

(Spiritual Guidelines for Courtship) the Courtship Relationship

by Rick Leibee

Courtship is a godly way to discern God's will for a life partner, and it requires seeking divine guidance, prayer, and wisdom.

Duration: 1:15:11

Scripture: Proverbs 22:6, Daniel 11:32, Matthew 6:33, Ephesians 6:1, 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 1 Timothy 5:17, Hebrews 13:17

Topics: "Christian Relationships", "Godly Decision"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of not letting emotions lead in the process of courting or seeking a romantic relationship. He explains that while emotions are not the basis for salvation, they are still an integral part of our lives and should not be ignored. The preacher also addresses the issue of when a courtship is not going well and advises that it is okay to gracefully and kindly end the relationship if it is not working out. Overall, the message encourages listeners to have a single-minded focus on Jesus and to trust in God's will in their relationships.

Transcript

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Bless God. Well, greetings once again in Jesus' name. Greetings in the name of He who is the Bridegroom.

Can you say today that you are His bride? Amen. I hope you can. And that you have a single eye fixed upon He who is everything.

Oh, what a wonderful day that will be when we are at the wedding supper of the Lamb. Amen. Hallelujah.

I think before I start into this message, one thing that I would like to share, I guess, is maybe a bit of a follow-up somewhat of the question that we had this morning that I tried to answer about God's will. I think we have to recognize and acknowledge that sometimes things happen. A couple starts a courtship and for whatever reason, a month, two months into it, it usually happens fairly early.

Things are not going well. Things are not clicking. They are not growing together.

Things are not flowing the way they should. It doesn't seem like the blessing is there that needs to be there. I think someone even said in the lunch line, they were asking me, you know, have you seen situations like that? Of course, we haven't seen them.

But I think the question they asked was, should the couple sort of be whatever, pushed or forced or coerced into going on anyway? Of course, there is again no pat or simple answer to those things. There might be those cases where couples have been, quote, pushed hard to do that and maybe some problems followed them into their marriage that may have taken years to resolve. And yet on the other hand, at the first sign of something that isn't going just the way you think it should go, you don't give up and quit either.

Because in real life, in relationships, there are bumps in the road. There are things where you maybe don't see eye to eye. There are things which don't flow as easily as you would just love everything to flow.

And there are differences of opinion and differences in characteristics or way to see those things. And it's good to learn to work through those things. And yet, different from that is where things are not flowing as far as the feelings are not growing.

There's not that resonating yes in the heart of that spark that, as it says in the Bible, in Proverbs, who can know the way of a man with a maid? Where that is just missing and it's just not there. And you realize a month or two or whatever in the courtship, it's not there. So what do you do? And when those things occur, of course those are sad things.

They are difficult. They are emotional things to walk through. And yet courtship is not married.

You are not betrothed. The wedding day has not come. You have not committed your whole life and then six weeks into it realized, Oh no, I can't get out of this.

I'm struggling. The feelings aren't there. The hearts aren't resonating like they should.

And yet, you know, panic sets in that you're there for life and you're not sure what to do. Because in courtship, there is still that opportunity to as graciously and as carefully and as kindly as you can find your way out of those situations. And we've had those in our church.

We've had those in our circles. Thankfully, when you compare them to the numbers of, quote, how would we say it, successful courtships, there's still a very, very small percentage. And I believe, again, still a much better result than the extremes of the dating over here or the betrothal where once started, you're locked in and the teaching is you're bound.

And you can only get away from being bound by death or divorce. And so courtship, I think, offers us that opportunity that in the real world of relationships and people, that can and does happen. And again, we've had some of those situations.

And so I don't know how to balance all that because, again, there is a time to work through issues. But if the issue is bigger than just differences in personality or differences in characteristics or differences in some biblical interpretations or whatever there may be that there's just some real differences in, and it's really down to those feelings are not resonating in the heart like they should be and it seems like it's time for the courtship to end, those times do happen. And we need to deal with those times.

And we need to give a lot of support to both parties as churches trying to be understanding, trying to be gracious, trying to be loving and not consider that anyone is a failure or anyone is a bad person because this has happened. Because it does happen. Because the couple wouldn't have started courting if they hadn't already had the blessing of their authorities and weren't going in the right way.

It's not an issue that there's now something stained or marred about their testimony or their character. It's just sometimes those things do not work out. And I believe we have that opportunity in courtship to be able to leave that courtship there and move on.

And again, we've had many testimonies of people moving on and then getting married later on a year, two, three years later what it is and looking back and being very thankful that God worked it out. They did part at that time and then were able to find a spouse that they were totally happy with and totally committed to spending the rest of their life with and their hearts had no problem joining and knitting together and all the sparks are there and all those things. Because romance is scriptural.

We need to say that out loud. Song of Solomon's is in the Bible. There is romance.

And if there is no spark, I don't know how to use all those right words. I guess if you can just try to hear me. If there is none of that in there, there is something wrong.

There is, I believe, a beautiful picture of romance in the Bible. Whether if you look at the story of Ruth and Boaz or even, I believe, Christ and His heart coming after us because He loved us. The Bible makes it clear.

We love Him because He first loved us. It was love that put Him on the cross, not duty. It wasn't legalism that He died on Calvary.

It was that love as a bridegroom for a bride to sacrifice Himself for the love that He had for His bride to draw her and win her unto Himself. And so a lot of those principles, you know, if your Christian life is flat and emotionless and you don't have the joy of the Lord and you don't love Jesus Christ with all your heart, I'm sorry, you might not be born again. There is something wrong because your emotions are involved.

Now again, emotions don't lead out. Just like emotions don't get you born again, emotions shouldn't lead out and get you courting. But if they are not part of the story, then the story is wrong.

It's not complete or whole. Does that make sense? You know, I don't know how to share all those things. We could probably spend a lot of time on that.

But I just felt like, you know, maybe we should just expound that perhaps for a few minutes here at the beginning. As I said, I was in the lunch line and someone asked a question about that. And I felt like it was pertinent to where we left off there this morning.

So, amen. With that, why don't we go ahead and stand to our feet and begin here this session then with a word of prayer. Committing ourselves to God.

Amen, Father. We do want to begin with prayer. We do want to seek Your divine guidance, Your divine help, divine inspiration, divine power.

Lord, in and of ourselves, we do not know how to do all these things. But we do look by faith to You, Your Word, Your principles, Your Son. Father, teach us, guide us, help us.

