

# (Sex, Love & Marriage) 3. Opposite Poles Attract

by Zac Poonen

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of maintaining a healthy balance in relationships between the sexes, avoiding unnatural repression and excess, and upholding the Bible's teaching on friendships and marriage.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 4:23, Matthew 5:28, Romans 14:16, 1 Corinthians 8:1-3, Galatians 5:13, Ephesians 5:3, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, 1 Timothy 5:2, Hebrews 13:4, 1 Peter 5:8

**Topics:** "Friendship", "Purity in Relationships"

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## Description

Zac Poonen discusses the natural attraction between the sexes, emphasizing that while it is normal to seek friendship and admiration from the opposite sex, it is crucial to maintain a disciplined approach to these feelings. He warns against both excessive intimacy and complete avoidance, advocating for a balanced relationship that honors God and respects personal boundaries. Poonen highlights the importance of treating members of the opposite sex with purity and integrity, particularly in the context of friendships and dating, which can lead to emotional complications if not approached wisely. He encourages young people to focus on their spiritual growth and responsibilities before considering marriage, and to avoid dating and petting, which can lead to moral pitfalls. Ultimately, Poonen calls for a life that glorifies God, free from regret and frustration.

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## Transcript

There is something within all of us that makes us long for the company, friendship and admiration of the opposite sex. We would rather impress one of them than one of our own sex. We feel more disappointed when ignored by the opposite sex than when slighted by our own. A person who denies the existence of such feelings must be either a homosexual or a liar!

In all normal human beings, a change of attitude towards the opposite sex begins with puberty (between the ages of 14 and 16 for a boy and between 12 and 14 for a girl). Before that age, boys usually prefer boys, girls prefer girls. But with puberty, there develops in each sex, an attraction for the opposite - although each will be slow to admit this. This attraction may express itself at times in nothing more than perhaps an increased attention to one's dress and general appearance or an automatic change to a more graceful attitude in the presence of the opposite sex. Such attraction is natural and unavoidable, and is in itself not sinful at all.

Since God Himself has made us thus, He must surely expect us to be friendly in a natural way with members of the opposite sex. God does not expect us to repress in any unnatural way such desires for friendship. But He does tell us to discipline those desires so that they do not get out of hand and go to excess. There are, no doubt, dangers in becoming too friendly with members of the opposite sex - especially when that friendship is restricted to one individual alone. But there are equally great dangers in going to the other extreme and avoiding contact with them altogether.

There are those who consider themselves super-spiritual and avoid even conversation with the opposite sex. This, however, is no indication of their being spiritual, but rather of their being unnatural. The idea that friendliness with the opposite sex is an unspiritual thing is really part of the same philosophy that teaches that the single state is more blessed than the married one. Unscriptural teaching like that can only lead to hidden sin - as is amply evidenced by the immorality into which many religious celibates have sunk. In just the same way, the minds and private habits of those who mingle only with their own sex are invariably more evil than of those who mingle naturally with both sexes.

What has been said above is not meant to encourage any undisciplined liberty with the opposite sex, for that can lead a person to the other extreme of licentiousness. All we are pleading for, is a healthy balance.

Dr. Herbert Gray in 'Men, Women and God', says, "The mutual relations of men and women in the realm of comradeship, and quite apart from marriage, may be so happy and enriching - so exhilarating and so bracing - that one may reverently say the whole arrangement of having divided mankind into two such groups is one of the most splendid of the Divine thoughts. In all life's departments, with a few obvious exceptions, men and women supplement and stimulate one another, and by comradeship make a bigger and better thing of life than would be possible otherwise".

## Friendships

The Bible teaches that young men should treat girls as sisters, in all purity (1 Timothy 5:2). In other words, you should treat a girl just as you would want other men to treat your own sister. This is indeed the safest rule to follow at all times.

Both sexes should treat each other with honour and respect, as well as with reserve and restraint. We should never be too personal or inquisitive or even flippant with members of the opposite sex. It is always wisest to maintain some degree of reserve or at least of sobriety - although this does not rule out a sense of humour. But we must bear in mind that we will be tempted to indulge in excesses of flippancy much more when in the presence of the opposite sex than at other times, and this can be dangerous.

Friendships between the sexes develop very quickly and almost without warning, because the boy is constantly desiring to show off his abilities, and the girl her attractiveness. There are many who seek to be friendly with ulterior motives so one must be careful. A Christian young man should never exploit the weakness of the opposite sex and give a girl the idea that he is interested in her when he is not. Girls are sometimes quick to read a meaning where none was intended. All young men must remember this. They should therefore avoid writing letters or even giving casual invitations or presents to any girl, lest the motive behind such acts be misconstrued. Even letters on spiritual topics should be avoided. It is also unwise to approach an unmarried person of the opposite sex, for advice or help in personal or even spiritual matters.

This does not mean that we should not consider a person of the opposite sex as a possible life-partner. But it is certainly unwise for a believer to form any exclusive friendships with the opposite sex during student days. A student should keep his emotions in the ice-box and concentrate on his studies. A young man should not normally consider marriage until he has finished his studies, and in any case, not until he is at least 25 years old; and a girl not till she is at least 20. Till then they should give themselves unreservedly and undistractedly to the work of the Lord in all their spare moments. Marriage brings with it responsibilities that cannot be avoided and one will never be free (in terms of time) to serve the Lord after marriage as before. But wife-hunting (or husband-hunting) and exclusive friendships with persons of the opposite sex can be more time-consuming than even married life! Another reason for delaying marriage (as mentioned above) is that young people need the mental and emotional maturity that age alone can bring, in order to choose wisely. We shall consider this further in Chapter Five.

