

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series you may learn to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. Two teachers will teach from the Bible what is a disciple of Jesus Christ. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Today's teaching is: **A DISCIPLE DEVELOPS HEALTHY MEN-WOMEN RELATIONSHIPS**.

Today we want to learn what the Bible teaches about the special relationship between men and women. We want to discover how to make a choice for a marriage partner and how to develop your relationship with the opposite sex in stages.

(S) **POINT 1. THE MAIN PRINCIPLE FOR ALL RELATIONSHIPS IS CHRISTIAN LOVE**

John 15:4-5 teaches that Christians can do nothing without Christ. They must completely depend on him when they are seeking to find a life-partner. 1 Corinthians 13:1-8 teaches that genuine Christian love is very different than the love in the world. Christian love is completely unselfish. It is self-sacrificing! And 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 teaches that Christians must avoid every form of sexual immorality. They must exercise self-control in their relationship to the opposite sex. Christians must know how to acquire a life-partner, not in passionate lust like many non-Christians do, but in a way that is holy and honourable.

(T) **POINT 2. THE SEVEN DECISIONS TO DISCERN GOD'S WILL FOR A LIFE-PARTNER**

How can a person know which person in this whole world would be the right life partner for him or her? The Bible gives seven important decisions. Memorise these seven decisions together with their Bible references. Before you even begin to look for a life-partner, you must make these seven decisions. If you do not make these seven decisions and instead ignore God's truths, your marriage might not be pleasing to God and you could face many problems during your marriage.

(S) **The first important decision. God calls some people to remain single for a period or for life.**

1 Corinthians 7:32-35 says, "I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs - how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world - how he can please his wife - and his interests are divided. ... I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord."

We live in a time with lots of pressure on young people to get married. The advantage of remaining single is that you do not have to face all the responsibilities and difficulties of a marriage and a family. Then you could serve God single-mindedly and whole-heartedly. However, the disadvantage of remaining single is that you may sometimes have to exercise greater self-discipline in the area of moral purity.

In order to get some essential Christian training and experience for your job and for God's kingdom, a Christian should consider the following optional decision: "I yield to God my right to marry for as long as God thinks it is best, in order to be completely devoted to what God wants me to do." A premature marriage could limit your educational training as well as crowd out significant experience in Christian training and Christian ministry.

(T) **The second important decision. A Christian may only marry another Christian.**

2 Corinthians 6:14 says, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers". And 1 Corinthians 7:39 says that you are free to marry anyone you wish, but this person must belong to the Lord.

Every Christian must make this very important decision: "I will only marry a genuine Christian." The first reason why a Christian may not meet with a non-Christian with a view to marriage or why a Christian may never marry a non-Christian is that God commanded it in at least three places in the Bible. The second reason why a Christian may never marry a non-Christian is that every Christian marriage must reflect and proclaim the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Christian Church (Ephesians 5:22-33). Without spiritual unity, the most essential aspect of a marriage is lost. The third reason why a Christian may not marry a non-Christian is that the non-Christian will turn the Christian away from following Jesus Christ and cause him or her to serve other gods in another religion (Deuteronomy 7:3-4).

(S) **The third important decision. The prospective marriage partners must have the same life-goals.**

Amos 3:3 says, "Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?"

Every Christian must make this decision: "I will only marry another Christian who has the same life-goals."

In Matthew 6:33 Jesus teaches, "Seek first God's kingdom and righteousness." In Philippians 2:2 the apostle Paul teaches, "Be like-minded, have the same love, be one in spirit and purpose." Without clearly defined goals, there is no basis for making important decisions in dating or marriage.

(T) The fourth important decision. The prospective marriage partners must have self-control in the moral area.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 says, "It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lust like the heathen who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother..." Every Christian must make this important decision: "With the help of God, I will control my own body and win the other Christian only in a way that is holy and honourable, and never in passionate lust."

Hebrews 13:4 warns, "God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral." *Sexual immorality* is all sex before marriage and all sex outside marriage. It includes any lustful actions of the body, like committing sexual immorality in the mind, with the eyes or with the hands. *Adultery* is all kinds of flirting and sex with a person that is not your life-partner. Guilt and blame about wrong physical standards during the period that a man and a woman meet one another with a view to getting married carry over into their marriage relationship and become the source of many marriage problems later. However, Galatians 5:22-23 promises that the fruit of the Holy Spirit is "self-control". Every man and woman that is filled with the Holy Spirit will have self-control.

(S) The fifth important decision. The prospective marriage partners must have as harmonious relationships as possible with their parents.

Exodus 20:5-6 says, "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."

The two Christians that intend to get married should realise that unresolved conflicts with their parents will carry over into their own marriage. A husband tends to treat his wife as he treated his mother and a wife tends to respond to her husband as she responded to her father. Moreover, the way you both treated your parents may become the way your own children will treat you later. Therefore, both Christians must decide to have as harmonious relationships as is possible with their parents.

(T) The sixth important decision. The prospective marriage partners must wait for God's timing.

Ecclesiastes 8:5-6 says, "The wise heart will know the proper time and procedure. For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter."

