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verticalthought

a magazine of understanding for tomorrow's leaders

A Touchy Subject

The Dating Debate

How Do You Recover From a Costly Mistake?

True Dating: *What Guys and Girls Want*

INSIDE **thought**



Letters From Ukraine



Dating Outside the FAITH



Higher Level Dating: Don't Be an Animal!

Having just spent a few days hunting, I was keenly aware of the behavior of the deer population. Understanding animal behavior can be quite helpful when attempting to take home game. During the “rut,” male deer become very intent on pursuing females. In fact, during this time bucks are so single-minded that they become less aware of other things in the woods, such as hunters. My hope was that this would work to my advantage.

Deer, of course, are quite different from humans. After mating, the animals go their separate ways. Bucks and does only spend a brief amount of time together for the sole purpose of propagating the deer population. Sadly, some humans think we are just like animals. They think that it is OK to have sex whenever we want and that we can leave that person after the act.

The reason some people sanction such conduct is based on their belief that humans are part of the animal kingdom, in which such behavior is quite acceptable. The Bible, however, says otherwise. Jesus explained that humans were created for the ultimate purpose of becoming “children of God” (John 1:12)—a marvelous potential that animals have not been given. And as for the way we interact with the opposite sex, God has some specific instructions regarding how those desiring to enter the Kingdom of God should conduct themselves.

For Christians, spending time with the opposite sex in preparation for marriage is supposed to be an honorable, godly process. Paul wrote: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from fornication; that each one of you know how to control your own body [or how to take a wife for himself] in holiness and honor” (1 Thessalonians 4:3-4, New Revised Standard Version).

This issue of *Vertical Thought* focuses on the higher, godly values regarding dating and sex. In the various articles you will find biblical principles and practical suggestions for applying God’s instructions. We hope you will think vertically about these critical principles.

In closing, let me go back to my hunting trip. I did manage to take a nice buck on this excursion—partially because he was more concerned about the doe he was following than about paying attention to who or what else was in the woods. And here is an important principle for us regarding dating. If we don’t pay attention to God’s instructions, we, too, can end up paying penalties. Ungodly human behavior brings penalties that can include heartache, disease and divorce. May each of you reap the sweet, rewarding blessing that comes from dating God’s way!

Managing editor, *Vertical Thought*



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Everyone knows that contact with the opposite sex is fun, and young people often ask, "Just how far can a Christian go without sinning?" The time to make decisions about physical contact is *before* you get in a touchy situation. Making a decision on the fly with no forethought is a recipe for going too far.

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Some experts say, "Don't date." Others say, "It's no problem. Go ahead." What should a Christian do? Is there any way to harmonize the conflicting advice?

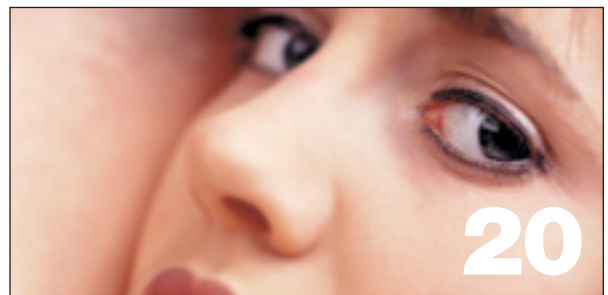
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A quick overview of movies and sitcoms gives the impression that the only thing young people want is sex.

Some vertical thinking shows this to be a very poor choice. Instead of following the road to failure, check out what godly young men and women want in a date.

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A Touch

Hand-holding, Hugg

by David Treybig

But is all this contact good, upright and moral? Is it in our best interest to engage in these practices prior to marriage? How does one decide? For those who have adopted the standards of behavior endorsed by today's entertainment industry, these are stupid questions. In fact, they are non-questions—meaning they just aren't asked. When people believe it is OK to have sex before marriage, a little (or a lot of) touching doesn't really mean anything.

Consider the blockbuster movie *Titanic*. Two young people fall in love and, before they are married, they decide to have sex. Even though current stats show that the majority of high school students don't have sex, many movies like this present this scene as

(emphasis added throughout).

“One flesh” means to have sexual intercourse (1 Corinthians 6:16) and, according to God's instructions, this is to take place *after* a man and woman have been joined together in marriage. Having sex prior to marriage is immoral and, according to God's Word, we are supposed to “*flee* sexual immorality” (1 Corinthians 6:18). *Flee* means to run away from or avoid. So we're supposed to run away from premarital sex and things that could entice us to be immoral.

An important point to note in God's instruction is that abstinence doesn't have to be forever. It just must wait until two people are married. Then, God says, sex is good (Hebrews 13:4). Because abstinence has been described in such negative terms, some educators are now choosing to use the word *postponement* to describe the process of delaying sex until marriage.

The time to make decisions about physical contact is before you get in a touchy situation. Making a decision on the fly with no forethought is a recipe for going too far.

the norm for young people before they say “I do.” The way it unfolds is true to life. It all starts with physical contact—touching, hugging and kissing. And then comes full sexual intercourse. But this isn't what the Bible teaches.

In Genesis 2:24, God explains how and when a sexual union between a man and a woman should take place: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall *become* one flesh”

How to decide

Many of you reading this have already decided that you are going to wait to have sex until you are married. That's great! You've made a good decision. But what about this touchy stuff? Are you going to hug, kiss, hold hands or more? The Bible doesn't specifically address these areas. It does clearly say that we aren't to have sex prior to marriage (1 Corinthians 6:18) or to even lust after another person (Matthew 5:28), and that



Biologically, it is called the sense of touch. For those dating, it can be exhilarating—actual, real-live, skin-to-skin contact with someone of the opposite sex. And while it isn't sexual union, it can definitely be sexy. Just ask any red-blooded male or female who has had a close encounter with Miss Good Looking or Mr. Hunk.

Hand-holding, hugging, kissing or any other similar contact can be oh so delightful.

My Subject

Engaging, Kissing and More...



love is not to be awakened until the appropriate time (Song of Solomon 2:7, New Revised Standard Version). Human history shows that these “touchy” activities often lead to lustful desire and sex. Unfortunately, many young people have engaged in these forms of physical contact and then lost their virginity because their emotions overwhelmed their sense of judgment. They just couldn’t stop because it felt so good.

So how can you decide what you will do? Some have asked, “Just how far can a Christian go without sinning?” The time to make decisions about physical contact is *before* you get in a touchy situation. Making a decision on the fly with no forethought is a recipe for going too far.

To help you establish godly standards, consider the following advice given by a panel of young American Christians between the ages of 20 and 30. Some are married and some aren’t. While the names are changed to preserve each person’s identity, the comments are genuine.

Should you hold hands?

Hand-holding according to 20-year-old Sarah K. is “OK *if* you plan to marry him or her, when you both feel like the other is the right one for you.” Continuing, she said, “I wouldn’t hold hands with someone who I felt to be ‘just a date’ or someone I was mildly interested in, or even just plain had a crush on. I think holding hands is a sign that ‘this is the one for me’ to all the world, and that is just not something I want to do with just anyone.”

Bill, 28 and married to Sue, said that he didn’t have a rule about holding hands before he was married but realized that “those first thrilling physical touches when one is young can often open the

door to premature intimacy and big life mistakes.” Continuing, he remarked, “If I could do it all over again, I would refrain from hand-holding until becoming engaged (and then make sure the engagement was brief enough so as to minimize any potential problems). Individual tolerances to holding hands or other touching may vary, so there’s no hard-and-fast rule. But I would have done better erring on the side of strict conservatism in this area.”

Kate, 28, who is married to Luke, wrote: “We didn’t hold hands till almost a year after we started dating. (We started dating a year or more after we had known each other as friends with the understanding that we were potentially interested in marriage and wanted to spend time together to find out.) Luke asked me if he could hold my hand initially. Looking back, it was a good thing, even though I questioned it at one point because it became a distraction for me for a short time—either wanting him to hold my hand, or having a difficult time reigning in my thoughts when he did. However, he explained to me that he felt like it was important that there be a physical means of communicating with each other and expressing the closeness that we felt. I think that he was right.

“One thing that both of us learned was that before marriage, if you are pursuing marriage with a person, anything has the potential to be physically exciting and distracting. In the midst of the excite-

ment, you have to take your thoughts captive and make decisions about enjoying emotional closeness and small amounts of physical contact based on whether the relationship is deep and solid enough to benefit from these added dimensions, or whether it will only serve to cover up a lack of real communication. For Luke and me, hand-holding was a positive thing that physically manifested some of the feelings and ideas that we had already verbalized.”

What about hugs?

Once you become good friends with someone, it seems as though hugs

become part of the way many people say good-bye before long intervals apart or hello when they reunite. While the majority of this panel felt these kind of short hugs were appropriate, they did offer a few cautions about regular and lengthy hugging with the opposite sex.

Sarah K. said, "I think the thing is, the longer two people of the opposite sex hug, the more tendency there would be



Before Kate and Luke married, they said, "We got into the habit of giving each other a brief hug coming and going sometime during the first year of dating. It was good to acknowledge the way we cared for each other with something warmer than a 'Hi.'"

