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APPROACHING

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*Marriage*

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IN FAITH

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A P P R O A C H I N G

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*Marriage*

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I N F A I T H

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A RESOURCE FOR SINGLE  
BELIEVERS IN CHRIST

*Second edition, June 2015*

*Blossoming Youth, thou our hope and our fond expectation,*

*Hear now the voice that is calling in sweet invitation!*

*Follow the hand that oft thy welfare hath planned,*

*Pointing to Christ and salvation!*

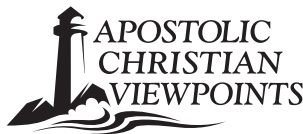
*Zion's Harp hymn 168, verse 1*

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*This booklet is part of the Apostolic Christian Viewpoints series, a collection of writings prepared by a committee of the Elder Council of the Apostolic Christian Church (Nazarean).*

*These booklets are not intended as exhaustive works on their respective subjects. Rather, they are offered as an encouragement to those who currently embrace these views; and to those who do not, a call to consider these topics in the light of scripture ... and the Lord give thee understanding in all things. (2 Tim 2:7).*



## *Introduction*

Aside from our relationship with our Creator, marriage is one of the most fundamental relationships in this life. It was ordained by God at the very beginning of man's existence on earth. As His institution, marriage reflects His goodness and love in both its design and purpose. Where people have honored God's principles for marriage, it has brought unmeasured good both to individuals and to society. Indeed, strong marriages make strong families; therefore, no family can be truly strong if the marriage itself is weak.

Marriage was designed by the Lord God to meet basic needs in both men and women as well as for the procreation of children. In this way marriage is life changing, and it is little wonder that most people desire to marry. In spite of the universality of marriage throughout every age and culture and in spite of the teachings recorded in the Holy Bible, approaching marriage is not easy. There are hard questions to be answered first. Should I marry? If yes, when? Whom should I marry? Where will I meet him or her? How will I find the answers to my questions?

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These questions are of great importance since marriage alone is no guarantee of blessing. In fact, many marriages do not last. Further, the failure of a marriage is not a simple matter. There are grave consequences. We see the evidence all about us: the ugliness of strife, the pain of broken hearts, the bitterness of betrayal, the toll on the children, etc. All these underscore the importance of marrying within God's Will.

Finding and following the Lord's Will makes the difference between a spiritually fruitful and personally satisfying life and a life of

heartache and disappointment. Most believers will receive direction from God to marry, but how does one proceed? How does the single believer take a completely spiritual approach to marriage?

Seeking God's will for the answers to these questions involves the deepest levels of our heart. It involves our relationship with God and what we truly think of ourselves. The believer in Christ must fully trust the Lord for guidance in this weighty matter. Only the Creator knows what each one of His children will face, and He has promised to meet every need in all matters of life.

"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye." Psalm 32:8

The Elder Council of the Apostolic Christian Church (Nazarean) has prepared this booklet to help guide single brothers and sisters who desire marriage. It is also meant for parents and others who would give counsel in this area of life. This booklet is not meant to be a quick reference guide. It requires time and effort to understand what it means to approach marriage in faith.

We believe this booklet can be valuable if used in personal devotions. Not every believer will marry, but every believer can benefit by examining his or her heart in the light of the Word of God. Our prayer is that this booklet will be a blessing to everyone who reads it.

## *1. Preparing Oneself for Marriage*

Getting married is a life changing step. No matter what follows, one's life on earth will be permanently changed by entering into marriage. Therefore, when single believers begin to consider the possibility of marriage, they must seek the guidance and help of the heavenly Father. Above all, we desire His will and blessing for our life. For this reason it is often emphasized among us that we believe in marriage by faith. This phrase "marriage by faith" refers to the way we approach marriage. It refers to preparation for marriage. It refers to the way to seek our life's partner.

It has been well said that when preparing for marriage, you should focus on developing those qualities that will make you a faithful companion if God leads you to marriage or a contented servant of God if He does not. In effect, the single believer should focus on the need to "be the right person" before they seek to "choose the right person."