Give us strength. Give us faith, Lord, to trust You. Thank You for this time now.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Alright, you may be seated.

Okay, courtship then. Again, as contrasted to dating and betrothal, is, I believe, a godly way to discern God's will for a life partner, for a marriage partner, for a spouse. And again, to reemphasize, the purpose of courtship is marriage.

We're not looking at courtship just to try out courtship. We're not looking at courtship just to get around dating and call it by another name. The purpose is still very, very serious.

And we don't want to take that away from anything that we have. And a young man must have solely the intent of marriage upon his heart for him to have the faith and the courage to come to a father and ask him about his interest in his daughter. There can be no justifiable reason, I don't believe, for developing a relationship between a young man and a young lady without the end view of marriage in mind.

Anything else, in the end, just becomes dating by any other name. And courtship is not dating, I do not believe, but neither is it betrothal. Alright, now I want to shift our focus a bit.

It's similar and yet perhaps just a bit of a shift here. And look at some important building blocks and direct principles that have to do directly with courtship that we want to look at. Number one on my list, we've already mentioned this morning, so again I won't spend a lot of time on it.

And that is that we do need to acknowledge and be prepared to answer this question. And that is whether or not we should be married at all. Have you truthfully prayed through 1 Corinthians chapter 7? Have you really prayed through that chapter and asked God, God, am I who this chapter is written to? Because that chapter is in the Bible, so we cannot ignore it and therefore it is for some people.

We cannot say it is not for some people because it is in the Bible and it is written to the church. We are the church and so therefore there are those who will be and maybe should I even say should be single by the grace of God. I do believe they are again somewhat the exception as we understand the word of God and the will of God.

The general will is that most would be married and yet we do not want to ignore that or set that aside. So I think that is something that you need to seek the Lord about. You need to seek counsel about from your authorities, your parents, your ministers and look and see.

God, is this chapter, is the intent of this kind of life my life? And it could very well be that it is because for some it is. And it is still a godly life. It is a holy life.

It is a life given in total service whereas you can do things that quote unquote others that are married cannot do. Alright, the other first principle that we want to look at here is divine guidance. God's prayer is our source, our hope for all things in the Christian life.

We need to pray for our young people and we need to pray with our young people about this subject. They need to know that parents you are praying about this subject for them. And I am not saying you wait until they are 22 that you pray about it.

I do not believe that is good theology. I believe that you should pray for them from an early age on up. That if it is God's will for them to be married that you begin preparing their heart and teaching them God's divine guidance as part of this whole process and His blessing as part of it.

Do not leave God out of the picture. I believe when there is a lack of prayer what you are doing without realizing it is leaving God out of the picture. Pray for wisdom.

There is so much in this whole courtship thing I think as you have already seen and as we will go further into it. Frankly it just takes a lot of wisdom. It is one of those things that is in many ways so simple and yet takes a lot of wisdom.

It takes a lot of wisdom to make all these decisions because part of the courtship process requires a lot of decision making. And when I am making decisions I need wisdom. And I know you do too.

And you need to pray that God would give you wisdom. So pray that God would fill you with His wisdom. And I would ask you young people if you are thinking about courting but you have not spent time praying about it then you are not thinking rightly about courting.

Because you cannot think rightly about courting if you are not praying about it in the right way. Because you need the divine guidance of God. You are already off to a wrong start.

We have several versions of a book called They Knew Their God. Has anybody ever seen that book? They Knew Their God. I really enjoy reading those.

Those are just like short stories. Sometimes 5, 10, 15 pages about Christians from maybe 100, 150 years ago or whatever it was. Maybe some not even that long ago.

And I don't know why but I always get inspired reading those. But you know there are certain things in those stories that are almost universally consistent. And one of the things in the stories of all these young people, all of which men and women, that seem to do, if I can say it this way, great things for God.

One of the things that was very consistent, because I am a father I read these things I guess, was their parents praying for them. And their parents praying for them not just about their work in the Lord but their parents praying for them about spouses and those sorts of things. The big important things in their life.

It is like if you read in those stories it is almost in every one of them. And it is not a little part of the story. It is a big part.

The young people knew their parents were praying for them. And their parents were praying for them about, again, marriage and these sorts of things. And so I just thought, wow, the wisdom of that and the testimony of that that it speaks even now, whatever, 100 years later in the lives of these people and the life that they lived.

Amazing stories, many of those things. I would recommend those books if you don't have them at home. I have been blessed just reading those from time to time.

It is always interesting to me how we get encouraged reading about other people's stories, their testimonies. It is just something that seems to click in our own hearts, isn't it? I guess the other thing I would like to say about prayer, especially to you fathers, I guess because I am one, I think, from that perspective perhaps too much, is if you could just imagine or envision in your hearts a little bit the power of a parent's prayer, your young person is going to have to face some difficult decisions, some things they need to do. But if they have a solid mountain of your prayers, I guess I would like to think of it that way, a mountain of your prayers stored up for them, they have this place to stand on the mountain of your prayers which gives them a rock solid place.

Because they have all these prayers stacked up as it were as a mountain. And so the mountain of your prayers becomes a plateau, a rock, a bedrock in their life that they can stand on, that I think just puts them up and so further ahead than they can be any other way. And so I just want to encourage you with that, that it is a very important principle or building block in this whole thing of courtship.

The next thing I want to look at this morning, I mentioned briefly at the very beginning of the message this morning, but we want to look at it in connection here with courtship. Turn to Luke chapter 1 for the next principle or building block here. Luke chapter 1 verse 16.

Luke 1, 16 and 17. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. That's revival.

God's Spirit comes, there's work going on, and many turn to the Lord their God. And He shall go before Him in the spirit and power of Elias to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. And what I would just like to say in all of this is it's very, very important for the parent's heart to be turned toward their children, towards their young people.

And this whole thing of the relationship of the parents and turning their hearts to their children at a young age, but also at the middle years and also at the youth. And again, I've noticed a bit of a thing among some people without realizing it, but as their children get older and they turn to their youth years of 15, 16, 17, the parents without meaning to begin to sort of take steps back as far as having their hearts. And what they get confused in is this.

Yes, when they're getting that age, you do need to open up their world to more freedoms, whether it's work and the workplace, making more decisions, but you don't turn loose of their hearts. You actually press in harder. The time you should have their hearts more is 16, 17, and 18 than when they're 3, 4, and 5. A lot of people work really hard at getting their 3-year-old's heart, and amen for that.

