

Vital Questions to Help You Spiritually Discern if He's Mr. Right

I consider the decision to marry (and whom we choose to marry) the most important decisions a person can make, apart from saying yes to the grace of God working in our lives unto salvation. Some Christians have a deterministic view of marriage. This means they believe God picks their spouse and leads them to that person. Then, the Lord moves their hearts to fall in love. This view is problematic for many reasons best addressed at another time. For now, it is easiest to simply say there are aspects of the beauty of romance and marriage that genuinely delight the Lord. He loves to watch romance that we initiate unfold and love grow in our hearts for another.

It is mysterious and amazing that God leaves the most important decision of our lives in our hands. He will help us, lead us and serve us in the process. He will not, however, make the decision for us. This is a terrifying thought for many Christians. I have witnessed some very emotional reactions to this idea. It does not have to be terrifying, however. A few simple principles can help us navigate the steps of dating, courtship and marriage victoriously.

The Way of Love

In terms of decisions we make before the Lord, we will never make a bigger decision than our decision to marry. Whom we choose and why we make the choice plays perhaps the largest role in our spiritual growth and daily life in the Spirit than any other decision we will make over the course of our lives. As simple as this sounds, it is amazing to me how often this point is forgotten in the whirlwind of romance. A number of

emotional dynamics contribute to the whirlwind, and some are not positive or healthy even if the romance feels good.

I find one of the greatest dangers in romance and dating among young people stems from how shortsighted we've become. Modern media and imagery urge us to live in the moment and be swept off of our feet. If we are really lucky, we will experience love at first sight as we encounter our soul mate. But one of the greatest problems that young people face in the early stages of romance is the trivialization of the very idea of love itself. Because we have, as a society, taken our eyes off of the very source and definition of love, Jesus of Nazareth, we have repackaged love into a storm of emotions that barely resembles the biblical ideal.

Beyond trivializing and diminishing love, our culture has shifted our focus from love from God, for God and for others to love for ourselves. Our greatest pursuit must always be the knowledge of God and encountering His love. As we pursue the One who has found us, loved us and saved us, we are empowered to love Him back with all of our hearts—which must be our highest priority and greatest goal. If these words define the rhythm of how we live our lives, we will express what the world calls true love deeply and authentically. Love for the one who is in Christ is something far deeper and more powerful than a Hollywood romance.

We must define and express love by the One who gave all to fight for our present lives and ultimate destiny in Him. We can define love through the lens of the incarnation (He pursued us in humility) and the cross (He fought for us in a costly way). We can define love through the lens of the gospel (He values our lives and cherishes our love) and His ongoing intercession for our destiny (He prays for us and prophesies over us). Much could be said beyond this about His glorious leadership in our lives and the way He directs and cares for our hearts in the journey of knowing Him and loving Him back.

The subject of the love of Christ is a vast one that has many chambers to explore and get lost in. Few young people discover the treasure and the riches of this subject in a detailed way that leads to real fascination. For many believers, the subject of the love of God touches them on an emotional level and not in a revelatory way. Therefore, when a new romance develops which touches them on a similar emotional level, a young person often loses their way in Christ to focus on the new relationship. The revelation of the love of Christ—the experiential knowledge of it—instructs us in how to love well and serves as an anchor that holds our hearts firm during the storms of life.

The Dark Side of Romance

I'll say it again: Jesus loves romance. He loves the dynamics of a man's heart awakened to love for a woman. So many good things happen when a godly man falls in love with godly woman. When my wife and I realized we were falling in love with one another, our conversations changed a bit. As good friends, we talked about life, the future, Jesus and many other things. As romance began to blossom, we began to share deeper things from our hearts to one another. We prayed together. Dreams of the future that mostly involved me now involved "we." What would our lives be like together? How would our calling and destiny work together in pursuing God? A whole new journey of discovery opened up to us. It was beautiful, and beautiful to God.

We did not walk out romance and our dating life perfectly, by any means. We both walked through real immaturity, inexperience, and conflict—together. One thing that we worked on together was enjoying the romance and the journey of falling in love with one another while keeping the big picture of the rest of our lives before us. The great joy of romance is the thrill of new-found, growing love that touches and awakens deep places in the heart. The great danger of romance

is the temptation to cast aside restraint to simply live for the moment. We can become led by—even driven by—our emotions and desires in ways that can be very costly. How the person we are falling in love with makes us feel—and not whom Jesus says they are and where He wants to take them—begins to govern the relationship if we are not careful.

The great challenge of romance is to enjoy it as a gift from the Lord without elevating it above the Lord. We want Jesus to continue to govern our values and vision, which empowers us to govern our emotions and maintain a godly perspective. We do not want to be governed by the fear of being alone, the fear of rejection or the fear of failure. We want to be governed by the love of Jesus and the power of His gospel as we seek to grow in love for the person we are interested in marrying. As we do, we can grow in a prophetic spirit and a servant's heart for them as we gain understanding about how Jesus loves them, what He thinks about them, and how He made them to love Him back.

Jesus' Vision for Marriage

How then do we make such a huge decision? As we begin to grow in understanding of the love of Jesus, it is easier to grow in our understanding of His vision for our marriage. Allowing our vision for marriage to originate in the heart of Jesus is so liberating and exhilarating! When Jesus has the idea, then He provides the resource and the power to bring it to pass. We do not have to fear that we will miss out or choose the wrong person. Jesus is committed to transforming our definition and understanding of the *right person*, which makes it really hard to follow our hearts to the wrong place.

