

The Pursuit of Marriage



Foundational Concepts of Courtship



Much has been written, and for good reason, regarding the topic of marriage and all that is related to it. As a result, much focus has been devoted to the processes leading to marriage. Two of the most common terms used in our society are “dating” and “courtship”. Both are relatively undefined and both can have similar and vastly different ideas in their usage. Dating has come to carry, in general, the idea of “trying each other out” emotionally, in personality, and most often, physically. Courtship has come to be more associated with stricter standards and is usually “entered” with the full understanding that marriage is the goal. There is not perfect term, but for the sake of this study, “courtship” will be stressed only because it is associated with greater caution and oversight.

Because there is relatively little regarding the “lead-up” to marriage written in Scripture on this topic, we will look to come at it with most of our focus on the desired result (a good marriage) and the undesired consequences of poor choices and uncontrolled impulses of pursuing marriage irresponsibly. In Proverbs 18:22 we are told that whoever finds a wife finds “...a good thing and obtains the favor of God” (God has blessed him). The same is mentioned in Pr. 19:14 and 31:10. It seems almost unquestionable that no matter how we look at this topic, the man is to be the one with the greatest responsibility in the pursuit and formation of the relationship. Parents should be closely involved to protect the children because:

- Parents do know more about life in general and will have both an objective and subjective perspective
- Parents are better at “reading” the potential “mate” regarding the most important qualifiers of spiritual conditions, readiness, and overall maturity levels
- Parents will usually be the best friends to their children in that they will be honest with them and will genuinely desire the best for them

No doubt, many of our societal norms will be in constant competition with a truly sensible approach to achieving the best possible outcome. We live in a time when it is fairly common for young people to assume they should and do have full say in their relationships. This was looked down upon in two key examples in Scripture: Esau and Samson, both who chose whoever they wanted against their parents and neither were described well in this area (Gen. 26:34-35 and Jud. 14:1-6). Marriage and beginning a family are so important and have lifelong affects, so it should bear far more attention and discretions than it is typically being given in our time. Marriage is truly to be honored and to be deemed so by all - Heb. 13:4

I. Keeping Focus on the Goal - What are We Striving For? - Gen. 2:18-24, Mt. 19:3-12, Gen. 6:1-5

A. The goal - a harmonious marriage

1. A good marriage is one of harmony of goals - II Cor. 6:14-16

There is no closer relationship than that of a husband and wife which also carries with it the highest vulnerabilities to being hurt

- a. The initial relationship shouldn't just focus on the immediate things in common, but needs to look down further in time at what goals both persons have later in life as well as when they stand before God
- b. As illustrated in the test, a young man and young woman should not even begin to seek a relationship with one that is not a believer (in Christ)

The core component of Love is a focus and drive to give, not getting, and few go into marriage with this conscience obligation in their thoughts and goals

- c. Many haven't settled a solid life-focus well into their twenties, or have not matured enough to make a commitment that will last their entire lives (maturity is seen in their ability to commit and stay with it, disciplining themselves (thinking, physically, financially, emotionally) and becoming individuals with responsibilities)

2. A good marriage is one of harmony of personalities - they are friends (Pr. 19:13; 21:9,19)

Poor choices and bad decisions entering a marriage do not mean that things can't change later, but in our pursuit for the best, we should be seeking it before the marriage and not presuming it will be "fixed" later

- a. It often happens that a couple marry based more on "infatuation" than they do a committed, mature decision - immature decisions are usually fueled by novelty (the thrill of a new experience), physical attraction alone (focus strictly on externals) and even psychological attractions ("I feel better about me when I'm with them")
- b. The goal is to be with your best friend in this lifelong covenant, having a companion through the trials, challenges, happy occasions and times when truly "two are better than one" - Ecc. 4:9-12
- c. The pursuit of "oneness of spirit" can and should be started before marriage in courtship