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This focus on "becoming the right person" is part of maturity. The spiritually mature are neither presumptuous nor self-centered. The spiritually mature realize that their time, possessions, strength, abilities, etc., are not theirs to do as they want with them. They realize that in Christ, they are not their own. Most certainly only the mature should marry.

*"What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" 1 Corinthians 6:19*

In preparing for marriage, it is helpful to take the needed time to pray and reflect on some questions about ourselves:

- Am I content as a single believer?
- Do I have joy in the Lord?
- Do I find fulfillment in serving others?

*“Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content”* Philippians 4:11

*“But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord.”* 1 Corinthians 7:32

*“There is a difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit...”* 1 Corinthians 7:34

- Is my spiritual life healthy and growing?
- Do I have regular devotional time in the word and prayer?
- Am I engaged in the Lord’s service?
- Do I know which gift(s) my heavenly Father has given me?  
Am I using it?

*“Let no man despise thy youth, but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”* 1 Timothy 4:12

- Am I living in purity?
- Am I discerning in what I choose to read and watch?
- Are the websites I access online consistent with Christian purity?
- Am I modest in my speech and in my outward appearance?

*“I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes, I hate the work of them that turn aside, it shall not cleave to me.”* Psalm 101:3

*“Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” 2 Corinthians 10:5*

*“But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you as becometh saints, neither filthiness, nor jesting [dirty speech], which are not convenient, but rather giving of thanks...*

*“...and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them, for it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.” Ephesians 5:3-4, 11-12*

The goal of a single person in Christ is not marriage. The goal is the development of Godly character and spiritual maturity. These in turn will prepare us for a life of meaningful service, whether in marriage, if marriage is God’s will for our life, or by remaining single, if that is God’s will for us. This also means that our preparation begins early in life, often accompanied by the prayers of our parents. Those who desire to marry one day should begin by praying, “Lord, prepare me for whomever you might choose.”

Youth is the ideal time to cultivate Godly character and spiritual maturity. Both are indispensable for all areas of life, and lack of them will be especially evident in marriage. Godly character and spiritual maturity will be reflected in daily devotion, responsibility, sobriety, watchfulness, diligence, serving the Lord in a meaningful manner, exercising one’s spiritual gift, and faithful church attendance.

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*“...those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and bad” Hebrews 5:14*



### **Preparation for marriage includes the following:**

- Putting away “childish things” (*1 Corinthians 13:11*)
- Recognizing that our decisions and the choices we make while being single can affect us when married. (*Galatians 6:7-8*)
- Being teachable and learning about relationships, not from the “counsel of the ungodly” but rather from the “law of the Lord” (*Psalms 1:1-2*)
- Having a Biblical understanding of Love (*1 Corinthians 13*)

### **Specifically, for a young man to prepare for marriage:**

- He needs to know how to walk with God. (*Micah 6:8*)
- He needs wisdom from above. (*James 3:17*)
- He must have the courage to do right especially when under pressure to do wrong. (*Daniel 1:8*)
- He needs to understand what it means to be the spiritual leader of his own family.
- He must be ready to take on the financial responsibility of married life.

### **Christian stewardship of personal finances includes the following:**

- Living within one’s means
- Generously giving to the needy and supporting the Lord’s work
- Being honest and fair in all financial transactions
- Spending wisely, not impulsively
- Avoiding unnecessary use of credit; learning to wait
- Avoiding debt
- Paying bills on time
- Paying taxes honestly
- Avoiding any financial dealings that will jeopardize your Christian testimony
- Not sacrificing family or relationships for financial gain
- Avoiding co-signing for others

## Specifically, for a young woman to prepare for marriage:

- She must understand her worth in the eyes of the Lord. (*Psalm 139:14*)
- She needs to develop the heart of a servant.
- She needs to cultivate a meek and quiet spirit. (*1 Peter 3:4*)
- She needs to cultivate a gracious spirit. (*Ephesians 4:32*)
- She must see the value of the Biblical role for married women. (*Proverbs 31:10-31, 1 Corinthians 11:7-9, Titus 2:4-5; Ephesians 5:22-24*)

It has been said, “A woman’s heart should be so hidden in Christ that a man should have to seek Him first to find her.”

