

Explanatory Notes:**CHOOSING A MARRIAGE PARTNER****Series Title:** Choosing a Marriage Partner**Topics:** Arranged marriages and Dating. Choosing a spouse.**Table of Contents:**

Message 1: Seek a Partner Who Honors God	p. 1
Message 2: An Obedient Search	p. 5
Message 3: A Prayerful Search	p. 7

Message #1: SEEK A PARTNER WHO HONORS GOD**Proverbs 31:10-31, CEV****Introduction:**

Who decides whom you will marry? Do you choose your own husband or wife? Or do your parents choose for you? How well must you know a person before marrying them? How do you know when you have found the right person to marry?

In many countries today the practice of dating is very popular. In dating, young people spend time with each other. They go to public places together in order to spend time together, have fun, and get to know each other. If they 'fall in love,' they decide to get married. Some ask their parents for advice and approval before deciding to marry. Others do not. **In dating, it is the young people who choose their future husband or wife.**

But dating is a relatively recent practice. Before the practice of dating and 'falling in love' appeared, parents arranged marriages for their children. Parents in much of the world today still arrange marriages for their children. They make sure their children marry someone who meets the family's approval. Some parents allow their children some freedom

Producers:

Many unbelievers assume that the Bible favors dating, since that is the practice in 'Christian' nations. We offer this series of messages as a witness that the Bible has a balanced view on the issue of dating versus arranged marriages. You could use these messages as an evangelistic tool to show your listeners that the Christian faith is compatible with their views on marriage.

We realize that in some areas Christians may be divided on the issue of dating and arranged marriages. **Use your best judgment to decide how to make these messages appropriate for your listeners.**

in approving or disapproving the person they have chosen, other parents do not. **In arranged marriages, the parents seek future husbands and wives for their children.**

Which is better? The practice of dating or the practice of arranged marriages? Most people have very strong opinions about this question. People who are against the practice of arranged marriages say, “How could parents compel their daughter to marry a man if she is not willing? How can a marriage be honorable to God if it is not based on mutual love?” People who criticize dating say, “Dating leads to sexual immorality. It is a way of avoiding commitment and responsibility. How could young people marry anyone against their parents’ wishes?” “Can’t parents who are mature make a better choice about the best mate for a child?”

How does the Bible help us address this controversial question?

On the one hand, the Bible was written in ancient Israel. In Israel, parents normally arranged marriages for their children. For example, Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac. Neither Isaac nor Rebekah were allowed to choose whether or not to marry. Their parents chose for them.

On the other hand, the Bible gives us examples of the power of romantic love.

- Jacob loved Rachel so much that he worked seven years to earn the right to marry her.
- Samson asked his parents to arrange a marriage for him to a woman that he loved.
- And the biblical book “The Song of Songs” [or Song of Solomon] celebrates the emotions and sexual attraction of two people in love with each other.

So the Bible doesn’t give us an easy answer to the question, “Which is better, dating or arranged marriages?” **The Bible gives us principles that can guide us no matter which way we prepare for marriage.** Whether we allow our children to date or whether we arrange a marriage for them, **the Bible can help us make sure our decisions about**

marriage are morally upright and pleasing to God.

One of these principles is this: GUARD GOD’S HONOR. We must choose spouses who demonstrate love for God and moral character. Here are some important Bible verses about finding a virtuous spouse.

A truly good wife is the most precious treasure a man can find!

Her husband depends on her, and she never lets him down.

She is good to him every day of her life, and with her own hands she gladly makes clothes.

She is like a sailing ship that brings food from across the sea.

She gets up before daylight to prepare food for her family and for her servants.

She knows how to buy land and how to plant a vineyard, and she always works hard.

She knows when to buy or sell, and she stays busy until late at night.

She spins her own cloth, and she helps the poor and the needy.

Her family has warm clothing, and so she doesn’t worry when it snows.

She does her own sewing, and everything she wears is beautiful.

Her husband is a well-known and respected leader in the city.

She makes clothes to sell to the shop owners.

She is strong and graceful, as well as cheerful about the future.

Her words are sensible, and her advice is thoughtful.

She takes good care of her family and is never lazy.

Her children praise her, and with great pride her husband says, “There are many good women, but you are the best!”