B. The goal - a long and solid marriage

see Ec. 5:1-7

1. A marriage that lasts is built on covenant vows that both persons take seriously

Courtship should be designed to prepare for exclusive commitments to each other by keeping their present commitments to God and their parents (or other authorities)

Far too often it is heard in broken and troubled marriages that "This isn't the person I married" - if ever research and investigation is needed, it is before marriage

Arguing can also reveal a focus on self

- a. This means that both should be expected to demonstrate themselves as trustworthy and faithful before they come to take the marriage vows
- b. Much of the modern approach to dating seeks to stretch the limits of what they are supposed to avoid (usually physically) and seeks to emphasize independence prematurely
- c. If the aim is physical, the marriage won't last beyond the natural affects of age - true friendships have common goals and enjoy each other's company - these are foundational to lasting friendships that will hold-out till one's dying days
- d. If either members of the perspective couple cannot be found trustworthy and consistent in their temperament and obligations, they certainly should not be trusted to keep marriage vows - this is essential to know before marriage!
- e. Fighting/arguing is most often based on mistrust and should be a warning sign that the couple are not practically "compatible" - this point is not designed to encourage several break-ups in the pursuit of a spouse, but is designed to stress that it is better to know this before the two have vowed their commitment to each other before God

2. A marriage/relationship that is "solid" does not fear difficulty because of their trust in each other

Typically, something that is solid was made so over a period of time and not quickly - so it should be expected that the pre-marriage relationship should be given plenty of time to solidify the relationship

- a. As hardships arise, a couple that can depend on each other faces them together and are not apt to turn-on each other in their pain and frustration
- b. A solid relationship is seen when two can lean-on each other and expect it
- c. Both have developed a trust in each other and allow themselves to become interdependent - marriage is not a place to seek out independence from the spouse!
- d. It is good for each to see the other face stressful situations ahead of time, realizing that pressure has a way of revealing what's really on the inside

II. Keeping Focus on the Requirements - What are we Building on and Working With?

A. It often appears that relationships just happen and that some are just "lucky" in being in one that is happy and harmonious and that is truly committed - it is better though to realize some things "work" because of certain "ingredients" no matter the seeming influence of "chance" (as if there actually is such thing as "chance") - this does not discount God's grace, but neither should we treat faith as though it is blind - so we need to realize there are three fundamental building blocks of any relationship and these should be built upon before marriage

1. It may be argued that in many, if not most of the marriages in the Bible do not illustrate this process leading up to their marriages - this is true
2. This does not dictate though our pre-marriage processes since these Biblical examples truly were demonstrations of their cultural practices (there were arranged marriages, illustrative marriages and multiple wives marriages)

B. The three foundations, in a necessary order, on which to build

1. The necessity of communication - talking, listening and learning (understanding)

In texts such as Heb. 13:16 the idea of “communication” is giving of one’s self which is core to the idea of communicating

Relationships focused on “self” are soon to be consumed of “self”

- a. Many are guilty of assuming that love is the most important part of a relationship failing to realize that there are two necessary ingredients to the love that are needed in a marriage relationship - love is essentially giving of one’s self in sharing thoughts and taking in the thoughts of another (listening) and learning about the other
- b. It is absolutely essential to communicate before we can love - if true communication is not reached, many will have a love based on perception and not reality and, sooner or later, reality will be seen for what it is in a marriage
- c. So much of what is considered “dating” today is the discovery of each other physically and this being driven essentially with the newness of discovering a new area of pleasing themselves - but if the relationship can begin focused upon and built upon the enjoyment of getting to know each other’s thoughts and thinking first, all that follows will be solid - it is learning to “relate” which is essentially what a relationship is!

