

*F*riendship



*E*ngagement

*M*arriage



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The articles are written by different German authors, well known and trusted by the publisher. For any questions please contact the publisher.

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# Preface

## Love – an adventure?

### A bleak view?

Your female school friend has got a boyfriend and more or less lives with him. The father of a fellow student of yours recently separated from his wife and lives with a man now. During the lecture, the guy in the row in front of you is watching sex videos from time to time. Your believing female friend from your meeting has fallen in love with an unbelieving man, whom she wants to marry. One of the young men from the youth group keeps sending ambiguous messages to girls via WhatsApp. A good female friend has broken her engagement after four months and doesn't want to hear anything of love and marriage anymore. And right in the middle of it is you – with your faith in the Lord Jesus, with your wishes and desires, with your sorrows about wrong decisions, with your

disappointments about yourself or about somebody else. Does all this give reason to despair, to give up, and to say no to a committed life as a single person, to engagement or to marriage?



### Saying Yes!

Say yes! Yes, to holding fast to God's Word that wants to give you direction and instructions on your way. Yes, to a practice that follows these pointers. This is why we have created this booklet: to provoke thoughts,

to provide an alternative to the dark ideas of this world, and to encourage you and all who want to follow their Lord. Putting this advice into practice may mean renouncing the 'acceptable' views of this world or it will have the result that your peers, maybe even fellow Christians, may smile at you disdainfully. However, having the approval of our Master compensates for this loss, and will lead to blessing instead of misfortune, and to happiness instead of grief, especially if it is in the matter of love (or refusal of it). Love can indeed become an adventure – a happy one with the Lord Jesus, or a calamitous one without a joyful ending. Therefore, trust in your Lord, who will never let you down in any part of your life!

### **One after the other!**

You are probably unmarried, like most of the readers of this booklet. Then the articles on the relationship between guys and girls and on sexuality and love will certainly

ly interest you. Are you going to find the messages in there rather extreme? Yes, maybe, but they are certainly helpful and for your blessing. Examine them based on God's Word. Maybe you are asking yourself the questions: Should I marry at all? If so, who and when – and how? Then you might want to thoroughly read through the articles on the choice of a marriage partner, engagement and on remaining single. And read the one on marriage itself – even if it does not concern you (yet).

### **To be concluded!**

Your questions and thoughts on the topic of this booklet are probably not all answered yet. Therefore, immerse yourself in sound literature – it will be for your blessing – and study the Bible, the Word of God!

We trust that you will enjoy and benefit from reading this booklet.

# *For Girls Only*

*The time of adolescence is an enjoyable time, but it can sometimes be quite difficult. It is the time in which you make decisions – decisions for which you carry the responsibility yourself. Take this freedom of decision-making seriously and do not let it be taken away by what 'the others' do, or what is 'in' at the moment. Disciples of the Lord Jesus need to have the courage to consciously swim against the current.*

### **A special temptation**

It must be something fascinating for a girl to find out that she has the power of attraction towards the opposite sex. However, there is a great temptation to play with this power of attraction – just for fun but with no commitment, just for self-affirmation or just to experiment. And when a young man 'falls for it' and wants to treat it seriously, you let him fall, or at least 'keep him on a string.' "But I didn't mean it like that." Let me tell you something: if you didn't mean it like that, then don't act as if you had meant it. Through that you pile guilt on yourself.

This power of attraction starts with the eyes. Solomon says of his bride:



"You have ravished my heart with one look of your eyes" (Song 4:9). However, a bride 'is allowed' to do that. But until then self-discipline is needed. Just as Job made a covenant with his eyes (Job 31:1), a girl

must also know about the impact of her eyes, her appearance, and ask the Lord to help her to behave correctly. But it is not only the eyes. You should know that men react strongly and often automatically to sexual stimuli without a conscious decision. Be aware what kind of signals you are sending. If you not only dress yourself attractively but also provocatively and indecently, you may be the reason for men's immoral thoughts (not to mention worse things). More than once in the Bible, women are encouraged to dress decently (1 Tim. 2:9; 1 Pet. 3:3-5).

### ***God knows your longings***

It is a relief for a woman to realise that God knows her longings for a spouse and that she doesn't have to 'desperately' look for one on her own. You can count on God's leading even here.

In Genesis 2:18 it says: "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper com-

parable to him." Here it becomes clear:

- God sees and knows the deepest need of man, whom He has created
- God takes the initiative and leads Eve to Adam
- God knows best who fits whom ("comparable to him").

If we accept God's good thoughts for us, then we can become calm. Then we can wait for God's leading and trust Him. Eventually, it is God's task to lead those ones together whom He has ordained for one another. You do not need to become

'active' because you fear you are going to be 'left on the shelf' or that your female friends will get in before you. But one thing you can and should do: ask God to guide you in this important matter.

### ***Use your time and gifts for the Lord!***

Is marriage the only goal in life? Well, for most girls this will be 'included' in God's will and way for them. For a few it might be that the Lord makes it clear that they should remain unmarried so that they are able to serve the Lord better (1 Cor. 7:34). However, some

young women will remain unmarried until – if ever – a suitable spouse comes along. For a faithful sister, the idea, "rather an unbeliever than no man at all" is unacceptable, because it is unbiblical.

You may tell the Lord the questions and needs that arise in your heart. If you know that your entire life is in God's hand, then you do not, in a last minute panic, need to be carried away by the wrong and sinful behaviour of pursuing a relationship with an unbeliever. Instead, you may use your time and gifts for the Lord and wait for His further guidance in your life.

The evangelist Philip had four (probably no longer so young) unmarried daughters. What is said of them? Did they sit at home and wait until they got married? No, they "prophesied", i.e. they served the Lord with their gifts (Acts 21:9).

This way is also open for you today. A sister who lives with and for the Lord is always more attractive for a spiritual brother – and do you not want to have a spiritual husband? – than a sister who wants to have everybody's attention by flaunting herself.



# For Boys Only

God expects us to put up with the tensions of our awakening sexuality in order to mature by them. The verse from Lamentations 3:27 has an application in this context: "It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth." It is part of maturing and the transition to adulthood to be able to handle inconveniences and to cope with tensions.

Self-control begins with the eyes. Job made a 'covenant' with his eyes not to look at a girl desirously (Job 31:1). Surely, this is not easy in our 'sexualised' society and requires much emotional strength. No man has this kind of strength – by the way, not even an 'old' man – in himself. We will only be victorious if we fully lean on the Lord. However, the effort is worth it. This self-control must be learned. It needs time and strength. Ultimately, you need the whole of your teenage years, or even longer, for this. You shouldn't allow yourself to take the 'shortcut' of masturbation in the process of learning self-control.

## **Masturbation – a way out or a sin?**

Masturbation is a big problem for young people. Very few people would argue against that. How must one evaluate this issue according to the Bible? Is masturbation sin? The principle mentioned earlier, that sexuality is a gift of God for marriage, should surely make this evaluation easy. Every alternative 'application' is an abnormal use of sexuality.

What reasons bring young people into this problem? To begin with, there is the sexual stimulation from outside, that gets triggered without one doing anything (through

seeing suggestively clothed members of the opposite sex, advertisements etc.). This is a problem of our day. We live in a time of drastic overstimulation. A Christian can hardly escape it. How do you deal



with such a matter? We want to see plainly: up to the point of stimulation you cannot do anything about it. Of course, I will need to keep my eyes in check, so I do not act negligently. But my responsibility begins here. How do I react? Here we come to the core problem of masturbation.

I satisfy my own desires that arise in me. In principle, this is nothing other than my own self. Should I, as

a Christian, seek to gratify myself? Certainly not! 2 Timothy 3:2 speaks in a chiding manner about egoistic people and Romans 13:14 warns us about the provision for the flesh to satisfy its desires. From this it becomes very clear that masturbation is a sin.

The problem is intensified when one gives way to this overstimulation through corresponding literature, pornography, or fantasising about certain situations. In addition to this, the desire to release sexual tension lies within the person themselves. From this it is clear that resultant masturbation is sin. Therefore, keep away from such situations and scenarios. Keep your hands off such literature or even pornography. You will always succumb to it.

Another common reason for this problem is idleness. Even David (2 Sam 11) needed to experience that idleness is fraught with dangers. For him, this led to the sin of adultery with Bathsheba. There is the risk that downtime, in which young people have nothing to do, can easily turn into a similar dart in the hands of the devil, so that immoral, sinful thoughts can arise

in their hearts. It is therefore no coincidence that the wise Solomon warns us about idleness in the book of Proverbs.

Emotional feelings (such as disappointment and loneliness) can be further causes for masturbation. This kind of conduct is also unbiblical. Philippians 4:6 tells us that we need not be anxious about anything but that we may pray. Without doubt, this is a better, divine solution for problems. Because I express self pity through masturbation, I put my own self in the centre, rather than Christ.