Charm can be deceiving, and beauty fades away, but a woman who honors the LORD deserves to be praised.

Show her respect—praise her in public for what she has done.

Proverbs 31:10-31, CEV

These words from the Bible tell us about the blessings that come from carefully choosing a spouse who is virtuous and loves God. We should not think that the Bible is only talking about good wives. Husbands need to be godly, virtuous people, too! And young women are likewise blessed by God when they choose their husbands carefully!

It is very tempting to choose a marriage partner who is personally appealing but who does not love God. Young people who date are often overcome by their attraction to people who are physically attractive or who have a pleasant personality. They 'fall in love' with these persons and want to marry them. They do not ask themselves whether the person is a faithful Christian. They do not ask themselves if the one they love has a good moral character and the same values. But the Bible says, *Charm can be deceiving, and beauty fades away, but a woman who honors the LORD deserves to be praised.*

Parents who arrange marriages for their children face the same temptation. They often look for someone who comes from a rich and influential family. They want their son or daughter to marry someone whose status in society will help their own family's social or financial standing to improve. Some even treat their children as if they were property to be bought and sold for personal gain! But our children are made in the image of God. They are special. We must not treat them as property. We must love them and find spouses for them who will love them. We must find spouses who love God and live good, moral lives.

Conclusion:

It is not wrong to want to marry someone who is intelligent, attractive, humorous, educated, and talented. Nor is it wrong to want our children to marry someone who comes from a wealthy, influential and well-respected family. But our first priority should be to look for someone who will always love and praise God, someone who will live in ways that please him.

Message #2: AN OBEDIENT SEARCH
Exodus 20:12, Proverbs 5:1-23

We have been considering the difficult yet wonderful process of choosing a marriage partner. The decision concerning the person we will spend our lives with is one of the most important decisions we make in our entire lives.

We saw in our last message that the Bible makes room for dating or arranged marriages. It gives examples of parents who provide spouses for their children and it gives examples of people who fall in love and get married. God is more concerned that we follow his wise principles when we choose a marriage partner for ourselves or for our children. We saw that one of those principles was that we search for a virtuous spouse. God wants us to marry spouses who love and honor him.

Another principle the Bible gives us to help us choose a spouse is this: OBEY GOD’S WILL. We should never disobey God’s commandments in our search for a husband or wife.

God gave the people of Israel ten special commandments, or rules to obey. The Ten Commandments are a summary of God’s will for all people.* As we consider the topic of choosing a spouse, two of these commandments are especially important.

A. “Honor your father and your mother.” (Exodus 20:12).

With this commandment, God gave parents authority over their children. In an earlier message we said that parents must use this authority wisely. They must not force their children to marry against their will. They must take their children’s feelings and beliefs into consideration.

But children must listen to their parents, too. This commandment makes it clear.

Parents have wisdom, maturity and experience that young people lack. Christian parents have experience and wisdom

***Producers:** You may wish to summarize the Ten Commandments for your listeners at this point. Below is a simple summary based on the CEV translation of Exodus 20.

1. Do not worship any god except me.
2. Do not make idols that look like anything in the sky or on earth or in the ocean under the earth. Don’t bow down and worship idols.
3. Do not misuse my name.
4. Remember that the Sabbath Day belongs to

that come from God's Word. Young people who rashly reject their parents' influence rob themselves of valuable wisdom.

Parents have raised their children for years. They know what kind of spouse will be beneficial for their child. They can predict which partners will be helpful and which will be harmful for their sons and daughters. Young people who do not listen to their parents miss out on the helpful insight of parents who know them best.

Parents also know what kind of family will make good in-laws. Marriage is more than a union between individuals. It is also a union between two families. The two families must be able to get along. Marriage has many effects on both families. Parents and family members have a right to be involved in decisions that will affect them.

Young people who date show they are wise when they seek the approval of their family before deciding to marry. Young people whose parents arrange their marriage show they are wise when they listen to the wisdom of their family members rather than foolishly rebel against them.

B. "You shall not commit adultery." (Exodus 20:14).

The other commandment that is important for our discussion on marriage is "You shall not commit adultery." Adultery is having sex with a person who is not your husband or wife. But Christians have long understood these words to be a command from God to avoid *all* the kinds of sexual behavior that are prohibited by God, including sexual activity before marriage.