Jesus' vision for marriage is found in Eph. 5:15–33, as Paul describes what it means to “walk circumspectly” (carefully) in the fear of the Lord, understanding His will. In that passage, He calls us to “[be] submissive to one another in the fear of the Lord.” In the very next passage, he calls wives to “be

submissive to [their] husbands.” I find that husbands, in particular, focus on the what of this passage without considering the why of Paul’s assertion. What is Paul asking wives to submit to?

The answer is found in more than a call to submit to a person but rather in a call to submit to a process. Wives are invited to submit to a process within marriage whereby husbands love their wives “just as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for her” (Ephesians 5:25). Paul is gospel-oriented in the way that he views marriage. In the same way that Christ loved us first—empowering us to respond and love Him back—husbands are to be the ones who love first in marriage in a way that empowers wives to confidently trust their leadership and love well in return. In conflict, in disagreement, in serving, in giving, the husband is commanded to love first in a way that establishes a safe context for his wife to love him back.

Another part of the process is the command that the husband love freely—with no thought of what he gains in the exchange. Whether or not his wife loves him back, a husband is called to love sacrificially. He is to give all of his heart to honor, cherish, and value the one whom God has joined him to, regardless of behavior, circumstance, or emotions in the moment. The commitment of the husband to his bride must be defined by something greater than the behavior of his wife. In the same way that the husband is loved freely by Jesus, he is to be empowered to love his bride.

Finally, the husband is invited to love his bride fully—fighting for her destiny and future with all of his might and resource. A husband does not have to fight for his own destiny—Jesus is fighting for him with great grace and fierce loyalty. Thus a husband is free to fight for his bride and the godly desires of her heart. He does not view his wife as a resource to make his life work or to make his calling great. He is free to view his bride through the eyes of Christ

and, by grace, fight for what Jesus envisions.

Choosing the Right Person for Life

With these truths in mind, how then do we make the right decision about marriage?

Men have Prov. 31 as their guide in discovering the incomparable worth of a woman to Jesus and where life can go for her by the grace of God. The greatest question, as it relates to marriage, is simple: does *she* want to go there? What defines success for her? What is life about? Dating is a great time to search out the answers to these questions, to discover if the first seeds of romance will ultimately blossom into respect in the years to come. “Is this a woman whom I will be attracted to?” is the wrong question to ask. The laws of attraction will change as the heart matures.

The right question is, “Will this be a woman I will respect in the decades to come?” Is she *interesting* and potentially fascinating in ways that go far beyond physical attraction? Is she about the right things for the right reasons, and does she have the potential to follow through on those convictions consistently over time? She may stumble, and she may have many moments of weakness in the years to come—but is she oriented rightly in her heart towards Jesus, and is her life vision wrapped in His loving gaze?

For women, Eph. 5 also serves as an able guide. That young man who is seeking to win your heart—where is his heart going? While he may be a rough stone in the moment, is there a jewel underneath waiting to be discovered? A young man can have the right values and the right convictions without the present maturity to walk them out. A vision for growing in love must be connected to a vision to grow in respect on the bride’s side of things as well. Is this a man that desires to pursue the love of Jesus—experiencing it, understanding it and expressing it? Is this a man that has the integrity of heart

to keep reaching for this goal even when he fails? How does he handle failure and hardship? How does he govern, lead, and serve?

The secret I always give young women is a very simple one: watch how that young man treats waiters and waitresses when you are out to eat together. How does he treat them? Is it about him, or does he have the capacity to be about others? Are they beneath him related to his money and temporary power over them, or does he treat them with kindness, dignity and genuine interest? I find this secret test of the heart to be a far more effective one than the “mom test,” which can be deceiving. Failing this test is never a deal-breaker in the relationship, but this brief window into his heart is a great opening for asking certain questions related to how he views you, your future, and your destiny.

Permission to Do It Badly

When I share about these truths from Scripture, I often hear a small but real twinge of regret from those who are married. Usually, it is a simple confession: “I wish I had heard this sooner in life.” I had never heard these things either, but learned them later on. The glory of the kindness and mercy of God is that His grace is enough for the truths we believe today. When we did not know better, He helped us get through our ignorance. While we may know “better” today, He still helps us grow through our immaturity in walking out what we now know. God takes our marriage covenant more seriously than we do. Therefore, He is infinitely committed to helping us walk it out regardless of how much ignorance and immaturity we walk in.

Our part is found in sincerity—the earnest desire to love God and others well. We say yes by faith to His definitions and value systems. We grow in grace, by grace. We start out in a very rough way, but things smooth out over time as we stay with it. The great thing about being introduced to new truths

is that there is no such thing as too late in the kingdom of God. Repentance always brings us into a fresh start as we seek to walk out truths that are new but newly dear to our hearts. If you are fearful about your future, your marriage and your weakness in relationships, today is a great day to turn again to the mercy of God and the riches of His grace. It is His joy to overwhelm you with kindness and incomparable help in laying hold of His heart for you and your relationship.

If you're seeking a special place to encounter Jesus and His love, we invite you to Onething, Dec. 28–31, in Kansas City. Speakers and worship leaders include Mike Bickle, Allen Hood, Bill Johnson, Todd White, Matt Maher, Audrey Assad, Bethel Music's Jonathan David and Melissa Helser and many more.

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What advice would you give about choosing a spouse?

David Sliker is a senior leader at the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, where he lives with his wife, Tracey, and their four children. He is an instructor at International House of Prayer University, where he teaches biblical studies, prayer and eschatology. David is the author of three books, *End Times Simplified*, *Old Testament Survey* and *Biblical Foundations of Eschatology*.