After it has become obvious that we are dealing with a problem that is sin in God's eyes, surely many a young person concerned asks the question: How do I end this? There is no 'patented recipe', but the Bible gives us guidance here as well:

- Proverbs 4:23 "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life." When, due to sexual stimulation, ungodly thoughts arise in your hearts, acknowledge and judge them immediately, otherwise the completion of the deed will follow swiftly. Take Eve as a cautionary example. She saw that the

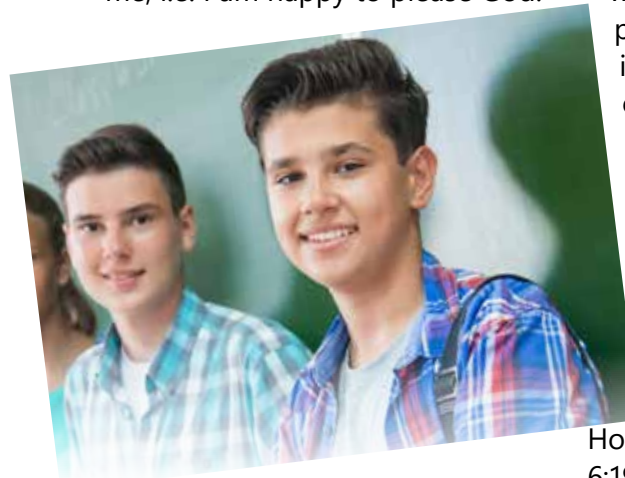
fruit was good, and she took it. When you experience this, speak with your Lord about it immediately – then you will remain pure. Critically keep watch over your heart – it can easily betray you, and often the damage is immense.

- Flee! Just as Joseph fled from Potiphar's wife, fleeing is often the only thing that helps you – sometimes physically, but always in your thoughts and in your heart. Do not be casual about such things, otherwise you will be subject to them.
- James 1:13-15: lust – sin – death. In this it is clear: it is not lust that is sin but lust leads to sin. You cannot do anything about a bird landing on your head. But if it nests there, then that is your responsibility. If you do not banish wrong and bad thoughts, you will sin.

### **A proposed solution**

And what if masturbation has already become an addiction? How do I get rid of it then? Firstly, by confessing it. Through this I show the Lord that I acknowledge that I cannot handle this problem my-

self. I practically experience that my flesh, the old nature, can do nothing else but sin (Rom. 7:25). At the same time I recognise that as a believer I am no longer under the rule of sin (8:2). I still have the ability to sin but I no longer have to because I possess the Holy Spirit (8:9). He brings about godliness in me, i.e. I am happy to please God.



Should the desire, the lust, come up, now I can think of the fact that I no longer have to do it – whereas in former times I couldn't help it. God even desires that I am well-pleasing to Him at this very moment. I ask Him for help and grace, and I will no longer have to give in to sin. I no longer live according to the principle of flesh but I disallow the activities of the body (8:13), and I will literally discover, feel and develop the new life in me. Then I will

get down on my knees and thank God that He has helped me and given me strength to resist the evil, and to do good.

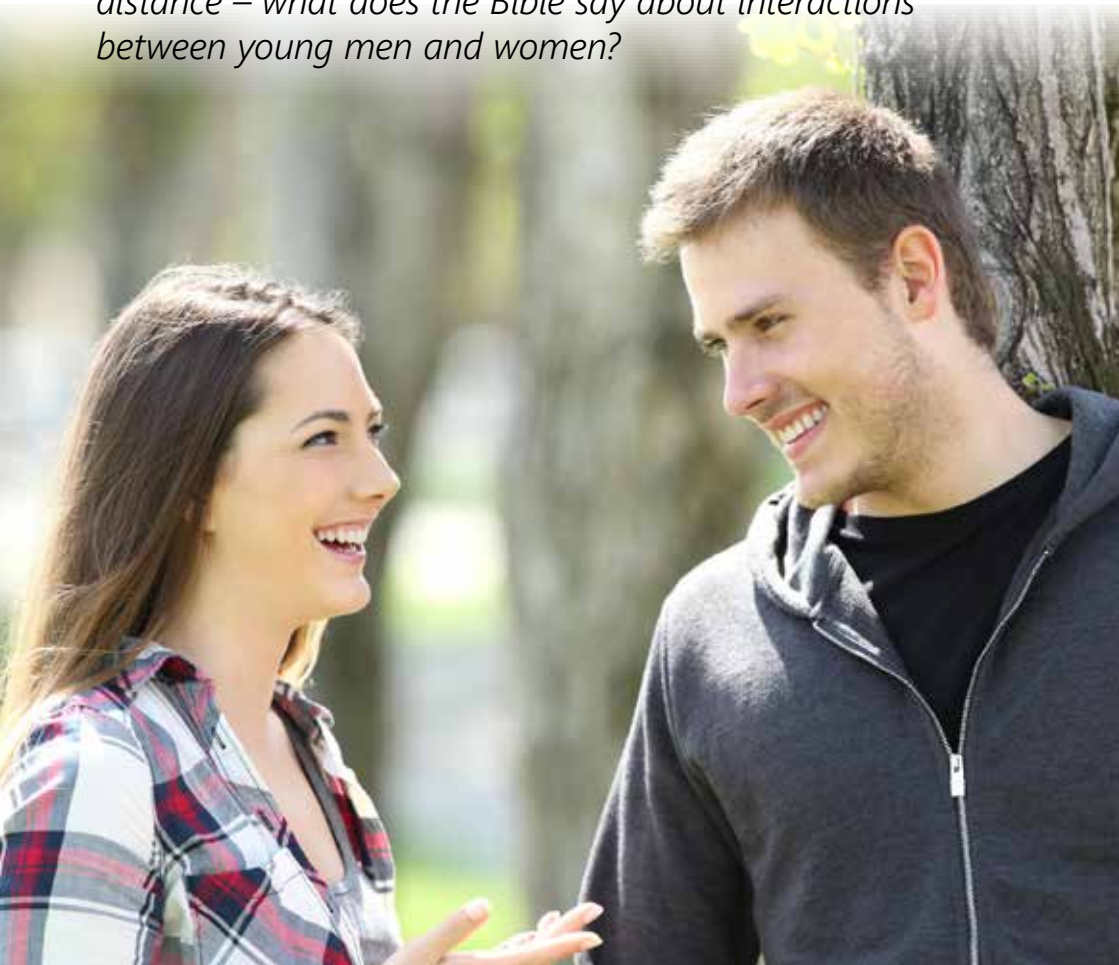
Let us be realistic: we will not always overcome. But we can always turn to the Lord for help. Also, we will take 'precautionary measures'. We will keep away from dangerous places. We will not buy or read immoral literature, or dare to get close to it. In solitary moments we will spend time with our parents or believers. Finally, we will always ask the Lord to preserve us from masturbation. If we do all these things and, if necessary, flee, the Lord will help us. Let us consider that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us (1 Cor. 6:19). This gives our body a dignity that we do not want to destroy by committing false deeds. We have a Lord in heaven, who always makes intercession for us and whom we can always call upon. He is always there for us! Let us therefore pray to Him: we will receive help.

And after every fall you may get up again and start anew. This time of self-control and of waiting is part of preparing the gift of sexuality for the future spouse.

# Friendship

– *between a young man  
and a young woman*

*Friendships – getting to know each other – keeping one's distance – what does the Bible say about interactions between young men and women?*



Friendship is a relationship of mutual affection between people, which is characterised by liking and trust<sup>1</sup>. And what does the Bible say? "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (Prov. 17:17). From the point of view of the Bible, how do things stand with friendships between young people of different sexes?

## **Friendships – mind the criteria**

Friendship is therefore a positive relationship in which we share sorrows, fears, joys and experiences (i.e. involving the soul). The friendship of David and Jonathan illustrates this very clearly. Read 1 Samuel 18:1 and 2 Samuel 1:26. But with whom is friendship possible?

In order to answer this we do not want to listen to people's opinions, trends in our surroundings and surveys. Only the instructions of our Creator can help us here. We find basic and general hints in the Bible:

- Real friendships are solely possible among believers (2 Cor. 6:14, 15).
- In the Bible we do not find an example of friendship between

a man and a woman outside marriage. When God brought Eve to Adam, God gave him Eve as wife, as help, as a 'friend'.

- The disciples' reaction in John 4:27 shows that it was (is) unusual for a man to speak to a woman by himself.
- Boaz instructs Ruth to keep with the women. He impresses upon the servants to behave well towards Ruth (Ruth 2:8, 9).
- Paul did not leave the behaviour between Timothy and the women, presumably of the same age, to chance but exhorted to purity (1 Tim. 5:2).

Do you think now that the Bible wants to spoil your fun? Don't we live in a different time now? No, the commandments of the eternal God are always up-to-date and given to us as a protection. He desires the well-being of His creatures. If we deviate from His plan, we will harm ourselves and others.

## **Women and men are different**

It has been widely noted that men and women not only differ physi-

<sup>1</sup> Source: Wikipedia (English and German version combined)

cally, but also in thinking and feeling. God created human beings male and female, each in their own unique form. A few examples:

- Men rather think and feel in sections. They perceive single topics separately and are able to focus exclusively on them, and in doing so almost always manage to block out their surroundings. This explains why men often manage to say things by using few words, and are rather objective.
- A woman rather perceives her surroundings holistically. She associates many additional things with a topic, especially emotions. This is why a woman usually needs more time and words to explain something.
- The emotions of a man are strongly influenced by what he sees. A man therefore is in danger of focussing more on the body of a woman than on the person herself. Read Job 31:1 and Matthew 5:28.
- The emotions of a woman are strongly influenced by what she hears or listens to. She receives much stronger signals through

words or messages than men are aware of.

