

## MARRIAGES

Marriages are the building block of a nation but especially of a community of faith. Yet, today marriages are under attack, while the church at large seems helpless to stem the tide of divorce. The divorce rate of those attending church and that of those who don't, reveal that the church is having little to no impact on the stability of marriage. In taking a hard look at where things have gone wrong, the answer is found in the way marriages are formed in our Western culture. While many may think dating is ancient, it has only been around since the twentieth century. In examining the skeleton of the dating system I have found three things within its bones that are a cancer for potential relationships. First, dating encourages emotional promiscuity. Secondly, dating leaves the G-d ordained authority of parents out of the picture. And thirdly, dating creates relational scars that create unnecessary baggage for the eventual marriage. I know that there will be someone who says, "Well I dated, married, and we have lived a happy life for many years, so the dating idea can't be all that bad". To those who dated and have stayed together I am thankful and happy for you. Unfortunately, the divorce rate in this country tells me that while dating may work some of the time, it is not working well enough most of the time. Let me put in into an analogy we can better grasp. Every time I hear that a plane has crashed I hope that there were survivors. However, my joy at hearing that some have survived does not have me wishing that more planes would crash. The dating system is a crash just waiting to happen. While I am thankful that some have survived the crash, I would not wish the pain of crashing on anyone. If there is a better way, and we can prevent the crash from ever occurring, then let's pursue that way.

As stated earlier, dating allows for a young man and young woman to enter into an emotionally promiscuous relationship with no covenant commitment. Israel Wayne rightly defines dating as: "a non-committed form of emotional promiscuity, where one is romantically involved with someone whom they have no certainty (and often no intention) of marrying. In most homes, it does not require the blessing or permission of the parents, and it is often unsupervised and unchaperoned." In the modern dating scene, two people who are physically attracted to each other, go out on a date, with absolutely no commitment. As you continue to give your emotions away, if the relationship develops then you eventually give more and more of yourself away---Only to be "dumped". In dating there is the "dumper" and the "dumpee". So now that you have been dumped you are free to "play the field" and "sow your wild oats". And then the cycle repeats—Go out, give yourself away, get dumped—ad infinitum, ad nauseum. And eventually if this cycle continues, more than likely you will give your body away. This cycle of date, give yourself, get dumped, becomes the pattern that makes dating a practice for divorce. Eventually you date someone long enough to make a commitment and get married. Only now that you have given your heart away multiple times (and probably your body) you have baggage and scars that G-d never intended for the marriage relationship. I have talked with countless numbers of Christian men and women who are married, but wish that they could go back and undo things that happened in the years they dated. The model I am proposing for marriages is designed to leave one with no regrets.

As I look at the Hebrew Scripture, the model I see for marriage relationships is one man, with one woman for one lifetime (barring death). As I search the Scriptures I do not see the “dating scene” which is permitted, promoted, and in some cases encouraged in Christian homes, found in the text of the Bible. G-d never intended for a man or woman to enter a marriage relationship with their emotions guarded, their body spent, and the regrets that come from modern dating. One will search in vain to find the concept of dating within the Scripture and this should be the first clue that it’s not G-d’s way.

The second major problem with dating is that it allows and encourages young men and women to be “free agents”. In an informal poll of married couples of our congregation, I asked both to rate how much involvement their family was in the decision of the person they eventually married ( using the 0-10 system with 0 being no involvement and 10 being high involvement). To my surprise I found out that most couples revealed that neither set of parents was significantly involved in this most important life event. One of the things that all married couples understand eventually is: You married into a family!! While dating gives one the feeling that you only will be marrying the person in front of you, the truth is that every person comes with a family and the influences that flow from that. The problem with the exclusion of the family is that this is not the way G-d intended marriages to come about. Young men and women were not meant to be free agents selling themselves on the open market.