The two Christians that intend to get married must decide to wait for God's timing in when to start meeting one another with a view to marriage and also when to actually get married. Dangerous stresses are added to the relationship between a Christian man and a Christian woman when they have not yet completed their education, or when they cannot wait until they are spiritually mature enough to marry or financially independent to marry. Impatience is always a sign of immaturity and self-love, because genuine Christian love can always wait to give.

(S) The seventh important decision. The prospective marriage partners must make a real effort to know one another very well.

Proverbs 27:19 and 23 says, "As water reflects a face, so a man's heart reflects the man." "Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds."

The two Christians should decide to get to know one another's beliefs and convictions, one another's values and customs, one another's spiritual and social life, one another's relationships to family and friends, one another's likes and dislikes and one another's life-goals and commitments. The better you know one another, the better you can make the important decision about marrying.

(T) POINT 3. WHAT YOU SHOULD DO WHEN YOU FALL IN LOVE

When you fall in love with a Christian, discern if it is only your feelings that are aroused or if you genuinely love the other person for the kind of person she or he is. Get to know the other person in a variety of group situations with other brothers and sisters. Especially notice the other person's relationship to God and the kind of influence he or she has on other people. Ask advice from godly and mature Christians, especially from your spiritual leaders. In some Christian cultures the Christian church helps their young people to find the right life-partner. However, if you fall romantically in love with a non-believer, never start to meet that person with a view to marriage! Keep the correct distance to that person. Rather invite that person to Christian meetings, introduce that person to your Christian friends and together try to win him or her to accept Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

(S) POINT 4. THE THREE PRACTICAL STAGES OF PREPARING FOR MARRIAGE

Whenever young people receive no help from their Christian church to find a marriage partner, then suggest to them to follow the following three stages when they prepare themselves for marriage. First, advise young people to get to know one another very well in an acquaintance period. Second, advise young people to build a strong friendship relationship with the other person in a courtship period. Third, advise young people to prepare for marriage in an engagement period. Each of these three periods has a clear objective, approach, practical activities and a clear termination.

(T) Stage 1. The acquaintance period.

Acquaintance means getting to know one another without exchanging intimacy. The objective is to get to know one another well enough before you start a courtship relationship. The approach. When you are interested in a specific Christian sister and you have asked the advice of godly and mature Christians, then you may ask the sister to get better acquainted with one another. The sister may consent or decline friendly. If she consents, then arrange to meet one another unofficially for a set period, say once every week for three to six months, in order to get better acquainted with one another. Practical activities. First, develop a spiritual relationship. Get to know one another's relationship to God and Christian convictions. Second, have no physical contact, because you want to leave one another free to develop inner convictions. Third, have no official or binding relationship. You are still a Christian brother and a Christian sister to one another, nothing more. Do not talk about your feelings of love for one another, because it creates expectations and hinders development of a genuine spiritual relationship. Termination. This period ends when one or both of you feel you ought to stop meeting one another or when you both are sure you want to begin a courtship relationship.

(S) Stage 2. The courtship period.

Courtship means the period of seeking to win a person with a view to marriage. The objective is to discover if there is enough ground to enter into the life-long bond of marriage. The approach. Communicate clearly to one another and to others that you are special friends and that you are meeting to discover whether God would want you to marry or not. Develop your special man-woman relationship openly, but within clearly defined boundaries. Practical activities. First, establish a set of courtship boundaries together. The boundaries or set limits should include the aspect of time, place, physical contact and activities. With regard to time, decide together how often and how long you will meet together and at what time you should leave at night. With regard to place, decide together where you meet and also decide to which places you will not go. With regard to physical contact, decide together whether you should touch one another or not. Talk about what kind of physical contact is right in God's eyes, about what kind of physical contact is appropriate in your culture and about what kind of physical contact would build one another up. With regard to activities, decide together what things you will do together and what things you will not do together. Second, encourage one another's spiritual growth, build one another's character up, serve God together and develop other friendship relationships with men and women together. Third, only discuss the marriage issue at the end of this period, when both of you are ready. Otherwise you create expectations that cause tensions and make promises that you cannot fulfil later. Termination: This period ends when one or both of you feel that you ought to stop the relationship or when you both are sure that God wants you to get married.

(T) Stage 3. The engagement period.

Engagement means being under the promise to marry and thus unavailable to others. The objective is to prepare together for marriage. The approach. Make a concrete plan when your marriage will take place. A limited engagement period is advisable, because it helps to keep the physical area pure. Practical activities. First, continue to keep the physical boundaries that are based on the Bible. You will need more self-discipline and commitment to keep one another pure. Second, openly discuss your expectations in all important areas, like your future church and service for God, your home, your relationship to parents, your jobs, your finances, and the issue of sex and children. Third, it is advisable that your parents and spiritual leaders approve of your marriage. Termination. You end this period when one or both of you feel that you ought to stop the relationship altogether or when you get married.

(T) POINT 6. ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. Memorise the seven important decisions to discern God's will for a life-partner. Memorise the Bible references. Seek the advice and leadership of your Church in the matter of marriage.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and make disciples" and Internet on www. etc.

Third. Listen on short wave radio every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY to "Discipleship training on the air".