But when they're 16, 17, and 18, you can almost see it. I've just almost watched it, just the father's backing up. And they don't mean to, but I think they get confused again between giving them a little bit of freedom for work or whatever and their hearts.

Just the opposite. You run harder and press in at that time because it's the most critical time because a lot of the decisions they make at 16, 17, 18, and 19 will follow them the rest of their life. Most decisions a 3-year-old don't follow them the rest of their life, realistically.

But an 18-year-old, my, some of the decisions they make, they'll never outlive, hardly, you know. And so, you know, I'm just begging you to reconsider. And look at this in the light of this passage here too.

We see a powerful thing that when there's revival in the land, and the Spirit of God is there, and people are turning to God, one of the things that happens is there's something happening in the homes too. And so if you have a spirit of revival in your home, and God is working in your home, I'm hoping and praying and begging there's something happening in your hearts too. You know, with your children, with your young people, at whatever age they may be.

But may I say, because of the context of what we're doing, especially at this age, your young people in your home need to be brought to the place by your winning of their hearts and your relationship, however you want to say it to them, where they actually have a desire to please you. Where they actually care about what you think. Where one of the blessings in their life is to bless you.

I've seen homes like that. I've experienced it in my home. And my, it makes everything so sweet.

You know, it's like you can share just about anything. You can tell them just about anything. You can even rebuke them and reproof them.

By the way, young people, if you don't know how to accept, rebuke or reproof, you're not ready to get married. That one I don't have to go on a limb on. If you struggle when somebody comes to you rebuking you or correcting you, you have no business even considering courting.

You know, because you're not going to do it all right when you court. And you're not going to do it all right when you're married. And you may need somebody to help you.

And, you know, if a husband and wife cannot talk to each other about things in their life, something's not right. So parents, I would just encourage you again, enter back into the world of your young people. Enter into their world.

Learn how to connect into their world with your time, your attention, your affection. You know, one of the big things, sometimes people say, well, how do you enter into the world of your young person and their teens? Well, I don't know if I have all the answers. But learn how to listen to them.

You know, most of us aren't very good listeners. But if you can learn how to stop and listen, listen to them. Not just hear what they say because, okay, yeah, all right, Brother Rick said I had to listen.

Okay, boom. But, I mean, hear their hearts. You know, if you can learn how to listen, you will have a great secret on how to tie those heart strings and attach those bonds and those cords which need to be there.

Because sometimes you're going to need to pull one of those cords to direct their heart a different direction. But if none of those things are tied and you go to pull, you just come up with an empty line. And that's a very scary feeling as a parent.

And a lot of parents have tried to pull or direct their youth or somebody in their 20s, even in the area of courtship, and they realize, you know, this thing doesn't look quite right, and they pull, but there's nothing attached. But whose fault is it? You know, whose fault is it? And I just tell you, you know, we can have a lot of other things lined up on this courtship and we can learn all these kind of things, but if you don't have this relationship right, I think you're in trouble before you start. You know, you're going to run into troubles

that you're not going to know what to do with.

As I said earlier, I'm very, very, very, very blessed with having gone through six weddings, one coming up this summer, seven weddings. And, you know, as Jeremy shared here, I think a little bit this morning, but I just want to testify from my perspective what a joy it has been in sharing with all of the couples and hearing their hearts and learning how to listen to them and learning how to hear their hearts and learning how to, you know, try to give direction, try to give oversight, all those things. I don't know how to do all those things either.

I don't, you know, none of us have all the answers for those things. We have the Word of God, we have the wisdom of the Word of God, we have the Spirit of God, but each situation is unique. There's no way to cover everything.

And that's why where you're at is very important in your heart and in your relationship because things are going to come up and you're not just going to have, you know, some notes to pull out and say, okay, that's number five. You know, it doesn't work that way because you're dealing with human relationships here. And so, you know, this is very important that we understand all this.

Turn to Proverbs 23. Young person, this verse I'm going to read for you. It's kind of hard on your parents there, but let me tell you something you need to hear this morning or this afternoon now, I guess it is.

Proverbs 23, verse 19. Proverbs 23, verse 19. Hear thou My Son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way.

You know, okay, maybe your parents don't do it all right. Maybe they don't listen the right way they should or often enough. I don't know.

And probably some don't. None of us do right all the time. But based on the Word of God here, it seems like that you have something to do with it too, that you can actually, may I say carefully according to the Word of God, guide your own heart.

It's kind of an interesting concept, isn't it? You often think of your heart, well, that's just the way my heart is. Well, my heart's over here, my heart's over there. Well, actually, the Bible says, guide thine own heart.

In other words, you can redirect your heart and turn it back to your father and guide it in trying to attach some of those strings and cords I was talking about earlier that I was encouraging your parents to attach. I would say to you, young person, come on. You know, they're not alone in this.

It takes two here to make this thing connect. And according to the Word of God, you have a power over your heart. Your heart does not overpower you.

You can have an effect on guiding your own heart and steering it in the way that it should go. And I can tell you, the best blessing for your heart is to have it connected to your parents. Now, there may be some, I know in our circle, sometimes they don't have parents.

Well, you know, I've lived through some of that, too, with some that have been in my home. Like, Davina already gave her testimony here, and I can testify for her. She moved into my home in the summer of 2001, Davina? August? September? August, was it? And the first month, it was kind of the way it was.

And she was kind of learning her way. But, you know, within a few months, this girl that raised on a Hutterite colony that didn't, quote, know better in lots of ways, did make a decision for a verse like this. Now, I don't know if she ever read this verse, but I can testify she gave us her heart.

And theoretically, she shouldn't have. I mean, she didn't really know us. She only lived there a couple months.

But she just sort of almost saw it happen one day. She just kind of, I mean, she got a hold of her heart and just kind of guided it. I don't even know if she knew what she was doing.

But when she did that, after that, it was so easy. I mean, you know, I could tell her anything. And now, I didn't deserve that.

I didn't raise her. I didn't, you know, I wasn't the one responsible for feeding her for 20 years or 19. Or how old were you when you moved in? 18, 19? 19? You know, there's a lot of things I didn't do in her life.

I didn't deserve that. But she gave it. And so, I guess what I'm saying is if she can do that at age 19, you can do it too.

You know, it's not that it's without precedent. It can be done. And the blessing is sweet.