2. The necessity of trust - growing a reliable reliance with each other

Whether we realize it or not, we are building patterns of thought and motivators well before the marriage and often these are founded on selfishness - many want to be able to trust but don’t focus on being trustworthy themselves

so many offenses in marriages come from mistrust - Psa. 119:165 “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them”

- a. Many marital issues stem from a mistrust (not necessarily that one or the other will be unfaithful) beginning to second-guess each other and their motives - this is, of course, a result of a lack of true communication, for we do not trust those we don’t know
- b. With trust comes dependability making it so each can come to reliably depend on the other - if the couple can come to a stage where each one is driven to be dependable this will carry into the marriage as a norm and not a novelty likely to fade
- c. As described in Pro. 31:10-12 the “virtuous woman” (literally a woman strong in what is right, reliable) whose husband can fully trust in her that they will not lack gain because of her reliably taking on her responsibilities in the family - and as indicated in verse 10 we see the difficulty; “who can find her” seeming to indicate she is hard to find
- d. The man, on his part, strives to prove himself trustworthy taking on the example of our Lord in his expectation that he will give himself for her - Eph. 5:25-30
- e. So, true, open and consistent communication leads to their negotiating their way to trust

3. With communication set in place, trust is fostered and both naturally leading to true love

Rom. 8:29, Mt. 7:23, II Tim. 2:19, I Pet. 1:2 - the uses of the word (and variations) “know” mean more than “know of” but to know as we would of someone we know closely

- a. It is a fact that we will not love (relationally) someone we don’t talk to and someone we don’t trust - God uses the term “know” of Himself with us carrying the idea of an intimate (close/personal) knowledge displayed in His love of us
- b. The concept of salvation is an excellent demonstration of this type of love - there is a “knowing” and a giving, all communicated to us in detail of His work for us - each partner in the marriage relationship should hope to follow such a pattern of giving, communicating, knowing and loving
- c. Then, in the marriage relationship, the physical relationship comes as a response to the love that has been fostered and is not the source of the love itself - those who found their relationship on the physical aspects soon come to find the relationship to be shallow and unfulfilling - many then go onto other physical or flirtatious relationships to find the fulfillment they know they are lacking only to find frustration

C. The need for “standards” - commitments, obligations, restrictions and responsibilities

1. The goal is a true marriage and a true marriage is one of commitment

As in a marriage, solid standards keep it proper and functioning, so also good standards keep us from potentially the painful and difficult obligations of a poor marriage

- a. There are standards (guides) established to keep us focused each on the other because true love obligates itself so the one reliant on us can trust in us - because we love them
- b. If we set the standard of a “good marriage” high enough, many of our young people are less apt to settle (seen usually in compromises) seeing the value of working and waiting for such a relationship - and on the flip-side, if such standards cannot be met they are apt to see the value in remaining single not defining their lives ultimately by being married to another person, but mainly in their “marriage” to Christ

2. Well-planned and proper standards keep the relationship focused

Trust is essentially earned over time, with commitments and varying “proofs” of reliability so it should not be assumed by the children that their parents are obligated to completely trust them at the start

Standards, restrictions and rules may vary between couples realizing the differing strengths and weaknesses of those involved - fairness is not the “driving force”!

- a. Temptations need to be anticipated and selfish tendencies expected and realizing this, protective guides and barriers need to be established (ideas of these to be discussed later)
- b. There is not only a need for each to guard their hearts but a need to guide them
- c. There is certainly place for some mistrust in a courting relationship by the parents of the prospective couple, but this can often be so emphasized that the proper areas of development can be stifled - “standards” are more than just restrictions but are also guides of what to do (not just lists of what not to do but what should be done)
- d. So, restrictions will be given as well as encouragement as to what should be done to build the relationship properly - concepts of “investment” for their future
- e. As clarified in Pr. 29:18, when there is no “standard” (rule or goal) the people “cast of restraints” and are uncontrolled (lit. “are naked” in Hebrew)
- f. The purpose for these standards and guides needs to be clarified, realizing we all appreciate these “rules” when we see their purpose (e.g. traffic laws)

III. Starting at the Beginning - Dealing with the Initial Attraction - Pro. 30:18-19

A. “The way of a man with a maid” is one of the items listed as “too wonderful” and “which I do not understand” - all that is associated with attraction is “above figuring out” (difficult)