Though each has the liberty to marry, it is wise to consider if any serious difficulties stand in the way. Examples of these may include the obligation to care for aged parents, a difficult financial situation, physical or emotional handicaps, lingering illness, even times of distress (*1 Corinthians 7:26*).

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These difficulties do not necessarily preclude marriage, but they do merit that we give them sufficient consideration. Not doing so — or even worse, not disclosing the existence of such issues when appropriate — can bring great distress in the marriage relationship. This can lead to troubled marriages and difficult family relationships, situations that will bring dishonor to the name of the Lord, for many years to come.

This time of preparing for marriage ideally should begin long before one is actually seeking their life’s partner. Even so, one may find they have romantic feelings for another before they are ready to pursue marriage. The development of romantic feelings is somewhat natural, yet if left unchecked they can grow into a powerful force. As

such, these romantic feelings can become very persuasive, as they seem to offer a legitimate shortcut to finding one's life companion. However, following these feelings often leads to poor choices and problems. Here is some advice to help you avoid the entanglements and regrets that often accompany romantic feelings:

- Understand that it is natural to have romantic feelings.
- Remember they are only feelings, and feelings alone do not equal love.
- Do not feed your romantic feelings.
- Ask yourself serious questions in the face of such feelings (for example, "Am I walking in the Spirit?").
- Resolve to honor God's principles.

If we feed these feelings by spending one-on-one time with the other person, day-dreaming about them, making special efforts for them, confiding in them, etc., they can soon change from innocent feelings to infatuation. Infatuation, once kindled, can quickly run rampant and completely crowd out of our hearts and minds the calm and prayerful discernment of God's will, completely destroying a sober and spiritual perspective. Society is filled with people who made foolish decisions that have led to disastrous, lifelong consequences.

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In great contrast to this stands the Bible teaching on love. A careful reading of 1 Corinthians 13 reveals these characteristics of true love:

- It is long-suffering.
- It is kind
- It has no jealousy
- It is not proud or vain
- It is discreet and appropriate in behavior
- It is not conceited or self-centered
- It is patient
- It is pure
- It does not take pleasure in sin
- It rejoices in the Lord
- It carries burdens graciously
- It is strong in faith
- It is filled with hope
- It is enduring

## *2. Seeking a Companion for Life*

If one has prepared themselves (as discussed in the previous section), it will follow that their overriding desire will be to seek the Lord's will regarding whom they should marry. This emphasis on seeking the Lord's will is part of what is meant by "Marriage by Faith." The following elements are considered essential to a "Marriage by Faith:"

- i. Seeking God's will through earnest prayer**
- ii. Looking for Godly character**
- iii. Seeking Godly counsel**
- iv. Being accountable to parental and church authority**
- v. Avoiding emotional attachment**

### **i. Seeking God's will through earnest prayer**

The need to pray can hardly be overemphasized. We do not know God's purpose for us in the years to come. He alone fully knows His present and future plans for our life. Seasons of prayer and meditation are indispensable to

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remaining close to the Lord so that we are not led astray by suggestions and inclinations, whether our own or another's. Here is some advice about seeking God's will about who we should marry, through prayer:

- We should not simply assume our motives are right, but prayerfully consider whether they are.
- There is a great difference between adding prayer to our own work and will, and giving our concern to the Lord and waiting

upon Him. It is the difference between asking the Lord to bless our work, or turning our eyes on the Lord and following where He leads (*Proverbs 3:5-7*)

- If our motivation is self-centered, our focus will be on what we will gain. This would cause us to evaluate “our options” in a worldly manner.
- We do well to look at the example set by our Lord Jesus. When He came seeking His bride, it wasn’t for selfish reasons. His motive was to share His love and all that He had.
- For the believer, our petitions to the Lord should include not only if we should marry and whom we should marry, but also when we should marry.
- Having previous experience in seeking the Lord’s will and waiting on Him for other important matters in life helps us to be familiar with the way the Holy Spirit directs us.
- The Lord Jesus loved His bride because He received her from the hand of His Father. In fact, the more the Son honored the Father, the more value the gift had in His eyes. What a blessing when both a brother and sister see in one another an answer to prayer!