It's a wonderful thing. You know, so I would just say to some of you, whether you're in your own home or maybe you're in another's home or maybe you're somewhere where you don't have anybody except somebody in the church, don't miss this blessing. It's a very important one because you're going to need people to help you along and speak into your life.

And so, you're going to need this kind of wisdom. All right. Well, following on the heels of this building block or principle, whatever you want to call it, we want to just lay out here the matter of authority.

We've inferred it or talked about it directly and indirectly several times this morning. And now we just want to go ahead and go over some of the principles and some of the applications as they more specifically apply within the context of courtship and what we're looking at here. Now, parents, first, I just have a few things to you.

Please hear me on this point. You are not to be, especially with your, well, with any of your children, but especially you, you are not to be an authoritarian. An authoritarian, by my definition, is a dictator.

It is the one who always has the answers and is always right and you always do what they say no matter what. You may run your home that way, but you're going to have problems. You know, that kind of home produces a rebel.

Just like the home that is too soft and too easy and doesn't know how to exercise authority produces a rebel, also the home that's too authoritarian produces a rebel. Both extremes, both ends just don't come out right. And so I just encourage you to find your way.

You are to be authoritative, okay? You are to exercise authority. You have God-given authority that you are to exercise. But it is in the spirit and the manner that you exercise it in love for them, not at them or to them, that will determine its true effectiveness in their life.

Does that make sense? I wish I had more time to explain all those things. I'm not sure I could even do it properly, but talk to me later if you don't understand. I'm limited somewhat by time up here that I can't spend enough time on every topic.

But the authoritative parent has the authority and uses it for the good and because of their love. There is a burden in a parent's heart that wants their children to go the right way. And his love for him motivates him to actually exercise authority.

And God knows our hearts need to exercise authority even when they don't want to. I can't quote the verse for some reason in Proverbs where it says, Do not spare for their crying. How does somebody know that verse? How does somebody look that up? And the reason that it says that verse in that way, and there's another one about chasing them betimes if you love them, is because God knows in our hearts that sometimes our heart gets confused and we think, Well, if we love them, I won't exercise too much authority because maybe then they won't love me.

Well, I'll give you a hint. When you start getting caught in those conflicts, you don't really love your children. You love yourself.

You like yourself a little too well. But if your heart is really for them, you will not be afraid to exercise authority because it will be in love for them and because you want help for them and you realize they need this. Did you find it? How does it go? That's it.

Let not thy soul. That's what it says. Let not thy soul.

See, in your heart you kind of want to spare him because you don't like his crying. It doesn't feel very good to exercise. And I'll use that verse not just for small children of giving them a spanking, but just when a young person is not doing well and not doing right and you know you need to put some blocks in their life and restrict something, in your soul you're kind of, as a parent, and I'm a parent too, I do this too, I chafe.

I kind of go, I don't really want to tell so and so, no, you can't do that because you want to tell them yes. I mean, as parents, it's much more fun to say yes. I love saying yes.

It's great. But, you know, the principle here is, but if you really love them, there will be times when you'll say no. Don't let your soul win that one.

Your soul here is your emotional side of your, a man is three parts, body, soul and spirit. And your soul sometimes kind of tries to tell your spirit, you know, don't do that, don't do that. He might not like you.

He might misunderstand you. And you kind of wrestle, you ever do that as a parent? You kind of wrestle with some of that. And I'm just saying, if you really love them, find the grace and the love to not listen to your soul at those times and say, I'm sorry son, no, because I love you, you're not going there or you're not doing this or you are going to do this, even though you don't want to do it.

And again, I don't have time to get into all the details about how those things work out, but you must be authoritative, but not an authoritarian. There is a difference. Now, you may say there's a subtle difference and maybe there is.

I don't know. I don't think it's so subtle, but there is a difference and you need to find your way in this one. It is very, very important.

Now, young people, let me just, you know, settle one maybe small issue, but maybe it's not such a small issue. You may be here today and you may be 19 or 22 or, how old is Jay? You just turned 24 two weeks ago. You may be 24.

You may be 27 or 28 like Jeremy says he was a couple of years ago when he started courting. As long as you are still in your home under the authority of your parents, I think we can just say you are still under the authority of your parents because the Word of God says that for this reason, the reason of starting another home, shall a man leave? And we can try to balance all that and debate that. And I do believe there are exceptions to that.

I do believe there are times where somebody transfers the authority because maybe their parents aren't born again. Like in the case of Davina, her parents are not born again. She got baptized, chose Christ, and the only way for her to go home was to recant Christ.

She wasn't going to do that. But God then provided, as God says, he who will not leave mother and father for, this is the only reason you can, for my sake, for the sake of the kingdom of God. I will, you know, and he basically says replace it thirty, sixty-eight, even, and hundredfold.

So there are those situations. But forgetting the exceptions for just a moment, you know, if you're home in your parents' authority and they're Christians, you are still under their authority. And so, you know, don't play the game of thinking, well, you know, I'm twenty-three now or twenty-four.

You know, I don't really need to ask Dad about this or this courtship or that courtship or this part of my life. I would say you are missing the boat. You are missing the boat.

You are missing an extreme blessing that you need to be, you need to rebalance yourself and look at this. Think of Jesus just for a moment. At age twelve, when he was in Jerusalem there, the Bible says in Luke, I can't remember which chapter it is now, maybe four or five, somewhere near the end of that chapter, I think it is, after his parents finally found him, the Bible says he went home and submitted himself, and the word is used there, under his parents.

I mean, let's not forget who Jesus is. Jesus is God. I mean, he's not just man.

He's also God. He's fully man and fully God. And the Bible says he went home, even though he could teach the teachers at age twelve, the wisest men in all the land in the Bible, but the Bible says he submitted himself and went under his parents.

As far as we know, he stayed there until age thirty. So if you're over thirty, you can come and maybe debate this with me later, but I mean, let's not put an age on it, okay? I don't know how to say all these things, but you see the principle. You see the importance of it.

If Jesus was willing to walk this out, can't you? Can't you try? Parental protection is very important. And protection here, again, is done in a loving way. Parental protection is removed from people's lives way too often.

There would be many less stressful marriages and courtships around, and even dating, if there were more parental involvement. But parental protection for the girl and the boy has been removed from the formula far too many cases. Far too many cases.

All right. Okay, the next thing we want to look at here in the area of authority, there's a lot more I could say on that subject. I think I'll leave that part of it and move on to the next building block in authority.