"It felt a bit stiff to us both as we grew to care for each other more, but anytime you are holding back feelings for the right time, things can feel awkward.

"We liked to sit close to each other, but it was not until a few months before we were engaged that we sat together with his arm around me. At first, we only did this in my [Kate's] parents' home when they were near. A little later we also sat like this when we were alone as well—often in the context of a conversation that was on a deep emotional level, and especially after we were engaged and began talking through more personal things . . . We didn't 'bear hug' until a month before we were engaged, and we were careful with that."

is an easy way to fast-forward to more explicit sexual contact. Young, single people should avoid mouth-to-mouth kissing at all costs except maybe just prior to marriage (even then they must be careful to avoid lustful behavior)."

Explaining how they first kissed, Kate said, "I had told Luke what a kiss meant to me as we started to grow closer. He honored that understanding and never took advantage of any vulnerable moment. I respected him deeply for that and still do, even as I sometimes wanted him to kiss me. To me, a kiss meant, 'I love you. I want to be your husband.'"

Continuing, she recalled, "I had asked my mother when I was young if it was all right to kiss before you were married. She said that it was as long as you both understood what that kiss meant. As I thought about that, I began to feel that I didn't want the memory of any man's kiss except my husband's, and that for me (very cautious and slow to give myself), a kiss was a seal of love and possession. Hand-holding is like that to an extent—it implies exclusivity and mutual ownership to a degree.

A kiss between a man and a woman implies ownership in a sexual way that is beautiful and powerful.

to kiss. So if that sort of thing is affecting your mind, where it's like you've been hugging this person and all of a sudden you just *have* to kiss them, then uh-oh! You'd better rethink your actions, because the godly way is to go in the direction of 'flee from immorality,' not see how close you can come to it!"

Bill agreed with Sarah K., saying, "Hugs between two people who know they are attracted to one another should be brief . . . Hugs involve even more physical contact and can be misused if one is not careful and/or has a weakness in this area."

Cheryl, 23 and married, said her "main concern was finding the person that I could continue a relationship with until the end (marriage). If he didn't meet my qualifications enough to that end, I would remain friends but never make any more physical contact than a hug here or there."

And kissing?

Kissing, according to our panel, is definitely more intimate than hand-holding or hugs and should be avoided prior to engagement. After you are engaged, a brief kiss seems appropriate.

As Sarah K. put it, "I know it is *hard* to resist kissing someone, especially if they mean a lot to you, or are *very* attractive. But you have to remember, if God hasn't picked this person for you, your lips are on another person's mate. If you were married already and someone kissed your wife/husband, you'd be pretty mad! So think 'fourth dimensionally,' as Doc Brown would say, and know that this other person is *not* your mate."

"One can argue that the former two items (holding hands and hugging) can be shared in a more casual and 'harmless' way," said Bill. "However, mouth-to-mouth kissing is actually one of the beginning stages of sexual intimacy and

"To me, a kiss on the lips between a man and a woman implies this ownership in a sexual way that is beautiful and powerful. Luke asked if he could kiss me a month before we were engaged. Because I knew his character and because he was aware of what that meant to me, I knew that he wanted to marry me . . . We did have to limit our kisses, because it is fun and intoxicating—meant to lead to more. We limited our kisses to coming and going so that they did not take over our time together, or prevent our growth in communication. This was a good decision. It did get harder and harder to finish our good-byes!!"

More?

Physical contact that is more intimate than the above is often described as petting. According to our panel, this category of conduct clearly exceeded the safe boundaries Christians should maintain.

As for petting before marriage, Kate wrote: "With exceptions only of his hands on my hair or face and vice versa,

What's Going on Under the Skin:

What Touch Can Trigger

Is it real love, or are you just feeling powerful brain chemicals stoked by the touch of that special someone? Neurologists have studied the biological and chemical changes that can be brought about by sexual desire, infatuation or love—all of which can be intensified by touch. Touching, hugging and kissing help fire up “nature’s” love cocktail—a powerful chemical concoction that drastically and dramatically changes our brain chemistry. This puts a person *under the influence* and works marvelously when handled correctly—depressingly if not.

Dr. Pat Love writes about these neurobiological effects:

“We don’t need a slew of studies to convince us that sexual energy runs high in the infatuated state, but neurologists report that the sexual euphoria accompanying infatuation is a direct result of the love cocktail.

“PEA (phenylethylamine, a naturally occurring, amphetamine-like neuro-transmitter) stimulates the libido, raising interest in sex. Dopamine makes us more sexually receptive by increasing our enjoyment of sex and making us want it again. Norepinephrine, which is largely responsible for that ‘swept away’ feeling of infatuation, acts like a shot of sexual speed as it hurls us into action.

“The one-two-three punch from the love potion explains why many times lovers go along for a while claiming, ‘We’re just friends’ and then wham!—They fall into the sexual abyss. The delightful influence of infatuation makes us dangerously inclined to make decisions we may later regret. It is important to realize that infatuation is merely the earliest stage of love. *Do not mistake this temporary power surge for a permanent condition, or confuse it with true love*” (*The Truth About Love*, 2001, pp. 30-31, emphasis added).

Touching, hugging and kissing can have powerful effects. If young people understand how the body works under these potent conditions, it can help them set boundaries to avoid triggering premarital temptations, thereby respecting their future mates and honoring God.

—Jerald Aust

we didn’t go here. I think that the temptations would not have been fair to either of us. As well, we had resolved that we did not want to feel guilt for anything that we did with or to each other in this area, so we kept away.”

Concluding advice

Summarizing her thoughts, Sarah K. said, “The decision to stay totally pure before marriage is . . . hard because of all the feelings humans have, but try to look at it in a big sense . . .

“Do you want to be guilty of defiling someone else’s special person? Do you want to feel guilty that you are defiled? Do you want your mate to have been close to sex with lots of others before you? The Golden Rule is ‘do unto others as you’d have them do unto you.’ So put it into practice, and not only will you be happier for it, but God will bless you!”

Sometimes being godly is the most challenging when you meet the person

you plan to marry. According to Cheryl: “When I did find the person that I felt I could marry someday, it was then that I had to be very careful. Small things can turn into big things very quickly. Comfort zones are quickly reached and

“When I did find the person that I felt I could marry someday, it was then that I had to be very careful. Small things can turn into big things very quickly.”

expanded when you are with someone you love and trust. My best advice is not to date exclusively until you find that person. Group dates with trusted friends can be a very fun way to get to know and spend time with someone you are interested in but with less pressure or temptation.”

Continuing, she said: “And when you are on a date with someone alone, it really helps to be careful not to put your-

self in a situation where you are alone and unseen for a long period of time. If you [stick to] lighter environments, you don’t have to come up with reasons to be uncomfortable if your physical limits don’t match up with his.”

Offering concluding advice to singles, Bill wrote: “Do not allow yourself to be alone, or at least alone in situations where sexual contact is possible and the privacy necessary to engage in it exists (i.e., parked cars, in a house or secluded room alone, in the woods or a wooded park, etc.). The temptation may just be too great . . . Think of physical contact the same way you might think about virginity. Once the line is crossed, there’s no going back. You cannot reverse the current ‘touch status’ you have with someone else (i.e., we’ve held hands, we’ve kissed, we’ve slept together, etc.).”

Kate put it this way: “Know yourselves and set limits wisely with this knowledge. Involve your parents if you can by asking them their opinion and/or letting them know your limits. Follow the limits that your parents set or advise. God gave them to you for a protection and commands you to honor them. If you disagree with their ideas, discuss this with them in a respectful way.

“Don’t let physical contact take over or lead in communication—it can feel good and when this happens, you may not know what it meant to either of you in the end . . . Use common sense. Don’t let feelings control your actions. Acknowledge feelings without serving them, or you will make miserable mistakes. Don’t

be engaged too long—it gets harder [to refrain from premarital intimacy] after you are more committed—but take enough time to talk about things that were too personal before . . . Physical contact is powerful. God made it so. Respectfully use it as a tool in His service.”

David Treybig is the managing editor for *Vertical Thought* and pastors United Church of God congregations in St. Petersburg and Tampa, Florida.

The Dating Debate

by Ken Treybig



From *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* to *I Gave Dating a Chance*, the books about dating in the Christian realm run the gamut, with all of them saying they have biblical backing for their approach. Which is truly right in God's eyes?

Dating in the United States and most other developed countries is in serious trouble. Don't misunderstand—the practice of dating is very much alive. The problem is what has happened as a result of current normal dating practices. Teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, emotional scars and a host of other problems often result from modern dating practices.

Beth Bailey's book, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, chronicles the dramatic changes that took place in the world of dating and courtship during the 20th century. As the title indicates, the auto-



mobile has played a part in those changes. By giving young people more mobility, one-on-one boy-girl contact has gone from a public almost family setting in the parents' home to a private and intimate setting. This often leads to sex before marriage in defiance of God's command about keeping sexual activity within the bounds of marriage (Exodus 20:14; 1 Corinthians 6:18).