1. This text can be taken two ways - honorable attraction and all that comes with it and dishonorable (which usually carries with deception stemming from lustful intents)

“I like how they look”
“I like how they think”
“I like who they are and what they stand for”

- a. When a young man and young lady find someone they are “attracted to” they will typically need some guidance in discerning the exact nature of their attraction
- b. There are three basic forms of attraction; physical, psychological (attracted to how the other thinks and acts) and then spiritual (values, commonness of goals)
- c. Often the attraction can be discovered to be just physical and a little “research” will point out other more important areas that are not so attractive - it is best if the young person talks it through with their parents, so parents need to do all they can to cultivate a comfortable atmosphere for their children to bring them such situations
- d. If the attraction is more than external but truly found to be sincere, then comes the intimidating part of investigating whether or not the attraction is mutual - this should, then, involve the parents of the other - this will need to be handled with great caution!
 - There is potential for deep hurts at this point so it should be treated as such

Often there will be a sense of embarrassment which makes them apprehensive to talk about it

2. There is nothing initially wrong with physical attraction - most of the Song of Solomon illustrates this as one of the aspects of genuine attraction and affection

Maturity will be seen when either my see past outward “good-looks” to a lack of character and discretion - see Pr. 11:22

- a. Finding another physically attractive should not be considered evil (though it could become so depending on the direction of the thoughts (where they go))
- b. Physical attraction is natural and God-given, but is often treated with suspicion because history demonstrates the tendency for it to become the sole focus
- c. Many were described in Scripture as being “good-looking” (Sarah (Gen. 12:11), Rebekah (Gen. 24:16), Esther (Es. 2:7), David (I Sam. 16:2; 17:42))
- d. This will often be the first point of attraction though that is not always the case - many could testify that there was not an initial physical attraction but as each was able to get to know each other an attraction formed in personalities, life-outlook and then physical

3. The “opposites attract” is true but can be misunderstood - there may be aspects of a person that are opposite that we find attractive because they are different from us, but some differences are not good - basically, we desire complimentary differences

- a. So much of what we find attractive stems from our upbringing - one of the goals of a parent is to develop desires in their children for what is right (best) and this is often what “when they are old they will not depart from it” - Pr. 22:6
- b. Some attractions reveal character issues that need to be addressed

Many of the things that take place in our teenage and young adult years will impact the rest of our lives

Much of the initial instruction is for the son to keep these commands nearby, as constant reminders and central to his focus (“apple of thine eye”)

- c. We (as parents or other influences) need to be discerning of what some of these attractions may really be - if there is an attraction to “rebellion” of sorts, this may lead to potentially dangerous consequences and influences
- d. The warnings of a father to his son in Proverbs 7 are descriptive, not just of an immoral person, but of the process used - there is strong instruction to “keep” (guard) the words of counsel being given and to utilize “wisdom” (to be of “good sense” and to be one given to looking beyond the immediate to the after effects (consequences) of possible directions and decisions)
- e. The objective, as it is and should be for all of us, with not only our sons but our daughters also (that they not be taken in by such and that they not become such)

B. The tactics and allurements of immoral attractions - Proverbs 7

1. The “victim” in verse 7 is characterized as one “naive” and “lacking in sense” as one untaught, unwarned or one willfully neglecting what was given - guard against attractions to those lacking discretion - as in Pr. 1:22, they may be attractive, but seen in a better light, it is like the attraction of “a gold ring in a pig’s snout”
2. These are also characterized as those, as it were, “flirting with temptation” (going to where temptation was and where what it offers is more convenient) - be wary of attractions to “flirts” (showing indications of affection without serious intentions of commitment)
3. She is now described by her attire (as a harlot) and she is immodest not only in her dress (undue attention to clothing and overemphasis on appearance) but is also immodest in her behavior (she is “boisterous” and “rebellious”) - these types of individuals put on a show of over-confidence, independence and irresponsibility, all of which should be warning-signs to those that are young to beware of attractions to the flamboyant (ones constantly seeking out attention to themselves) - someone who is the “life of the party” is not necessarily obsessed with self
4. Her tactics are aggressiveness, maybe even pseudo-religious (as in our example of “paid vows” and “peace offerings”), flattery (“it was you and your face I have been looking for”), instant speech usually set aside for deep commitment (seeking earnestly and now, “I have found you”), immediate emphasis on the physical (lustful), justifying and building false security in what is normally forbidden and immoral
5. The reason for these warning and illustrations is to warn them to “not let your heart turn aside to her ways, do not stray into her paths” - these types of attractions can truly be “captivating” and will seize onto the heart clouding good-judgment
6. Similar warnings are given in Proverbs 6:23-28 where the goal of these restrictions and instructions is to “keep you from the evil woman”