Let's turn to Acts 20. Let's turn to Acts 20, 28. Acts 20, 28.

Okay. Acts 20, 28. It take heed, therefore, unto yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood." Now this word overseer is an interesting word because it implies both authority and oversight, but also feeding and nourishing.

It's a beautiful word, really. It implies both oversight in giving direction and counsel and guidance, but also feeding and helping and nourishing and promoting. That is the role, one of the roles, one of the duties, the functions of the shepherds as under-shepherds of the church of God for our head shepherd, the chief shepherd, Jesus Christ.

Now turn over to Hebrews 13, verse 17. Hebrews 13, 17 says, Obey them that have the rule or we could say the oversight or those that are overseers over you and submit yourselves for they watch for your souls as they that must give account that they may do it with joy and not with grief for that is unprofitable for you. And if you understand the context and if you can get over the first word obey, the problem with this verse is most people that read this, they stumble over the four letter word obey and they can't hear the rest of the verse.

But the rest of the verse is beautiful. In other words, God is saying, I want a profitable Christian life for you. I want things to go well for you.

I want you to find your way into more beautiful, bountiful pastors in your Christian life. And oh, by the way, one of the best ways to do that is to obey those that have over you because they want to do it with they want to actually joyfully take you to these pastors and they want to help you with all these things. But usually people read this verse, they go obey and then they kind of go and they grimace and groan somewhere in their spirit, maybe because of past mistakes of ministers.

And I don't know how to undo all those. I can't, because I know sometimes ministers abuse powers and do things they were never meant to do as shepherds in the church of God. Sometimes I think maybe a lot of those probably aren't even born again, maybe from some of your backgrounds, some of you Hutterites.

I would think that the majority of those Platticus probably weren't even born again as far as the majority of them. And so and yet because of those bad experiences with some of those men who probably weren't even born again, there's a flinching and a resisting of what God wants for you. And may I say to you, poor you, you're missing what God has.

God has good for you. He only has your good in mind. He's not telling to obey you because he thinks you're naughty and he wants to put you in a corner.

He wants it to be profitable for you. OK, now turn to First Thessalonians, chapter five. First Thessalonians, chapter five, verse 12.

And we beseech you, brethren. Now notice this word beseech. Paul is begging you, church.

To know them which labor among you, that's your ministers and watch this, and are over you. Here's that word oversight, overseer over you in the Lord. you in the Lord and admonish you and to extend them very highly in love.

Notice the word love. There's a relationship in this authority relationship for their work sake and be at peace among yourselves. Now, the reason I'm reading all these very, very serious verses and there's others as well, and I don't have an exact step by step process to tell you how to walk through this courtship thing with your ministers.

But if we're going to be spiritual about our courtship, and I think we're all agreed we want that. How do you leave out the ministry? How do you leave out your church? How do you leave out the counsel of those that watch for your soul? How do you leave out those that are going to give account for your soul? How how can you do that? I don't think you can. Now, I know in America, in most churches, the preachers never called probably till a week before the wedding, told to show up and perform the wedding.

But, you know, God forbid, I'm not saying we're like that, but I do feel like we don't see this one rightly. I do feel like we're missing a blessing and we're missing something in this area. Sometimes it's a temptation to sort of arrange everything, have everything already sort of kind of decided that I'm going to go this certain way with a courtship, with this certain person or situation, and then sort of, may I say, after the fact, ask the ministers to bless it.

You know, I've been caught in that position some. And then, you know what you do as a minister? You feel like. Do I dare say anything, because, you know, it's already decided, and so there's sort of like this little gun pointing at you that if I say anything, I'm going to get shot.

And should it be that way in the church? I don't think so. Now, I don't know how to walk through all this. Like I said, you know, I'm not saying the ministers want to pick out your wives or your husbands.

We don't want to. I can testify. I've been in hundreds of ministers meetings.

That is not our heart. That is not our spirit. But to be left out of the process, to not be brought into it, to not to be asked to pray about it or give a clearing.

I've been on that side of it, too. And it's not right and it doesn't come out right. And I I feel sorry for you if I can say it that way.

If that's where you're at, you're missing a blessing and you're missing the heart of God in the area of authority. I don't think you can read these verses or I hope you can't read these verses and think it's OK to just bypass the church. So somehow we need to find our way with this to get our clearing, to get our blessing, to get the prayers, to get the counsel.

I have found with ministers, there's many times the ministers know things about certain situations, about certain people which they are not privileged or allowed to divulge because it's private and would never divulge it. But when somebody comes and asks you, I'm thinking about this person or that person at that time, you have the liberty to say, well, actually, at this time in that person's life, I think you need to let that one go. You know, and I praise God for times I have been asked.

There are times that I have been consulted and I'm thankful for every one of those and I believe have saved and spared people from many hurts and many disappointments. And so I've learned that the

ministry sometimes does know things which, again, they're not privileged or able to maybe divulge for sake of confidence, but could save a lot of misunderstandings or hurts or whatever somewhere down the road. So I just, again, want to bless you all who have come and who do come.

And many of you do. And I thank you for that. And may I say, I think you have gotten a blessing from that.

I can think of a number of young men that have come to me before they were truly settled on a young girl and just honestly asked, you know, what do you think, Brother Rick? I've been praying about this, but before I go any further and, you know, they share their heart and we talk and sometimes I have an answer and sometimes I say, you know what? I'm not sure what to say. Can you give me a little time? I'm not going to stretch this out for months, but can you just give me a week to pray about it? I'll give you a call. We'll get back together, whatever it is.

And, you know, I'm not sure what to think. You know, that sounds probably like it's OK, but there's a few things I do need to check on. And there's sometimes things a minister can do and check on that maybe nobody else can't because maybe he can call the minister of the other church where that person is.

And like I said, I don't know how to do all these things. And, you know, I don't want to be falsely accused again, like I said earlier, of trying to arrange marriages. I have no desire to do that.

I do not do that. I'm not in that business. But we are in the business of shepherding the flock and part of shepherding the flock is giving spiritual counsel, spiritual advice and helping people.

And what can be a bigger decision spiritually in somebody's life other than getting born again in this area of courtship? I don't know of one that has a bigger impact for their whole life and even generations to come. And so, again, to exclude the ministry from that until it's already basically decided. I struggle with that one.

I really don't know what to do with that one. And so I would just beg you to repent if that's where you are and change your thinking because I don't think it's right and I don't think it's going to come out right. All right.