God has consistently told His people to be different from the people around them—from His commands to ancient Israel to statements like the

With all the bad results, should a Christian give up on dating altogether? Or is there a better way?

one in 2 Corinthians 6:17. Christ said those who follow Him are the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world" (Matthew 5:13-14). He inspired Paul to call Christians lights that shine brightly in a crooked and perverse world (Philippians 2:15).

As dating practices from the 1960s on became more focused on physical intimacy before marriage, authors familiar with Scripture began to draw attention to the fact that modern dating practices were going against God's Word.

Joshua Harris grabbed a lot of attention with his best-selling book about kissing dating good-bye, published in 1997. In 2000 he wrote a sequel book after his

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To Date , or Not to Date ?

by Jaime Welch

There was a time in my life when I would have died before admitting that my parents had given me good advice. I can still remember that moment when I suddenly realized that my parents' advice could be a little extreme. I realized that enjoying certain TV sitcoms was not the next step to moral suicide, and that if I listened to rock 'n' roll it wouldn't cause my heart to uncontrollably beat off kilter.

I began to second-guess all the advice I was given all the time. Especially the "You'll be so much happier if you wait to date until you get a little older."

Even though I'm sure my parents had some hidden ulterior motive besides just wanting what was best for me (that was a joke if they happen to read this), I believe following this advice was beneficial to my overall happiness and sanity. Call me a traitor if you like, but I encourage all young teenagers to think twice before throwing themselves into superserious relationships.

The reason I'm saying this to you may be different from any other reasons you've heard before. I don't think hormones have to take over your body, "forcing" you to have sex before you know it. I don't believe that God expects you to wait to date until you've met "the one." Believe it or not, it was some crazy psychological theory I learned about in my college freshman psych class that made me thankful I had waited to "hook up" seriously—it was Erikson's theory of psychosocial development.

Erik Erikson (1902-1994) taught that throughout a human's life there are seven major life issues faced, each of the seven being the strongest at a certain time of life. Each issue is a struggle between two opposing ideas or forces. Before you can progress

to the next level you have to conquer the present level.

The issue we primarily struggle with as teenagers is Identity vs. Role Confusion (the crisis of "Who am I really?"). Erikson taught that until you have established your identity, you are not prepared to deal with the next issue, the primary struggle of young adulthood: Intimacy vs. Isolation (the crisis of "Who's the guy/girl for me?").

Erikson uses a lot of big words so this is going to be my interpretation of all his psychobabble. As teenagers we have this huge pull in one direction to fit in, and we also have this great desire to be our own person, to shock the world with our dazzlingly clever originality.

We are consumed with this struggle. In this search for ourselves we experiment. We dress differently from year to year, change our opinions constantly on politics, religion, etc. We hate ourselves often for getting suckered into doing things we know we shouldn't, for not standing up for ourselves, for focusing on copying others instead of being comfortable with being ourselves, being different.

When we are young we often take on different roles at different times to keep things easy and peaceful, just so we don't stand out as a little weird. Crazy changing moods and inclinations seem to sporadically take over, and sometimes they're good, sometimes not so good.

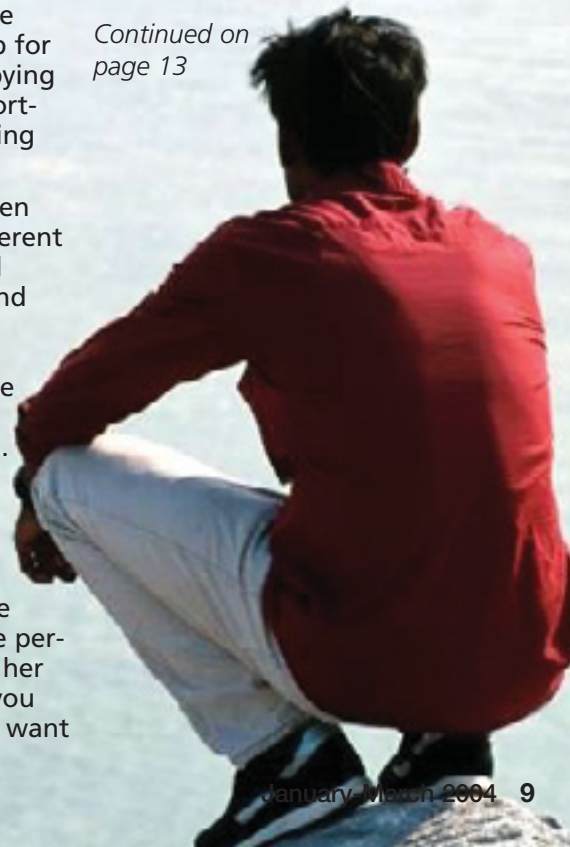
So why not attach to a "lover" at this time? Erik Erikson taught that since most teenagers are especially impressionable, a teen is more inclined toward becoming the person the "lover" wants him or her to be. He taught that unless you know who you are, what you want

and what you stand for, you cannot succeed in an intimate relationship. In fact, without your identity you cannot truly be intimate. Being intimate includes always telling the truth, making yourself vulnerable, not being afraid to disagree, and trusting yourself and your "lover."

When you are still at that stage where you desperately need people to approve of you to give you meaning and security, you are more apt to compromise truth and your own beliefs, needs and desires to make yourself more appealing to someone else. What a dangerous time to commit to loving someone!

Of course, there are high school sweethearts who have very meaningful relationships, and I do not mean to diminish the very memorable relationships we experience at a young age. All I am proposing to you is that before you let the allure of your emotions drag you into a "pretend marriage," where

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LETTERS FROM UKRAINE

LifeNets is a nonprofit organization that provides practical assistance to needy people throughout the world. A good portion of the financial support, exercise and medical equipment, computers and other donated items used in the "Revival" Center were provided by LifeNets. Victor Kubik and other volunteers travel overseas regularly to stay informed of the needs of those running humanitarian projects. For more information, visit www.lifenet.org.

by Katie Durham



There are life-changing opportunities that only come along once. LifeNets' Chernobyl Trip 2003 was one such opportunity. On Jan. 12, our team of seven set out from Indianapolis International on a weeklong trip that would change our perspective on life, the world and each other.

Jan. 13: We landed in the Ukrainian city of Kiev late this evening, and after we got through customs, we were met by Dr. Pasichnyk, director of the "Revival" Center for the Medical Social Rehabilitation of Disabled Children. The center is located about 40 miles east of the doomed Chernobyl nuclear power plant. The seven of us had already begun to bond by the time we landed in Kiev, some 20 hours after our first takeoff. We were tired, dirty and the only ones in sight who spoke English.

The airport in Kiev was small and intimidating, filled with uniformed personnel who looked like soldiers who directed our every move. I felt uncomfortable in our first moments in Ukraine, but when we walked through the customs gate and saw the gracious smile on the doctor's face, it was the last time any of us felt any awkwardness or inhospitality.

It took us about three hours to get to the rehabilitation center in the neighboring province of Chernihev. As chance would have it, we arrived on the eve of the Ukrainian new year, and although it was getting late, the festivities in the town were just beginning. Holidays are celebrated by the Julian calendar, which is 13 days behind the Western calendar.

When we arrived at the center, the staff was waiting to begin their celebration, not only for the new year, but also for the "good friends" the new year had brought. We were greeted with a program they had been preparing the entire day before—with gypsies, costumes, dancing, singing and Ukrainian folk songs. Even the doctor joined in the dancing, and soon they invited us to join them. After the program was over, we sat down to our first dinner in Chernihev where we were able to get better acquainted with the doctor, his wife, Natasha, and the rest of the center's staff. The food, along with the company, was wonderful, but we were all tired and ready for bed.

As soon as dinner was over, we were taken to Dr. Pasichnyk's apartment building where we would be staying for the rest of our journey. Dr. and Mrs. P., as we affectionately grew to call them, had an apartment next door to their daughter, Anna, and son-in-law, Valera. The men took root with the doctor and his wife, while we women settled in with Anna, Valera and their 4-year-old son, Georgie. They had a small apartment that the three of them shared with their grandma, whom they called "Baba."

One of the first impressions I had of life in Ukraine was the inconvenience of everyday living. The entire city runs from the same water supply, and the hot water is turned off at night. There were no hot baths before bed, just two tubs of cold water beside the sink in the bathroom that were used for brushing teeth and washing face and hands. But a hot bath was the last thing on my mind that night. They had set up beds in the living room and set out juice and cookies for us on the desk. It was obvious to all of us that they had given



us their best. It had been more than 24 hours since any of us had slept, and bed had never felt so good before that night.

Jan. 14: Today was a full day! The first thing we did was eat breakfast. While we ate, Dr. P. and his wife told us the story of the Chernobyl disaster and how he and his wife founded the Center for Rehabilitation. In a way, it was a sad story—about their failing government and poor economy—but he's done a wonderful thing here. He's a very respected man in the city of Chernihev and considered a pioneer. He took us on a tour of the center, and we met all the children.

