

From Singles to Spouses

Biblical Principles for Dating and Marriage

Author of the *New York Times* Bestseller
The Reason for God

TIMOTHY KELLER

WITH KATHY KELLER

THE
MEANING
OF
MARRIAGE

FACING THE COMPLEXITIES OF
MARRIAGE WITH THE WISDOM OF GOD

Question

- Why talk about marriage to the unmarried?
- Single people cannot live their lives as singles without an informed view of marriage
- They will either over-desire or under-desire marriage

1 Cor 7:27-31

- ²⁷ Are you pledged to a woman? Do not seek to be released. Are you free from such a commitment? Do not look for a wife. ²⁸ But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this
- ²⁹ What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not; ³⁰ those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; ³¹ those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away
- Paul's view of marriage seems inconsistent with his view in Eph 5

The Kingdom of God

- What does Paul mean by “For this world in its present form is passing away”?
- God’s Kingdom is here but it is not fully realized
- The old order of life—with its decay, disease, and death—is not over but it is passing away
- Not until Jesus returns will the Kingdom of God be fully manifested

Implications for Marriage?

- Married life and singleness are good conditions
- We should not be elated by getting married nor overly disappointed by being single
- Why? Because Christ is the only spouse that can truly fulfil us
- The gospel and the hope of the future kingdom de-idolizes marriage
- The Christian's future is not guaranteed by family but by God
- Even Eph 5 does not regard marriage as ultimate
- Marriage is meant to reflect our relationship with God

Eph 5:21-33

- ²¹ Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.
- ²² Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.
- ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— ³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” ³² This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Misconceptions about Marriage

- Today, marriage is all about me. This is not to make a sacrifice but to find someone who is compatible, who accepts me as I am, and helps me to reach my goals
- That approach puts great pressure on the kind of marriage that the Bible prescribes
- We need to understand that marriage is a covenant commitment to not just feel loving to your spouse, but to be loving, to serve him or her regardless of how you feel (Gen 2:24)
- That's what you are promising when you get married. Then you can truly be yourself

Misconceptions about Love

- Love for most people is that someone you like and admire responded to you. That's not love. That's ego. It's hunger. It's ego emptiness that needs to be affirmed by someone who is making you feel better about yourself
- Biblical love is sacrificial service and the delight you increasingly find in someone that you've invested your life in
- At first, we fall in love with the idea of that person, not the actual person. People see each other's flaws and get disillusioned. Slowly repentance takes place when people give up, then holding on, trying harder, forgiving, showing grace to each other. And slowly real love grows. Slowly you begin to admire that person for what he has been through for you

Ready for Marriage?

- The Christian writer Fulton Sheen wrote a book entitled, *It Takes Three to Get Married*
- “A cord of three strands is not easily broken,” because God has to be the center for the marriage to succeed (Eccl 4:12)
- A marriage will only endure when people fall in love, not so much with each other, but together with a transcendent third—God
- It’s never enough for a husband and wife to just love each other. Their mission in life is to serve God together
- Otherwise, the marriage will eventually become self-serving, unless God pulls the couple outside of themselves

The History of Dating

- What practical guidelines can we give singles who are seeking a spouse?
- Until the 19th century, most marriages were arranged
- Only at the turn of the 20th century did dating emerge, at least in the West

Practical Advice for Dating

- (1) Keep God's greatest commandment first: Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matt 22:37)
- You will not truly love others well unless you love God first
- (2) Understand that the "gift of singleness" (1 Cor 7:7) does not mean a lack of desire for marriage
- It refers to the freedom to concentrate on ministry that married people cannot

Practical Advice for Dating

- (3) Do not get emotionally involved with a non-Christian:
- “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?” (2 Cor 6:14)
- (4) Feel “attraction” in the comprehensive sense
- “But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion” (1 Cor 7:9)
- Physical attraction is reasonable but go beyond that to one’s spiritual character or fruit (Gal 5:22)

Practical Advice for Dating

- “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control” (Gal 5:22-23)
- (5) Marriage should encourage your partner to become what God wants him/her to become
- (6) Don’t get passionate too quickly—make time to get to know each other without letting desire cloud your judgment
- (7) Don’t date someone who won’t commit to you
- (8) Get input from those in your spiritual community or family