger for a wedding ring. I seize the day, travel over seas, take classes, switch careers, indulging in the delights and rewards of being single and still I wait. I watch my married friends build homes, families and history.

It is summer wedding season again. My cousin is getting married. I congratulate myself that I am actually excited about being there, really o.k with my place in life, o.k. that I don't have a date for this wedding, feeling genuinely happy for the two tying the knot. At the reception, between sipping white wine and sampling stuffed mushrooms, she approaches me….that token distant relative, you know the one…she has known me since birth, and kept up on me through my parents Christmas cards…and she asks "So are you going to be next?" I politely answer that I am not currently dating anyone…and she replies, "Well, what is a pretty girl like you still doing single?" Deep in my heart I have to trust that she means well, but the thoughts in my head and the words about to fly off my tongue feel like dragon fire. I want set blaze to her lovely over-sprayed doo. I smile and shrug, and pop another mushroom in my mouth to choke down my anger and my shame. "Yeah, what is wrong with me?" A moment ago I was confident in my singleness and now I feel other. I feel like a freak of nature, an alien, a misfit. I feel shaken.

{Hebrews 11/12}
"All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised, they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth……They are longing for a better country- a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them……..Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a

consuming fire.”

I am thirty-six.
I am single.
Singleness seems to be the new “have it all” lifestyle.
I decide to take a break in my day, a little escape from work.
I brew my cup of tea, add a dash of cream and sit back on the sofa with a magazine for some creative inspiration. I flip open into the middle and look down on the page. It is an advice column. The first question I glance at reads {Capital Q, semicolon} “Help, Please! What should I say to people who ask “why are you single?” It’s so rude, I can never think of a response. (yeah, I agree and can’t wait to hear the answer) {Capital A, semicolon} Shake your head, frown and say, “I loathe giving up all the fabulous sex” The answer hits me in the gut. I feel sad, disgusted, disappointed and angry. I’m appalled at the culture in which I live and yet not surprised. What do you expect, Angela….this world is not going to encourage you in your singleness, at least in a moral sense. I’ve read that singleness is on the rise…more people are single now that ever before. I want to think, great, I’m not so different, not so alone, but there is a huge chasm that defines this single lifestyle. The chasm is sexuality. It is one thing to be single and living with someone, single and sleeping with someone, single and sleeping with anyone and a very different state to be single and abstinent.
Abstinent not because it feels good or is pious, but because it honors God. Choosing abstinence out of obedience and respect for the vulnerability of the human body and spirit. I am ashamed to admit that I often hide the truth that I am nearly forty and a virgin. In this culture being a virgin makes me feel small, prude, asexual. Some nights I lay in bed at night aching to be held, longing for sexual intimacy. Gravity pulls my bones toward the earth, my body fills hollow…..I lay one hand on my belly and the other over my

breast, not with the intention of arousal, but to be held. It would be easy to deny my sexuality and I have. But tonight I want to acknowledge that my body was designed for sexual intimacy, and although that yearning is not being fulfilled, I am still a sensual creation.

{Psalms 139}
“You hem me in – behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me.”

{Martin Luther}
“This life, therefore, is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness;
not health, but healing;
not being, but becoming;
not rest, but exercise.
We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it.
The process is not yet finished, but it is going on.
This is not the end, but it is the road.
All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified.”

I am thirty-eight.
There are days when I feel content knowing that I am growing in wisdom, I am awaiting the Kingdom. That my singleness is just part of my journey here, it is the color of my life. Our stories all get colored in, mine just happens to be green at the moment.
Perhaps I’ll meet someone and get married and then I’ll get to add some purple and red, but today it’s green. I feel blessed with my greenness, alive and grateful. I love my career. I have rich, beautiful friends, and family….. my daily needs are always met, and still there is this tension. I’m driving home from Eugene, marveling over the spring grass, the baby lambs, the sinking sun…the beauty is intoxicating and warm tears roll down my cheeks. I’ve just come from holding my new godson. His sweet newborn smell, his fragile breath, his parents (my beloved friends) and his

sisters (my other two god children) all nestled in unison. This is a family. In this moment I am so grateful to be a part of it, but now I must travel north on I-5 towards home, alone. These tears are full of sorrow and joy, so bittersweet. In my heart I hold the hope that I may one day receive the blessing of a family like this earth but I know that this earth in all it's beauty, is broken, so that for which I was made, I may not receive. There are bigger promises, larger hopes…to that I must cling.