It was the first time since we arrived that we were able to get out and see the city. We visited an art museum and ancient Orthodox churches and took a walk to a place called "the Twelve Cannons." It's a park in a city that's set on a hill, and I could see an entire village from the top. The falling snow against the leafless, black trees gave everything a black-and-white feel, and with the train rolling along a bridge in the background, I felt like I was in an old war movie. But it was good to see a city for what it really was and not as a tourist attraction.

It occurred to me that, although the seven of us had known each other for years, this was the first time we were really learning about one another. Before the trip, I knew but little more than just their names and familiar faces. Yet by the second day of the trip, we had already formed a bond that will last a lifetime.

Each of us brought something different to the group. Mr. Kubik, of course, was our communication link and the man we looked to for his example. Mr. McClure and his son Jonathan provided our daily dose of laughter. Mr. Peine, I began to see, was not only a father figure to me, but to all of us. And of course, Katie and Debbie Shabi were instant friends and the only female companions on the journey. I was a little disappointed in myself that I hadn't gotten to know these wonderful people before—and they had been there all along.

Back at the center, dinner was just starting to be prepared. I decided to see if there was anything I could help with in the kitchen, and of course, the Ukrainian women said no, but I stayed anyway. There was an English translator who was visiting for the day and I got a chance to talk with all the ladies about their lives as women in the Ukraine. They talked about their husbands' annoying (but endearing!) habits, their children and being a woman in the workplace. We spoke a different language, but we

were all speaking about familiar things. After talking with these wonderful women, it was so obvious to see that they are loving and dedicated wives, magnificent conversationalists, gracious hosts, compassionate mothers, loyal friends and hard workers who labor without complaint. They made me want to be more like them, and they could serve as wonderful teachers to our women in America.

Jan. 15: We woke up early to be on the road before the sun came up this morning and drove for four hours to Chernobyl. Normally, it's only a one-hour journey, but you have to cross through six miles of Belarus to get there. Since relations between the United States and Belarus are a bit strained, we were not able to get a transit visa through Belarus and had to go three hours out of the way to get to the closed nuclear power plant. Since our arrival, we had been hearing about Chernobyl and the tragic disaster that affected so many people's lives. Now, we were going to be able to see it.

No one is allowed within 25 miles of the power station, and passes are usually given only to scientists and journalists. You have to pass through three checkpoints to get to the actual town where the people lived when the disaster occurred. We were only able to go because Dr. P. is so respected there. He was able to get us passes, which had to be signed by the mayor and other influential people. Just beyond our last checkpoint were the gates to Chernobyl. As they opened, we drove into what was called "the Dead Zone," the area surrounding the reactor site that still harbors radioactivity.

Our guide, whose name was Yuriy, gave us some history about the disaster. On April 26, 1986, one of four reactors at Chernobyl exploded. While thousands of people in the immediate area were evacuated, the government did not let the world know that anything was wrong until May 6. They didn't want to ruin the upcoming May Day celebration, so for days the people living and working in the surrounding areas were going about their lives, walking in the contaminated air, breathing radioactive dust and allowing their children to play in the streets where radiation was present. Many firefighters trying to extinguish the flames of the explosion died. Doctors' offices were filled with people who had mysterious burns on their bodies. Pregnant women later gave birth to babies with severe defects and disabilities.

Our tour guide then took us to the reactor site and walked us through Pripjat, a ghost town about a mile away in which 45,000 people once lived. We

Photo: Victor Kubik



walked around Pripyat and were able to go into one of the deserted apartment buildings. Everything was abandoned; only scattered furniture and pictures were left. We then walked to a park that had become overgrown with moss. Carousels, bumper cars and a play set were rusted and the paint was peeling off. We were in a state of awe. These used to be symbols of laughter and innocence, and now they stood in ruin and decay. It made me think of what the world might look like closer to the end of the age.

We also saw a nursery in the town. It was an old brick building that, like everything else, had been overtaken by weeds. Inside there were several small rooms down a concrete hallway, with one main room on the end. All the windows had been broken out and the concrete floors were cracked. There were wrought iron beds and furniture scattered around the rooms. Books, toys, wooden blocks and shoes that weren't even the size of my palm were lying in ruin on the floors.

In the corner of one room, there was a pink, stuffed, dirty little bunny on a pile of concrete, and lying next to the bunny was a gas mask. The one thought that kept replaying in my mind was that some of these children died. It was just too much for me, and I couldn't hold back the tears. I was so overwhelmed. I've seen movies in which hundreds of innocent people die in a tragic catastrophe, but standing there, seeing the aftermath with my own

“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

eyes, it seemed very real. I thought about Revelation 21:4-11 and the future time of restoration.

Jan. 16: After our usual morning routine of breakfast at the center, we walked, in freezing weather, to the market place in Chernihiv. The market place looked more like a festival than a convenience store. It's not inside a building. Rather it's out in the open, and everyone runs his or her own stand, selling everything from oranges to books, from meat and fish to ladies' pantyhose.

Later that evening, we all got dressed and went out to dinner at a formal restaurant. There were so many people there, including the vice mayor and some well-known doctors. The atmosphere was so formal—

quite a change from the rest of the town. It was funny to me that Valera thought we were used to fancy dinners and expensive foods. If he had known the truth, it was the first time I had ever been to an expensive restaurant or tasted raw salmon.

Soon after the meal began, it was time to give the traditional rounds of toasts, which are the cornerstone of every Ukrainian meal. The usual order begins with toasting the host or the event, then continues with the second, honoring the children. The third toast is always given by the men in honor of the women, and the fourth toast honors the men and is given by the women.

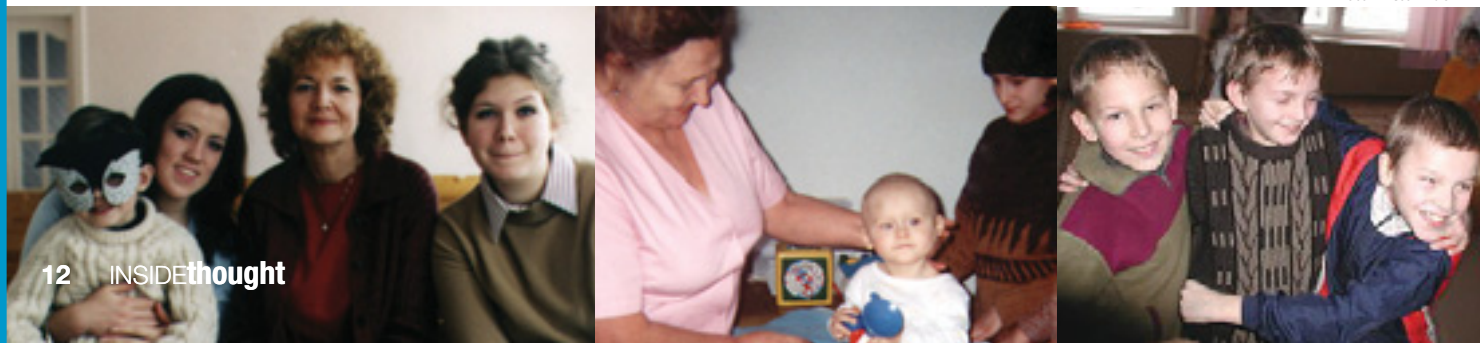
Jan. 17: Today we were finally able to work with the children! We've been able to meet with them for little bits at a time, but our schedules have been so busy that today is the first time we've been able to spend the entire day with them. We played games and sang songs, and the differing language was not as big a barrier as I thought it would be. When we couldn't speak to one another, we laughed, and then we understood what the other was saying. It's funny how easy it was.

Jan. 18: We held a church service at the center today, and all the children and staff members stayed. After each one of the songs, the children would clap their hands in applause for us, and Mr. Kubik told us later that they thought we were putting on a concert for them. Several of the children brought presents for us. We all exchanged hugs and said our good-byes. I hated to think about how hard it would be to leave. The Ukrainian people had put away their preconceptions of us as Americans and welcomed us with open arms.

Before we went to bed, we said more good-byes and cried a little. The next day at the airport, I knew one of the most incredible experiences of our lives was ending. Yet the people I met taught me lessons that will stay with me for life.

Among many others, one of the most important lessons I learned was that you don't have to have a lot of material wealth to understand what's really important in life. Those we met taught me to be accepting of everyone, and not be judgmental of others. They taught us lessons of hospitality, respect, genuine love for other people and passion for a greater cause. I hope to see these wonderful people again someday. But most of all, I hope to keep them, and the lessons they taught us, in my heart always. **VT**

Photo: Victor Kubik



To Date...

Continued from page 9

you try to pretend you know more about yourself and life than you really do, ask yourself, "Is this me?" Extend your present situation; see yourself with your current "somebody" for an extended period of time, and if you get an uncomfortable gagging feeling, be secure enough to go it alone. Experiencing life is always exciting, and when you are single it just means you have more time to develop yourself, make more friends and date around so that you have a better idea of what you need. There is one question I ask myself often. "If I met the one for me, would I be the one for him?" And, well, as old as I am, as old as I get, I know I'll never be quite right; so if I find myself dumped or alone I can always improve myself for the next disaster . . . oops, I mean, relationship.