All these are descriptive of the superficial and the lack of true depth in a relationship - much of society stresses these now as relationship builders and sustainers

What attracts us will most definitely affect us

- a. It does not say not to desire beauty, just not to desire “her beauty” - there is an attractiveness, but it is to be avoided so it does not take hold of the heart
- b. This type of person is “captivating” with her attractiveness (here it references her eyelids - the types of looks she gives and the way she looks at “you”)

C. We need to be alert early-on to the influences of society as to what it indicates is attractive

1. Culture will in one way or another impact what we look on as attractive - look to the past with clothing styles, hair styles, beards and mustaches and even weight

Parents need to teach their children that their attractiveness is not dictated by society and that they should seek to be who they really are - they don’t want to attract shallow people or to develop an attractiveness built on pretense

- a. These types of “beauties” are fleeting and not something relationships should be built on
- b. As seen above, we will have tendencies to be attracted to “bad” things and “shallow” qualities, so we start with the acknowledgment of this - forewarned we are forearmed
- c. Some of these will be wholesome and will last throughout a marriage relationship (what we find attractive) - much of it will be individual and this is not wrong or evil, but other points of attractions should be built

2. Before courtship and during it, “better” attractions should be developed - not exactly, but similar to our trying to develop other “tastes” for our health - courtship should not just be a time of enjoyment and fun, but one of development and growth - we need to be challenged

D. It is important to learn and remember that beauty is more than “skin-deep”

1. The “sons of God” in Genesis 6 married (as it seems) solely because those they saw were “fair to look upon” and there needed to be more in their decisions to marry

Annon thought he loved Tamar but soon came to discover it was just one of the many variations of lust and soon, as is always the case, it became hateful anger - II Sam. 13

- a. Courtship should seek to discover and develop other attractions - is the other’s personality, behavior, aspirations and overall outlook on life attractive? - if so why?
- b. The goal is to discover and grow in attractions that last (they’re always attractive) - these lend to helping us get through times of other “unattractions” that may arise
- c. Lustful attractions are short-lived because lust always seeks to get and in the getting always wants more and something different

2. They need to come to see areas of contentment and completeness with each other

It may be revealed that the affection is one that is only superficial and not based on what can be lasting

- a. The courtship needs to be limited in what they can do related to their attractions, but should also seek to encourage growing in other attractions in each other
- b. What we find attractive can be developed and grown over time - we strive to truly have what is mentioned in Rom. 12:9 that our love be “without hypocrisy”
- c. The time given to courtship needs to ensure that the “familiarity breeds contempt” concept is not true with them - this phrase carries the popular idea that at first there may be an attraction, but once more is known of the individual they no longer seem as attractive as they used to be
- d. As we mature, we develop better perspectives of what is attractive, which demonstrates why it is best to have a mature outlook when it comes to prospects of marriage

If there are “grating” traits early on, it is probable these will become major problems later

IV. To Court Or Not To Court

A. This part of the materials that we are about to venture into, will no doubt vary with each relationship based upon the two families involved. Clearly there are exceptions to these, as some may not have a parent (age or one or both parents are gone), or one or both of the families may not be “on the same page” when it comes to this processes - either way, it is good to have a plan and structure to set a pattern to layout goals and keep the couple focused on their end-goal of a good marriage

1. Some may choose to date (though this should be under some accountability) but it would be in their best interest to follow some of what will be suggested here

see Pr. 4:20-27

2. Since we can be very vulnerable (emotionally thus mentally) during these times, it is best to have objective counsel, perspectives and guidelines to keep rightly focused Not all counsel will be good counsel.

