

Made for Marriage

The subject of marriage is one that we are most proud of. How privileged we are to present to you some of what we know about it!

If you are new to this book, you would do well to first read our previous lesson entitled “Treating Ladies Properly.” Those who have already studied this lesson might benefit from a review. Indeed, “Treating Ladies Properly” and “Made for Marriage” go hand in hand as much as any two lessons can.

You will find, in the lesson that follows, encouragement upon encouragement regarding this wonderful topic. To be sure, we will include cautions, but each point made will guide you toward truth, wisdom, and sound reason.

In the Beginning...

As you know, God created the world and all that is in it. But did you know that when He did so He also created the first *institution*, and that this institution was marriage? This fact is wonderfully laid out for us in Genesis, and it is one of the most revealing narratives of God’s intention for intimacy ever written:

The Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and

breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being...Then the Lord God took man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it...

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." ...So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh at that place. And the Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man.

And the man said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. *Gen. 2:15, 18, 21-24*

God Ordained

When we say that marriage was the first institution, we are stating that it was purposefully put into place by someone. The Genesis narrative makes it clear that this Someone was God. Indeed, He is the one who created and ordained it. That is why some people refer to marriage as *holy matrimony*.

There are those who do not want to acknowledge that God created marriage, for if they acknowledged Him, they would also have to be accountable to Him. Instead of believing marriage was God ordained, they have convinced themselves that marriage is a *social construct*, meaning that certain societies long ago "invented" marriage to suit the needs of their culture.

But marriage is not something invented by man. How

foolish to think this were even possible! Man could not have invented the institution of marriage any more than he could have spoken himself into existence. On the contrary, marriage is a heavenly construct, and as sure as the heavens reflect the glory of its Maker, matrimony is “clad in the beauty of a thousand stars.”

Marriage—A Perfect Design

Could a man improve upon the splendor of the heavens by tossing tinsel in the sky? Of course not; so neither could he hope to improve upon God’s design of holy matrimony. From the beginning, the institution of marriage was a perfect one. And within His design, there are clear qualities which comprise this perfection. Let’s discuss some of these now:

One Man and a Wife

Marriage, as God has intended, is the holy union between a man and a wife. One would think that this quality would be self-evident, but unfortunately this is not always so. In fact, certain adherents to worldly ideals have made a downright mockery of holy matrimony. In this regard, they have attempted to redefine marriage altogether. This mockery has resulted in a variety of expressed ideas, ranging from the ridiculous to the grotesque.

We do not want to spend too much time describing what marriage is not. Sufficient to say, marriage is between a man and a wife, nothing less. Suggesting that it could be anything less would be like comparing the Grand Tetons to a termite hill, or the Pacific Ocean to a mud puddle, or the Great Plains to a briar patch. You get the idea. One simply cannot take the majestic and make from it the mundane.

A Lifelong Commitment

There are some who have concluded, for selfish reasons, that

a man and woman can just live together as long as it conveniences them to do so, instead of honoring God's original intention. Not surprisingly, God's intention involves a *lifelong commitment*.

Some religious leaders once asked Jesus a question related to this topic:

And some Pharisees came to Him, testing Him, and saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all?" And He answered and said, "Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh'? Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

Matt. 19:3-6

There are a number of important things that we can gather from this passage. For starters, we note that Jesus Himself, when posed a question, went to the Scriptures to present His answer, for He knew that Holy Scripture is the supreme authority on all matters. This is true not only for the subject of marriage, but for all other subjects as well.

Another key point is Jesus' emphasis that a man and woman become *one flesh* upon the marriage union. This is a vital component to your full understanding of the matter. One day you will likely be married, and you must understand that you and this lucky lady (although you may be the luckier), will no longer be considered two people in God's eyes. Rather, you will be one.

This passage also emphasizes the importance of honoring commitment. Jesus said that no man should attempt to separate what God has joined together. Just as God has merged the ocean with the shoreline and the forest with the field, so too has He

joined man and woman through holy matrimony. The two are as inseparable as can possibly be.

Oh, how we lament that not all who are joined in holy matrimony understand the strength of their bonds! Perhaps you, like us, have been witness to the awfulness of divorce. Divorce is never ideal. At its worst there are casualties, and at its best there is an awful state of confusion one must recover from, like waking from a horrible dream yet thinking you are still caught in it.

We will say a final word on the subject of divorce and then be done with it. Simply stated, you must purpose that divorce will *never* be an option for you to initiate.