One final thought to leave you

with: Erik Erikson taught that you build on your identity your whole life, so don't think you have to have it all figured out before you take a chance at life, at love or at any obstacle or challenge. A big factor in identity is acceptance. It's seeing yourself as who you really are and not committing suicide because you realize you may not turn out to be an Einstein or a Shakespeare or a Britney Spears (ahh!!!).

Someone told me that if I included a warm and fuzzy personal experience story, you all would pay more attention, so here it goes. Once upon a time, I met a handsome, charming prince who swept me off my feet and carried me to a magic world. It seemed like he was the answer to all my questions and all my problems. I thought nothing could go wrong for us, that he would be my everything. So I forgot about the real world with all its real people, because I thought I would stay in the magic fantasy world forever. I was wrong. As we grew older the prince and I drifted

apart because a magic fantasy world is difficult to maintain. One day I met this normal guy. He was sweet and smart and funny, but he wasn't quite a handsome, charming prince. Sometimes he was insensitive or rude or boring. But on the other hand, he wasn't afraid to live in the real world, and he helped me see that the real me was even more desirable than the fantasy me. He was my best friend. The charming prince couldn't compare to the best friend, because I could never be myself with the prince.

The more I stayed with the best friend, the more he seemed like a charming prince. I realized that the charming prince was just a normal guy too, but that I had built him up to be someone he wasn't, just as he had done with me. When you are living in a fantasy world, and you're looking for a charming prince or princess, you will easily find one. But one day you grow up, and the real world is all around you. Are you waiting for a fantasy, or searching for a best friend? **VT**

Up to You

compiled by Andrea Pacelli

The only limit to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today. Let us move forward with strong and active faith.

—Franklin D. Roosevelt

All things are possible until they are proved impossible—even the impossible may only be so as of now.

—Pearl S. Buck

A complete reevaluation takes place in your physical and mental being when you've laughed and had some fun.

—Catherine Ponder

Great works are performed not by strength but by perseverance.

—Samuel Johnson

To accomplish great things we must not only act, but also dream; not only plan, but also believe.

—Anatole France

There is not enough darkness in the world to extinguish the light of one small candle.

—Spanish Proverb

Some people merely dream of success, while others wake up and work hard at it with God.

—Anthony Pacelli

DATING OUTSIDE THE FAITH

by
Cindy
Gore
Harper

Why can't I just go out, for fun?! Just for a movie? It's not like we're going to get married." I was so frustrated with my parents. This was the first guy that I would actually enjoy getting to know better. How embarrassing it was to have to turn him down because my parents wouldn't let me date outside the Church. I could not understand it. There were good guys in "the world." A few of them really seemed to be of higher character than some guys I knew in the Church. I felt this was my decision to make.

This was not the first time my parents and I had disagreed over this, and it was not to be the last. Somehow they always won, and I never dated anyone outside the Church through high school. I did go on a lot of group outings with friends from church, and also spent time alone with guys in the Church. Camps, Feasts and big church activities were the highlights of my high school years. But for a long time I never completely understood why my parents kept me from dating in high school.

An older friend of mine shut down my main argument one evening during my senior year. I was complaining to her about my parents' decision relating to dating guys in high school. I told her about a few guys that seemed awesome at my high school. They seemed to have very high morals and were smart, kind and interesting. I told her that there were

some guys "in the Church" that I could not respect because of their attitudes or their hypocrisy in going to church but not living God's way. I told her: I have not found anyone in the Church that I could see myself marrying—and besides that—what are the chances? There's one guy my age in my area, but he is more like a best friend than a marriage candidate. Church sizes had decreased, church activities were few and far between, and young people were all so spread out. How can you date someone who lives three states away?

I had so many objections and I was at a loss for understanding how one could possibly find a mate against all those odds. I pondered aloud, "What if God has chosen for me someone from outside the Church?" She calmly but deliberately asked, "Why would God do that to you?"

She helped me to see what I already knew but did not want to face. We should trust God, looking to Him, not our own reasoning. He wants us to be happy and fulfilled in marriage. If we ask Him in faith, He will find the right person for us who will be compatible with our beliefs. Marrying outside the Church brings with it many problems to overcome from the start—problems relating to worship, prayer, the Sabbath, Holy Days, Feast times, holidays,

children, foods and more. God does not want us to bring upon ourselves more challenges than are already there by choosing a mate who does not live His way. It was hard for me to accept, but I finally did understand and commit myself in faith that God would choose someone for me in the Church.

It's not hard to date someone outside the Church, but dating is the precursor to marriage. I did not want to start a relationship that I could not finish. I did not want to date someone that I could not marry. It was not worth the pain that it would cause that other person and me. I decided to stick with this decision as I started college. I feel this is one of the best decisions I have made.

During college, when I was out with a group of friends, I met the man that I was eventually to marry, and he wasn't in the Church. Daniel soon became a great friend. He taught me to swing dance, we studied together, and sometimes

A few guys seemed awesome at my high school. They seemed to have very high morals and were smart, kind and interesting.

we had lunch or dinner together. We didn't hang out with each other frequently, but we kept in touch and would talk and spend some time together. After a while he told me that he was interested in me, but I told him right away

that it would not work, and I was interested in someone in my church. Over time we talked about how important it was to me to marry someone of the same faith. It was very hard for him to understand, but after much discussion he came to respect my decision and remained a great friend.

Over our many talks we discussed music, world events, history, travel and even religion. He asked a lot of pointed questions about my faith. I answered his questions as best as I could, striving to show how the Bible was the foundation of my beliefs. I never tried to convert him. I knew that was God's job for those that He chooses. All I could do was represent His truth the best that I could.

One day I mentioned our church Web site so that he could learn more about the Church. I never thought that God would use me to call him. I'd had friends in the past who seemed interested but never would follow through. We live a very different way of life, and it is very difficult for most people to accept the way God commands. One day he said he would like to come to church with me. I was happy but as always, very cautious. I was afraid he might be coming only because of me. It made me very wary about getting too close in our relationship, and I remained steadfast in my resolve that my future mate would live God's way.

Daniel did come to church. He came again a few weeks later. He asked fewer questions of me, because now he could find the answers himself. Daniel began to follow the food laws, keep the Sabbath, attend on Holy Days and study the Bible more. As he came into the Church, I struggled within myself. I tried to be discerning and cautious in case it was not a genuine and long-lasting conversion. I prayed often that God would do His will and give me the strength and wisdom to see and accept that will. If Daniel was not being called, I wanted to know as soon as possible. If he was, I wanted to know that too. Over all this time I had begun to truly love him, but I knew I could not be happy long-term if we did not share the same faith.

Over time, and through many trials, Daniel showed that his con-

version was true and his dedication to God unwavering. It was after one particularly severe trial with his parents that I felt I could be pretty sure that he was serious. We became closer. He attended his first Feast alone in France, as he was studying there for a fall semester. The fact that he went by himself was another test that he passed. I began to really believe that God was truly calling him.

Since those early days he has remained true to God and His way. We attended ABC together in 2003, where he made the final decision to counsel for baptism. At that point we knew for sure. We married in the fall of 2003 and are now incredibly happy living God's way. We pray together, worship together and, one day, will bring up our children in the truth together. **VT**



SO, WHAT WOULD I TELL YOU?

I learned many lessons in this relationship, and I would like to pass along a few of those to you:

- Never assume that God is calling the person that you are interested in. It is safer to assume that He isn't, so that you maintain your distance in the relationship until you can be absolutely sure. This is hard, but possible if you pray about it and commit yourself to this decision before you are in the situation.
- Maintain the friendship, but don't let it progress. Don't start something that you can't finish. It is very hard to break away from someone you've gotten close to but who does not come into the Church. During this time you could miss out on other great converted people. It is possible, if you make the choice, to end up with the wrong person and miss out on someone more fitted for you. Do your best to let God choose someone who is just right for you.
- Never use a dating relationship as a means to convert someone. Some guys or girls might come to church and not eat pork or keep the Sabbath just to be with you—if they believe that will keep your relationship going. It is not necessarily true conversion. God makes that decision and calling, not us. I have a close friend whose boyfriend felt so strongly about her that he said he would "join the Church" and be baptized for her. He would live the way of life that she chose. She recognized the trap and made the right decision, even though it was the hardest thing she had to do in her life.
- Go to camp, go to the Feast, go to big events in God's Church and *have fun!* Make a lot of friends and trust God to show you the right one.

Usually after a calamity, one hears the words, "Where was God in all this? Why didn't He prevent it?" While some 95 to 98 percent of the people in the United States profess a belief in God, only around 40 percent attend any church regularly. There is a great disparity in what is professed and what is practiced.

Where does faith come in this process? Without faith one cannot understand or please God (Hebrews 11:6). Jesus Christ said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16). The apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "By grace you have been saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). So faith is vital to a person's future!

