

Finding a Life Partner

Finding a life partner is something most of us aim for - though Paul suggests that singleness can be a real virtue.

The Middlesbrough Seventh-day Adventist Church takes the issue of marriage and relationships very seriously. In 2005 the Church Board decided that they would try to provide the young people of the church with advice about seeking a partner.

Pastor Cyril Sweeney came up and spent some time with the Church and met some of the young people. His advice is presented in this publication to help you.

Love – How to detect the real thing

Is love detected by its physical manifestations? Do you realise that love has arrived when the pulse rate rises, when you get just that little hotter under the collar - or when the heart starts palpitating? The physical effects are not good guides. Some or all can be reproduced by eating an extra large bowl of curry - but may thankfully have less damaging effects than a marriage based on emotions or infatuation.

When is a person ready to fall in love?

Research and anecdotal evidence suggests that feelings of sexual attraction for the opposite sex begin at about 12. This is normal and natural. It is God's built-in mating instinct. We shouldn't feel ashamed or guilty when we feel such attraction.

Where does love come from? 1 John 4:7 "love comes from God". What sort of love is it? The context suggests that it is

a Christian love, "we have been born of God". It is important to realise that for a Christian love for a partner needs to include God in the partnership. The relationship also needs to include God's love, the love that is which God provides. (Romans 5:5)

How do we choose a good partner for life?

Pastor Sweeney outlined a list of sensible guidelines for us to follow. We should begin with a wide circle of friends of both sexes. This helps develop the social graces and helps relationships develop in less demanding ways (low cost relationships). The dangers of immediately starting a physical relationship is avoided. This method helps young people develop a catalogue of qualities he/she desires. It is good to make a list of the qualities you admire in a partner - Christian, kind, non-abusive, good-looking? In making such a list it is important to recognise that Mister Right doesn't exist - and we shouldn't aim simply for Mister Right now.

Know your self

In searching for a partner we need to be able to love ourselves. A measure of self-acceptance is needed. Love your self. Leviticus 19:18 and Matthew 19:19 and 22:39 outline this Biblical principle. We need the healthy self-image outlined in *Desire of Ages* page 668.

How do we build a healthy self-image as Princes and Princesses of God? There are a number of things we can do. We need to realise that a healthy self image begins with God. Realise you are God's

creation - God doesn't make junk. We should discover our hidden assets and use them. These would be in the areas of spirituality, emotional strength, mental, physical and educational assets - but would not focus on our looks.

We do need to accept negative features that can't be changed. However this acceptance is not a resignation to the negative. We can improve these features and use them positively so as to make the best of them.

Further practical advice followed. Cyril advised that the young person should be out of their teens before a serious attraction develops. This is outlined in *Adventist Home* page 79. Psychologists say that the best ages are between 21 to 29 for girls and 24 to 29 for men. There are good reasons for this. 50% of those who marry under the age of 20 will divorce in less than 5 years - a very sad statistic. The adult body is physically and emotionally better equipped to take on the responsibilities of marriage. Mental and emotional maturity is needed along with mutual attraction. Further advice which suggests a later start to serious relationships being commenced is that it is wise to complete basic education for a career before marriage - for both parties!

But how do you tell the feelings when a new relationship begins are really love?

The Greeks had a word for it

Agape is God's love and is self-giving and unconditional while the Greek word Phileo describes brotherly love and friendship. Sturge is the kind of love you find among families. Lastly Eros suggests passionate and sexual love. This latter is still love given by God - but should be participated in within the right relationship at the right time.

Arranging these forms of love on a time line suggests that before we reach eros love we should first begin with spiritual love and pass through stages to eros love. This is depicted in 1 John 4:7.

Judges 14:1-3 The story of Samson, tells of infatuation rather than of love and reveals the dangers of a relationship based on infatuation. On the other hand 1 Corinthians reveals a picture of what real love is.

What is there to do before you say 'I do'

Talk, rather than 'look' or 'have sex'. Remember that men and women talk differently and so part of this talking process is learning what he wants to talk about - and how he can talk more in the way the woman needs. Women talk approximately twice as much as men. On describing a night out the man would say 'fine' when asked how the night went - when the woman wants to know details of clothes. Marriages aren't built on good looks but on good communication. Can you talk about any subject you are interested in - and listen to one you may not be interested in?

Play, but make sure the play is safe and does not lead to intimacy too early. Life isn't all talk. A couple need to be able to help each other relax, laugh and have fun.

Work together. In church, cleaning home, DIY - and work together. In other words, can you get routine, unpleasant tasks done as a team? Can you clean a house? Could you plan a party - together?

Do have mutual friends. Keep the former friendships up to date. This sets a model for married life. You aren't going to spend all your lives together with just each other. You will need other friends, and it's important that they do not split

you apart. The fact that you both get along with the same people is also a good sign that you are compatible.