Love and Commitment

We are proud to report that we have been witness to thousands of blessed, rich, and wonderful marriages. And we know that there are millions more than those we have witnessed. What accounts for the success of these marvelous relationships? To be sure, there are several contributing factors, but central to them all is an understanding of the relationship between love and commitment.

Perhaps no greater passage describing the essence of true love can be found than the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians. In part, it says...

Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails....

While we can glean several things from this wonderful passage, one thing seems to stand out. If you consider the various phrases used to describe love, you will notice that *not one of them suggests that love is an emotional feeling*. So we can see that love is a commitment more so than anything else.

How does one exercise patience? By *choosing* to do so. How does one exercise kindness? By *choosing* to do so. How does one exercise belief, hope, or anything else that comprises love? The answer is always the same—by *choosing* to do so. Perhaps no other thing that you will learn during your journey to manhood is as important as the conclusion that you will find here, and that is that *love is a choice, rather than a feeling*. If you are to be married one day, you will do well to dwell on this truth.

How does one choose to love? By commitment toward this purpose. So you can instill the important virtue of commitment toward your future wife now, even though you may not yet know her face or name. You can do so by thinking of her and praying for her, all in a spirit of awe, commitment, and anticipation.

To what degree should you love your wife? The love you express for your wife should be greater than your love for anything else. In fact, the measure of your love for your wife should be proportional to the love that Christ has for His church. Ephesians 5:25 says, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.” So your love will need to be a *sacrificial one*.

Sacrificial Love

What is sacrificial love? Among other things, it involves a willingness on your part to become lesser so that your wife can become greater. It also involves accepting her for who she is, rather than trying to make her become something worthy of your acceptance. After all, does Jesus make a person behave perfectly

before He will accept him or her? Of course not (although there are plenty of religious people who would suggest otherwise).

You will see plenty of men getting angry at their wives for trivial things, but we implore you not to follow their ways. Getting mad for simple matters is really a waste of everybody's time and energy, and we would like to spare you (and others) of this. To the degree that Jesus tolerates your behavior, you should tolerate your wife's, and always give her the benefit of the doubt in this regard. In doing so, remember that "love is patient, love is kind...." Emulate Jesus, and you will do right.

We should know that sacrificial love can be taken to an extreme not intended by God. We have witnessed plenty of men who let their wives have their ways in just about everything. Perhaps these men think they are somehow demonstrating sacrificial love, but more often than not they are likely just "giving in" to avoid a fight, or they may not know any other way. Some of these men, though they may be aware of their calling to lead, are nonetheless ill-equipped to do so.

Leadership and You

Simply stated, you are to lead your wife and the rest of your family as God gives increase. The Bible says, "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and He is the savior of the body" (Eph. 5:23).

Does this mean that you will simply declare the marching orders and your wife will follow suit? Not exactly, although your leadership may in fact need to be direct at times. But just as often as not, you will be leading by being a *servant* to her.

God often allows us to make decisions simply because He wants to fulfill the desires of our hearts (Psalm 20:4). Likewise, you should want to serve your wife by granting her desires. Of course, God does not always give us everything we want, and so

you will need to discern God's will in regard to her desires. But when in doubt, listen and respond accordingly to her. If you have a wife who loves the Lord, you will be wise in understanding that she will often be able to discern God's will in ways that you cannot.

Of course, leadership as a husband involves more than interaction with your wife. It involves an understanding that the various responsibilities of decision making rest on your shoulders and a willingness to live up to this calling. The good news, as you likely know, is that *you were made for this purpose*. We have no doubt in our minds that you can meet or exceed all expectations in this regard.

It is our view that the wisest and most efficient means for a man to provide for his family is for his labor to be the primary means of income for the family. In fact, it is our conviction that he should make enough money to meet the family's budget without his wife having to work. Are we saying it is wrong for a wife to work for income? By no means! We just think it is usually best if the family does not have to *depend* upon her income. We hope you follow our advice in this regard. Needless to say, you will have to be a good, steady worker.

It will also be up to you to set various policies in your home. Where will you live and what kind of house will you live in? Who will pay the bills, and who will be in charge of cleaning? What kind of vehicle will you buy? Will you have a garden? Of course, these decisions and many others will need to be made with your bride in mind. You will want to seek her insight, her desires, and her counsel. Together you can make these decisions. But the responsibility of the whole matter rests on you.