{Hebrews 11}
"none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."

{Wait: as defined by Webster's: To look forward expectantly, to hold back expectantly.
To remain neglected or to remain in readiness.}

Today, as I write this, it is hard to wait.
I squirm. I writhe.
My skin crawls. The discomfort is visceral. Anything would feel better than here. The loneliness penetrates and all I see around me is what I don't have. I hike through Forest Park and I see love and families. I see holding hands and holding hearts. I see couples with babies and couples with dogs and couples melting into one another, sharing food, laughter, words and breath. I cry out "God, spare me from this loneliness, this waiting. I want my feelings to change. I feel guilty for not being satisfied with what I have in this moment. My head knows the gospel's truth.
The God of the Universe cares for me, loves me to the core, is for me,….and he has promised me life.
Not this life, but the everlasting kind.
The one without pain and suffering, hungering and squirming. A promise that is more than I can conceive, contain, or deserve. His grace covers the reality that my heart, at this moment, does not feel any better with this knowledge. I feel

small and fragile, achy, and tired. Right now I am marred then I shall be perfect, right now I am broken, then I shall be fixed. I cry out for redemption.

{Deuteronomy 31}
“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

What is it that I wait for? For what do I long? Is it Connection? Wholeness? Safety? Love?
I wait with myself, with my family, my friends,
I wait with my neighbor, the clerk at the grocery store, the lady next to me on the bus.
I wait with those across the country, across the sea, across the world, in places I know nothing of, filled with people waiting….
They wait for things that I have. They wait for warm food in their bellies and water on their lips, they wait to see their sick child healed, or the miracle of their bodies restored, they wait for a soft place to lay down at night, and the demon voices in their heads be stilled. The wait for the terror to stop and the monsters slain. We all wait.
We wait for hope, for freedom, for comfort
We wait for love.
Deep, deep love that will never fail. A love that will fill us.
We wait for Christ.

{Romans 8}
“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angel nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Angela Severson
http://www.imagodeiwomen.com/2010/03/this-life.html

This blog post originally appeared at
http://reneamac.com/2010/04/09/to-live-is-christ/

"Why Are Dating Methods Unreliable?"

I'm a Christian who believes in a six day literal creation and I have been looking at lots of material on the Grand Canyon to see if it can shed any light on how it was formed and how old it is, and in my search I come across your report which to me seems a very honest and an unbiased report.

Could you help me by telling why dating methods of rocks are unreliable and sometimes come into contradiction? As since I have been doing my own research into how old some things are, I keep getting different answers from different scientists, whether they be young earth or old earth scientists.

Also, I have been informed that only a geologist with a Ph.D can tell the age of rocks and no one else in any other field; is this true?

Your confusion is reasonable. There are many conflicting messages on this topic from people who ought to know what they are talking about. This is one of the reasons why I am undecided about the age question. I simply am unable to discern the reason for these conflicting views. Is it because of prior assumptions? Is it because of truly conflicting data? Is it because of incomplete knowledge of the facts? Is it because of a deep-seated prejudice against a particular position? As a biologist, I find myself unable to follow the technical critiques that go back and forth and so I am unable to truly answer the above questions for myself.

The conflicting age estimates can be due to a number of problems. The dating methods themselves can be unsound, based on faulty presuppositions (the position of young earth creationists). They can be due to local anomalous conditions that do not apply to most great age estimates (position of most old age creationists and evolutionists). Old earth creationists maintain that the preponderance of the evidence should hold sway over the few exceptions that young earth creationists have found. Yet some young age research is being submitted to the scientific community for scrutiny and is holding up well. But is it a local exception or something more significant?

Your last statement about only geologists being able to tell the age of something should be treated suspiciously. While it is reasonable to say that they have a better grasp of the details of geological dating methods, it is also an unveiled appeal to authority: "Only I know what I am talking about therefore you should trust me and me only." Scientists shouldn't communicate this way. Science has always been marked by humility before nature and openness to new information and theories. This view is not very open. It sounds like they have something to hide.