What is faith and what do you need to believe? The Bible shows faith comes in different forms. One faith has to do with the set of beliefs a person holds. Some may ask the question, "What faith do you profess?" Jude 3 exhorts Christians to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." He is referring to the set of doctrines we are to believe.

A second type of faith has to do with a faith that is the fruit of the Holy Spirit—which God promotes and produces within a person. Galatians 5:22 lists one of the fruits that the Spirit produces in our lives as faith or faithfulness. This is a faith that is supported by God's Spirit.

The gift of faith is the third type. This is found in 1 Corinthians 12 in which Paul explains about gifts that the Spirit gives. I understand this to mean an extra measure of faith to see one through difficult times. Have you ever seen individuals come through major trials and wondered how they were able to do so? The gift of faith may have been the source of their strength.

The final aspect of faith is that which brings one to Jesus Christ. In the Gospel of John we read of an encounter that Jesus had with the Jews. They were looking for faults in Jesus so they might accuse Him.



by Gary Antion

He taught them some things; and as a result, many believed in Him. He showed that their initial faith was not complete when He said

"... If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

Faith is defined by the apostle James as that which has two components. The intellectual and the active are both sides of real faith. If one only believes in his mind, it is not good enough. The believer must also show his intellectual faith by his actions. James uses the

example of Abraham who not only believed God would and could fulfill His promises and take care of his family, but also demonstrated his conviction in following God by being willing to do whatever God said, however difficult it was (compare James 2:14-23; Genesis 22:1-12; Hebrews 11:17-19).

Some basics are essential to believe. We must believe in God (Romans 1:20). He is the One who has a plan of salvation for us. We must believe in Jesus Christ as God's Son who came into the world to live a perfect life and to die for our sins (John 3:16). We must believe in God's Word as inspired and as a guidebook for our salvation (Matthew 4:4; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; John 5:39; 1 John 2:3-4).

We must believe God and His teachings if we are to recognize where we have gone astray and know to turn from unrighteousness to God's righteousness. It involves repentance or change. But, prior to repentance, one needs to have faith! Jesus showed both were essential in Mark 1:15.

So, faith has four aspects: the set of beliefs, the fruit of the Spirit, the gift of the Spirit and one's own belief to bring him or her to God. Take the time to establish in your mind and heart firm reasons to believe that God exists. Take time to really believe that Jesus was the Christ and that He died for each one of us. Take the time to form sound reasons to believe that the Bible is God's Word for humankind. When you need extra help, ask God for His strengthening so that you may believe from the heart (Mark 9:23-24). The Ethiopian eunuch's response to the statement "if you believe with all your heart" was a convicted "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." (Acts 8:37). Philip then baptized him and the eunuch was under the grace of God and on the way to the Kingdom of God.

May God give you the resolve, conviction and courage to seek to believe in Him and His ways (intellectually and actively—"I know" and "I do") with all your heart! **VT**

Dating Debate

Continued from page 8

courtship and marriage, titled *Boy Meets Girl*. As the back cover of the book says: “*Boy Meets Girl* is an honest, romantic, and refreshingly biblical look at relationships. It’s about dating with a purpose.” So despite what might appear to be a

1 It leads to intimacy but not necessarily to commitment. When couples eventually break up, they simply move on to another similar relationship.

2 It tends to skip the friendship stage of a relationship. Friendship can be described as two people walking side by side toward a common goal or interest. Typically dating tends to focus on

attention is focused on steady dating.

6 It can cause discontentment with God’s gift of singleness. Some might disagree with the choice of phrasing, but the focus is that being single means you have opportunities for growth, learning and service that will be more difficult if not impossible when married. The author urges people to use their time as a single to its maximum capacity.

The dating debate is about rejecting the kind of dating that is so common in society.

7 It creates an artificial environment for evaluating another person’s character. Being fun on a date doesn’t necessarily say a lot about how a person will be as a husband or wife. Real-life settings around family and other friends show much more of what a person is really like.

The rest of the book focuses on how to avoid these negative effects. It focuses on godly love. Harris accurately points out that Christ said if we love Him, we will obey Him. So true love always expresses itself as obedience to Christ and service to others. In contrast to that, the focus of defective dating is usually gratifying self and going against God’s commands concerning righteousness and purity in our lives. There is a chapter on putting past mistakes behind and realizing that even if you have made mistakes, you can live a pure life from now on.

There are also suggestions on how to keep your focus on being singles and truly friends in a “couples” and “just do it” world. The final section includes some thoughts on what really matters in a life partner—the character and attitude issues that will be a blessing to one’s spouse. The book ends with a chapter encouraging readers to be sure their stories of how they came to marriage are ones they will be proud to tell.

So the dating debate is not really about giving up on dating completely. It’s about giving up going out exclusively with one person until you are ready to marry. It’s about being sure that your dating practices are godly and done at the right time and in the right manner. It’s about rejecting the kind of dating that is so common in society and making sure that you follow God’s instruction about purity and holiness in everything you do.

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prejudice against any kind of dating by the first book’s title, the book is really about avoiding the *wrong* kind of dating.

So if his first book is not really against all dating, what’s the point? Was it just a catchy title for marketing purposes? Perhaps a quick review of the book will help.

The first chapter deals with the importance of doing what is good, not just doing whatever feels good. Having a series of short-term relationships that include physical intimacy not only means you give away part of your heart to many partners before marriage, it also sets a person up to view marriage as a potential short-term relationship instead of the lifelong commitment God intended (Matthew 19:6).

Chapter 2 gets to the heart of what’s wrong with the typical dating scene by focusing on the negative tendencies of defective dating—that is, dating the way most people have done it for decades. He points out that the wrong kind of dating can have the following negative effects:

being a couple with the goal of intimacy.

3 It often mistakes a physical relationship for love. A later chapter talks about looking up “love” in God’s dictionary to see what it should entail. Sex does not equal love, yet it is often mistaken for love. The excitement of the physical relationship is intoxicating.

4 It often isolates a couple from other vital relationships. Many authors have noted the importance of making a lot of friends of both sexes while young so you have a good idea of what others are like. Often when a breakup comes, other friends have been or will be alienated, leaving the former couple isolated and lonely at a time when they really need friends.

5 In many cases it distracts young adults from their primary responsibility of preparing for the future. The most obvious thought might be of higher education, but even developing skills and talents can be stunted when one’s



What's the general goal of much or most of dating today? That's right.

It's all over the sitcoms, lots of the "chick flicks," R-rated movies and conversations among teens and young adults in school hallways and social hangouts. There's just one primary message about what too

smoking, drinking and illegal drug use with the related criminal paths that can lead to? That's a crummy kind of dating.

Two questions

Now what about you? Consider two questions. First, what kind of dating does the loving God who made you expect you to do? Correct—a better kind

native has yet to be found."

Or ever will be. That's why God made us male and female. Marriage and family are God's way. The book of Proverbs frames the beauty of dating and true romantic love like this: "There are three things which are too wonderful for me, yes, four which I do not understand." The fourth one, per-

communicate with. They were silent on the silent type. *Maturity on demand.* Fun-loving is fine, but foolish is out. *Chivalrous, respectful and eager to serve.* A fellow who opens doors for them and keeps his armor of honor well shined.

Appropriate self-confidence with a strong work ethic, finding joy in his work. When this



by Randy Stiver

True Dating:

What Guys & Girls Want

many guys and girls want of each other—and it's not good conversation, fine friendship or eventual marriage.

What's the endgame of wrong and promiscuous dating? Right again. Ragged and jaded emotions; sinfully violated bodies (both genders); a haunting, sad-eyed, brokenhearted, guilty conscience; premarital pregnancies ending in either the weary and lonely existence of single-mom-misery or tiny aborted lives snuffed out before they can even cry for help.

Need we even mention sexually transmitted diseases and the statistical tendency of sexually active young people to engage in other risky behavior like

of dating than that described above. Second, what as a guy do you want in a girl, or what as a girl do you want in a guy?

Remember, whether you're in your teens or 20s (or later), dating often leads to marriage. Right dating provides you the opportunity in the meantime to build good character and polish your personality as you get to know a variety of people, until ultimately you find your own true love.

The most famous British leader of the 20th century, Sir Winston Churchill, observed it this way: "Where does family start? It starts with a young man falling in love with a girl. No superior alter-

haps most wonderful of all, was the way of a man with a young woman (Proverbs 30:18-19).

So what should a guy want to see in a girl, and what should a girl want to see in a guy? This reporter recently posed that question to a group of more than 20 teens and young adults, mostly singles with a handful of young married couples. Their answers proved most insightful and instructive.

Ladies first: What girls want in guys

Gentleness and kindness, genuineness and sincerity. No interest here in the broody, hot-tempered and rough or the obsessively jealous. *Easy to*

kind of young man matures, he can and will provide well for his wife—and children. That's a serious concern on girls' minds, guys—girls who are thinking, that is. *Self-control with money, toys and temper.* There are few things worse than being shackled to a broke, hot-tempered goof-off.