We will offer two cautions in regard to the leadership you will one day exercise as a husband. The first caution is to not take the calling of your leadership to an extreme. It seems there are always a few so-called men who think that leading their wives

means controlling them in some way. We have seen certain men become so arrogant in this regard that they make their wives follow them around, rarely letting them speak for fear of losing public respect. How sad this is. It is as though these men were teased on the playground during grammar school and are now trying to make up for their insecurities by oppressing their wives. You shall have no part of this nonsense.

However, there are those men that do not take their calling to lead seriously enough. These men will let their wives overspend, over-plan, over-direct, and over-lead in all manner of daily living without bringing a balance to the order of things. Some of these men may be victims of overly assertive women, but we wonder how many of these women are overly assertive simply because their husbands won't lead. This is a common trap that many couples fall into, and the consequences often trickle down to the children who are never sure of the family's order.

Planning Your Marriage

“Wait a minute!” you protest. “I’m only halfway through this lesson and you already want to plan my marriage. I’m not ready...Slow down!”

Relax, we are not wanting to determine what kind of cake you will be having or whether or not your wedding will be held indoors or outdoors (although we do recommend a splendid pig roast with all the fixings). What we mean by “planning your marriage” is thinking about your wife now, even though you may not have yet met her. If this seems odd, hear us out....

Too many couples never give a thought to marriage before they tie the knot. In fact, there are those who literally elope and get married within an hour of deciding to do so. While some of these foolish couples may be spared their due folly, more often than not they will somehow pay for their lack of preparation. Indeed, they would have been better off to study the concept of

marriage beforehand.

Do Not Be Unequally Yoked

What kind of woman will you marry someday? We hope you have some ideas founded in wisdom, but if you don't, we will be glad to offer a few. For one, we admonish you to marry a lady who loves the Lord as much as you do. It will be acceptable if she loves Him more than you do, as long as you don't argue about this in public.

Do you love the outdoors? If so, would you marry someone who spends her day under the bed? Do you love fine food? If so, would you marry someone who would rather eat cardboard than steak? If you love dogs, would you marry someone who prefers the company of fleas? Of course not! Why then, would you ever think of marrying a non-Christian who, at the core of her very soul, was opposed to everything you knew to be right and true?

The Bible offers clear direction on this matter: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6:14, KJV).

A "yoke," in case you don't know, is a wooden bar or frame by which two draft animals (like horses or oxen) are joined at the heads or necks for working together. If this team of two animals are "unequally yoked," they will not be able to travel in a straight line, for one will be strong and the other weak. At best, they will wander off the intended course many times. At worst, they will go in many circles and be forever lost. God wants neither; rather, He wants you to marry a lady who is as spiritually strong as He intends you to be, so that you can work together in a straight line toward the place of His leading.

So picture yourself as a strong and able ox, and behind you

is the master of the field and the plow which you are honored to pull. But yoked alongside you is a droopy-eyed basset hound whose feet don't come anywhere close to reaching the ground. And every time a rabbit or chipmunk comes in sight, this hound sounds off and tries to shake himself free.

We wouldn't blame you if the thought of being teamed up in this way took the spunk out of you. Yet this is kind of what it would be like if you were unequally yoked to a non-believer in marriage.

Role Models

If you have been blessed to be raised in a godly home, then you likely need to look no further than your own mother as a wifely role model. Is your mother perfect in this regard? Probably not (although she may be), but you should consider and appreciate everything and all that she does in the way of being a godly wife to your father, and look for a woman one day that will be somehow like her. Of course, you will find enough variance within the similarities to keep you on your toes. But you will be a blessed man if your wife is like your mother in at least a few ways.

Consider also some of your mother's friends. It's probable that you have already seen godly character emulated from these women. Mark these qualities down, and make it a point to determine a pattern in the things you appreciate.

Consider too the godly qualities that you see in your sisters or your sisters' friends. Now we realize that there may be a few things about some of these girls that are downright turn-offs. Maybe one of your sisters leaves her hairbrush on the vanity counter every morning. Maybe her friend talks too much or voices disapproval when you get blood on your pocketknife. But we aren't talking about these things. Rather, we are talking about virtues. Learn how to recognize and appreciate virtues.

The importance of this matter deserves special attention, and so we will discuss it further now.