- As a young man, you can raise hopes through a conversation or a message, hopes which you often cannot fulfil, and, as an adolescent, do not want to. If you, for instance, say to a girl: "You have a great voice!" then she might get the impression that you are attracted to her. Are you aware of that?

### **Marriage – God's concept for a 'complete' friendship**

These differences are good and intended by God. In a harmonious marriage they lead to enrichment, and therefore to unity. Sharing of spirit, soul and body, however, requires a protected and binding frame: marriage. Any attempt to live out a section outside or before marriage respectively will damage both parties, causing emotional injury.

Besides, boy-girl friendships are a great danger for your future marriage. Even after many years, the 'crush of your younger days' will appear in your thoughts more quickly than you think. An intense friendship outside marriage should only

exist between two people of the same sex (of course not sexually!). Maybe you say: "We're just friends because we understand each other well." Careful! You are playing with fire. Affection, liking and trust can quickly turn into more. Do not overestimate your strengths. There is a great danger that sooner or later a flirt is followed by holding hands, a kiss and possibly sexual intercourse. The fire of sexuality blazes fiercely only too quickly if you let the spark happen. Many a person has regretted that bitterly.

Keeping your distance and yet getting to know each other – how is that possible?

**Way of behaving:** The previous points are not suggesting that you should behave in a cold and reserved manner, or that you need to cross to opposite sides of the street when you see each other. But you always need to keep a safe distance apart. As a young woman, do not undertake anything with one or more young men on your own; also, as young man, do not undertake anything with one or more young women. There are many opportunities to do positive and fun-filled things together in a bigger group.

**Location:** The choice of the right locations is also vitally important.

The Bible gives us an example for such locations: Abraham's servant found Isaac's wife at a well of water – a figurative hint about places where God's Word is of importance (e.g. youth groups, choir practice, Bible conferences, lectures etc.). If you





consider your motives before the Lord, you will realise that some places and activities (e.g. going to a swimming pool together in twos) are a 'no-no.'

But how should you know whether you are a match if you haven't got to know each other in a friendship? Ask yourself a counter question: How can you see God's will if liking, trust and affection towards a person grow continually? You will not be able to separate your own will

and God's guidance from one another anymore. Pray, and keep the necessary distance until you get the impression that this person is the right marriage partner for you.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding" (Prov. 3:5).

**Getting to know each other, and deciding:** The way into marriage is a conscious decision which obviously has a previous history:

regular contact, conversations, observation and, especially, intensive prayer. A detailed preliminary talk can follow this before the mutual decision for a marriage is taken and 'made public', for which engagement is well suited. A non-binding early stage of friendship or 'going out' is unbiblical and therefore to your own damage.

**Behavioural guidelines for young men:** Remember that when interacting with young women, you may strongly influence their emotions by what you say or write. Check your motives in regard to your communication. Do not tolerate unclean thoughts. Pray that you are not led by your eyes.

**Behavioural guidelines for young women:** When dealing with young men remember that you may influence their thoughts by what you let them see of you. Tops that highlight the cleavage, slim fitting clothes, a skirt that allows unhindered glances (especially when sitting), and a provocative way of walking are not fair towards men. Of course this does not absolve men from their responsibility; however, you are responsible for your part before the Lord. It is still modesty and discretion that are the divine adornment

of a woman (1 Tim. 2:9). Consider this: your body and its sexual attraction belong solely to your future husband.

**For young men and women:** Profitable conversations on positive topics, showing interest in the spiritual activities of fellow Christians – these appear 'attractive' in a completely different way to the other sex and make it easier to have a normal interaction. Also, they lead to a fitting, spiritual atmosphere should the question of the choice of the right marriage partner arise.

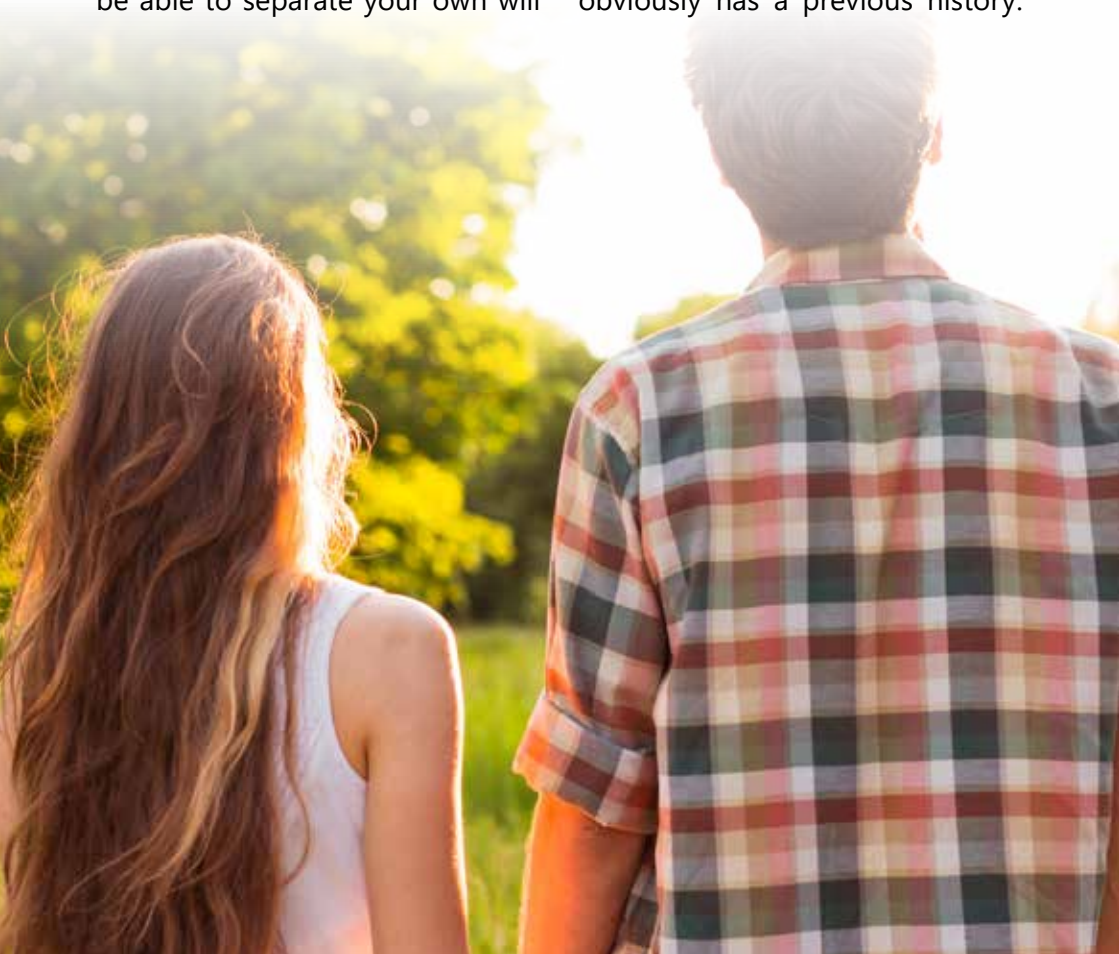
"How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word" (Ps. 119:9).

### ***Social Media – the bringer of friendship?!***

Social media (Facebook, WhatsApp etc.): for many of us it is impossible to imagine our lives without it. This type of communication also has a bearing on our topic.

Take the test:

- What platforms do you use?
- What are your goals here?
- Who is in your contact list, and why? (male/female/unbeliever)



- o What do you post?
- o What do you show of yourself to others, and why? (profile picture, status...)



Eventually, an intensive and virtual communication has developed, without any intentional basis and decision. You keep posting messages and photos, which you would have never shared in a normal contact. This is how hopes develop, hopes that will remain unfulfilled. Often, as a consequence, hurt souls are left behind. Be consistent, and do not have social media conversations with the opposite

sex more than is necessary. Perhaps you find this message rather extreme; however, it will keep you from bitter experiences.