*“...in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.”* Philippians 4:6

*“...He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”* Hebrews 11:6

## **ii. Looking for Godly character**

We should be able to see qualities of Godliness and maturity in the one we may be thinking of marrying. This is different from being impressed by an attractive appearance, family wealth, worldly accomplishments (in business or in education), talents, popularity, etc. Therefore, when a brother feels led to a sister, or when a sister receives a proposal from a brother—in addition to continuing prayer—they should carefully consider the character of the other as much as is possible. The idea is not to use the following questions as a test but rather to understand that one’s character will certainly impact the marriage relationship.

### **Specific traits for a sister to look for in a brother:**

- Is he harsh or courteous with others?
- Is he kind or critical of others?
- Does he expect more of others than himself?
- Is he spiritually stable and consistent?
- Is he spiritually indifferent?
- Does he have a problem with lust?
- Does he try to take advantage of others?
- Does he brag or show off?
- Does he compromise to win approval?
- Does he have time for or interest in children?
- Does he take responsibility well?
- How does he take defeat or disappointment?
- How does he act towards the weak and undesirable?
- Can he acknowledge his weaknesses and mistakes?
- Is he honest about his feelings?
- Is he sensitive towards other's feelings and preferences?
- Does he know what he believes and why he believes it?
- Does he have a good work ethic without idolizing his work?
- Does he love money and/or the things that money can buy?
- Does he value his family?
- How is his relationship with his father and mother?
- How does he treat his mother, his father, and his siblings?
- Does his lifestyle reflect modesty or vanity?
- What type of character do you see in his family?

### **Specific traits for a brother to look for in a sister:**

- Is she outspoken or argumentative with others?
- Does she have a critical spirit?
- Does she have a meek and quiet spirit?
- Is she bossy?
- Is she flirtatious or silly?
- Does she have a know-it-all attitude?
- Does she always have the latest negative information about others?
- Is she a busybody in other people's affairs?
- Does she express self-pity?

- Is she gracious in her manner?
- Is she pleasant and cheerful, with a healthy sense of humor?
- Is she discreet in the presentation of herself?
- Does she have an optimistic and hopeful view of life?
- Does she maintain her composure or does she become easily distraught?
- Can she express her personal views without being pushy?
- Does she interact well with children?
- Is she comfortable with herself as a woman?
- Is she faithful and trustworthy with information?
- Does she take initiative?
- Does she have a good work ethic?
- Does she love money and /or the things that money can buy?
- Does she value her family?
- How does she treat her father, her mother, and her siblings?
- Does her lifestyle reflect modesty or vanity?
- What type of character do you see in her family?

The character of one generation, whether good or bad, is often reproduced in the next. This is why it is important to discern the character of the other’s family. It is difficult to overcome bad training and an ungodly heritage. However, though difficult, it is not impossible. Numerous Kings in the Old Testament were Godly though their fathers were wicked. For this reason, we must not place too much weight on the discernment of family character. Even so, if serious character flaws are discerned, it is important to remember that marriage alone will not change that. Moreover, if changes are necessary, efforts should be made to deal with these issues before marriage.

**iii. Seeking Godly counsel**

The principle of the younger learning from the older is a theme in Scripture (*Titus 2:4*). There is safety and value in seeking counsel from Godly believers about marriage. Ideally, this should begin with ones’ parents. It is also

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wise to counsel with an elder, minister, or an experienced believer whose life demonstrates spirituality.

Here, too, balance is needed. This element of taking counsel with those spiritually qualified to give counsel does not replace our personal need to earnestly seek the Lord's will through prayer and meditation. Discretion is also needed when sharing personal matters of the heart. If we share our innermost feelings on such personal matters too freely with others, it shows we are lacking discretion.

In 1 Kings 12: 1-19, we have a sobering account of a young man who made poor decisions because he relied on poor counselors. The choices that Rehoboam insisted on were ruinous to his kingdom and his family. In effect, he spurned the many proverbs of wisdom that his father Solomon had written especially for him.

*"A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels"* Proverbs 1:5

*"Without counsel, purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counselors they are established."* Proverbs 15:22

Often what seems so important today looks different with the passing of time. Wisdom and maturity are needed to make choices based on what remains important with the passage of time. This is what Godly counsel can help supply.