ICR has come up with some new data on dating methods and some of the information is online at http://www.icr.org/research/. Articles 3-10 in the first list all relate to your concern. These papers were all presented at the 2003 International Conference on Creationism here in the US. They might help to clarify some things for you.

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin, Ph.D.
Probe Ministries

“Why Won’t My Sister Accept My Live-In Boyfriend?”

Please help me answer this question?

I am a single parent (40 yrs old) of three children 16, 14, and 9. I have decided to live with my current boyfriend. I have taken all the pros and cons into consideration. So far it is going well. The only draw back so far has been my sister, her husband and 2 children. My sister and I are very close and spend a lot of time together. But since I have started dating again, 2 years with this one person (the only person I have dated by the way), I am not allowed to bring my boyfriend to her house. We are not allowed to do things with her children at all. I can understand that they would not want their children to spend the night or us to spend the night over there. I do not however understand why we can not spend time together as a family as we have in the past. Going to Six Flags, etc…. We do not hug or kiss, we may on occasion hold hands. I understand this is a moral issue, living together.

Can you please explain why I can’t spend time with my niece and nephew?

P.S. My family is Catholic. When I married the first time I married into a different church. My family is Catholic. I was married for 19 years. Been divorced for about 2 1/2 years and have been dating my current boyfriend for much of that time.

Dear _____,

I’m sort of wondering why you’re asking US instead of your sister. . .??!

My guess is that your sister is extremely uncomfortable with

your choice of an immoral lifestyle and she is concerned that doing things together as if you were married might communicate to her children that immorality is okay. Many people are not confident that their kids can handle (or that they can teach) both the belief that “we love our family member” and “that family member is doing wrong things that we deeply disagree with.”

I noticed you used the term “moral issue,” but my guess is that your sister is thinking of it as an IMmoral issue. Which, to be blunt, it is. Living together outside of marriage is sin. You said you took all the pros and cons into consideration, but apparently you didn’t, since you could not possibly foresee how other people would react to your choice.

I hear the hurt in your “voice,” and I am sure that it weighs very heavily on you. Unfortunately, that’s one of the consequences of making choices that do not align with God’s intentions and commands for us. Sin causes pain and always ends up affecting more people than just ourselves. Your sister may be concerned about the effect of your lifestyle choice on your children as well, since you are teaching them that living with someone you’re not married to and not committed to is a good thing. As a mother, your sister may be concerned about the impact your children’s attitude and perspective may have on HER children as a result of what you’re modeling to your own kids.

By the way, I don’t think this issue has anything to do with denominations. It’s a people issue and it’s a moral issue. You could substitute any mix of religious traditions and have the same heartbreak over this situation.

If you were looking for comfort, I’m sure this isn’t what you were hoping for, but it DOES align with what the Word of God says. He grieves over your choice just as He grieves over the pain you are experiencing because of it.

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“How Far Is Too Far?”

My question is one that has been posed to me on many occations by many a frustrated teenager. They hear all the information about sex and everything that goes with it, but the one question which I still find being asked all the time is… “How far is too far?” as well as ways to prevent themselves from reaching these boundaries. Would it be possible for an article to be written from a biblical perspective on how far is too far and ways to prevent adolescents from crossing these boundries?

Since I have worked with high school students and addressed this issue a lot, let me share what wisdom I have gleaned from others and learned from the Word.

Another way to phrase your question is, “Where should I draw the line?”

The line is the place where our behavior moves from that which glorifies God, to that which is sin or leads to sin (either mental or physical sin).

Scripture says, “It is good for a man not to touch a woman” (1 Cor. 7:1). One of the meanings for the Greek word for “touch” means “to press against in such a way as to kindle or catch on fire.” So another way to translate this verse would be, “It is good for a man not to touch a woman so that they become sexually aroused.”

This is true wisdom, because once people become sexually aroused, hormones kick in and it gets hard to think rationally. So it is far easier to stay in control by limiting our behavior to that which isn't sexual.

I suggest that this means not touching anyone in a way you wouldn't dream of touching one's pastor (or pastor's wife, depending on your gender), or family member. When it comes to dating couples, that means not kissing each other with anything more than you'd give your sister or brother.