OK, turn to Isaiah 40. Go to the next principle here, Isaiah chapter 40. Let's see first the last chapter of the last verse of the chapter is thirty one.

But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary and they shall walk and not faint.

The next principle or building block or concept is waiting, patience, resting. Now, when we talk about waiting, people have a lot of different words to use, but, you know, I want to use this word waiting because it's a Bible word in the New Testament. We're told to watch, to wait, to pray.

And I look at it as an active word. Waiting is an active focus. First of all, an active focus on God.

But it by waiting until God's timing for courtship doesn't mean you're just sitting, waiting like you're in the waiting room of a doctor's office. You know, it means you're actively focusing on the things of God, going after the things of God. Even in this verse here, it says, but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.

You get the idea that there's a lot of action and activity here. And yet when you read the first part of the verse, you go, wait, renew strength, rising up physique. Wait a minute.

You know, it's almost like it seems like a paradoxical verse in a way. And it is. It's a spiritual truth.

But that waiting just simply means I am at rest that I want God involved in this. I'm at rest. I'm at peace that I'm not restless.

I'm not going to and fro. I'm waiting on God and God's timing. And it's part of being content, Paul says in the New Testament.

He has learned the secret of being content. And it's much the same idea, meaning whether I'm going this way or that way or whatever God has me doing, I am waiting. I'm content.

I'm at rest with who I am and where God has me. And if I guess I could say that if you are discontent with being single, you're probably going to be discontent with being married because marriage will not make you happy. Being married will not make you happy.

Jesus Christ will make you happy. You know, marriage will not make you happy. Adding one person to your discontent life will not make you a content person.

That is a deception. Now, you can have a desire to be married and that's good. That's right.

It's OK to have it. I'm not saying don't misunderstand me. It's wrong to have a desire to be married.

But if you are discontent with who you are, just with Christ, if Christ is not enough, if you are discontent with that, adding another human being to your life will not suddenly make you a content, good Christian. Does that make sense? And so that's that's this thing of waiting. We need to understand it or our hearts are going to get wrong.

The other problem is if we're discontent, we may do something really wrong and take the matter into our own hands and resort to trying to attract somebody or trying to win somebody's heart when we're and it's not legal to win their heart. We don't have their father's permission. We don't have the right or the blessing of the church.

And yet we're behind the scenes trying to win a girl's heart or a girl behind the scenes is sort of letting it be known with her eyes and her attitude towards a young man. She really likes him. What I'm saying to you is you're not waiting.

You're not waiting upon the Lord. You're not content. You are discontent and you are trying to take matters into your own hands.

The problem with that is you might just get what you're asking for. Something that you've got with your own hands instead of something of God, and that's really sad, you know, when you get something of your own making rather than something that God you've let God help make now. Again, I don't know if this is the right time to bring up this point in the middle of this waiting by waiting.

I know there's opportunity to be misunderstood and that I'm saying you're never allowed as young people to talk to those of the opposite gender or sex. I'm not saying that. In fact, I'm saying just the opposite.

If you're really at peace and really at rest, you're free to talk to everybody because you're not out there trying to make your own house, so to speak, with your own hands and make your own way. There should be a certain freedom of a brother and sister in Christ to speak to one another. You know, how are you today? God bless you.

Good to see you. Oh, I see your family just got back from a trip. Did you have a good time? You know, whatever it may be now, what you're not allowed to do is go in the corner for a deep one on one conversation for an hour and a half discussing the deep inner secrets of your heart and your devotional life with a with a boy or a girl together.

OK, that's you just crossed a big line. But but we're free. It's just like in the church.

If I see a sister in the church, Sister Rachel, you know, if I see her, I have no problem shaking her hand. Good morning, Sister Rachel. Oh, I heard so and so sick in your family.

Are they doing better? We'll have a conversation and she's free and I'm free. We're free in the Lord. I don't have to run and say, oh, I'm not allowed to talk to Sister Rachel.

There is a freedom in Christ. You know, we're both part of the the the body of Christ. And so it should be with young people.

There is a freedom to be in the Lord and to be brothers and sisters in the Lord. And in fact, I often think it's a little bit strange because I've seen some girls like that, that I guess their father, I don't know if he's thinking he's practicing fatherly protection. He's got him so scared.

They actually won't even hardly talk. In fact, if boys come up, they'll actually almost run or I should say run. They'll scurry away sort of.

And it's like, oh, that's almost as bad in a way as being, you know, off in a corner because it's like something's out of order and it makes people uncomfortable, not sure what to do with it. So again, I just don't want to be misunderstood when I say waiting. I'm not saying run away from conversations or run away from, you know, being free to talk to brothers and sisters in Christ.

Amen. Again, I wish I had more time to further expand all these things, but we didn't choose a week of meetings. We chose a weekend.

So we'll have to keep moving here. Sorry. OK, well, OK, I think I just want to say this.

I believe Jeremy shared a little bit of this in his testimony about what do you do when you are waiting? And I think he mentioned, you know, he chose service, whether it was the children's ministry or I think he mentioned going to Africa. I know he also got involved in some of the lives of some of the other young men in the church. I don't think he mentioned that.

And he didn't do that accidentally because he and I were relating then just as pastor and, you know, someone in the church, we, you know, knew each other fairly well. And we talked about some of those things and he would share some of those things. And what I saw in his life is when he was focused on those things and serving, his spiritual life grew.

He was being a blessing to others. He was blessed. He was having victory in his life and many areas of his life.

And all those things were working very, very well. And yet that didn't mean he wasn't thinking about getting married. He was waiting, but he was active in the kingdom of God.

So, again, I don't want to be misunderstood when I say waiting. It doesn't mean you're just sitting waiting to somehow wake up one day and be in the middle of a courtship. And another reason I would say to be asleep or to be waiting and to be active, like in Jeremy's example, I think of also Wes and Tanner were involved in it.

I know many of you other young people is it seems like when we're active and busy in the kingdom of God and waiting on God's time and in these things, it also helps to not wake up feelings of interest in and passions toward those of the opposite sex. Because, again, there is a normal, natural drive that God has put in men and women that they desire this companionship that we read about this morning. They desire this intimate relationship.

They desire some of these emotional types of relationships. And God has and they're good and they're right in their time and in their place. God has a good word to say about all those things.

Those are not wrong desires. We need to separate desires from wrong actions or wrong ways of looking at it. But the desires God has given to them, it's how we channel them and what we do with them in a godly way that determines how they work out in our life.