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#### **iv. Being accountable to parental and church authority**

Related to the seeking of Godly counsel is this matter of remaining accountable. Accountability is in contrast to autonomy. While growing through the teenage years, it was natural to desire increased

independence. This desire was helpful to develop increasing responsibility for ourselves. Maturing into adulthood, we learned that such independence was not meant to be absolute. Accountability is necessary for us to interact in healthy ways with others. It is no wonder that God included accountability in His design for families. This is true whether we speak of our earthly or our spiritual family. Not only is accountability an integral part of healthy relationships, there is also safety in accountability.

In Genesis 24, we have the account of Isaac and Rebekah, an example of marriage by faith. Even though some parts of their experience are unlikely to be repeated in our time and age, it remains the most detailed Biblical account given. Surely, there are lessons the Lord intends for us to learn. In this account, we see a balance between the desire for parental guidance and blessing as well as consideration for the desires of the prospective partners. In contrast, Genesis 26 gives an example of a son (Esau) who chose his own spouse without the guidance or blessing of his parents. It was a choice that brought much grief to his parents.

Children should seriously consider their choice in marriage before forcing their will in opposition to their parent's counsel. Even if one has grown older and more independent, they should still seek the advice and counsel of their parents.

Caution must also be given regarding the "unequal yoke" spoken of in 2 Corinthians 6:14. While this principle can apply to many areas of our life, an "unequal yoke" will certainly be the result of marrying someone who is an unbeliever. Choosing to marry someone who has not been born again would mean choosing to disregard the Holy Spirit in this very important step of our life. If such a relationship has begun to develop, the believer may justify this by persuading themselves that the person they love is probably converted or will soon be converted. In either case, the result is the same. It is disobedience to plain scripture.

An unequal yoke will also result when marrying someone whose doctrinal beliefs are different. There should be no consideration

given to entering any marriage relationship that will guarantee an unequal yoke. Marriage is a state of unity between two. Beginning marriage with known disunity in spiritual beliefs will lead to problems and compromise.

#### **v. Avoiding emotional attachment**

It is a normal part of emotional development for young men and women to begin having feelings of attraction for one another. As discussed in the previous section, these feelings are not wrong in and of themselves. The key is to honor God's principles when dealing with those feelings.

Dating relationships are common-place in our society. By "dating" we refer to the arrangement where one enters into an exclusive and intimate relationship with another. Originally, the reason dating was practiced was to find a compatible partner with the intention of eventual marriage. However, it must be recognized that in dating neither party is absolutely committed. If things do not work out, either party can end the relationship. Today dating is often practiced just for fun, for social pleasure and for companionship. In other words, many people date today with no intention of marrying the one they date. It should be no surprise that dating relationships today commonly involve the sin of fornication. People want the privileges of marriage without the commitment of marriage.

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For the believer in Christ, there can be no consideration given to "recreational dating." We are taught to flee youthful lusts (2 Timothy 2:22). Even when practiced to determine compatibility, dating is fraught with problems. Consider these points:

- It is poor training for the lifelong commitment of marriage. When things become difficult, ending the relationship is always an option. Surely, the practice of dating is a factor in the Western world's high divorce rate.
- When one enters an exclusive, intimate relationship, it will undoubtedly lead to strong temptation, especially when done secretly and without the knowledge of those to whom one is accountable.
- Dating relationships commonly lead to jealousy, resentment, disappointment, and even deep hurt.

One significant factor in the forming of interpersonal relationships today is the changing world of personal communication. Personal communication has become very easy with rapidly changing technology: The growing prevalence of cell phones, texting, online social networking, instant messaging, etc., has made interpersonal communication much more common place than before. These popular communication modes seem to be geared towards promoting a high volume of very casual, but very personal, interactions.

Characteristics of these popular forms of electronic communication include self-centeredness, convenience, a strong sense of entitlement, a climate with little or no accountability, priority given to having fun and a good time, careless sharing of personal feelings, preoccupation with idle talk, instant access to others, etc. Typically, this type of communication is very shallow, and somewhat “choppy.”