God intended for sex to be a blessing for married people to enjoy. The practice of dating carries with it the powerful temptation to sexual immorality before marriage. Critics of dating are correct to point out that dating often leads to ungodly behavior. But parents who arrange the marriages of their children face this problem, too. This is because they must allow their children opportunities to become acquainted with their future spouses. All parents should supervise their young people when they allow them to

me.

5. Respect your father and your mother.
6. Do not murder.
7. Be faithful in marriage.
8. Do not steal.
9. Do not tell lies about others.
10. Do not want anything that belongs to someone else.

Extra Resources for Producers:

Seven good reasons not to have sex before marriage:

1. God forbids sexual immorality. See 1 Corinthians 6:18-20, Hebrews 13:4, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8. Sexual immorality hinders our relationship to God. We will feel guilty for disappointing the God who loves us so much. On the other hand, trusting in God's way leads to great blessing.

2. Resisting temptation builds character, but sexual immorality destroys our character. When we resist temptation, we grow in patience, self-control and trust in God. We become better people. But sexual immorality makes us weaker people: we are more likely to become addicted to pre-marital sex; we are more likely to be unfaithful to our spouses if we marry. In fact, it is helpful to think of pre-marital sex as unfaithfulness to our future wives or husbands.

3. Having sex before marriage changes the way people view sex, marriage, and themselves. Instead of

spend time together. They should not leave their children to resist the power of sexual temptation on their own.

There are various ways to limit young peoples' opportunities to be tempted by sexual immorality. Some parents require young people to visit in their home, where they can watch over them. Other parents require their young people to be accompanied by a chaperon (or guardian) while on dates. Others allow their children to go on 'group dates,' where a number of young people whom the parents know and trust are present.

In conclusion, the process of choosing a spouse involves many strong feelings and pressures: family loyalty; romantic love; fear about the future; differences between older generations and younger ones; financial pressures; pressures from culture and the media; and many more besides. But we must never let our feelings or our circumstances lead us to disobey God and his commands. We must honor our fathers and our mothers. We must honor God by fleeing sexual immorality.

God's commandments are for our well-being and happiness. When we obey them we bring wholeness and joy to our lives. Psalm 19:8 says, "The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart." [*Producers: You may wish to close with all the words of Psalm 19:8-11*]

Message #3: A PRAYERFUL SEARCH **Genesis 24**

We have been considering the difficult yet wonderful process of choosing a marriage partner. The decision concerning the person we will spend our lives with is one of the most important decisions we make in our entire lives.

We saw that the Bible makes room for dating or arranged marriages. It gives examples of parents who provide spouses for their children and it gives examples of people who fall in love and get married. God is more concerned that we follow his wise principles when we choose a

viewing sex as a wonderful, God-given blessing intended for marriage, people begin to view sex as simply a physical activity meant for gratifying their desires. Instead of seeing marriage as a gracious relationship ordained by God, they begin to see marriage as an undesirable restriction of their freedom. They desire the freedom to have sex without the commitment of marriage. Some also begin to view themselves differently. They begin to find their self-worth in their sexual attractiveness rather than in God's love for them. Instead of seeing themselves as people made in God's image, they see their bodies as 'sex objects'—good only for arousing the sexual desire of others. Instead of seeking virtue or godliness, they seek only physical pleasure like unthinking animals.

4. Sexual immorality damages people's reputation in three ways.

A. It reduces them to 'sex objects.' Some people will only take interest in them because they want to have sex with them. They will not be interested in their character, personality, intelligence or religion. They will only want to use their bodies for sex.

B. It brings shame on them. Most other people will look on their sexual immorality as shameful. They will bring shame on themselves and their family.

C. It destroys their Christian witness. If they are Christians, they will bring shame on Christ

marriage partner for ourselves or for our children.

One of the principles the Bible gives us concerning the choice of our future spouses is this: LISTEN TO GOD'S VOICE. We must seek God's special guidance for our marriages through prayer.

Genesis, the first book of the Bible, tells the story of Abraham, a man who loved God. Abraham arranged the marriage of his son Isaac. He sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac from among his family. He wanted a wife who would be virtuous and worship God.