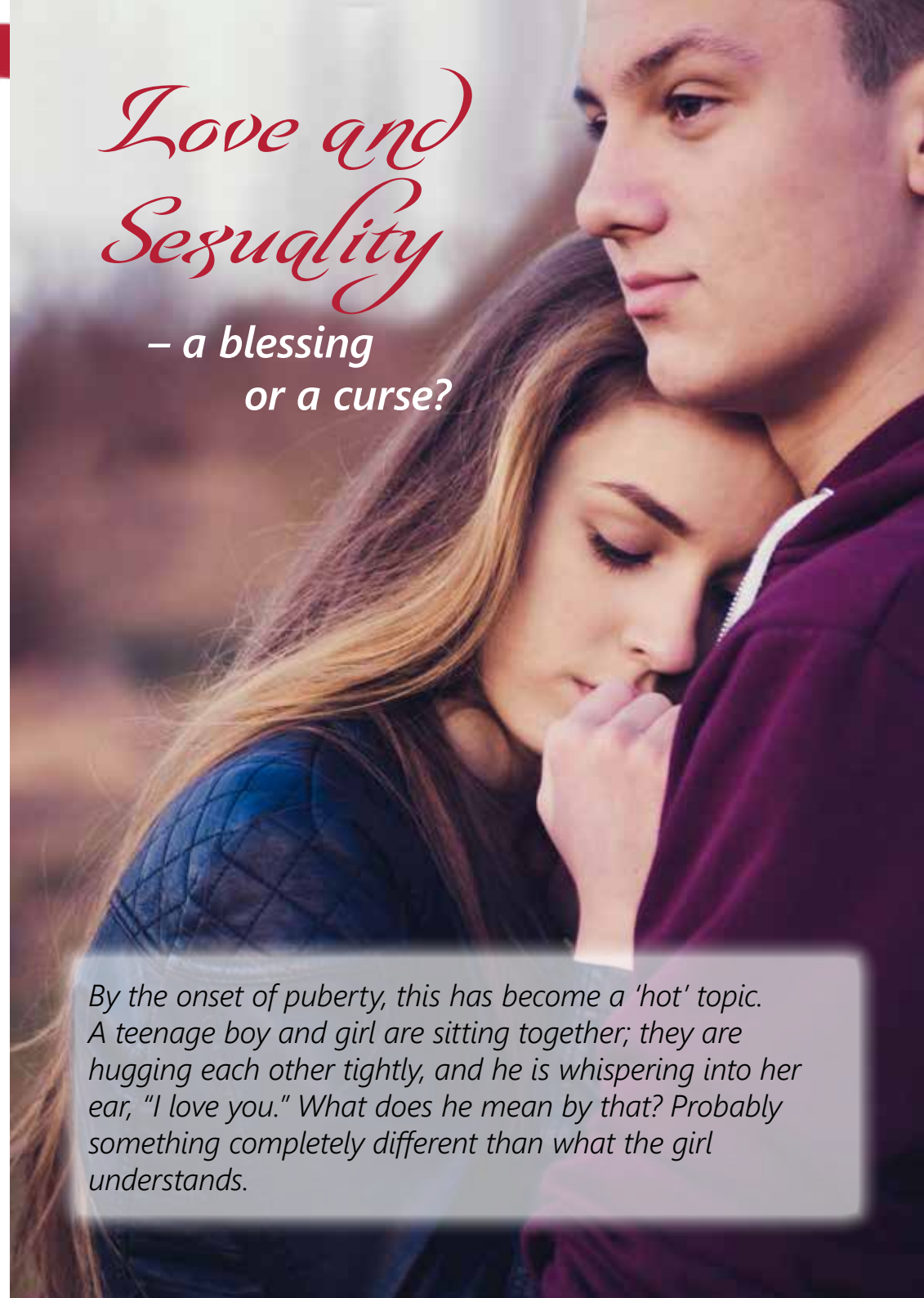
***A safe interaction – blessed and happy***

As I have already said: it is not about a restricted interaction between young believing men and women, but about a safe one. If you consciously decide to stay pure in your feelings, with your eyes and in your actions, you will choose the right approach for interactions with members of the opposite sex.

Do you realise that there is a need for change and tidying things up? If so, I would like to encourage you to make a decision from your heart, just like Daniel. Virtual communication restricts the quality of an encounter. The main risk in relation to our topic lies in the fact that communications with the other sex are easier and more intensive and can happen from any place. Many a person has, by these means, started an unwise relationship: at first an 'insignificant' message, then regular communication, then ...

# *Love and Sexuality*

*– a blessing or a curse?*



*By the onset of puberty, this has become a 'hot' topic. A teenage boy and girl are sitting together; they are hugging each other tightly, and he is whispering into her ear, "I love you." What does he mean by that? Probably something completely different than what the girl understands.*

- He says "I love you". He means: "I love myself, and for this I need you."
- She hears: "I love you." She understands: "He only wants me!" But unfortunately she is mistaken here.

In marriage, love and sexuality belong together. They are God's very fragile gifts. We can either use them in the way our Creator wants us to use them, or we can abuse and destroy them. Therefore, here are a few points to think about:

### 1. *Are love and sexuality bad things?*

Of course not. God's gifts are always good. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights" (Jas. 1:17). It depends on how we treat it. If I use an electrical device without reading through the operating instructions and warnings, I should not be surprised if the device blows up in my face when I first use it. Whoever uses God-given sexuality wrongly will experience similar things. The collateral damage can be huge. If we do not manage to control our sexuality in our youth, it can have

consequences for life. However, if we use sexuality in line with what our Creator expects, there will be great blessing in it.

### 2. *Why has God given us sexuality at all?*

There are two answers to this question:

- Answer 1: God wants humans to reproduce. His instruction to us is: "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:22, 28; 9:1, 7).
- Answer 2: God wants a married couple, a couple who are joined together in love, to have pleasure in practising sexuality (Gen.

2:24). "Let your fountain (i.e. your wife) be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth ... let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love" (Prov. 5:18, 19). We see how openly the Bible speaks about this topic.

### 3. *Are the sexual feelings of a man and a woman the same?*

No! It is important that young people understand this as early as possible. A man 'functions' differently than a woman and vice versa. That is why the young girl understands the statement of that young man ("I love you!") differently than he

means it. God has installed different 'software' in men than in women. This includes sexuality.

- Sexuality in men kindles itself. That is very often different for women.
- Male sexuality is strongly influenced visually. That is mostly different with girls.
- Sexuality of a man equals a lamp that you can switch on and off. The lamp is on from one second to the next, and also off just as quickly. Women react more like an iron. It takes a while until working temperature has been reached, and it takes a while until it is cooled down.

It is important to know this so a person doesn't make any mistakes.

### 4. *What does that mean specifically?*

This is a justified question.

- For you guys it means practically to take care not to kindle a young girl's sexuality at an early stage. You should leave this to the future husband. Only he has the right to do so. Never say



"I love you" to a girl if you do not intend to marry her. It is unfair to do this. A text from the Bible can give you help here: "Do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases" (Song 2:7; 3:5; 8:4).

- o For you girls it means not to 'turn on' guys. The way you dress, the way you touch a guy and the words you tell him should be in a way that does not stimulate a sexual fantasy. It is playing with fire. It can backfire easily.

In order to avoid misunderstanding: it's completely normal and right to just be yourself in any interaction with the opposite sex. But please do not come too close – especially when you are alone.

### 5. *Are love and sexuality gifts that we can use for our own pleasure?*

The answer is clear: No! If we think of Question 2 again, it will be immediately obvious. Practising sexuality only has its place in marriage – not before! Every selfish use of sexuality is an abuse of sexuality. This counts for sex outside marriage as well as for masturbation. Sexuality should be an expression of love in marriage. In the first place

it is intended to please my spouse, and not myself. Paul writes that the married man cares how he shall please his wife (1 Cor. 7:33) – not simply himself.

### 6. *Do love and sexuality really belong solely in marriage?*

Yes, absolutely! That is how it is written in the Bible. "For this is the will of God ... that you should abstain from sexual immorality<sup>1</sup>; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honour" (1 Thess. 4:3, 4). Fornication is sexuality practised outside and therefore before marriage. 1 Corinthians 7:2 makes it even clearer: "Because of sexual immorality<sup>1</sup>, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband." This means that a person should marry so that he or she does not have unlawful intercourse<sup>2</sup>. By implication this means that a person who is not married should not be sexually active. In 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 it becomes very clear what God thinks about "sexual immorality". Please read this text contem-

<sup>1</sup> fornication

<sup>2</sup> It is obvious that this is not the only reason why we marry. Still, it is a point that is connected to it.

platively. This text is important and is actually self-explanatory.

### 7. *Isn't God a spoilsport then?*

No, He is not. God is no 'killjoy', as some say. On the contrary: God knows how sensitive we humans are. He knows that wrongly practised sexuality will only cause damage. That is why He has given us this 'security fence', called marriage. Inside this 'safe haven' we can act out love and sexuality. Outside of this we will only hurt and damage ourselves. "Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be seared? So is he who goes in to his neighbour's wife; whoever touches her shall not be innocent" (Prov. 6:27-29). So, hands off sexuality before you are married.

### 8. *Why do love and sexuality go together?*

God has instituted it like this. First of all, He desires that man and woman are a unity of love in marriage, involving spirit and soul. Only if this

is the case, then this unity will be crowned with a physical unity. It is the icing on the cake. That is why it is important that not everything



revolves around sexuality. Sexuality is only one part of marriage. Love is so much more than coming together sexually. The first thing is the spiritual and emotional component. Sexuality goes with it, but it is not the essential character of a good marriage. There is much more to it than that.

### 9. *And what if I cannot resist anymore?*

That is not the problem. You actually can. The problem is rather that

you do not want to. Sexuality is not a basic need, like eating and drinking. He who permanently does not eat will die. This will definitely not happen if somebody doesn't live out his or her sexuality. The devil may talk us into believing this but it isn't true.

### 10. *Can I be preserved?*

Yes, you can. Here are a few tips:

- Make a decision from the bottom of your heart to do what the Bible says (Dan. 1:8).
- Keep your thoughts (2 Cor. 10:5). They are often tomorrow's deeds.
- Carefully choose friendships and

contacts. Bad company is always a high risk (1 Cor. 15:33). Keep with those who want to follow the Lord (2 Tim. 2:22).