Above All Else—Virtue

In short, make virtue the supreme target of your affections. More than money, appearance, fashion, or fame, be attracted to virtue. Is she kind? If so, good. If not, then remove her from consideration. Is she patient? If so, good. If not, avoid consideration of her. And so on.... Let the list of heaven's great virtues be your compass toward a godly wife. Remember, "If virtue accompany it... it is the heart's paradise."

There are those who may think your standards are too high by measuring a lady against godly virtue. But on what grounds should you lower your standards? On the contrary, we say *raise* your standards when in doubt, for we know you will not be able to raise them past the highest heavens, and the highest heavens are where the truly virtuous reside.

What do you say to "good looks"? Do you place a demand on this vain commodity? If so, we admonish you to consider otherwise, for the appearance of a lady, unlike her virtue, can be stolen by either time or travesty. And we have yet to meet a married man, who upon exercising true, sacrificial love, did not consider his bride as the supreme measure of all true beauty. Let the love of virtue guide your heart, and the concern of physical affairs will take care of itself.

Recognizing Virtue

How will you know virtue? Virtue is almost impossible *not* to recognize. If you do not recognize it, it is either because it is not there or you fell asleep during your study of the matter.

Virtue comprises the *persona* of a lady, and so you will see it manifest, among other ways, upon her countenance. She will

have the kind of smile that is never forced, and her candor will be smooth and confident, like the Spirit who resides within her. As her friend, she will make you proud for knowing her. As your wife, she will empower you beyond measure.

Recognizing virtue sometimes involves having a “blind eye” to the things that might otherwise distract a fussy man. In this regard, consider how Christ views His bride. Does He see His bride (the Church) with faults, or does He see his bride as being holy, pure, and perfect because He has made her to be so? The answer, of course, is the latter.

Therefore, as Christ sees his bride as pure and perfect, so should you also see your bride. View her as Christ views her, and you will see virtue upon virtue. You may, in fact, see virtue where others don’t, but remember, reality is always from God’s perspective.

Virtue and You

So far we have stated quite a bit about the importance of virtue within your bride-to-be. But what about your own virtue? Should you expect this wonderful lady to want to marry a man who cannot demonstrate the same qualities that he expects from her? If she is virtuous, she is likely wise, and so you should expect her to have a standard that is as high as your own.

Do you consider yourself “a catch” for a lady someday? If not, are you on your way to becoming one? We trust you are. And know this—that it is okay for you to see yourself as a catch, for you must be confident that you have something good to offer your bride-to-be. Just don’t let your estimation of yourself get so big that it clouds reality or makes you haughty.

What kind of man will you be toward your bride-to-be? Will you guard her dignity, her character, and her purity? We trust you will. She is, after all, the daughter of the Most High, and so

treat her accordingly. Even though you may not have yet met her, think of her kindly with godly anticipation. So guard your own dignity, your character, and your purity. And do so in both thought and deed.

Where Is She?

All this talk about high standards may have you thinking that the virtuous woman we have described doesn't exist. After all, "An excellent wife, who can find?" (Prov. 31:10). Rest assured, she does exist, and it will be your privilege to find her. The good news is that the search will be somewhat easier than you think, for in all likelihood she will want to be found.

But how will you recognize her? In our estimation, this is a question that has paralyzed too many Christian young men. There seems to be a teaching that suggests that there is only one woman whom God has predestined to be your wife. However, we find this teaching to be against sound, biblical reason. The Bible indicates clearly that "He *who finds a wife* finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord" (Prov. 18:22, emphasis added). God has equipped you with wisdom and insight in this regard, and He allows you the freedom to find and select a wife who is suitable for you.

Of course, talking about finding a wife assumes one thing, and that is that you are ready to find a wife. Some of you reading this lesson are far more interested in making tree forts and go-carts than you are in girls, and we do not ever wish to diminish the importance of these things. And we know that most of our readers in their later teens are likewise not quite ready to go wife-shopping. We are not discussing this matter to accelerate it; it's just that we know that time has a way of slipping by. It is inevitable that you will one day be attracted by God's greatest design, and so you must have certain convictions on the matter which will set you up for success.

The Road to Marriage

We will state up-front that we do not believe the Bible has a dyed-in-the-wool formula for how a young man should meet a lady and eventually select her for a wife. But neither is the Bible silent on this matter. On the contrary, it offers universal truths that speak to us, truths rich in wisdom.

One of the most vital admonishments offered in Scripture is Proverbs 4:23: “Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.” This proverb acknowledges what we already know, that the heart is something vulnerable, subject to damage, and that we must protect it.