So the bottom line is, I suggest that "the line" should be drawn between a short kiss and a long kiss. Short kisses are not necessarily sexual, but long kisses are. Sexual arousal happens after you cross the line from a short kiss to a long kiss. Sexual activity outside of marriage is the sin the Bible calls fornication; it's a sin because God wants all sex (and sexual activity, even if it's far short of intercourse) to be contained within marriage since it's so powerful. Many kids define sex as intercourse, but God's view of sex is far broader than that. Even physiologically, we can tell that sexual feelings occur as a result of doing things that are a long way from intercourse.

Things become startlingly clear when you think: "What if I touch or kiss my brother or sister in this way?" If the thought of French kissing your sibling grosses you out (and I hope it would), then that means it's sexual, and it falls in the category of "off limits."

This discussion is a different approach from "How far is too far," because that question really means "How close to the edge of the cliff can I walk without falling off?" God wants us to ask, "What do I need to do to stay holy and glorify God in everything I do?"

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin

“Is It a Good Idea to Marry Someone I’m Not Attracted To?”

I’ve been dating a long time friend of mine for three years, and the subject of marriage came up. She is my best friend and we are both saved. Both of us have never married and are 45 years old. We enjoy each other’s company, and go to church together. But sometimes I don’t think she is pretty. I find myself looking at other girls at times. Would this be hindrance to marriage? I realize that beauty and brawn change over time. But I can’t date her forever and don’t want to lose her friendship. Do you have any advice?

It sure sounds like the Lord has blessed you with a wonderful friend. It’s quite possible you would be better off friends than spouses. If you don’t think she’s pretty, does that mean you’re not really attracted to her? If you’re not attracted to her after three years of dating, it’s probably not going to happen. And marriage to someone who only makes a good friend can range from empty and colorless to downright miserable when your heart longs for passion.

The fact that you find yourself looking at other girls is not a problem. It would be a problem if you LUST after other girls. And it would be a problem if your girlfriend catches you looking at other girls in her presence because I assure you, women’s egos are really just as fragile as men’s.

Read the Song of Solomon. Do you experience that kind of

intense love and longing for your girlfriend? That's God's intention for marriage. If what you have is nothing more than a comfortable friendship that has been a convenient base for dating, and if it hasn't developed into real romance after three years, then do yourself and your girlfriend a favor and find someone that you CAN feel that kind of passion for. I'll tell you a secret about women: we long to be wanted. We long to be thought of as beautiful. We long to be lusted after with a holy lust. If you can't give that to your girlfriend, you are cheating both yourself and her. And that's no way to treat a friend.

Hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

Love Myths

Soul Mates

In this article we are going to focus on a few of the myths surrounding love and romance that can have a negative effect on dating and marriage. Some of these ideas have become so pervasive in our society that it may seem heretical to label them as myths. But as we will see, they can have a devastating impact if they are accepted uncritically.

The first myth is the belief that you will know when you meet "the one." Of course, this assumes that there is only one person who is right for you—a soul mate you must find and marry. Garry Friesen in his book *Decision Making & the Will of God* (along with many other Christian writers) question whether

there is *only* one right person for you to marry. But I will set aside this theological question to focus on some relevant practical issues.

First, is the problem of a false positive. We have all heard stories about couples who met and immediately one or both of them knew they were going to marry the other person. Often we call this "love at first sight." But we don't hear as much about the many other people who met, thought they had met "the one," but later decided not to get married or ended up getting married and then divorced.

Certain people come into our lives and we immediately "click" with them. Why? We carry around in our minds a template of what that certain ideal person may be. It is influenced by our family background, our own expectations, books, movies, and personal experiences. When that template comes into our lives sparks fly. We may not even know much about that person's social, family, and religious background, but we are immediately attracted to him or her. We may feel that he or she is "the one," but over time our relationship may surface concerns that might be detrimental to a successful marriage. Unfortunately, many people can be blinded by a belief that they have met "the one" and thus ignore important warning signs.

Second is the problem of the false negative. We also no doubt have heard stories of couples who weren't attracted to each other when they first met. Many didn't even like the other person. Only over time did they get to know each other and began to see admirable qualities in what became their marriage partner.