- Avoid places that stir your sexuality unnecessarily (read Prov. 7).
- Make a covenant with your eyes (Job 31:1). This is especially important to young men.
- Have the courage to flee (1 Cor. 6:18). Joseph's only chance to escape danger was his uncompromising flight.

Most of all: occupy yourself with the positive – with your Lord Jesus!

*"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil its lusts" (Rom. 13:14).*

## *The Choice of a Spouse* – a natural or a spiritual decision?

*As a committed Christian you particularly do not want to make any mistakes in the important question of the choice of a spouse. It can have disastrous consequences if you deal carelessly with the choice of your husband or wife. This is what we see in the world daily. Love in marriage grows cold; disputes arise and increase. Eventually, divorce is the result. Unfortunately, this also happens among Christians. Therefore the question of the choice of a spouse is relevant and important.*



As children of God, we have clear prerequisites for every decision. We have the Word of God, which also presents us God's 'concept' of marriage. We have the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us and who wants to lead us. We have a God who is our Father. He wants the best for us, be it to stay single (this is also a possibility!) or to marry – but "only in the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39b). And last, but not least, we may bring everything before Him and ask for His leading and guidance.

### **Only a natural decision?**

Is there actually an alternative to a biblical, and therefore spiritual, decision? If you really want to be happy with your spouse until the end of your life, as God wants it, there is no alternative. According to which criteria should you choose your spouse? Let us go through three 'natural' criteria and have a look at arguments that negate them.

**Appearance:** "The exterior plays an important role. It's essential that my future spouse is beautiful or handsome."

Beauty is difficult to grasp because it is not universal but is judged

individually and differently. However, is beauty the one and only criterion? Is it permanent? Exterior beauty wears out; at some point there will be the first grey hair for example. The appearance alone cannot be the deciding factor for real and permanent marital bliss.

**Being in love:** "Love decides which spouse will suit me permanently. When I am in love, everything is settled. And if both are in love, then that's even better."

Is that really the case? Being in love is a momentary feeling, which



can develop through certain stimuli and opportunities. This may sound harsh but it is true. The feeling of being in love can easily vanish. Equally, you can fall in love with somebody who should definitely not be your spouse, because he or she is an unbeliever for example. Being in love alone cannot be the relevant criterion.

**Interests:** "If our interests are the same, then that's OK. We are both interested in good food, nice furniture, travelling etc. This unites us and will lead to happiness."

Having the same interests may well contribute to mutual happiness because you feel things similarly. Yet this is not automatically the basis for a happy relationship. Interests can change and often children enter into the everyday life of a marriage and there is not much time left for mutual interests. That is why you shouldn't let these things have too much influence on your decision. You should not, however, completely disregard them, but they are surely not sufficient for a lifelong relationship.

### **Consequences of a purely natural decision**

We have seen that natural criteria are not viable on their own. They change. They depend on time and circumstances, and sometimes on feelings and situations. They cannot be a final standard for a relationship that should last until the end of life, and one that also has a firm foundation against storms that may arise. One cannot say, though, that natural criteria should not play a role at all, but they should not take the highest priority – they have to come second to spiritual criteria.

### **Fleshly – spiritual**

We have to add that the Bible makes a difference between fleshly and spiritual (read Rom. 8:1-14 and Gal. 5:16-25). Fleshly decisions are only about what I might get from something. Even though you may obviously think of your personal happiness in marriage, pure selfishness can still have devastating consequences in the choice of a spouse. Selfishness completely undermines real love in marriage. Real love looks for the well-being of others – and at the same time becomes happy by doing so.

### **What distinguishes the spiritual choice of a spouse from the natural choice?**

The question of what the Lord wants comes first. God's Word says that the Holy Spirit dwells in every believer. He wants to lead the believer to the honour of God. I have to acknowledge this guidance of God and have to learn it personally. How can I experience God's guidance if I have not learned it while still being single? This is exactly what I mean when I talk of my 'Lord' Jesus: He is the leader, not me.

Romans 8:6 warns us clearly: "For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." Here we learn what the consequence of our actions will be eventually: either death or life. 1 Corinthians 7:39b speaks of getting married "in the Lord". How can the Lord guide and bless me if I arrange my own marriage according to my own criteria, without considering God's will?

### **What does the spiritual choice look like in practice?**

**Only real Christians:** The Bible provides us with some assistance. If we respect it, God will bless that. A believer can never get married

to an unbeliever, for "what communion has light with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6:14b).

**Holistic attractiveness:** We read in Genesis 2:24 that "a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." We consist of spirit, soul and body, and these three parts are addressed in this quoted verse. If two people enter into the most intimate bond there is in this world, they should find each other attractive, suited to one another and in harmony with one another on the basis of spirit, soul and body.

**Authority of the Lord:** If we consider what it means to marry "in the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39), then we have to ask ourselves whether the Lord could go into this marriage with all His rights, or whether He would miss out on any particular part in this bond. With Isaac and Rebecca in Genesis 24:13, the first contact was made at the well, a type of the Word of God. Where do you get to know your possible spouse: on holiday, on the internet or rather while engaged in the consideration of God's Word?

**God's Word as the compass:** It would make me happy if you

were motivated to take up the Bible yourself. Look up what it says about a man 'after God's heart' or about a spiritual woman. You will find passages, such as Proverbs 31, Ephesians 5 or 1 Peter 3 and others, and will discover many hints which will help you to find a spiritual answer to this question.

**Prayer:** You should also maintain intensive prayer. Unfortunately, the power of prayer is very underestimated sometimes. James 5:16 says "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." God wants us to supplicate Him and to strive for clarity and for peace in prayer.

**Inner peace:** Then He will reply, because we have this assurance: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6, 7). And: "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts" (Col. 3:15). The consequence of this will be peace in our hearts and a yes to God's ways. This may take a while sometimes as God puts our waiting and our patience to the test. If this peace is not present, don't try to make something happen but continue to wait and to pray. Then, though, this peace will come at some point. Whoever has experienced this can only speak about it with thanksgiving.

This peace is particularly precious because normally it doesn't vanish. There is the assurance that God will make His will clear. Apart from momentary mood swings, we can move forward conscious of His leading.



**No rush with a life-long decision**

You cannot skip these steps nor take a shortcut. In particular, they should not be put aside or forgotten because you are in love. Love is a conscious decision, a categorical yes to your spouse. Unconditional acceptance of the other and the willingness to foster and support him or her go with it. Your own ego has no place here. Love means getting to know the real needs of the other and trying to satisfy them.

Natural criteria, which attract us, may play a role as long as the spiritual criteria have been con-

sidered first. You may fall in love with a person or feel attracted to them. But this must not set aside the spiritual choice of a spouse in prayer and in waiting for the Lord's response. However, this should not lead to the idea that everything in this question has to be spiritual. Marriage itself is and will remain a natural decision. You might think because you are scared of a purely natural decision that everything has to be evaluated spiritually. This extreme is equally unhealthy. If natural affection, feelings and a practical togetherness are ignored, there is the danger of forgetting that eventually it is all about living together in a natural way.

To sum it up: in prayer, you must learn to see God's will through His Word – the guide for your life. Do not put your feelings aside, but do not allow them to manipulate you. You have to let God be your leader in everything and to submit your feelings to your will (rather, God's will). Then love will be genuine and permanent, and God will make it clear to you which person you may marry in the Lord. Trust HIM!

*Marital Status: Single*

– maybe permanently?

*A booklet on marriage might not be considered complete if it did not mention the fact that not all people do marry early in life. Some may have to wait longer than they thought. Others have to experience that God's will for them does not include marriage.*



*"And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them." (Gal. 6:16).*



This chapter does not deal with the special case of a believer who has chosen not to marry for the Lord's sake and who has the gift needed to live this way. Rather, we are talking about the case of 'involuntary singleness' which you did not wish for. This may apply to both brothers and sisters alike, even though this issue is more frequently to be found among sisters.

This topic cannot be exhausted in a short chapter, neither should it provide a general and basic debate on the topic of whether to marry or not. This chapter is rather intended to address a few of the questions and needs that are connected with this issue.

### ***Satan's lies about being unmarried***

Particularly when you are in a situation that you personally consider as difficult, you are in danger of dwelling on thoughts which the enemy whispers into your ear.

### ***Lie 1: You are unmarried because you are ...***

You can complete the sentence for yourself. There are a variety of op-

*As you do not know  
what is the way of the  
wind ... so you do not  
know the works of God  
who makes everything.*  
Ecclesiastes 11:5

tions. You are not married because you are ...

- ... not pretty enough,
- ... not clever enough,
- ... not spiritual enough,
- ... too spiritual (!) (carnal and worldly-minded Christians all have a spouse, it seems),
- ... too introverted/  
too extroverted,
- ... (can be extended endlessly).

No, in the vast majority of cases the fact that someone is not married has nothing to do with the

personality of the person concerned. That would give room for the illusion: "If I change this or that I will be married tomorrow."

The fact that someone is married, unmarried or widowed has, in the first place, to do with God's sovereignty and the way He leads a person through life. "As you do not know what is the way of the wind, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you do

not know the works of God who makes everything" (Eccl. 11:5).