B. Let’s start at the beginning; an attraction has been recognized between a young man and young lady and there is interest with both of pursuing it further

No two individuals will be “perfect” but their life outlook, their life focus and goals need to be discerned as much as possible

1. If either of the parents (or trusted, extended counsel) is against it, and sees issues or probable issues, it should be at the least put off and “held back” - one of the dangers of “casual” dating (indiscriminating dating) is the quick involvement of the heart

• Parents, though, should do all they can to scrutinize their own reasons to make sure they are not misdirected, uninformed, wrongly biased or just wrong

2. Ideally, following the idea of marriage being a covenant, the young man should take the initiative and approach the father of the young lady first to discuss his interests

a. Clearly for this to happen, it would be best to have had times where opportunities of “mingling” would and could take place for both to have some idea of the character of the other - there are cultures that do this differently, but we are staying focused on ours and one approach - good (useful) fellowship usually requires planning

b. Families or churches may set these times up, though it would be ideal if they could be with entire families around and not just teenagers - often (not always) the “atmosphere” will be different (in a bad sense) when responsible “parties” are not involved (not just present but aware and alert)

c. We must be on the guard against opportunities for “defrauding” to take place - I Thes. 4:1-8 which warns against those who “over-reach” in their impure desires on another

Social networking of all kinds should be monitored to watch out for premature attachments or even forms of defrauding

- C. The typical process leading to marriage is acquaintance, attraction, fellowship, friendship, courtship, engagement, marriage - this is progressive and should naturally lead to more levels of “seriousness”
1. As mentioned previously, some opportunities are needed for “youth” to have some interaction with others and usually they will be more or less casual times - without some time to form acquaintances, there may be undue awkwardness if the relationship is forced by others and attraction might end up being “ misinformed ” - match-making can become a problem
 2. Having some “quality time,” proper attractions can be formed (grown) - this is why some of the activities leading to forming these attractions should have some mature and spiritual aspects to them to allow opportunity to reveal genuine character or the lack of it
 - There are some guidelines in Scripture that should govern our approach to this - I Cor. 5:9-13 lays out Paul’s challenge to the Corinthian church and their associations, and particularly those of poor character in the church (they have a greater likelihood of being more of an influence/affect) - note also I Cor. 15:33 (bad fellowship has a way of “corrupting” good morals) - “good fellowship” is more than just “good” people being together, but also should include whatever promotes “goodness”
 3. Attraction usually finds a way (or seeks it out) to have more fellowship with a desire for more exclusivity (too exclusive can be distracting and not enough stifles its growth)
 - a. It would be wise to have some fundamental qualities worked-out ahead of time to guard the young person from forming attractions to someone that would be against their parents counsel or good judgment - we often form “standards” ahead of time to guard our future selves in moments of emotional instability and poor discernment
 - b. Key areas should be set firm and discussed (reasoned-out) together so not only are they known but the sense of them is clear also - qualities or conditions such as the spiritual state (salvation), a level of responsible maturity (it isn’t wise to form an attraction to someone who is clearly irresponsible or lazy), not given to anger (patient), goal-oriented (they’re aiming at something in life (vocational, mental, spiritual)), in good relation to their parents and/or other authorities, kind and gracious being considerate of others and one not given to facades (acting different for the sake of who happens to be around) but are open about themselves (weaknesses/faults)
 - c. Beware the defiant, belittling response from a “prospect” or even onlookers who believe this may too strict (we must not lose sight of the seriousness of what is being pursued) - No doubt, many have loosened standards in many areas just because of the fear of what others may think (who have very little, if anything, invested in the situation)
 4. A friendship should be formed including an open plan to lead to courtship (and may just become “courtship” anyway) - some of this openness may be useful to deal with potential jealousies (which should not necessarily be belittled since it is a normal part of a close relationship, though it should also not be allowed to become obsessive)
 5. Once it is fairly clear to the parents (or older points of counsel) an official courtship will be established, formally recognizing that the couple are “intended” for each other in the pursuit of a probable marriage relationship

