

# Courtship and Marriage

## **Petri and Mary Hotari**

Love between a man and a woman is a beautiful gift and a blessing from God. God created the world and it was good. Adam however was alone, and God said, “It is not good that a man should be alone, I will make him an help meet for him” (Gen. 2:18).

This meant that Adam received an equal partner, the gift of a spouse. God made a woman from Adam’s rib bone. When this was completed Adam was joyful and 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” (Gen. 2:23). Adam also said, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). In this way God established marriage.

## **God Hears Our Prayers**

It is a good prayer to pray for a believing spouse. A spouse is a precious helpmate throughout life, truly a blessing and God’s gift. We also want to accept God’s will if He doesn’t bless us in this way, for we trust that He knows what is best for us and leads and guides our lives as He sees fit.

Matters of courtship should be taken seriously and with a prayerful heart. We want to approach this with the intent of marriage and with a mature mind. Courtship is a time to get to know one another and to see if one would be a suitable spouse for the other. God instructs us to search within His flock and not to be unequally yoked: “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).

When a believing man and woman acknowledge their love for each other and their desire to spend the rest of their lives together it is good to turn to God’s Word and instruction for guidance. God’s Word teaches that “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world” (Titus 2:12). A believing couple is encouraged to get to know one another from the heart in the fellowship and care of the believers and avoid places of temptation.

We cannot in any way accept permissiveness of sin or worldly attitudes regarding living together before marriage or premarital sex. Sexual relations before marriage is fornication and sin. Paul instructs us to “make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof” (Rom. 13:12). Only in marriage should we begin an intimate physical relationship, which God expressly intends for man and wife.

## **Obedience Brings Joy and Trust**

The marriage relationship’s core is to honor and trust one another, living together for the rest of one’s life and being faithful. Jesus says that humankind must not separate that which God has joined together

(Matt. 19:6). One of the purposes of marriage is to continue God's creation work by raising a new generation, and God gives the command to procreate. "God blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). We want to be obedient to this command and accept all the children as gifts that God blesses us with. There is great joy and blessing when a family can grow in the unity, love and support of God's congregation, where each can uplift and support the other and share joys and sorrows.

Marriage can be likened to a journey that endures day by day through joys, challenges and sorrows. The married couple learns how to compromise, love, support, uplift and care for one another and – most importantly – forgive one another and put matters away with the gospel. The preached gospel gives the couple new strength to believe and renewed love to move forward on the journey, endeavoring to travel together, with God's flock to our heavenly destination.

## Courtship Prepares for Marriage

### **Harri Vahajylkka**

Courtship has a clear purpose and goal. It aims toward the upcoming marriage of the two that are courting. Courtship is wonderful, but it is also a serious matter. The time of courtship is meant to be a time when the future spouses get to know each other's background, personality, values and way of life; it is meant to be a time to plan a future together.

Falling in love can happen in many ways. It can be sudden and intense or it can last longer, deepening from a friendship or infatuation into love. Sure feelings or insecure feelings are part of falling in love and courtship. One has to give time and space for the other's feeling of uncertainty, and no one should be forced to commit against their will. Over the years I have met many wedding couples. Love stories never follow the same pattern. Love is God's gift. Through this gift, God unites two people in marriage, a beautiful gift of His creation work.

Courtship touches a person's deepest feelings such as falling in love. One should not begin courtship without genuine intent to get married. Playing with another person's feelings can hurt deeply. Courtship should not be used to show how "popular" one is among one's peers or to show that "I have someone too." Adolescence and growing to adulthood include infatuation and feelings of falling in love. These feelings, however, do not require courtship. When two people discover one another and notice their interest and mutual affection persisting and deepening, at some point they realize they are in love.

## **What Is Love?**

The most important tools in courtship are listening and discussing. With these tools you can get to know the person you're in love with, the person whom you wish to commit to and with whom you're ready to spend the rest of your life. Love is the gift and power of God that unites two people. Apostle John states that "love is of God" (1 John 4:7). That love is more than just a deep feeling between two people.

Married love could be described as many thin strands woven into a strong rope that unites a man and a woman in mutual matrimony. This deep relationship involves loving and accepting the other just as God has created him or her.

Nonetheless our own traits or even wrong behavior models learned in childhood do not justify doing sin. We cannot for example use our own short temper to justify insulting words or invalidating the other. Love does not place conditions or demands on another person. One does not need to earn love either. Love also involves building trust and respect. Caring for love requires openness and learning to be open.

## **Two Become One**

During the time of courtship it is good to learn to express your opinions, wishes and feelings. It is also necessary to listen to what the other shares about himself or herself. Sometimes it takes time to learn openness, but it is worth it. When God unites spouses together, two become one. Then my spouse's life becomes part of my life. It is good to know what kind of home the other has grown up in and what kind of life the other has lived to this point. In a secure courting relationship one may share joys and strengths in life and also those trials and difficulties that affect what kind of person I am today.