### ***Lie 2: If you are (still) unmarried, it is because God does not love you***

Of course you know this is not true. God is love (1 John 4:8). He gave His Son for you on the cross. Yes, you know that God loves you. However – do you really believe it? This world is characterised by the consequences of sin: sickness, tragedy, poverty, death. There would be many reasons to doubt God's love if we only looked at the circumstances in which we find ourselves. God's

love was (and is) revealed at Calvary. There He delivered His only-begotten Son to suffering and death to save you and to have a relationship with you as His child. There is no greater proof of God's love than the cross of Calvary. Even a spouse would not be a greater proof of love. The enemy wants to use our personal grief and personal needs to sow seeds of doubt in God's love (the fiery darts of the wicked). Then look up to Calvary and take "the shield of faith", which is also able to quench these darts (Eph. 6:16).

### ***Lie 3: As you are not married, you are worth nothing***

The enemy might suggest: If no one has taken an interest in you yet as a spouse, you cannot be worth very much. You have nothing to offer. Maybe other believers have suggested – explicitly or implicitly – that only married Christians 'count' in the assembly.

All this underlies the myth that your value depends on what others think of you. I could mention a number of unmarried brothers and sisters whose faith (and service) is of great value for the saints. And it is certainly good to mention our appreciation of this to those con-

cerned. But this is eventually on the same level as how I value the worth of another believer.

You do not become valuable by what you do (even if it is to marry), but you are valuable because God has created you and because you are precious in His eyes (see Ps. 139:12-16).

**Lie 4: Better to marry an unbeliever than to stay unmarried for the rest of your life**

The situation of being without a spouse can be painful, and the experience of loneliness can become overwhelming. In such a case marriage to an unbeliever may seem like a solution. But it is not! Scripture condemns this 'unequal yoke' as sin. Do you really think such a relationship will satisfy your deepest longings? Even if your spouse is exemplary on the human level and 'lets you follow your faith', this remains: you will be very likely to go to the meetings alone and read your Bible alone. You will not be able to talk with your spouse about the most important things in life. And think of the coming of the Lord – even then you will go to heaven alone! Your spouse will

be on his or her way to another destination. What an unbearable thought! Yes, God in His grace can save your spouse. But there is no promise for that in the Bible. No, you should not be taken in by this lie.

**The unmarried Christian and sexuality**

This deals with a problem that only exists for the one who is unmarried: a life of sexual abstinence. Of course, all Christians are called to a life of sexual purity, but for the married Christian this means being faithful to his or her spouse and to have sexual intercourse only with her or him. For someone who is unmarried it means a life of permanent sexual abstinence. In a completely sexualised society this is already a hard thing for a 19-year-old, and it is hardly easier for a 30-year-old unmarried Christian either.

In today's society, making sacrifices is seen as a negative idea. You have to live out all your wishes and desires. But the life of a Christian is often characterised by making sacrifices. In a marriage, both spouses have to make sacrifices for the sake of the other. Living out your desires in a selfish way is unthinkable in a

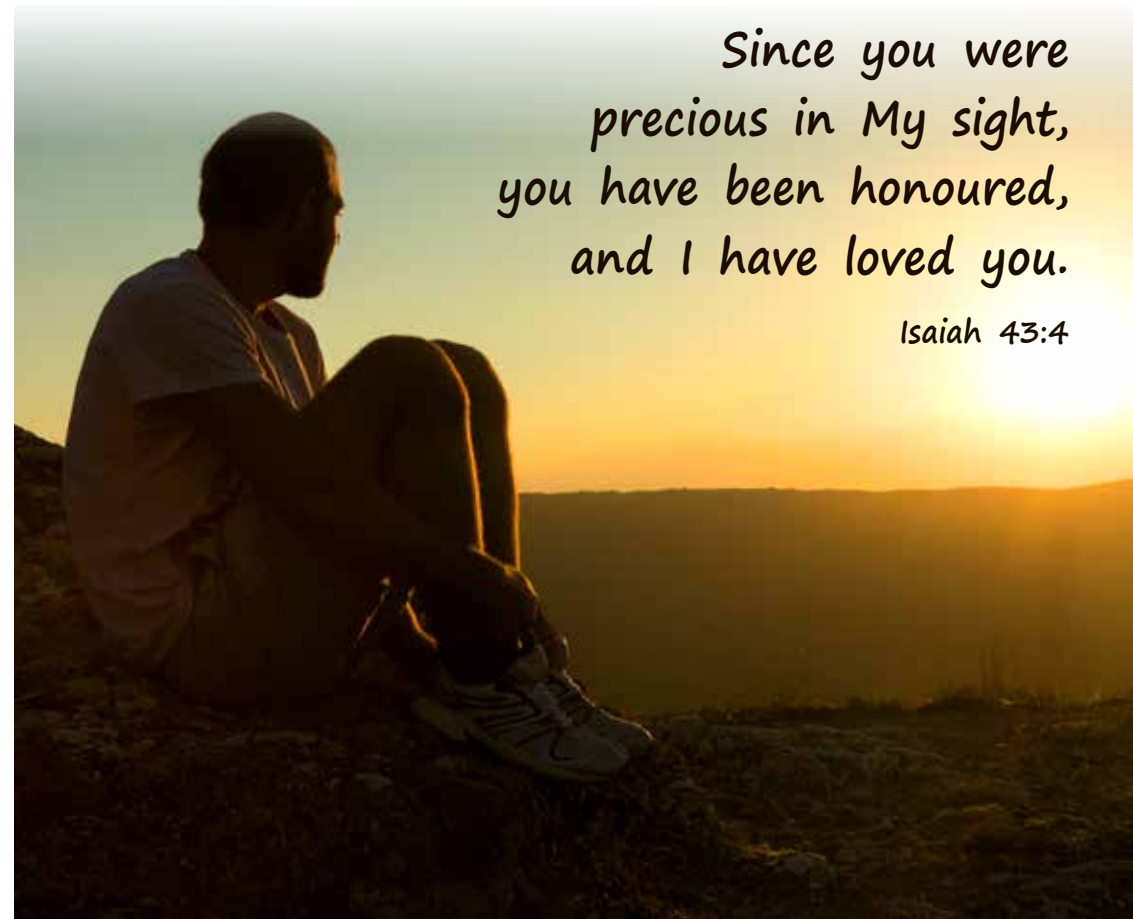
Christian marriage. Likewise, the unmarried believer should be willing to deny himself or herself in order to live a life of sexual abstinence.

Sexual desire may certainly become very strong, so the requirement to live in this way may make it more difficult. In such a case it is helpful if the young Christian concerned talks confidentially to a mature Christian of the same sex or a couple to find the help, support and prayer he or she needs.

Avoid any 'alternative solution' (masturbation, pornography, films, etc.), which will only make you unhappy and increase your burdens, and bring you into a spiritual downward spiral. "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

*Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honoured, and I have loved you.*

*Isaiah 43:4*



***"If it is God's will for me not to marry, why doesn't He take the desire for a spouse out of my heart?"***

For creatures to ask why God does something or doesn't do something is actually not our place. And very often we will not get an answer to such a question. Even though the thought behind this is understandable, it is also dangerous. Behind this – perhaps subconsciously – lies the thought that for a fulfilled life I have to marry, and if I do not marry then God should take away the desire for this. But the reality of life (also in the lives of biblical characters) is different: in our experience with the Lord, we find that we can have a fulfilled life without the fulfilment of all of our wishes.

The desire to marry is normal and good – even when God in His ways chooses not to fulfil (or has not yet fulfilled) it. Paul says in Philippians 4:11–13: "Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I

can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Even the apostle had to learn certain things that we find naturally difficult. A lot of things in the life of faith are part of a learning process. Perhaps you find it difficult to be satisfied with your situation of singleness because your desire for a spouse is still strong. But yet the Lord can help you to live a meaningful, blessed life with the opportunities He gives you to serve Him as a single Christian.

#### ***Mourning and bitterness – and how to deal with them***

In a certain way the ongoing condition of singleness can be a form of suffering, loss and deprivation. Therefore, it is natural and not a sign of being 'unspiritual' to feel this and to mourn about it. Jephthah's daughter said to her father: "Let this thing be done for me: let me alone for two months, that I may go and wander on the mountains and bewail my virginity, my friends and I" (Jdg. 11:37). She wanted time to mourn her situation, and then she would surrender to God's ways. There is a time for everything – also for mourning. Whether this

is two months (as with Jephthah's daughter) or longer depends on the individual case.

However, sooner or later, if the time has not come where we can accept this personal situation out of the hand of the Lord, then there is a

danger that "any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled" (Heb. 12:15). This often leads to accusations against God – spoken or unspoken. But not only does this dishonour God, it also harms our life of faith.