And I have seen in young men, as Jeremy shared, that are able to get focused on serving God, those passions, those things, they are then able to be put not away as if they don't exist, but to be able to put on a shelf maybe for a season or to be put in their place and handled knowing and trusting when the time is right, I can take those things off a shelf. I can, you know, be free when it's time. In the meantime, I'm going to serve God.

I'm going to Africa. I'm going to minister to these young men in the congregation or this one that's hurting or whatever it may be. And so if you're waiting, it means there needs to be an active focus in your life.

All right, while we're looking at this principle of resting or waiting, I guess we need to get to the question or try to answer somewhat. And I don't know that we can, again, give a simple answer. But the when question.

The when question, OK, I'm waiting, but when? When do I start? Well, again, I think the answer is almost too simple. And yet it's a very important one. Well, first of all, let's ask this question.

Is there an age, you know, do we pick an age? I don't know how to say all that. No, we don't obviously want to just say it has to be this age or that age. I have noticed something, though.

Maybe I'm I don't think I'm alone in this. It seems like girls mature a little bit before boys. I'm not sure about all that, but it seems that way in general to me.

And I've talked to other fathers. They seem to agree. And I know with young men.

I don't want to pick an age and do not mark this down. But I just notice it's probably wisdom for them to wait until they're, you know, 21 or 22. Don't write that down as law.

But because I realize some people at age 20 are 10 times more mature than some at 25. I'm not sure all the reasons for that, but I know some of it's their walk with God, where they're at, all those things. So I

don't want to pick an age.

But I do believe for a young man, there are some other principles we'll look at in a minute of preparedness for courtship that will help define some of those things, too. But the wind question is important. And some of the best ways to answer the wind question are some of the things we've already covered, being under the authority of your parents, having the blessing of your parents to go ahead, being under the authority of the ministry of your church, having their blessing to go ahead with those things.

All of those things are strong indicators and your mature walk by mature. Obviously, a 22 year old is not as mature. You know, we used to have kind of a I don't know if it's a joke in our house.

We used to say to sometimes it seems like fathers want their sons to be, you know, as mature as Denny Keniston before they'll let them court. And what we meant was they were holding almost like this boy out to this standard that he could never attain because a 20 year old is not going to be like a 50 year old. I mean, he's not he's he's still 20 years old or 22 or whatever he is.

And we need to relate to him as a 22 year old. And see how his maturity is for his age and for his situation and not judge him on people that are in their 40s or 50s or 60s. And so I think we have to have a little bit of wisdom in picking all those things out.

But again, that's why I hesitate to pick an age. But I do think the wind question will take care of itself somewhat as we understand where that person is at by their spiritual authorities in the church and in the home. I believe it's important one of the ways to answer this question to or help some of us parents find these things out is to.

Let our young people learn how to get outside the home and spread their wings a little bit on how to say that, whether it's to go on short term missions trips, go minister here, go minister there and see how do they handle things when. It's self-government, in other words, the parents are no longer there. They need to be able to handle real life situations and handle real life temptations and see how they walk through those things, because that's the Christian life or again, just like we're not courting to court.

We're not raising young people to stay youth forever, are we? We're not raising children to be children. We want them to grow up to be mature adults. And so therefore, you have to put them and should be putting them in mature adult situations to stretch themselves, to put them in situations where how do they handle it when they go witnessing in New York City with all the temptations there? How do they handle it when they go here or there or wherever it is and get involved with different situations and different temptations? And I think some of those things are important.

I think you can so over shelter your young people that they really have never had a chance to experience the Christian life as an adult. It's just I say someone I believe in sheltering our children and protecting them. But I think there's an over it can be overdone and it can be to the point where they don't really know if they can walk the Christian life unless they're at home, you know, just in their sweet little home that they go home to every night.

So, you know, find a way you find your way with testing some of those things direction in their life. See how your young again, I mentioned this earlier, but you young people, one of the one of the tests of the wind question is if you're moving about in the church as a church member, if I can use that word member correctly, as a member of the body of Christ, able to receive rebuke and reproof from other people in the

church, able to minister into the church, able to have other people minister to you, able to be a part of the body of Christ and not just, well, I live with my father over here and, you know, do what he does. There needs to be some expanding of that in their life to see how they handle those things.

All right. Another aspect of the wind question, but I believe it is a bit of a separate principle, but it's one we need to look at. And it deals maybe a bit a little bit more with the young men, at least at this point, is turn to Proverbs 24, Proverbs 24, verse 27, Proverbs 20.

I'm sorry I got it wrong here. Hold on. Oh, no, that's the right one on the wrong page.

Proverbs 24, 27, prepare thy work without and make it fit for thyself in the field and afterwards build thine house. Prepare thy work without and make it fit for thyself in the field and afterwards build thine house. And the principle here is that forethought, that ability of a young man to one of the one of the characteristics, one of the things that needs to be in his life is his work habits, his work life.

Is he able to provide adequately not only for a wife, but in nine, 10, 11 months, he might have a family. He might have a child. And so is he able to take the thought and prepare the field without and then do the things decently in the right order and build his house? Is he ready to take on that responsibility? I've read some studies and I'm not in favor of saying we have to be this way, but where a young man in some of these olden times had to prove that he had enough money saved up, that he had basically two, sometimes three, sometimes four years of wages saved up to prove that he could take care of a wife and or child very soon thereafter.

I'm not saying we need to do that. I'm not saying that's all wrong either. There's some wisdom in some of those things, because when you take on a responsibility of a family, there's a lot of expenses you didn't expect.

I know I tell a lot of the young men as they're courting in my home and maybe courting daughters or some young men. Now, when you start a home, whatever you think it's going to cost you, it'll cost you about four to five to six times more your first year of marriage. And they all laugh at me as if they're much wiser than me and say, no, we can live on and they'll give me a number X and I'll go, OK.

Fine. And then six months later, they all come back and go, how did you know? And I said, I've been married for 30 years. You know, it costs it does cost more.

And if your field is not prepared without, then you're not really ready to build your house. Do you get the order here? You know, young men kind of think they can just go and they think, well, you know, as a young man, it would only cost me X to live. I'm getting married.

It won't even cost double for that because she doesn't eat as much as I do. So it'll just cost a little bit more. Well, not only does it just cost a little bit more, but it actually getting a wife, it costs five times more to live.