Some of these may have some good qualities but they should not be used to overlook fundamental flaws since these will often become major issues in a marriage

It might be good to have the couple focus on qualities such as the Fruits of the Spirit in Gal. 5 for the qualities of the Beatitudes of Mat. 5

Other needed qualities may be worked-out based upon the uniqueness of the young person (strong likes/dislikes, personality quirks and personal aspirations)

This does not include the idea of one “forcing” others to accept their poor behavior or their independent opinions and criticisms

one of the drawbacks to “dating” is the common practice of forming fast, close relationships and then cutting them off abruptly leaving hurt hearts and often lasting, deep offenses

- a. This part may closely resemble engagement though without having an established “date” for the wedding and, most importantly, no proposal of marriage has been made
- b. This will be a time to allow for time for the character of both to be evidenced through the natural course of time and, if needed, either person may end it if it becomes clear they should not be together - this should not happen if both (including their families) have seen the couple form the friendship
- c. The time together, under the discretion of the parents, will be controlled and freedoms may be given (periodic times alone (in groups) and maybe a “date”)
- d. Clear and openly identified standards should be established not only for the couple, but for those who will be around them (public accountability can be useful)

It is often at this point that exceptions will be brought up but must not be allowed to derail the discussions

see Gal. 5:17

The goal is the focus of I Jn. 2:15-17 seeking lasting priorities

The “looseness” that typifies most of the relationships between men and women is a result of a disregard for God’s purpose in marriage altogether (as it is so many other areas of life)

As mentioned in James 1:15, lust ultimately leads to death, the death of not just the body, but of relationships and potential also

It may also be referring to the proper ways of “possessing” (obtaining) a wife

This point is so important that Paul points out that God is the “avenger of such” defrauding and overstepping the bounds of decorum and purity with another

Ignore this at your own risk - do not go after immoral pursuits and most certainly do not draw someone else into it also for this is what God hates and avenges - it is very serious!

Just as it is possible to be to short so there may be the possibility of it being too long

At this point, they are “very exclusive” to each other and other than the physical aspects of marriage and living together, they should see themselves as a “unit” and committed to each other