***"My times are in Your hand"***  
***(Ps. 31:15)***

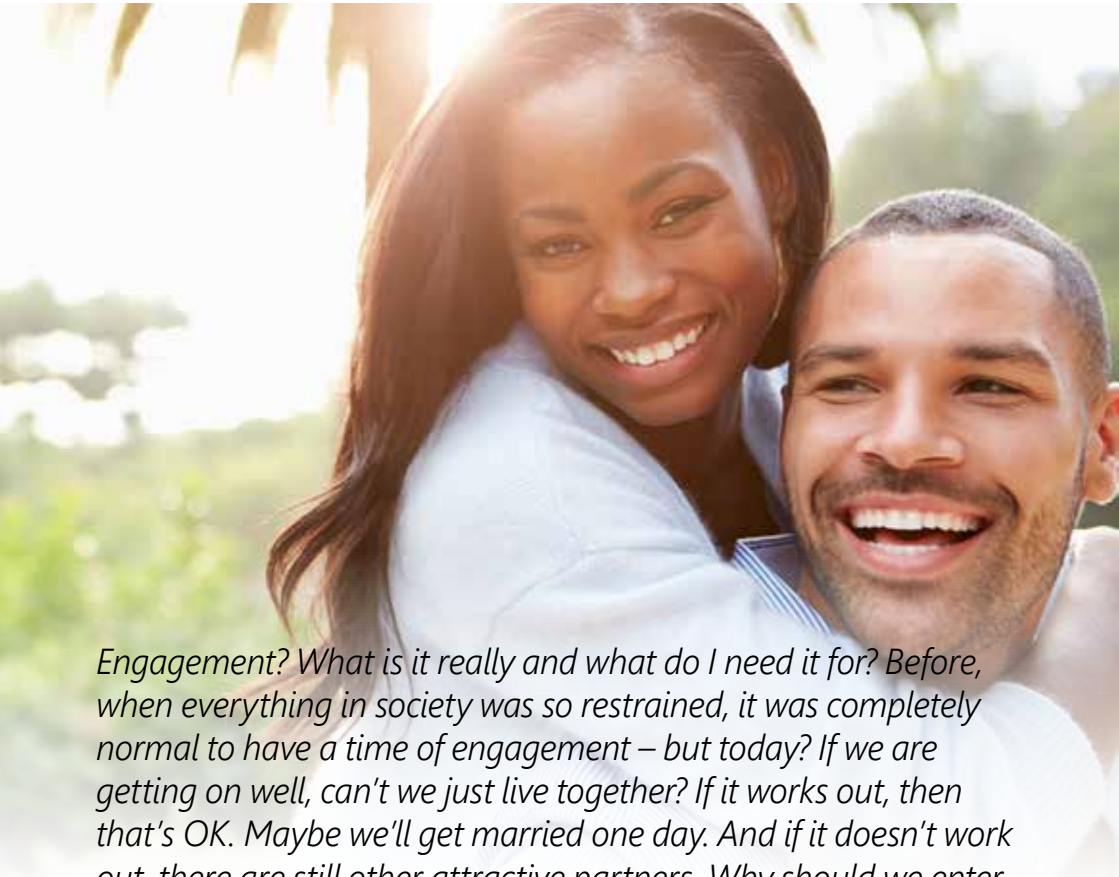
The following saying is an encouragement for every Christian, especially unmarried ones: "I don't know what my future holds, but I do know who holds my future." And He also holds the present in His hands – your years of singleness included. Living for Christ is happening now. Use the time and the opportunity for His honour. Only Christ can give life a sense of fulfilment – including in the life of an unmarried Christian.



***"I don't know what my future holds, but I do know who holds my future."***

# Engagement

– what's the sense of it?



*Engagement? What is it really and what do I need it for? Before, when everything in society was so restrained, it was completely normal to have a time of engagement – but today? If we are getting on well, can't we just live together? If it works out, then that's OK. Maybe we'll get married one day. And if it doesn't work out, there are still other attractive partners. Why should we enter into a commitment? That's far too risky.*

*You might hear these or similar conversations in the school playground or during lunchtime at work. But what does the Bible say on this topic?*

Even among committed Christians there are different opinions on this subject<sup>1</sup>. Therefore it is even more important that we examine the thoughts of the Bible thoroughly, and stick to them.

## **The topic of engagement in the Bible**

In the Old Testament times an engagement was like the signing of a contract, where the man committed himself to paying a dowry (Ex. 22:16), and thus acquired a right on that woman. One example of that is David, who got engaged to Michal, the daughter of Saul (see 2 Sam. 3:14). This is no longer the case today. Yet, engagement is still important and useful as a promise of marriage. Paul compares the relationship between the Lord Jesus and the believers in 2 Corinthians 11:2 with an engagement: "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."

A few important points become clear from this:

- "espoused": an engagement is something that God wants.
- "present you to Christ": it is a binding matter between a man and a woman, and results in the goal of a permanent relationship (see Hos. 2:19).
- "chaste": An engagement is not yet marriage. Those engaged will not become intimate with one another ("chaste" means "pure", also in the sexual sense).
- "for": this relationship is connected with blessing, and especially with responsibility (Paul was zealous for the devotion of the Corinthians towards the Lord).

The Bible also shows us an exemplary engaged couple – Joseph and Mary. Their relationship was characterised by love because Joseph did not want to publicly expose Mary to ridicule (Matt. 1:19). It was also characterised by the fear of God because Joseph, as well as Mary, wanted to do God's will. And it was characterised by purity because Joseph was absolutely certain that Mary was not pregnant because of him. Even today, we can learn a lot from Joseph's attitude.

<sup>1</sup> Sometimes different ideas are linked with this term. For some, the time of engagement is only the final period of a relationship that has existed beforehand.

**Preparation for marriage**

The time of engagement is in particular a time of preparation for marriage. It starts with a binding promise of marriage and ends on the day of the wedding.

**Leaving father and mother**

A marriage is characterised by the fact that the man has left his father

and mother. This is a process which starts before engagement. The man has to mature in order to 'stand on his own two feet' in regards to material, mental and especially spiritual things. He must be able to walk in communion with the Lord Jesus and to accept responsibility. This process is continued during the engagement period, and the man does not only learn to take responsi-

*There are three things which are too wonderful for me, yes, four which I do not understand:  
The way of an eagle in the air,  
the way of a serpent on a rock,  
the way of a ship in the midst of the sea,  
and the way of a man with a virgin.*

Proverbs 30:18, 19

bility for himself, but also for his future wife. The wife can be a big help to him by fulfilling the place which God has given her.

**Being joined to his wife**

Another important feature of marriage is that a man is joined to his wife. This close relationship, which cannot be loosed, is prepared in the engagement period. It is natural that there will be affections and a first getting-to-know one another before engagement. However, in the time of engagement both are intensified: How does the future spouse think? How does he or she feel? What emotions does he or she have and how does he or she show them? All these things you will get to know step by step during your engagement. This is important in order to be united to one another.

**The woman prepares herself**

The engagement period is also important for the woman. She gets to know the man and talks to him about issues that are relevant for their future as a couple. Together, they both ask for the will of the Lord Jesus for their lives. This is important preparation for the woman's married life.

**Man and woman are different from one another**

The creator-God has created man and woman in a different way. This was His wise and good purpose. You are getting to know these differences in a binding relationship more intensely. In the time of engagement the man gets to know that the woman thinks and feels differently in many things. The woman experiences the same. This is connected with some surprises! But it is a great opportunity to have these first experiences during the engagement period. You will benefit from this at the beginning of your marriage!

**First mutual decisions**

The step into engagement has certainly been connected with much prayer. The man has asked the Lord Jesus: "Should I ask this believing woman if she wants to become my wife?" And the woman has asked the Lord: "Should I answer this believing man with 'Yes'?" Both have personally prayed about these questions and decisions. But now, first decisions can be made together. Many questions are on the list, and it is a great joy to talk and pray about these things together. By doing so,

they will get to know each other and learn to value dependence on the Lord Jesus with one another.

**First steps with the Lord**

As an engaged couple, one significant point is to start praying and reading the Bible together. This is how the first steps with the Lord Jesus can be made together. This bond in spiritual things, this togetherness with the Lord Jesus, is the strongest bond between two people who have life from God. Walking together with the Lord is vital for a happy Christian marriage, and this togetherness does not only start at the marriage ceremony!

**Time of engagement – a time of waiting**

The time of engagement is also a time of waiting. Being engaged is not yet being married. There is a part of the togetherness that God



has saved for marriage: the physical part, the sexual togetherness. An engaged couple will hug each other; an engaged couple will kiss each other (depending on the cultural background). But sexuality must not yet be lived out during the engagement. Jacob was engaged for seven years while he served to obtain Rachel. But it was only after the marriage that there was a sexual relationship.<sup>1</sup> Joseph and Mary were completely

pure before they entered into marriage. And in 2 Corinthians 11 we have seen the chaste virgin in the time of engagement. The Bible is very clear regarding this point, and it will have negative consequences for us if we do not stick to it. The person, however, who is able to literally wait, in fellowship with the Lord, will have great blessing from it during their whole married life. That is why it is important for the couple to set

<sup>1</sup> The fact that Jacob was deceived by his father-in-law is a different matter and does not change anything here.

themselves limits which are based on the Bible, and which contain the caution and restraint needed. One way this can be done is by limiting the amount of time alone together. Every engaged couple in their situation will find the right duration for their engagement – not too short, so they can have enough preparation time for marriage, but neither too long, so it does not make the wait unnecessarily difficult.

**Engagement – a binding promise**

Finally, we want to reiterate the fact that engagement is a promise that should never be broken thought-

lessly. Still, it is not yet a marital bond and, unlike with marriage, an engagement may be broken for serious reasons. This will always hurt and leave scars. But if it is very clear that a mutual path will not end well, then it is better to break the engagement. Despite this possibility it should be clear to both man and woman that an engagement is a binding promise with marriage as its declared goal.