The Dangers of Dating

The need to protect our hearts is why we are so very much opposed to the conventional dating system that is prevalent in our culture. Think about it—dating actually *purposes* to promote affection (often quite deeply), and while doing so offers no *defined end-in-mind*.

Ask any proponent of dating what the ultimate purpose is, and he or she will tell you words to the effect “to have a good time,” or “to learn how to act in the presence of the opposite gender,” or “to accumulate multiple experiences.” While all of these purposes have varying degrees of validity, they can all easily be accomplished in richer, safer, and more efficient ways, ways that do not require the need to expose or share one’s heart.

The typical dating process goes something like this: A young man or lady (sometimes barely teen-aged) is physically attracted to someone (who is equally young and naïve). Having hardly thought the matter out, they exchange some sort of mutual affection. “I like you more than anybody else,” “You are always on my mind,” or “I love you” are just some of the many things

that might be said, written, or otherwise implied. And once an expression is received in the heart of another, there is left a looming, unanswered question: “*For how long will you like me more than anybody else?*”, “*For how long will I always be on your mind?*”, “*For how long will you love me?*”

Thus, there is always an ongoing uncertainty which is never really satisfied. And of course, there *is* an answer to the question “for how long,” which is inevitably revealed. This answer, unfortunately, is something similar to, “*I will demonstrate fondness, think about, or otherwise love you until I become tired of you or determine that you are no longer worthy of my affection, at which point I will attempt to return your heart, if in fact I am still able to present it in one piece.*”

The irony of the dating system is that it *practices breaking up!* By the time some men and women think they are ready to get married, they will have already been in dozens of relationships with varying degrees of intimacy, each of which resulted in a break-up. Sadly, a pattern emerges in which a person *expects* a relationship to go sour. It is human nature to think thus. Really, it is no wonder so many marriages end in divorce. In reality, dating has contributed to divorce by conditioning our culture to think that breaking up is a normal thing.

So, are we against the idea of you or other young men spending time with certain ladies? By no means! We would not deprive you of experiencing the presence of God’s crowning achievement. But we do know that your journey to marriage presents the opportunity for you to embrace certain convictions that will set you and your bride-to-be up for success.

Courtship

Much has been written about the subject of courtship, and we do not claim to have the final word on the matter. Nor do we claim that there is any one-set-way of engaging in the courtship

process. The Bible does not claim to present one, and so neither do we. So what we offer here are some simple, straightforward principles that can guide any man (and his bride-to-be) toward the beginnings of a successful marriage:

Know How to Recognize Her

First and foremost: Know what you are looking for in a future wife. We have already discussed the importance of virtue, so confidently assess what is important to you. Discuss these matters with your parents or close friends. While it's not vital, it may be useful to write these qualities down.

Proponents of dating argue that there is no way of really knowing a lady unless you date her. Respectfully, we disagree. We see little to be gained and lots to be lost with this approach. What adherents to the dating view fail to realize is that the best way to *really* know a lady is by observing her in *real life situations*. If a man is formally dating a lady, there is always the temptation to perform in certain ways to gain approval.

A far better way is to observe and study how a lady behaves toward her parents, her siblings, her friends, strangers, and of course, you. And the best places to make these observations are in natural ones, ones that are not contrived and where there is no need to wonder about ulterior motives. In making your observations, consider a lady's convictions on important matters and how they are naturally manifested in her life. Meanwhile, enjoy her company!

Seeking Godly Wisdom

The book of James tells us that "...if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (1:5). Without the seeking of Godly wisdom in all matters (especially this one), you are like a traveler going out in a stormy forest at night without a

compass. Seek God's input on whom you are to marry, and you will be richly rewarded.

Parental Input

We strongly suggest having a conversation with your parents in regard to when you might be ready to formally pursue marriage. There are several variables to consider, like your age, how much money you might want to have saved up, or how far along you might be in your schooling or career. The Bible offers no rules or formulas to these things, and so we will not imply any.

Of course, never feel pressured to get married. There is nothing implied in this lesson that suggests you should start your search now. That being said, we will offer some guidelines in regard to the timing aspect of this whole thing.

When you become fond of a particular lady, let your parents know. Get their wisdom and insight on the matter. But it is important that your feelings *not* be shared with the lady, at least not quite yet. In fact, we implore you to keep your thoughts only to yourself, your parents, or an appropriate mentor. While there is wisdom in the counsel of many, there is also foolishness in prematurely broadcasting something.