Friendships with the opposite sex should therefore never get too intimate until marriage is at least being contemplated. Young men and women (especially the former) should be careful to ensure that they are upright in their relationships with one another. There must be an utter honesty about one's intentions at all times, on both sides. Failure to abide by this rule has caused emotional upsets and frustrations in many lives. It has also resulted often in failure in examinations and loss of one's Christian testimony. The man holds the initiative and the woman, the power of attraction. So both must be careful.

Young men must realize that they can very easily ruin a girl's marriage prospects by being over-free with her or by giving others the impression that marriage is intended - when there really is no such intention. The boy may escape in such cases with little or no damage to his prospects or even his character. But the girl, through no fault of her own, will be suspected and looked down upon from then on. Such conduct is unbecoming of any Christian young man. Since it is the man who holds the initiative, the primary responsibility to prevent such a calamity rests on him. We should never play with the personalities of other people. God will severely judge those who do.

A young person may sometimes develop a secret affection for some member of the opposite sex without disclosing this to anyone. Such an affection may continue to grow while still remaining hidden. But this can finally lead him to disappointment and frustration when his "beloved" marries somebody else. In such cases, it is always wisest to share your thoughts frankly, at the earliest opportunity, with some older married believer, and ask for advice and help.

### Dating and Petting

And now, a few words about dating and petting, since these are becoming increasingly common in India. By "dating", I mean a boy and a girl meeting together privately and going out by themselves; and by "petting", I mean their indulging in physical contact (apart from sexual intercourse).

It can be said without any qualification, that in India, if a believer wishes to retain his testimony and be useful to God, he should not date a person of the opposite sex even when marriage is intended. He should also as far as possible avoid going out anywhere alone with a member of the opposite sex - especially after dusk. Anyone familiar with Indian culture will immediately understand the reason for this. Believers should be careful not to give any cause for scandal.

Some may say that Christ has set them free from being in bondage to the traditions and culture of those around them. Yes, indeed! But remember that Christ has set us free only in order that we might obey the Word of God - and the Bible does not encourage anyone to date. It is totally silent on the subject. Where

the Word of God and man's traditions clash, we must certainly obey the former. But in all other cases, we should ensure that our freedom "does not become mere opportunity for (our) lower nature" (Galatians 5:13 - JBP). We are to be governed in such cases by the rule given us in Romans 14:16. Here are two translations of that verse:

You mustn't let something that is all right for you to look like an evil practice to somebody else" (JBP). Don't do that which will cause criticism against yourself even though you know that what you do is right (TLB).

1 Corinthians chapter 8 is also relevant and if paraphrased and adapted to the subject of dating would read somewhat as follows: "Now to deal with the subject of dating a girl or a boy. It is easy to think that we alone know the right answer. But remember that knowledge only makes a man proud, whereas love makes him more like God. The man who thinks he knows everything is only showing his ignorance, but the man who really loves God - he alone is God's friend. So what should we do? Should we date or not? We know that there is nothing really sinful about going for a walk or going to eat at a restaurant along with some person of the opposite sex - provided our motives are totally pure. But not all people (in India) feel the same way about this. Most of them have all their lives been used to considering dating wrong. Remember that our acceptance with God does not depend on whether we date or not. If we date, that won't make us better men, and if we don't date that won't make us worse either. But be careful lest your freedom to date causes another Christian (or even a non-Christian who is seeking after the truth) to stumble and fall. Suppose someone (who considers dating to be wrong) sees you going out with a girl (or a boy, as the case may be), he may lose his respect for your Christian testimony. Furthermore he may also begin to date; and he may fall into sin because he may not be as spiritually strong as you are. You will thereby be responsible for causing the spiritual downfall of your brother. When another person falls into sin thus because of your indirectly encouraging him, you are actually sinning against Christ. So I have decided that if there is any possibility of my brother being injured or of others being stumbled through my going out on a date, I shall not ever go out on a date, lest I cause others to fall".

Those who continue dating will find it extremely difficult to refrain from physical contact - beginning with holding hands and going on to kissing and caressing. The urge for physical contact will be stronger in the boy than in the girl, for sexual passion is always greater in the male. Men are easily aroused sexually, and once passions are thus stimulated it will be extremely difficult to get them under control.

Once a couple start petting, it will be virtually impossible to stop. One step will lead to another, and each time you are together, you will desire more excitement than on the previous occasion. Each time too, you will get less and less satisfaction out of it.

Sexual experiences like petting penetrate to the depths of a person's being. They cannot be indulged in without serious consequences. Petting is the natural prelude to the intimacies of married life, and so it is sinful as well as unwise to indulge in it prior to marriage. Petting cheapens and degrades sex and can lead to emotional conflicts, frustrations and nervous tensions which may ultimately cause resentment and hatred where love existed once. It can very easily lead to sexual intercourse - which is its only logical end; and when a couple constantly stop short of such total union, it can lead to masturbation (to relieve the tension created) and later on to difficulties in the sexual relationship after marriage. Feelings of guilt and regret can also remain in the mind even after, as a result of petting.

Many friendships between boys and girls break up after a while, and if petting has been indulged in, the girl becomes not much better than a prostitute. The girl must therefore apply the breaks when she finds her boyfriend inclined towards physical contact.

From what has been said above, it will be obvious that dating invariably leads to petting and that petting can in turn cause manifold problems. And so dating itself is totally out of the question for anyone who is seeking to glorify God in his life. Others around us may be indulging in this, but we should not be governed by their example. There is no need to envy them either, for their latter end is always regret and frustration. If you honour God and obey the principles laid down in His Word, you can be assured of a life and an eternity that are free from all regret.

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