On the way into marriage, the time of engagement is a happy and blessed preparation time if those engaged experience this time in happy fellowship with the Lord Jesus. This is merely the beginning,



not the pinnacle for a couple. It is marriage that is intended by God to be the highest source of human joy and satisfaction. And this is what a well-used engagement can lead towards!

### Summary

- Engagement is still justified in the 21st century. It is a thing that has been established in the Bible and is valid today.

- An engagement is not a non-binding reservation of a spouse, but a binding promise to marry each other (even if it is not something that cannot be broken – see p. 43).
- The time of engagement differs greatly from marriage and serves as a preparation for it.



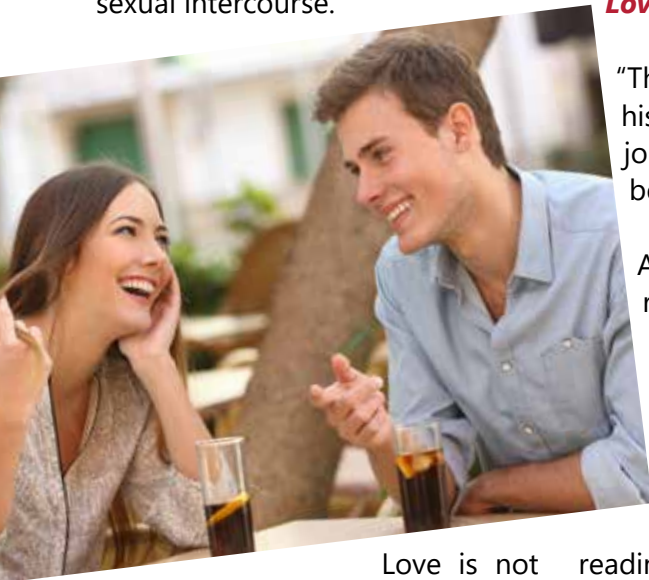
# Love Between a Husband and Wife

– what is this actually?

*How do you, as an unmarried person, imagine love between a husband and wife? What is involved in real, true love in marriage? Does love between spouses only mean the sexual part? If we look for answers to these questions in the Bible, we will be surprised that this topic is dealt with in many passages, and we will find that it touches on a number of aspects of love.*

**What love in marriage is not**

In order to answer the question of what love in marriage is, it is helpful to say first what love is not. Love is not to be equated with sexual intercourse. Marital love should include this part, but it should not be reduced to that. If it were different, then there would be no love, either temporarily or maybe even permanently, between couples who, due to health reasons, cannot have sexual intercourse.



Love is not merely a nice feeling, because our feelings vary. Sometimes we feel good, sometimes we don't. If I am feeling good, is it only then that I love my spouse? And not on bad days? No, this cannot be regarded as the epitome of love. Feelings

cannot be 'forced' but we can make a conscious decision to love.

Also, two people who love each other will remain two individuals, and love between them does not mean that they somehow think, act and feel the same in everything.

We would now like to try to make clear in several points what love in marriage really is.

**Love – a unity**

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24).

A special thing about marriage is the unity between a man and a woman. This unity is expressed especially in the fact that the spouses have spiritual communion with one another, for example by praying together, by reading the Bible together and by talking together about the things happening in their life. Equally, this unity is expressed mutually in both emotional and physical love. "One flesh" therefore means one complete unity according to spirit, soul and body.

**Love – affection**

Even though Michal's father considered David as his rival, she loved David (1 Sam. 18:20, 28). She had tender feelings for this man in her heart, and this became known.

You cannot explain the phenomenon that one person has affection for another person – an affection that goes beyond merely liking them. "There are three things which are too wonderful for me, yes, four which I do not understand: The way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea, and the way of a man with a virgin" (Prov. 30:18, 19).

Love is not automatic – it requires energy and commitment, again



and again. That is why God's Word exhorts both the man and the woman to love their spouse (Eph. 5:25; Col. 3:19; Tit. 2:4).

**Love – being there for each other in difficult situations**

We can see something of this 'being there for each other' in the couple in the Bible of whom it is first said that they loved one another. Isaac mourned his mother, and his wife comforted him (Gen. 24:67). Especially in difficult times it becomes clear what real love is. Then one spouse stands by the other and supports, comforts and encourages them.

This may be demonstrated in situations of everyday life. For example, if the wife is ill, then the hus-



band will take over the tasks in the household (normally it is the wife who rules the house – see Tit. 2:5).

If the husband is under pressure in his job, his wife will do everything to support him.

This 'being there' is vital in extreme situations, for example if a very serious illness or another exceptional situation is at hand. The spouse less affected by it – if one can say that at all – will make every effort to support the other.

### **Love – overcoming obstacles**

We read of Jacob, that he loved a woman and worked for her for 14 years in total (Gen 29:27). After having worked for her for seven years and then having been deceived by his father-in-law, he could have given up. But it was love that helped him to endure seven more years.

In relation to love within a marriage, maybe either the husband or the wife has already proved that he or she is ready to overcome obstacles on account of love. Perhaps there were difficulties that had to be overcome before or during their engagement. If both endured, then

this was a proof of their love for each other.

There are many obstacles that a married couple may be called to face, things like financial burdens, health problems, emotional distresses, difficulties in conceiving children – the list goes on. Such obstacles can both test and strengthen love.

In marriage there may also be difficulties caused by the 'in-laws'. Then the person concerned has to stick to their spouse and stand against his or her 'own' family if necessary. This is not always easy, but love for one's spouse will give strength for it.

### **Love – self-sacrifice**

When a slave in Israel had been serving for seven years, he could be released (Ex. 21:2-6). If he married during this period he could go out free – but only alone. His wife and his children had to stay behind. However, he could waive his personal right for freedom on account of love towards his wife. This clear picture shows us that a person who marries must be prepared to make sacrifices.

Marriage involves rights and duties for both parties. It is good to make sure that the other receives their rights. You will be ready to sacrifice your own rights in order to do this. Although it is important to have time for yourself, it is also your happy duty to spend time with your spouse.

Perhaps, for example, you had a hobby or leisure activity that occupied large amounts of your time when you were single. Now that you are married you will be considerate of your spouse and be willing to set aside your interests for theirs.

Your career can introduce particular challenges in relation to this matter of self-sacrifice. Without question

Christians should all be diligent in their work, and it is particularly good to have an interesting secular position. Further, if a believer has a reputation as a good employee, it is not uncommon that they will be entrusted with greater responsibilities. Advancement like this could be seen as important for a husband and father who wants to properly look after his family – especially if it incurs a salary increase. But such promotions are usually linked to expectations of increased time and energy at work or to additional duties like business trips away from home. If, for example, you want to be a good husband, there may be no objections to seizing an opportunity like this – but it is worth considering the idea of turning it down due to love for your wife and children, and because of the possible negative impact on time spent with the Lord. You might refuse career advancement because you know its demands would drain you of the energy you would prefer to spend on your family.

### **Love – caring for each other**

Love also consists of the fact that the husband and wife take care of each other. We have thought about the fact that a man and his wife are



one in spirit, soul and body. Each spouse will express their love for the other in responding to their needs in these different areas of life. What does my wife need – really need? What does my husband need? In fact, it will be the question of both of them to take care of the *real* needs of the other.

This is the true expression of love. If you don't know their real needs, you will ask, observe and discern – and this process of discovery will last for the lifetime of the couple. This might sound complex but it's actually a wonderful and precious experience of love.

This is how the husband and wife may "care about the things of the world", willingly taking on earthly tasks in order to please the other (1 Cor. 7:32-34).

### **Love – looking after your own body**

This point seems a bit unexpected at first glance, but we know from the New Testament that in marriage one's own body also belongs to the spouse (1 Cor. 7:4;



Eph. 5:28, 29). It is therefore not irrelevant how we treat our bodies. That is why we will, out of love for our spouse, pay attention to our health, to our personal hygiene and to our external appearance, but in a balanced way, not overdoing it. The spouses may in this way put emphasis on pleasing one another (1 Cor. 7:33, 34) – this can provide a measure of protection for them against temptations.

### **Love – practising sexuality**

This topic has been dealt with extensively in the chapter "Love and sexuality – a blessing or a curse?" Living out sexuality is absolutely necessary in marriage. The expression 'love for sale' to describe prostitution is absurd because prostitution is in no way about love but solely about the gratification of in-

stincts. But intimate togetherness in marriage is the highest expression of the bodily side of love and God gives us many hints about this intimacy in His Word. Concerning the joy connected with it, see Proverbs 5:19b and Song of Solomon 1:2, 4:10; concerning the duties connected with it, see 1 Corinthians 7:3,5 and 1 Peter 3:7. God always takes account of the unity of spirit-soul-body. If a couple pays attention to these hints in Scripture, the physical side of their relationship will enhance the experience and enjoyment of love in the manner that God intended.

### **Summary**

We have seen that love in marriage has many diverse aspects. With marriage,

God has preserved for us something from paradise – and if we pay careful attention to His Word, this will result in happiness and joy for us as a married couple. If we are prepared to take up the challenges associated with all aspects of marriage, then we will enjoy wonderful privileges designed by God Himself for our blessing.





*What does God say about the topics of*

- friendship*
- engagement*
- marriage?*

*How can these things be practised today?*

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