Patience with women and with womanly behavior they don't fully understand. This is very important when dating and in marriage. *Not self-centered; interested in all types of people.* This is the kind of guy girls love to be around. *Thoughtful and appreciative—one "thank you" goes a long way.* The females of the species get far

too little credit for all they do, gentlemen.

A positive attitude when facing the challenges and trials of life. This is a sign and act of leadership. Tamed down heroism in the daily details of life. This means he brings flowers, sends cards, etc. Creative attentiveness; he knows what to do and when (or at least takes such

control. She adroitly resolves difficulties and keeps her cool. Graceful in posture; fit and strong. Did you know that, all the girls' sports programs notwithstanding, American girls statistically stop exercising at age 13? Guys can't help but notice the fit and strong ideal girl/woman of Proverbs 31:17. A good sense of style and

and who doesn't take herself too seriously is the kind of girl that guys are drawn to. *Strong in the faith and dedicated to God and His ways.* High spiritual standards may not make you popular with a lot of fellows, but they're not the ones you want to date anyway.

Then a funny thing happened in our discussion—the girls

because communications experts say that the average man speaks about 15,000 words a day, but the average woman intones closer to 30,000. So speak on, ladies.

More of what girls want

A good cook and a good eater. Lassies like lads who won't starve when they're on their



Like a perfect rose blooming in a pock-marked battlefield is the fine art of true dating. Most of what you've learned about dating in popular culture is like the battlefield. Want to keep your emotions, body and spirit flying safely above the bombs bursting in air? Then read on!

advice well). *Takes initiative in making decisions.* Remember, fellows, God made the man to be the primary leader of the family (see Ephesians 5).

Then came the guys' turn to comment on girls.

What guys want in girls

Honesty with diplomacy—a girl who kindly speaks her mind. *Uncomplicated, and says what she means.* Too much feminine mystique can be a mistake. *Thinks for herself and is not clingy.* A girl who fosters intelligent opinions and has the confidence and poise to pose them.

Gracefully polite and courteous. Manners matter to good guys. *Graceful in damage con-*

modesty in dress. Bugs and guys that sting are attracted by bare skin; not the kind of guy you want to win. *Cleanliness in person and housekeeping.*

This reveals much about who you are inside (and it applies to guys too!). *Empathetic; notices the needs of others and is willing to serve.* This is the essence of Christian love for fellow man. *Desire to teach children.* Remember, dating eventually leads to marriage, which leads to kids.

Good cook and good driver. Trust guys to think of the practical. *Joyful, happy personality with a good sense of humor; a complete person.* The girl who is balanced, comfortable with herself, emotionally healthy

decided that they needed to add to their list of what they want to see in guys. Perhaps it's not surprising, though,

own and who can lend a hand in the kitchen. *Emotionally secure, with absolute trust and*

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IN THE NEWS:

Do You Attend a Small Church?

Fifty percent of all churches in the United States (and there are some 350,000 of them) have 100 or fewer members, according to The Hartford Institute. One fourth have 50 or fewer.

Today, many teens are finding e-mail and IM effective ways to keep in touch with others who share and support their Christian values, especially when there are few or no other teens in their local congregation. Attending United Youth Camps and other regional church activities are effective ways of building relationships with other "church kids."



How Do You Recover From a Costly Mistake?

When a broken bone heals, the body creates an area of increased density and strength at the site of the break. Godly repentance from sexual sins can strengthen your life.

by **Bonnie Greider**

At a Christian Living class at Camp Pinecrest in Missouri last summer, campers and staff were discussing the topic of morality and dating. There was a great deal of conversation regarding the need to remain pure and chaste while dating. Most agreed that young men and women should enter the marriage union without having engaged in premarital sexual activity.

But what if you already have? What if you have already had sexual relationships in the past? Maybe you have had a child out of wedlock or an abortion. Are you no longer capable of a happy, healthy marriage relationship? How does God see you? How do you see yourself?

No one can argue that the age in which we live isn't filled with promiscuity. Sexual activity and conversation punctuate virtually every prime-time television show. Movies, music and even video games are filled with the subject. It is no wonder that premarital sexual activity among young people occurs, even within the Church of God.

God allows us to make choices. Sometimes we make good ones, sometimes we don't. Some decisions we make have ramifications that last for a few seconds, while others last a lifetime. If God loves us so much, why doesn't He stop us from making decisions that could jeopardize our future happiness? Why doesn't He intervene and keep us from engaging in activities that will affect the rest of our lives?

As a mother of four children, I realize how difficult being a parent can be. Children learn things in different ways and stages. I vividly recall one adventuresome child who was determined that she could jump off of the top bunk bed and not get hurt. After several admonitions, I left the room knowing exactly what would occur within the next few seconds. Thump. Then came the yelp of pain that I was expecting.

I quickly reentered the room, comforted her and reminded her that sometimes it is better to listen to the voice of experience than to experiment on her own. However, it took two more attempts before she got the point. Sometimes we learn from a soft voice of admonition, but when we refuse to hear it, we pay a penalty. The lesson

learned from firsthand experience may be a great teacher, but it is also the one that causes the most pain.

Not all of us are willing to take admonition from a cautionary word of correction. Some do, but many do not. When we look at the world around us, we see people dating anybody they please. We see unmarried people holding hands, kissing and engaging in sexual activity. These people appear to be happy. They have somebody who makes them feel wanted and needed. Why wouldn't this be a good thing? Why would God not allow us to engage in something that feels so good? If He loves us so much, why does He forbid us from taking part in some activities that seem to be so enjoyable?

Have you ever babysat a small child, maybe a 4- or 5-year-old? If you opened the cupboard or refrigerator and asked the child what he would like to eat for dinner, would he choose steamed broccoli with a side of sautéed carrots? Or would he zero in on the ice cream? Little children don't know what is good for them. They know what they want and what they like. Older children, and even adults, are often the same. There are things God has designed that are good for us but other things that would cause



Q&A

Q. Why are there so many denominations in Christianity? How can I know which one is right?

A. Jesus Christ prophesied that there would be great religious diversity in those who claim to be Christian and represent Him. Matthew 24:4-5 says, "And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying [that] I am the Christ; and shall deceive many" (KJV).

As for the existence of the Church that Jesus founded in A.D. 31 on the Day of Pentecost, Jesus Himself promised that this

church would always exist. Specifically, He said, "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). Therefore, God's Church does exist somewhere.

The Bible explains that this church will accurately reflect the teachings and message of Jesus Christ. It will be preaching His true gospel in the world (Matthew 28:19; 24:14). By comparing what the Bible says God's Church will be like with the churches we see around us, we can discover where God's Church is today. Because this is a foundational subject that deserves much time and attention, we suggest that you write for our free booklet, *The Church Jesus Built*, or read it online at <http://www.ucg.org/booklets/CJ/>. This booklet addresses these important questions in much greater detail.

If you have a question, e-mail us at info@verticalthought.org



What if you have already had sexual relationships in the past? Maybe you have had a child out of wedlock or an abortion. Are you no longer capable of a happy, healthy marriage relationship? How does God see you? How do you see yourself?

So what if you have already engaged in sexual activities outside of marriage? What does the future hold for you? How can you have a right relationship with a future mate and with God?

One of my children broke a bone in her hand playing sports. When the doctor was putting the cast on her hand, he told me that the bone would heal in about six weeks or so and that the place where the break had occurred would become the strongest part of her hand. When a bone heals, the body creates an area of increased density and strength at the site of the break. However, if an X-ray of the location is taken, there will always be a deformity in that spot. In other words, there would always be a scar.

When we break God's laws, there are always scars. Sometimes they are not visible to those around us and sometimes they may not show up for some time, but they are still there. They may be physical, but they could also be emotional or psychological. However, as with a healed bone, areas that were previously flaws can become our greatest strengths.

Learning lessons the hard way is painful but often very effective. The humble repentance that ensues when a critical lesson is learned can be lifelong and profound.

Once this type of true, godly repentance is reached, the action that led to it is seldom repeated. Not only that, but one who has had to learn this way is often a very

miserable in a way that we may not be able to see.

For this reason, God has made some things out of bounds at all times and other things out of bounds only at certain stages in our lives. In the case of sex, He has created an environment where the right relationship at the right time of life is a beautiful blessing. When engaged in at the wrong time, sexual activity causes problems and difficulties—sometimes with results that last for a lifetime. AIDS, pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases are only a few of those effects.

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Send your e-mail questions or comments to info@verticalthought.org or write to our office nearest you from the list below. The United Church of God, publisher of *Vertical Thought*, has congregations and ministers throughout the United States and many other countries. If you would like to contact a minister or to find locations and times of services, contact our office nearest you or access our Web site at www.ucg.org/churches.

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effective teacher helping others avoid the same sin. But how does God view us after we have made such a mistake and repented of it? The Bible shows us some examples of how God, the ultimate loving Parent, receives one of His children who comes to Him in a humble and repentant attitude. The story of the “prodigal” son, found in Luke 15, is a sterling example of how a loving father welcomed his repentant son back.