Now, I'm not trying to say the women are expensive. I'm going to get I'm going to get in trouble here, but please understand me. But there is something about setting up a house and paying all the bills to set up a house and get all your stuff supply.

It's just it's more than you think. And it takes some saying that the principle of this verse is for is forethought. Prepare thy field without meaning get things ready here.

And when that's all worked out, OK, then you're going to be ready to build your house. And so there is this principle that we need to address of finances in a young man's life. And again, we can spend a lot of time on that.

But I won't. Now, for a young woman, I think we could look at. How does it say it, what does it say in Proverbs 31? Where's the part of Proverbs 31? OK, verse 10, who can find a virtuous woman for her price is far above rubies.

And then it goes on to describe a woman who also is getting prepared. Now, I don't know how to say all those things rightly, but I do believe there's things for a virtuous young woman to be doing to prepare herself, because the question is asked here, OK, which kind of woman do you think you should go looking for, son? This is written to her son here. And the answer is partially at least given a woman who's been what? Preparing herself to be married.

She's been in training. She knows how to sew. She knows how to cook.

She knows how to take care of children. She knows how to help the poor. She knows how to minister to other people.

She knows how to be a blessing and all these things. And so there is the idea, at least the principle given in Scripture, that for the girl waiting is not just sitting at home, but there's things she needs to be doing in the home. And even as in Proverbs 31, outside the home, ministering in the community and helping others outside the home and all those things, I believe are important principles that we could, again, spend a bit of time on more than we have time for this morning.

But we'll we'll leave that principle with you and maybe just consider that one a little bit. OK, another principle or building block that I mentioned in the aspect this morning of the question on how do you know it's God's will who you marry? I mentioned this, but I want to expand on a little bit more. And that is compatibility or similar convictions and even moving past that ideas on personality and characteristics.

And again, this one, I'm not sure. Again, I don't think there's a pat answer, but I will say these things. Marriage is about communication, flowing together, moving together, connecting hearts.

Who do you want, young man, to be the mother of your children? Who do you want to be the father of your children? Young lady, is it enough that they're a Christian and a member of the church? Maybe, maybe not. Compatibility is very, very important in our circles and settings. I do believe there are opportunities if we will avail ourselves of them to observe one another and to learn how to get to know one another, whether it's through visiting as families, church picnics, Bible schools, missions, trips, working together in ministry in the youth group.

There's many different things. And I would just say to you, parents, a wise parent, a very wise parent helps tremendously in this to. Make connections, if I can say it that way, to learn about each other, you know it.

Even though if I can pick on Davina again here this morning, it's too bad you're sitting here, even though she said she was surprised about Jeremy, she knew who he was, you know, and he had been around the home. He was a friend of our families, even years and years going back years, I guess. Jeremy had often stopped by and we'd visited.

And so we knew Jeremy, we knew him. And so she knew him. She knew who he was.

She had just not thought of him in this way, but she knew who he was, some of his beliefs and some of those things. And so this thing of compatibility and then again, in their case, as part of their testimony, I think it was given. But there were still some questions in her mind because she'd never thought of this way.

So they were allowed under our supervision and we were allowed to read the letters and those sort of things. We allowed them. They were not courting, but they were allowed to write letters to learn more about each other because of this principle, because what we didn't want to do is just because he asked and just because she said, well, OK, yeah, maybe, yes, or however she might have answered, start a courtship.

But rather, OK, since there were some of those questions about compatibility and not knowing each other, they were allowed for a season. I think it went on, like she said, a couple of months to write letters. And then they were able to ask some questions that you normally don't always get to ask just a youth group, you know, once a month or ten times a year, the youth get together.

And I think that's good. And a wise parent will know how to oversee those things and allow those things to happen with loving parental protection. But for the benefit of them finding those things out and in the end, they agreed that there was compatibility there.

There was likeness of convictions and those kinds of things. And here they are married today. So this thing of compatibility, again, the wise parent is going to help these things out and help make them happen.

Now, I would say you do need to understand that not everyone, even though I don't believe there is the one I made that clear this morning, I'm not also saying that anyone can just marry anyone. We are different, aren't we? We have different personalities. We have different characteristics.

We have different things that are very, very important. Some things that may be very, very important to me may not be quite as important to you. And certain characteristics in my life may be very different than certain characteristics in your life.

And many times those are compatible, but sometimes they just don't really click or flow together too well. And so we need to be aware of those things as we're helping our young people in this area of courtship and looking at these things. I know one of the questions I had in here was, why does it seem like opposites attract? And is that OK? And again, I don't have a bad answer, but the answer is if they're really, really, really opposite in some serious characteristics and personal personality areas, it may be a little bit difficult for them to get through a courtship.

It may be difficult because certain things that are in our life, it's kind of like a groove or a channel that runs in our life. And once that groove and channel is dug out, it kind of the water just kind of flows in that channel. You know, it's not easy to change.

Now, by the grace of God, God does change personalities. But don't you, young lady, marry a young man thinking you're going to change him. You will not change him.

I do not believe one person can change another person. I believe there is a person who can change any person, but you're not going to change me and I'm not going to change you. You know, I don't believe in psychologists.

Sorry. I don't believe, you know, some go and talking to somebody is going to change who I really am. Now, Christ can't really change who you are.

So you need to look at some of those things of compatibility spending habits. Does this young man always drive the best car and have the best clothes? These should be red flags. If you're a girl who believes in simplicity and, you know, modesty in spending and all those things, and this young man, he has the best car in the parking lot and always the best clothes, the best haircut, the best shoes, the best belt.

Use a little wisdom. You may not be compatible. You know, it may not be a match.

You know, there's things that we just have to reckon with that some things just don't match up the best with some people. And so we have to understand some of those things. All right.

OK, I think I'll bring this to a close here a little bit and we'll have time for some testimonies and questions to answer. I just like to remind everyone, I know I've said a lot of things here this afternoon, some of it very specific. Again, I pray for your grace and understanding that I be not misunderstood.

Remember some of the things I said earlier today. Flexibility is one of the things we're dealing with people here. I'm not making rules.

You know, if you're interpreting it that way, please don't. You know, there are principles, there are strong, important principles that we do need to look at and we do need to deal with in our hearts, in our Christian lives. But we are not making rules.

We are allowing for differences. We are allowing for flexibility. All right.

I think Billy and Alta have a testimony that we're going to let them share now, if they just come down here down front and they'll share a bit of a testimony here before we have questions and answers.

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