While today's communication technology can be used in a responsible, mature manner, it should be evident the norms that have evolved in many virtual online communities do not follow Godly principles for developing relationships that honor the Lord.

Showing personal interest through private communication that does not include maturity and carefulness — and when done without accountability and transparency — has often led to disillusionment and disappointment. Some have even suffered great spiritual harm from the bitter experience of being “led on” and later “dropped” by a fellow believer. Both brothers and sisters need to take care to avoid causing such deep hurts and disappointments. The Lord will not overlook those who cause offense.

If a sister has a conviction regarding a brother, she needs to exercise discretion and a patient waiting on the Lord. Actively serving the Lord and focusing on her spiritual growth should be her priority. For both brothers and sisters, to aggressively show interest in someone can move them in the direction of marriage before they are ready.

For both brothers and sisters, it must be emphasized that those who are not ready to consider marriage at this time should not engage in private or electronic communications on an emotional level nor should they presume upon the future by placing “holds” on each other.

A counterpoint is needed: Though we caution against careless interpersonal communications and we reject dating relationships as a practice of the world, it does not mean there is no place for direct communications between mature believers who are considering marriage. However, the need for carefulness, accountability and transparency must be especially emphasized. If such communications are appropriate, they should take place with the knowledge and advice of those spiritual authorities to whom we are accountable. Ideally, fathers and/or elders should have this role.

The desire to pursue marriage has often brought many to a point where they are discouraged and frustrated. Brothers and sisters who have become discouraged should share with their elder/minister and parents who may be able to assist them in pursuing marriage.

In summary, the way we approach marriage can make all the difference in whom we marry and in the way we will live after we are married. There is a great difference between approaching marriage in faith, or following the world’s methods and norms. The consequences are life-long. This is why marriage should only be pursued by those who have prepared for it through spiritual maturity and the development of Godly character.

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### *3. Proposals*

It should be apparent that in approaching marriage by faith, our focus is not on “the mechanics” of how to forward a marriage proposal but on the Godly principles that must be honored before one comes to this point.

#### **Proposing marriage**

Here in North America, the marriage proposal is traditionally forwarded through the serving elder or minister. In some cases the brother proposes directly to the sister. In either case the Scripture exhorts us to “let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40). For this reason the importance of being under parental and church authority should not be compromised. This means that a brother who wishes to propose marriage should always counsel with his parents and an elder/minister first.

The elder (or minister) would be responsible to counsel the single brother to see if he has approached this step in faith and with prayer. The elder would also be responsible to know or confirm that both the brother and sister involved are in good standing and that no interferences exist. After confirming these things, the elder would counsel with the brother about the way the proposal should be forwarded giving consideration to what the parents and the sister would most appreciate. When it seems a proposal should be forwarded directly by the brother, permission should be first obtained from the sister’s father before proceeding. Always, it is encouraged that the brother be willing to share his conviction on the way the Lord has led him to propose to this sister.

#### **Considering a proposal**

Attention is often focused on the brothers since they traditionally initiate the proposal. However, sisters receiving a proposal have an equal responsibility to discern God’s will in this question. For this reason, she should be counseled to have an open mind toward the Lord and not lightly dismiss a proposal simply because it does not come from “the one I’m waiting for.” It is not a Godly, spiritual

response to respond quickly with a “no” especially if she knows the brother has spent much time in prayer seeking the Lord’s direction.

As with the brother, a sister who has received a proposal should set aside time to pray and seek counsel, ideally with her parents. This is for guidance only; it does not change her responsibility to earnestly to seek the Lord’s will through prayer.

Sometimes during this process, it is helpful for there to be direct communications between the brother and sister. This can be a good opportunity to share convictions and discuss matters of faith and marriage. If both the brother and sister feel such conversations would be helpful, it is important that they be done with the knowledge and consent of those to whom they are accountable. They can also advise the way such communications should take place. The goal is not to create a special romantic moment which can put unnecessary pressure on both the brother and the sister. The goal is to discern the will of the Lord.