Another beautiful example of a love story is found in Ezekiel 16. In this account, God speaks of finding His bride as an infant, cast away to die. He took her in and protected her, providing everything she needed to grow into a beautiful woman. But her pride and vanity caused her to defile herself with other lovers and to commit fornication.

However, in time she became ashamed of her actions and repented. God then took her back and renewed His covenant with her. We know that this is speaking about His people, Israel, who rejected His laws and became involved in the political and religious system of the world. God was foretelling their repentance and His loving forgiveness.

The marriage union is called a great

mystery that symbolizes Christ and the Church. Jesus Christ will come to marry His Bride at His return. His Bride has not always been faithful to Him and has had to repent. The blood of Christ was shed for our sins, and those whom He has called are cleansed by that miracle.

Why is this so important? Because every single human being has sinned. Every one of us has had a need to repent and must do so on a daily basis. But our loving Father hears our prayers and is quick to forgive and remove our sins. Our sins, once scarlet, become white as snow. Every sin brings a penalty, but thankfully the ultimate penalty—death—was paid by Jesus Christ. No matter what the sin, once true, godly repentance has occurred, God forgives it totally.

Does that mean it is better to make mistakes? Not at all. If you can take advice and admonition from parents, family, friends and from God’s Word, life will be much easier. But when painful mistakes are made and real repentance occurs, a happy and rewarding life, with a powerful lesson learned, can still be achieved.

Bonnie Greider is the wife of United Church of God pastor, Larry Greider. They reside in Troy, Illinois.



IN THE NEWS: Who Makes More?

The New York-based Families and Work Institute (www.familiesandwork.org), in its new study on the quality of American employment, found that Americans are working harder today than they did 25 years ago. Two-career couples averaged 81 hours a week in 1977, compared with 91 hours today. Self-employed workers tend to earn more than those with regular wage jobs—\$58,000 a year, on average, compared to \$45,000. The most successful group, financially, are small business owners, averaging \$110,000 a year, and they also report more job creativity and satisfaction in life. But they also tend to work longer hours—38 percent of them work more than 50 hours a week.



Proverbs 24:27 says to “prepare your outside work, make it fit for yourself in the field; and afterward build your house.” In other words, prepare yourself for your “field” of employment first so that you will be able to provide for home and family later. But God also cautions against overwork. He tells us in the Fourth Commandment (Exodus 20:9-11) that we are to do all our work in six days a week, and to leave the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship. And we are not to become workaholics and neglect our families.

True Dating

Continued from page 19

trustworthiness. Someone who is steady at the wheel and loyal to the core. *Ability to compromise on practical matters* (and who doesn't pout when he doesn't get his own way). *Common sense and intelligence.* These are vital when a girl seeks to follow a guy's lead on a date or in life.

Willingness to change when needed. Stubbornness is unattractive in both genders. *Ability to rightly prioritize his life.* This kind of a fellow can get some traction. *Right kind of ambition; a go-getter.* This applies to education and career, and wise girls notice it. *Most importantly, a strong belief in God and His way of life.* Spiritual wishy-washiness is a danger sign to girls with eyes to see.

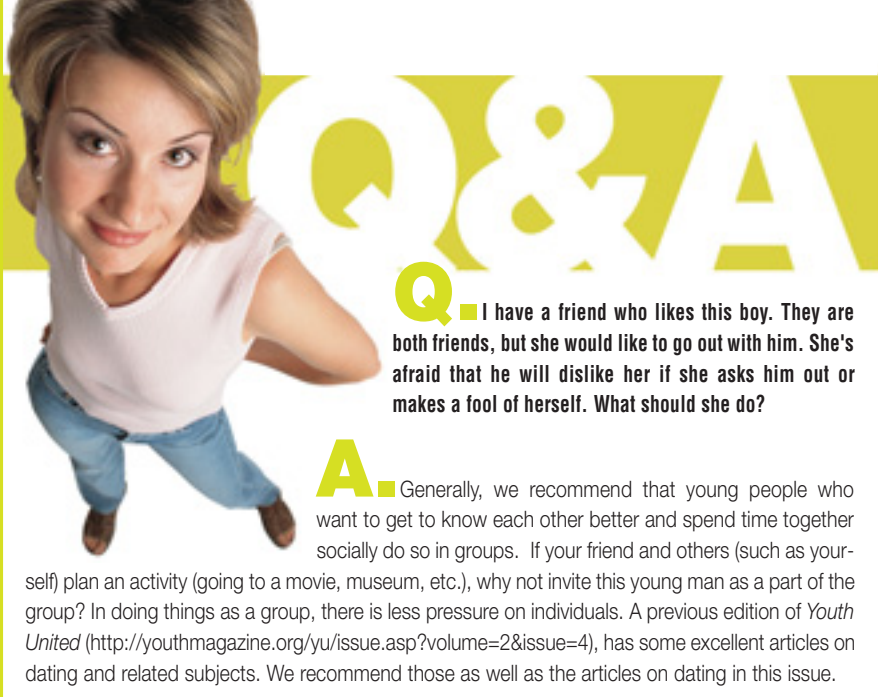
It was a fascinating discussion. It was straight-up, vertical thinking from a perceptive group of your peers. Why not give this list a vertical thought or two of your own? It may prove most useful in making your true dating experiences in family, group and couple settings come alive with value.

Don't sell yourself short. Don't give your heart—or body—to the wrong kind of person or at the wrong time. Right dating is a

fine art that builds life skills with practice. In the middle of that emotional battlefield of the sexes, called modern dating, grows a single, perfect rose. Ask God to lead you to it, and when the time is right, with His bless-

ing, to carry it home and make it your own.

Randy Stiver is the pastor of United Church of God congregations in Coos Bay, Eugene and Roseburg, Oregon.



Q ■ I have a friend who likes this boy. They are both friends, but she would like to go out with him. She's afraid that he will dislike her if she asks him out or makes a fool of herself. What should she do?

A ■ Generally, we recommend that young people who want to get to know each other better and spend time together socially do so in groups. If your friend and others (such as yourself) plan an activity (going to a movie, museum, etc.), why not invite this young man as a part of the group? In doing things as a group, there is less pressure on individuals. A previous edition of *Youth United* (<http://youthmagazine.org/you/issue.asp?volume=2&issue=4>), has some excellent articles on dating and related subjects. We recommend those as well as the articles on dating in this issue.

If you have a question, e-mail us at info@verticalthought.org



IN THE NEWS: Can You Trust Your Science Textbooks?

The Texas State Board of Education voted on Nov. 9 to use only scientifically accurate science texts.

Well, duh. They needed to vote on that? Seems that for years, seventh-grade science texts contained numerous known factual errors “that overstate the evidence for evolutionary theory,” said Bruce Chapman of The Discovery Institute, a Seattle-based public policy organization. Included in a list of 20 corrections that needed to be addressed were claims that human embryos have “gill slits” (they don't); overstatements about peppered moth research that purported to explain the process of evolution; and diagrams showing supposed similarities in human embryos with eight other species including tortoises, frogs and chickens—diagrams that were drawn in the 1800s by German biologist Ernst Haeckel, but that many scientists today acknowledge are inaccurate and misleading.

Still, biology texts remain overtly evolutionary. Efforts to have the Board of Education



also require that weaknesses of the evolutionary theory be addressed in their text-

books, as some say is required by Texas law, failed. The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills standards require that the student “analyze, review, and critique scientific explanations, including hypotheses and theories, as to their strengths and weaknesses using scientific evidence and information” (emphasis added).

“We were also hoping that the Board would require textbooks to include coverage of the peer-reviewed scientific weaknesses of evolutionary theory. Unfortunately, there wasn't a majority on the Board that was willing to enforce that,” said Mr. Chapman.

As one of the largest buyers of textbooks in the United States, the Texas decisions dramatically influence textbooks marketed across the nation. (Source: Discovery.org.)

For a factual evaluation of the evolution vs. creation issue, write for our free booklet, *Creation or Evolution: Does It Really Matter What You Believe?*

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for more?



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Sometimes we have more good material than we are able to print. And that's the case again this time. To see what we couldn't squeeze into the printed version, go to our Web site at www.verticalthought.org. There you'll find an interesting article titled, "The History of Dating." If you've ever wondered what dating was like a century ago, read this article to gain historical insight regarding arranged marriages, courting and how current dating practices evolved.

You'll also find additional Q&A that we simply ran out of room to include. And speaking of Q&A, if you'd like to submit a question, use the button at the top of the page and you'll receive a personal response from our staff—usually within 48 hours.

Of course, you can also send us suggestions for future articles. We like to hear from you!

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making life work

Some people go through life making all the wrong choices. They didn't really want the suffering and heartache that accompanies bad decisions; they just didn't know

what worked best. These people have to learn by bitter experience. You can find information that will help you make good decisions from the outset in *Making Life Work*—a booklet that addresses dating/marriage, success in your career and the importance of right friendships. Request your free copy online at www.verticalthought.org or by writing to our office in your area of the world from the list on page 22.