Pepper Schwartz in her book *Everything You Know About Love and Sex Is Wrong* (New York: Pedigree, 2000) says we are a romance-addicted society. We love movies with Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan, but life is more complicated than what is portrayed in movies with skillfully written plots, blended music, beautiful

actors, and exotic locations.

Choosing a marriage partner requires more than romance and emotion. For every story someone tells of finding “the one” and experiencing “love at first sight,” there are many more where those initial emotions turned out to be wrong.

Two Peas in a Pod

The second love myth is the belief that you should be similar to your partner. This myth is quite pervasive in part because there is some truth to it. Obviously, there should be some common basis of belief within a marriage. The Bible warns Christians not to be “unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” (2 Cor. 6:14) And there should be some common areas of social and cultural similarity.

But I believe we should question the prevailing belief that your life partner should be the same age, height, and race while having the same interests, gifts, and abilities. As some marriage counselors have said, “If your mate is exactly like you, then one of you is redundant.” Strong marriages celebrate the differences and work to have each person’s gifts and abilities complement the other. One partner may be good with the finances. The other partner may be good in the kitchen. One partner may be good at details. The other partner may be able to look at the bigger picture and plan for the future. Each partner’s gifts complement the other partner’s gifts.

In many cases, having a similar partner can actually be a source of conflict. Kevin Leman has found that two “first-borns” bring their perfectionist tendencies into a marriage. They will often “pick” at each other leading to increased marital conflict. Does that mean that two first-born children should never marry? Of course not. But they might want to reconsider whether they want to marry someone who is so similar to them.

What about differences in age? Couples should obviously consider the implications of vast differences in age in terms of energy level, hobbies, activities, and friendships. But there is also good reason to begin to rethink the prevailing assumption that compatibility must be based upon similar ages. Once again different ages and life experiences might be a significant way to bring complementarity into a marriage.

The same could be said about difference in ethnicity. Not so long ago, society frowned upon so-called mixed marriages. Today, more and more marriage partners come from different ethnic and racial backgrounds. While we still tend to marry people who come from the same social and cultural background, this trend seems to be changing.

The key point is this: you don't have to be similar to your partner to have a good marriage. In fact, your differences might actually help you to complement each other in marriage.

Annoying Habits

Now I would like to focus on the question of whether little annoying habits are unimportant in a long-term relationship.

When we are in love, little things like bad manners or chronic lateness may seem insignificant. Besides, we reason, we can always change our partner later on so that this is no longer a problem. We may even convince ourselves that these little annoying habits are kind of cute.

Well, they may seem cute in the courtship phase of a relationship, but they usually don't stay cute once you are married and have to deal with them every day. In fact, small habits often grow into bigger habits once they are indulged.

The book *Everything You Know About Love and Sex Is Wrong* describes a study done by Professor Diane Femly at the University of California-Davis. The researcher asked people why they married and then why they divorced. The reasons for

both were often quite similar. The only difference is that what was once sweet had now turned sour.

For example, a person might say: “I married him for his incredible sense of humor.” When asked why they broke up, she might say: “He was always silly, he was a lightweight.” Another person might cite her partner’s creativity and spontaneity as a big attraction, but later said of her spouse that he was “a dreamer” who “couldn’t stick with any one thing, couldn’t plan anything ahead of time.”

So it wasn’t that these people didn’t know who they married. Their spouse hadn’t changed, but their tolerance of their habits had changed. What was a minor annoyance before they married, became a major reason for their breakup later on.

Frankly, I believe one of the real tests in a marriage are the minor annoyances of everyday life because they accumulate day after day. A quirky habit might be even attractive when you first encounter it, but with daily repetition can become annoying and irksome.

A related issue is the iceberg problem. Most of the mass of an iceberg is below the surface. Likewise, most of the really difficult problems a person may have will stay below the surface during the dating and courtship phase of a relationship. Many couples, in fact, awake on their honeymoons to an entirely different person than the one they thought they married.

Here are a few issues to consider:

- *Cleanliness: what might at first seem like an admirable lack of vanity may indicate a general lack of personal hygiene.*

- *Neatness: although keeping things in order may seem like a small thing, it can develop into a major problem in marriage reminiscent of scenes from “The Odd Couple.”*

The bottom line is this: consider the long-term impact these little annoying habits will have in your marriage, *before* you get married.