### **Answering a proposal**

It is important that a sister never accept a proposal because she feels pressured by others. Rather, her answer should be given only after praying and receiving a clear conviction from the Lord to answer “yes” or “no.” It is her own personal step of faith, and therefore she must be at peace with the Lord.

Sisters having a clear conviction from the Lord that an answer is “no” and not simply “not now” and are certain that time and circumstance will not change things should make this known when giving her answer.

### **Receiving the answer**

If we have approached marriage in faith, and if we have forwarded a proposal in faith, we will need to accept the answer in faith. If the answer is “no,” neither the brother nor the sister should view it as a failure.

If not taken in faith, receiving a “no” can be very discouraging and cause one to question their walk with the Lord. It can also cause one to become very vulnerable to temptation from the enemy of our souls. Satan could tempt us to give up and succumb to a life of defeat and disappointment. It should be mentioned that a similar temptation could come to a sister who never receives a proposal.

Brothers who receive a “no” should be willing to examine their own hearts and lives to see where they can improve or if there is something that needs to change. For this purpose, the brother can counsel with the one to whom they have been accountable. Being open and transparent can help move away from the disappointment and be encouraged: *“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.”* Jeremiah 29:11

When a proposal has been accepted and the couple becomes engaged to each other, it is important that they counsel with their parents and the elder or minister regarding the announcement of the engagement. It is also important that they counsel regarding their time of engagement.

Becoming engaged is a very special moment in a believer’s life and should be a memorable experience. Moderation and simplicity are always good virtues to follow. Turning this special time into a “show” or “theatrics” and then freely broadcasting it does not enhance the experience but rather takes away from the spirituality of the moment. It also promotes unrealistic expectations for others and causes some to feel that they need to outdo others.

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## *Closing thoughts*

This is a special time of life when one reaches deep within his and her heart to approach the question of marriage. It is so important that proper sensitivity must be exercised.

For brothers who receive negative response(s) to their proposal(s), or for sisters who may never be proposed to, the soul-searching can be trying. The need for married believers to support their single brothers and sisters in love and with respect regarding these things can hardly be overemphasized. It is not helpful to tease single believers about getting married.

It must also be emphasized that when the answer to a proposal is “no,” it is important that the few who have knowledge of the proposal keep it confidential. Breaching such confidence is not Christ-like. It fuels gossip and often leads to offense.

Approaching marriage in faith requires humility and courage. Each experience will be different, but in the Lord we have His never-failing promise to guide us each step of the way.

## *Precious Promise*

By Nathaniel Niles  
Apostolic Christian Junior Hymnal  
Hymn #56

*Precious promise God has given  
to the weary passerby,  
on the way from earth to Heaven,  
"I will guide thee with Mine eye."*

*I will guide thee, I will guide thee,  
I will guide thee with Mine eye  
on the way from earth to Heaven,  
I will guide thee with Mine eye.*

*When temptations almost win thee  
and thy trusted watchers fly,  
let this promise ring within thee,  
"I will guide thee with Mine eye."*

*I will guide thee, I will guide thee,  
I will guide thee with Mine eye  
on the way from earth to Heaven,  
I will guide thee with Mine eye.*

*When thy secret hopes have perished  
in the grave of years gone by,  
Let this promise still be cherished,  
"I will guide thee with Mine eye."*

*I will guide thee, I will guide thee,  
I will guide thee with Mine eye  
on the way from earth to Heaven,  
I will guide thee with Mine eye.*

## *Bibliography*

Portions of this booklet were adapted from:

Looking at myself before loving someone else

by John Coblenz © 2002 Christian Light Publications, Inc, Harrisonburg, VA 22802; 1-800-776-0478 All rights reserved. Used by permission.

This workbook is available from Christian Light Publications, a conservative Mennonite publisher. It is a good study guide containing helpful questions and excellent scriptural insights.

**Other sources include:**

Author unknown: The Christian and Marriage Translated from German in 1949, reprinted in 1987 by The Apostolic Christian Publishing Company, Syracuse, New York

Klopfenstein, Perry. Betrothal in the Lord Apostolic Christian Church of America

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Additionally, many thoughts expressed in this booklet were contributed by several elder brothers. The manuscript was compiled by a small committee assigned for this purpose.

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