Do be proud of each other. Show this pride, do not mock or harm. Can you be proud of each other in front of friends. Are you proud of your special friend with your parents - or even in front of 'enemies'?

Are you intellectually on the same level? Take time to be find out interests and abilities, by talking and by finding out if there are wide gaps in knowledge.

Do share common interests. Which goes back to talking to find out what the interests are. And share those interests with friends - which would be good to be done as groups. The idea of common interests is that you are interested in more than simply 'each other'.

Do share the same values. Spiritual values, honesty, monetary, worship styles and needs, communication styles, prayer, Bible study, roles of men and women along with children. Many of these Pastor Sweeney suggests that these values include honesty in 'small things' These could include the importance of a nice house - if that is a shared value. There are the values of going to church every week - and may include abortion or divorce. The values are set by the couple studying the Bible rather than by society or external individuals.

Do you both feel comfortable about making decisions together? Different couples operate by different rules, but it is essential that you each not only agree to the rules set by the couple but feel pleased by the decisions they are arrived at.

Do help each other emotionally. Our roles are to build each other up. Each day should be aimed that you help the other

partner to be better than the day before. It is not enough for one to help the other. Both should draw encouragement and strength from each other. It is also important to be able to share the emotions safely.

Do show that you trust each other absolutely. There needs to be unconditional confidence in everything. In money, sex and in confidentiality. A lack of this confidence can quickly undermine love.

Do aim for equally creative and energetic lifestyles. Are you more creative and energetic because of the other. Depression, worry and lethargy are trouble signs in any person let alone within a couple's relationship. You shouldn't usually get less done because of the relationship - but more done.

Do help each other grow closer to God. It is important that both are in a relationship with God. In addition both sides of the relationship should be at approximately the same level of spiritual maturity.

Do accept and appreciate each others families. No man is an island. We are a part of our families and our families are a part of us. That said we are to recognise that the marriage relationship involves leaving the Mother and Father and cleaving to each other (Matthew 19:5).

We need to deal with unresolved relationships from each others pasts. You can! The past really does need to be put into the past. Nor can you, or should you try to make up for something you missed with another partner.

Sexual needs also need to be kept under control. If not, it is an unhealthy sign for the future. There are many times when a married couple needs to control their desires - including sexual desires - within a marriage.

Time should be spent together as friends. Pastor Sweeney suggests that a year or so would be good. It is good to spend time with groups in this friendship. Have you fought - and forgiven? Have you talked through the different areas of a future family life? Your jobs; your careers; any children that may come?

Have you talked about each area of your future life? This is not something to do early on, but when you are far into your relationship and quite serious about your future together. Early plans for a life together can prompt a too early decision to marry. Included in these discussions are finances, lifestyle and life expectation, jobs, children and such-like areas.

Finally, have you had pre-marriage preparation? This is available in many forms. Middlesbrough Seventh-day Adventist Church offers this before marriage. It is good to have this before the marriage date is set. The Bible speaks of marriage not being broken. Waiting a little longer is also worth taking in case you need to back out of a relationship before a potential disaster.

Love can be compared with infatuation

Love grows, while infatuation comes suddenly. It is one set of glands calling upon another.

Love is friendship that has caught fire. It takes root and grows one day at a time.

Infatuation is marked by a feeling of insecurity. You are excited and eager but not genuinely happy. There are nagging doubts, unanswered questions and small facets of your 'beloved's' life that you would just as soon not examine too closely. That might spoil the dream.

Love is the quiet understanding and acceptance of imperfection. It is real and realistic. You are warmed by the presence

of your beloved even when the person is absent. Near or far though you know that you can wait.

Infatuation says, "we must marry immediately lest we risk losing each other". Love says, "Be patient, don't panic, he is yours." Plan the future with confidence. Infatuation has an element of sexual excitement. If you are honest you will admit it is difficult to be in one another's company unless you are sure it will end in intimacy. Even a goodnight kiss may become more important than the night conversation and companionship.

Love is the maturation of friendship. You must be friends before you can be lovers.

Infatuation lacks confidence. When your future, or current, partner is away, you wonder if he or she is cheating. It is possible that you sometimes check.

Love means trust. You are calm, secure and unthreatened. This means that the couple feel trusted and trustworthy.

Infatuation might lead to you doing things you'll regret later - but love never creates this situation.

Love builds up. It makes you look up, it makes you think up and makes you think you are a better person than you were before.

Love considers the whole person while infatuation focuses on a few aspects of the character - or body.

Love is realistic while infatuation is idealistic

Love is balanced while infatuation is jealous of the other.

Love is honourable and spiritual - but infatuation ignores this.