The courtship period also includes discussion of what kind of home we want to have in the future. What foundation do we want to build our home on? It is necessary to ask what faith means to you and me. Do we believe in the same way? It is also good to discuss other values that shape our lives. How important are money and temporal success in this life? Do we want to acquire a lot of material goods or perhaps settle for less and spend more time together with our family? What makes you happy in life? Or what makes you unhappy?

Even during courtship there are occasionally conflicts, arguments and sin. In those cases we learn how our future spouse faces adversity and difficulties. How do we resolve arguments and take care of matters? We learn that although we love each other, it does not make us perfect or sinless. During courtship we must learn to speak about matters such that we can talk freely and without fear or guilt about what we experience and feel. We must speak and listen to the other as long as it takes for the argument or other difficult matter to be dealt with so that we can be free of it and move forward.

## **Marriage Is Very Special**

Marriage is the union of two people into one, as Jesus teaches us. He says they are no longer two, but one flesh (Matt. 19:6). In marriage we share and do almost everything in relation to our spouse. How I act or don't act affects my spouse. How I pay attention to my spouse, serve him or her, what names I use and how I talk to him or her, how I take my spouse's needs into account...all of these are what Jesus means by "being one." The most important word in marriage is not *me* but *us*.

Marital love is part of our everyday life. In everyday life, the trust, affection and respect for the other – things that are born of love that is cared for – are tried. Healthy love shows itself in life's small and larger things. Love can be expressed by talking beautifully to one's own spouse and making him or her happy in small ways.

I still remember a time years ago when I came home from work to the scent of coffee. At that time my wife did not drink coffee, so I knew it was made for me. That ordinary coffee had a strong aftertaste of love! Seemingly small things can also be meaningful the other way around as well. I have noticed that time together with one's spouse occasionally has great impact on the wellbeing of our mutual love. If I only have time for work, my own hobbies, friends and helping others, what does that say about our relationship. It is not a good sign if my spouse's needs are met only after everybody else's or if we don't enjoy being together.

It is necessary to discuss the big things in life, such as moving to another location, work, bigger purchases, and to decide on these things together. That allows both to commit to the mutual decision and later also stand by it. When a decision is shared by the spouses, then both want to commit to it and also endure any possible resulting adversities. If big decisions are made without consulting one's spouse, it may cause blame, arguments and bitterness. In the hands of the enemy of souls, fatigue and bitterness are powerful weapons against faith. In this way too we wish to support our spouse on the way to heaven.

Already at the beginning of marriage it is worth learning to spend time doing things together. My spouse and I have found that everyday life easily takes us further from one another on an emotional level. Our discussions revolve around everyday topics such as the children's school, dentists and new bikes. What happened to our deep and love-filled discussions about life, dreams and the future? We have agreed to let the other know if we find that we've grown mentally distant from one another. Then we have to reserve time together to go on a walk or to eat out or get away for a short time. Spending time together helps us find the love and that familiar person from under all the matters of daily life.

## **Forgiveness Renews Love**

God's adversary, the enemy of souls, is against love. It would wish to destroy all the beauty that God has placed between spouses. Nonetheless, we have been given the strongest antidote to sin. This medicine is the gospel of the forgiveness of sins. Sin causes us to say bad things when we are arguing and to think

wrongly of the other. We blame the other and defend ourselves, and we fail to see our own mistakes. We might even wonder why we are married since we have such deep disagreements. When we are able to stop and think about our own actions and words, we often find ourselves lacking. We can pray for the humility to approach our spouse and humbly ask him or her to forgive our sins and transgressions. Our hearts aren't always willing to forgive, but the gospel thaws hearts and opens up a constructive way to discuss matters. I have found that sometimes when we are clearing up our arguments, I need to again ask for the gospel for the sake of my own corrupt nature.

When forgiveness of sins is asked, received and believed, we can continue our journey together in good spirits. The gospel of forgiveness also bears the fruit of being able to discuss those difficult matters that we as spouses have encountered. It may sometimes be necessary to get professional help if the difficulties involve, for example, some sort of violence or abuse of power between the spouses. We may need specialized professional help if, for example, substance abuse or addiction to e.g. gambling or pornography has become a part of one's life. The gospel gives the sinful person's life a new beginning and a new opportunity. Surviving these difficulties together deepens the love between spouses and makes clearer the common goal spouses have through faith – eternal life in heaven.

## God's Congregation Supports Us

### **Jasmine and Larsen Keplinger**

March 10, 2019, was one of the most memorable days of our lives. As soon as we announced our engagement, the outpour of love and support from God's congregation was plentiful. I, Jasmine, began receiving words of congratulations and God's blessings, many from people that I had never met or talked to before. Most people in the Longview congregation had known Larsen since he was born, but I had begun attending services and received the grace to believe only the year before.

Despite this notable difference, many women came to my bridal shower to share in this joyous time and extend their congratulations. This meant more to me than I will ever be able to voice. These are just a few examples of how God's congregation extended love and warmth to someone who had been part of the congregation for hardly a year. Preparing for our wedding day would not have been possible without all the help that we received. People pitched in to get things done, such as setting up, cooking, serving food, building decorations and running errands.