Living Together

Next I would like to look at the question of living together before marriage.

In our society today, cohabitation has become an extension of dating and courtship. Couples see living together as an audition for marriage, reasoning that you want to get to know someone intimately before you marry them. Although the logic seems sound, it not only goes against biblical injunctions but against sound sociological research.

A 1999 study by sociologists David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead released through the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University confirms earlier studies about the danger of cohabiting and added additional detail. They found that cohabiting appears to be so counterproductive to long-lasting marriage that unmarried couples should avoid living together, especially if it involves children. Whitehead says that living together is "a fragile family form that poses increased risk to women and children."

Part of the reason for the danger is the difference in perception. "Women tend to see [living together] as a step toward eventual marriage, while men regard it more as a sexual opportunity without the ties of long-term commitment." And people who live together in uncommitted relationships may be unwilling to work out problems, and instead will seek less fractious relationships with a new partner.

The National Institute for Healthcare Research has found that couples who live together and then marry report less satisfaction in their marriages than other couples. Scott Stanley at the University of Denver has found that cohabiting

couples who get married have a significantly higher rate of divorce than those who did not live together.(*A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage*. Josey-Bass, 1998)

Couples argue that living together will provide important information about how a partner will behave and interact once married. But a cohabiting person may be quite different from a person within marriage. Marriage is a commitment for life, while cohabitation is usually a commitment for a season. That makes a big difference in a relationship. It's like the difference between being in a play and auditioning for the play. In the first example, you are in the stage production and working to make the play the best it can be. In the second example, you are trying out for the play and have much less invested.

Couples may also argue that they can live together and eventually get married when they are ready for children. But will that day ever come? The living together arrangement actually erodes a foundation of commitment rather than strengthening it. And if the woman becomes pregnant during cohabitation rather than marriage, it is less likely that the children will have a legal (and committed) father.

Living together before marriage may sound like a good idea, until you look at the facts.

Got Problems? Have Kids

Finally I would like to conclude by focusing on the idea that children bring a couple closer.

To begin, let's acknowledge that Psalm 127:3 says that children are a gift from the Lord. Children are wonderful. A Christian family with children is delightful.

The issue here is the prevailing belief that bringing a child into a relationship that has problems will improve the

situation. There is good evidence to believe that is not the case. If anything, a child can increase the tensions that are already present. Pepper Schwartz in her book *Everything You Know About Love and Sex Is Wrong* believes this may be the most damaging myth of the 25 myths she addresses in her book.

The fantasy that children will increase love and intimacy needs to be balanced by the reality that child-rearing also involves time and energy that can increase stress, fatigue, and worry. It will also decrease privacy and communication between partners. Unfortunately, many young couples may underestimate the impact of children on their marriage and be unprepared for the constant daily attention necessary to be a successful parent.

While having a child may be one of the most intimate things a man and a woman can do, the erosion of intimacy after the child arrives often surprises many couples. Even before the child arrives, a pregnant mother often begins to feel fat and unattractive. Once the baby arrives, she must give most of her time and attention to the child. On the positive side, she is madly in love with the child but may tend to squeeze her husband out of the picture. On the negative side, she may be so exhausted from caring for a child all day that she has little energy left for her husband.

Even good marriages must work hard not to allow their marriage to be pulled into two parallel worlds. It is natural to begin to divide tasks and focus on those, but couples need to schedule “date nights” and “talk times” to make sure their two worlds intersect. Isolation is a natural drift in any marriage. Children and children’s activities can increase isolation if marriage partners don’t attempt to counter-program against the pressures that naturally will push a couple apart.

Couples should also plan ahead for a time when children are not a constant focus of the marriage. In my article on *The*

Second Half of Marriage, I talk about the time when children begin to leave the nest. No longer does the marriage have to be child-focused. It should return to a partner-focused marriage. Even while a couple is traveling through "the valley of the diapers," they should keep a clear focus on the need to invest time, energy, and emotions in their partner.

Children are a gift from the Lord, but couples should understand their impact on a marriage. If a marriage has problems, having children will not bring that couple closer.

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