- e. Standards/rules will not only be for their protection and direction, but should also serve to help them avoid the appearance of wrong-doing - it must be recognized that whether it is appreciated or not, an example will be set and, in the area of relationships between young couples, there are precious few good examples seen in our day!
 - f. Guidelines regarding physical contact need to be firmly set and made clear - it would be best if no kissing be allowed since this is (in most cases) reserved for marriage and is usually only done by married couples (or close family) - affectionate kissing between unrelated people will almost always be inappropriate - reaffirm that the physical aspects of the relationship will have a place in marriage and will have the tendency to distract the true relationship-building if allowed (compromised) before the covenant of marriage (Why start what God never intended to stop?) - we are to “flee” the lusts typically associated with being young - II Tim. 2:22
 - g. Other situations, such as hugging and holding hands, need to be determined ahead of time and is probably best to be put off also - it may be argued that some gestures such as hugging are typically harmless between most people, but it would be naive to think this to be the case between a couple considering marriage - a hug and holding hands between a husband and wife is very different from holding the hand or hugging anyone else - the “marriage bed” as mentioned in Heb. 13:4 is to be “undefiled” not just in marriage but can be defiled before marriage, and we should honor it so highly (even though society does not) because it is God’s institution - so, rules are established, not just for the protection of the couple, but also out of respect for God
 - h. The warning and instruction of I Thes. 4:1-8 - the goal is to “walk” (live) as is pleasing to God and to pursue to do so even more (excel) - the phrase in verse 4 “...to possess his own vessel...” carries the idea of keeping one’s self pure (sanctification and honor) verses “lustful passion” as is characteristic of the “masses” (Gentiles) - this is, as the text began, the will of God, our “sanctification” (“set-apartness”) not our conformity to the age in which we live (in this area of purity)
 - (1). The other purpose and answer to why it is God’s will, deals with the result of impurity (or impure pursuits) and that being the “transgressing and defrauding a brother” (it is the overstepping the bounds and bringing someone with us)
 - (2). And, to make it clear, if anyone “rejects” this standard, they are not rejecting the standard of man but of God (the underlying word for “reject” communicates the despising of something so it is “set-aside” and ignored for something deemed more important)
 - (3). A case can also be made from this text and others (such as I Cor. 7:9) that it may be wise not to have a courtship too long as it may lead to stronger temptations to impurity (which is made so when the physical is outside of marriage)
 - i. Conversations between the couple should consist of topics that include how, as a team, they can learn, grow and minister and, also, how they can do all these as individuals (this is the core idea of “edification”, building-up, keeping the relationship constructive)
6. After some time of courtship, and once the man (young man) is ready to start the process to the marriage covenant, an official engagement should be established
- a. This is typically (and for good reason) begun by the young man asking the young lady’s father (or older point of counsel in some cases) for permission to marry - this has often been associated with seeking the “blessing” (approval) from whoever is the authority - this is a part of keeping the entire process honorable
 - b. Once the engagement is announced, all involved (family and friends) should encourage them in it as much as possible - the time of engagement should be used to prepare for the wedding day (and all logistics such as a date) and then all the planning for starting their life together (place to live, job, etc.)

- c. It would be wise for the couple to go through some pre-marital counselling mainly for the purpose to identify areas they may not have thought about or discussed - again, the purpose is not to rethink the marriage (if a thorough process has led them to this point) but to reinforce the “fundamentals” of marriage (the roles and responsibilities) and to better plan for their lives together (living together)

6. Marriage - Gen. 2:24; Mt. 19:3-6; Eph. 5:22-33

Many ceremonies become so focused on the pageantry that the purpose and seriousness is overlooked and overpowered by the celebration

There is a tendency to focus more on two families being united/joined rather than the unique, autonomous family being established

Witnesses to the covenant should feel the obligation to point the couple back to their marriage vows when there may be trouble

The best of marriages is formed on God’s purposes - all other purposes are temporal, fleeting and constantly subject to change

The sacrifices for children are much more gladly accepted when their value is encouraged

- a. The planning for the ceremony and all that is associated with it should include some of the underlying concepts with marriage - it should include the acknowledgement that the marriage is a life-long covenant and that the two openly agree and look to hold themselves as accountable to all “witnesses” to the marriage covenant ceremony
- b. The ceremony should include the reality of a new family being formed stressing the reality of the two leaving their parents to form this new family - this then needs to be lived-out and continually established after they are married - far too often there is still an inclination to be associated more with the family they left than in the one they have formed - it is essential that the couple stay focused most on each other and that both families encourage them in it rather than competing for their loyalties
- c. In-laws must be conscientious to be points of counsel and no more - the husband must be allowed to face the pressures and responsibilities of being the leader of his home
- d. The couple need to see themselves (now) as a team, a unit that God has brought together to combine their strengths in their overall service for God - most marital conflicts arise when either or both in the couple focus on their individual goals and not their combined goals - “faith” is more than religion and church, it is a definer of purpose and a director of ways by establishing priorities by restricting/focusing directions and decisions
- e. Having children should not be discouraged as though it would be a relationship inhibitor - procreation is one of God’s fundamental purposes for marriage, and those who would be points of counsel should encourage it rather than following the current societal ideas of children being hindrances and career destroyers
- f. The couple should also be encouraged by all to invest in each other (their marriage) and never should any true “fiend” seek to divide them and support conflict - “Love bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things: Love never fails” - I Cor. 13:7-8