Let’s take a look at some Scriptures that are relevant to our discussion: Numbers 30:3-16; Deuteronomy 22:13-21; and Exodus 22:16,17. In all these texts the one common denominator is that no matter what happens to a young lady her father is the one responsible for her (mothers are included as well). In fact, in the Numbers passage listed above, a father, upon hearing a vow his daughter made could overturn her vow making it void. This vow was not just any vow but a vow made to G-d. Now if a father could annul a daughter’s vow made to G-d, how much more could he annul any lesser vow? The Biblical model never allows for a young woman to be unprotected. She is either under the protection of her father or that of her husband. While some might argue that all of this is just cultural tradition of the Ancient Near East, the fact that it is mandated within Torah takes it out of the cultural arena. The Biblical responsibility to make sure that the daughter was married to the right man was not the responsibility of the young woman but of her father and mother. In calling for an end to “dating” I am saying that fathers need to once again take their G-d given authority seriously. Fathers need to make sure that their daughters are not just thrown to the dating wind, but rather they must guard the hearts of their daughter to insure that she marries a man who will provide the spiritual, physical, and emotional support the daughter needs. Letting our daughters “play the field” leaves them unprotected and is not the Biblical design intended by G-d. Many parents feel that if they just get their children grown up, educated, and out of the house they have done their job. One of the most important responsibilities that parents have is to make sure that their children marry a G-d fearing mate.

As I have talked with Christian couples that have now been married for several years, the one regret that they have is the way they met, or the dating life they led, before they were married. Many couples have spoken privately about how they wish things were different

in their past. The memories and heartbreak of the “dating scene” is one that many people will testify does not go away easily. God does not want His children looking back on their youth with major regrets and wishing things could have been different. I want my children and yours, to have a “no regrets” past in their marriage relationship. The dating system as it now works, is designed to leave all parties involved, with long term regrets. If we can spare our children the heartache and pain, along with a past with no regrets, then we must once again reclaim the G-d given mantle of parental authority. It is the responsibility of parents to make sure their children marry well not the children.

Ok, I agree you say, but then how does it all work and what is a “covenant commitment” supposed to look like. I will admit that for all of us these are uncharted waters as we grew up thinking that dating was the only way. While every situation will look somewhat different let me present a possible scenario. As parents, while your children are growing up, you must begin evaluating their marriageability. That is, are they mature enough to enter a covenant commitment from both a spiritual and emotional standpoint? On the other side of the issue, if your child is a boy, you must evaluate the young ladies in your community as to whether they would be a compatible life’s mate for your son. If you are the father of a young lady, then you will want to evaluate the young men in your community. This evaluation should lead one to evaluate the family as well as the individual within it. As a young man matures both spiritually, emotionally, and financially his father (and mother) will let him know that they think he is ready to be married. The young man, along with the help of his parents, will decide on a young lady in the community that they all believe would make a great wife. The young man would go to the father of the young lady (not the young lady herself) and ask for her father’s permission to be married. If the father of the young lady believe that either his daughter or the young man inquiring are not ready to be married then the process comes to a halt. If the father (and mother) of the young lady is in agreement that the young man inquiring meets their qualifications, they would then bring the proposal to their daughter. There is Biblical precedent for the daughter having veto power. If the daughter says “yes” to the proposal then the father informs the young man and the couple is officially betrothed. If the daughter says “no” to marrying the young man in question, then the father informs the young man that there will be no marriage. In all, these discussions should be private, and only between the young man and the girl’s father. I personally do not recommend long betrothals, but would encourage the couple to become married as soon as the wedding can be arranged. The format that I have just described is a return to the Biblical model given in the Hebrew Scripture. In other words, it’s a return to Torah. In this system, unlike dating, her father protects a young lady, until a husband protects her. This system allows both the young man and young woman the opportunity to enter into marriage with no emotional or physical baggage that accumulates with years of dating. I hope that fathers and mothers will give serious consideration to the words of this teaching before they allow their sons and daughters to be buried in a system that leaves them wounded, and in many cases, scarred for life. If we are to stem the tide of rising divorce, then we must go back to the Torah and restore to our children, what the culture has taken away.