If, in due time, you feel you are ready to pursue this lady with the intent to marry, then approach your parents and make your case! Don't worry—they won't be shocked, not if you have kept them informed. Besides, in many ways they know you better than you know yourself. They know this day is coming.

Regardless of your parents' reaction, honor it, especially if you are under their roof. Once you are grown and on your own, you will have the right and obligation to do whatever God has laid on your heart. But while under your parents' domain, their word should be revered and respected. If there are concerns or

objections voiced by your parents, listen intently. It may be that they see something clearly where you do not. If you want to make an appeal, do so in a spirit that promotes mutual respect.

Remember, your parents love you and want what is best for you. If this was true for baths and bedtimes when you were younger, how much more will they want your marriage to be a success! And keep in mind that they are not losing a son so much as they are gaining a daughter-in-law. You will do well to hear their entire heart on the matter.

The Next Step

Let's assume your parents wholeheartedly applaud your intentions. Now what? We suggest that you don't order your tuxedo quite yet. We advise you next to discuss the matter with the lady's father. Don't worry, if he has any wits about him, he won't be caught off-guard. Approaching him will be a gesture that he will surely appreciate. Remember, just as your parents will be gaining a daughter-in-law, so will your bride's father be gaining a son-in-law. So you should be treating this man as though he were your own father.

By now you have probably gotten the picture that this is serious stuff. Of course it is! But this whole process can be one of the most blessed experiences of your life. Approach this opportunity accordingly.

Keep in mind that you are not at this time asking permission to propose. You are asking permission to court the lady, to formalize and define the relationship as something that intends to go toward marriage.

How do you approach your potential father-in-law? We encourage you to do so confidently. While there is to be expected a certain degree of nervousness, you should not act as though you were a stray dog about to get yelled at for walking onto

the lawn. If you are really nervous, it may be that you have good reason to be. Do you anticipate objections? If so, are the objections legitimate ones? You should be ready to address any and all concerns that might arise. Have the same heart that Jacob had when he first addressed Rachel's father, and you will be just fine (Gen. 29).

But what exactly should you say? We're not at liberty to tell you what to say anymore than we would tell the President what to say in his Inaugural Address. But if you really need a starting point, you can try something like, "Mr. Dowry (or whatever his name really is), I want to talk to you about Princess Flowerpetal (or whatever her name really is). I want to hear your thoughts about my desire to get to know her better. I'm really impressed with her and would like to tell her how I feel. My parents approve of my desire, and I thought it would be important to talk with you next."

Something along the lines of our suggestion would be appropriate, but we acknowledge that you could probably offer something much better. Just be yourself, and the rest will take care of itself. The whole heart of the matter is to let the lady's father know that you value him and have his best interests in mind.

What Says She?

It may be that the lady's father or mother will want to talk to their daughter about this matter before anything goes further, or it may be that her father wants you to talk to her directly. Regardless (and it should go without saying), the lady will have a say in the matter.

It should not be surprising that your feelings toward this lady are mutual and that she is honored by your desire to get to know her more intimately. If this be the case, then we are excited for you. But what does this step mean, and how should you go

about the relationship from here?

The Relationship from This Point On

Perhaps the best way of progressing further is for you and the lady to identify some core convictions and guidelines. In doing so, we encourage you to keep them simple and reasonable, but above all they should be founded in wisdom.

We really want to stress the importance of creating for yourselves guidelines that are simple and reasonable. The Lord's ways are not meant to be burdensome, and so there is no need to create unnecessary perimeters that will only strain your relationship.

You may want to ask yourselves various questions and create your guidelines accordingly. For example, will you both agree to work out any differences that arise in your relationship, rather than quickly conclude that you are not meant for one another? Do you both agree to refrain completely from physical intimacy as the Scriptures promote until that day you are finally wed (1 Cor. 7:1-2)? These and other important questions should be considered before your relationship progresses.

The Proposal

At some point, you will both likely experience some sort of mutual confirmation that you want to marry one another. There is no way for us to tell you how you will come to know this, for the ways of love and commitment are the subject of countless songs, ballads, novels, and dramas, each describing a unique manner in which boy meets girl. But when you do know, we ask that you make certain to write and tell us the story of how you and your bride came to be.

And while we are being bold with our requests, might we ask that you send a couple of wedding invitations if you do take

our previous advice about that pig roast? We would be honored to attend...!