On August 3, 2019, we joined our hands and hearts together in marriage in front of our friends and family. It has been less than a year since we started our journey together as one, and already this time has brought many experiences and taught many lessons. When two people marry, it changes the lives of

more people than just the bride and groom. It is a time of adjustment and new exploration for both sides. Larsen and I have found this to be challenging at times, but we believe it is necessary so that we can form our own identity as a couple.

Through our difficulties we have learned how important the gospel is in marriage. When we can share those words of reassurance and forgiveness, our relationship with each other and God is strengthened. We want to care for offenses as soon as they occur when possible. This helps us to move forward before resentments can fester between us.

Although there are likely many pieces of advice we could share with newlyweds, the one we would like to emphasize is to share the gospel and share it often.

One of our favorite parts about marriage so far is having the ability to share, grow and learn from our joys and sorrows with one another.

## Thy Will Be Done

**Jessica and Mike Ylioja**

“Thy will be done,” she wrote in her journal, a few months before he entered her life. God was preparing each of them. “Greetings from Minister’s Camp,” he sent. She pondered the meaning. Prayers were said. *Lead and guide our thoughts and actions.* “How about a phone call?” The first conversation quickly turned into several hours, late into the night. The gospel was preached at the end. *Thank You, Father, for allowing the gospel to flow easily.*

“I’m coming to Minnesota soon,” he said. Where would this lead? Was it God’s will? They both prayed and wondered. It was nice to know believers were nearby to help whether God intended marriage or not.

A friend told her, “I remember it was the absence of the negative that made it feel right. I simply couldn’t find a reason why I shouldn’t.” She hunted for something wrong. Was there any reason not to continue forward? No red flags appeared; no concerns were raised. Friends and family were supportive and excited for this new beginning. She and he both marveled at and were thankful for the support of God’s congregation. It felt right and they continued forward. *Thy will be done.*

Although they lived a distance away, time was found to get to know each other in person. Weekends were spent visiting with close ones, as well as spending time alone to share life’s experiences. When apart, each processed the changes in their lives and the potential for a future together. Talking on the phone was important to share from the heart. The time apart was necessary too to reflect on God’s plan for their lives.

As things progressed, they got to know each other in moments light-hearted and full of laughter and also in moments of seriousness. They enjoyed being together in both. Courtship was full of excitement and fear at the same time, and it was important to take it one day at a time. Conversations about faith were frequent, and the gospel was preached often. Eventually it felt that their lives would fall apart without the other person. Love grew.

Soon friends and family were wondering about engagement. I'm not ready for that yet, they both worried. However, they agreed that it didn't mean it wouldn't ever happen. At the same time it was comforting to know that their close ones were praying for a marriage. *God, bless and protect our future.*

She worried about moving so far away from family and friends. He patiently waited. The step forward was a big one, but eventually God showed the way. She feared leaving all she knew to move to a land she'd never lived in before. The friends from her potential new home area that she had met in their courtship gave comfort. Conversations and shared experiences with close ones helped. They continued to trust in God.

I'm ready. A proposal was made and plans were in motion. Do I really love her? Is he the one God chose for me? Are we really ready for marriage? Questions flowed, and prayers continued to be sent, even on the wedding day.

Now, not even one year into life together, God has answered the prayers and questions. All we can do is marvel. *Thank You, God, for showing us the way. We pray You continue to lead and guide our marriage, as You showed us the way in our courtship.*

## Prayer

**Hanna Wittenberg**

I watch you, dearest couple,  
your first tentative steps on this journey together.  
My heart overflows with thankfulness and joy,  
for you are both children of the same Father!

There is fear in my heart too, mixed with joy –  
how will the journey go, will you remain united on the way?  
It seems almost impossible, in this ever-darkening world, to prevail.  
I can only place my trust in God, and I pray you always will too.

My greatest wish for you,  
is not the riches of this life, nor success.  
I pray for happiness and contentment  
with the future our Heavenly Father already knows you need.

Let the blessings that will come,  
be seen as the gifts they are, not something you made.  
Let the trials that will also come,  
only bind you closer together, and not ever divide.

May you always have  
eagerness to serve the other, daily.  
Willingness to see the other's burdens  
as something you were also meant to carry.

In your hearts, now so full of joy and love,  
may there always be room for Lord Jesus.  
In your minds, so full of excitement and plans for the future,  
may there also be quiet consideration of the old ways!

Let the forgiveness be there, every day,  
even before the other has a chance to ask.  
I pray you'll find your place in the middle of the congregation,  
and your path in the footsteps of God's holy nation.

### **Discussion Points**

1. What are the characteristics of a believing courtship, and how do they contrast with the habits of the world we live in today?
2. What are some important matters that a courting couple should visit and learn about before marriage?
3. How can God's congregation support the newly married couple? Or a couple that has been married for ten years?
4. Even marriages of many years take work and careful tending. How is this done?