This story shows us that parents should seek God's guidance when considering spouses for their sons and daughters. Listen as I read parts of this story from the Bible:

1. The servant prayed to God.

So the servant took a solemn oath that he would follow Abraham's instructions. He loaded ten of Abraham's camels with gifts and set out, taking with him the best of everything his master owned. He traveled to Aram-naharaim and went to the village where Abraham's brother Nahor had settled. There the servant made the camels kneel down beside a well just outside the village. It was evening, and the women were coming out to draw water.

"O LORD, God of my master," he prayed. "Give me success and show kindness to my master, Abraham. Help me to accomplish the purpose of my journey. See, here I am, standing beside this spring, and the young women of the village are coming out to draw water. This is my request. I will ask one of them for a drink. If she says, 'Yes, certainly, and I will water your camels, too!'—let her be the one you have appointed as Isaac's wife. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master."

As he was still praying, a young woman named Rebekah arrived with a water jug on her shoulder. Her father was Bethuel, who was the son of Abraham's brother Nahor and his wife, Milcah. Now Rebekah was very beautiful, and she was a

and his church. Their immorality will destroy the credibility of their Christian witness.

5. Sex before marriage can lead to unwanted pregnancies. This is a serious problem for various reasons:

- A. Many women are abandoned by their lovers. They are forced to raise the child on their own.
- B. Many young couples are tempted to have an abortion. Abortion is the murder of an unborn baby.
- C. Many young couples are forced to become parents before they are prepared for such a demanding responsibility.

6. Sex before marriage greatly increases a person's chances of contracting sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS and venereal diseases. There are 30 million cases of AIDS worldwide, and there is currently no cure for it. Everyone who gets AIDS dies, because AIDS destroys the parts of the human body that fight off other diseases. But couples can avoid the sexually-transmitted AIDS virus if neither partner had sex before marriage with anyone else and if both partners remain sexually faithful to each other.

7. Finally, sexual self-control increases the blessings of marriage: There is a deep sense of joy on a couple's wedding night—they have waited for this special moment and have resisted temptation in order to make their union

*virgin; no man had ever slept with her. She went down to the spring, filled her jug, and came up again. Running over to her, the servant asked, "Please give me a drink."
 "Certainly, sir," she said, and she quickly lowered the jug for him to drink. When he had finished, she said, "I'll draw water for your camels, too, until they have had enough!"* So she quickly emptied the jug into the watering trough and ran down to the well again. She kept carrying water to the camels until they had finished drinking. The servant watched her in silence, wondering whether or not she was the one the LORD intended him to meet. Then at last, when the camels had finished drinking, he gave her a gold ring for her nose and two large gold bracelets for her wrists.
 "Whose daughter are you?" he asked. "Would your father have any room to put us up for the night?"
 "My father is Bethuel," she replied. "My grandparents are Nahor and Milcah. Yes, we have plenty of straw and food for the camels, and we have a room for guests."
 The man fell down to the ground and worshiped the LORD. "Praise be to the LORD, the God of my master, Abraham," he said. "The LORD has been so kind and faithful to Abraham, for he has led me straight to my master's relatives." The young woman ran home to tell her family about all that had happened.*

Genesis 24:9-28, NLT

Abraham's servant prayed for an extraordinary sign that God was leading him to the right wife for Isaac. He prayed that one of the women approaching the well would offer to draw water for his ten camels.

A camel that has gone several days without water can drink as much as 25 gallons of water. To draw water from a well or spring with only a 3-gallon container to water one camel would take eight trips. To draw water for ten could take eighty trips! Any woman who would work this hard to help a stranger and his camels would be a very kind and loving

complete. Their trust in each other is greater because each of them knows that the other is a person with great patience, faithfulness and self-control.

Another resource for Producers:

Young women who date are often pressured by young men to have sex. Here are some of the enticing words young men use, and some helpful and humorous responses young women can use to say no to them. These responses were drawn from various websites.

WHEN HE SAYS "If you really loved me, you'd have sex with me"

YOU SAY *If you really loved me, you wouldn't pressure me!*

WHEN HE SAYS "Everybody's doing it"

YOU SAY *"That's not true. I'm not 'doing it' and I'm somebody." OR "I can become like everybody else anytime I want to; but they can never again become like me."*

WHEN HE SAYS "Don't you trust me?"

YOU SAY "Marriage is built on trust. Do you want to marry me right now?"

WHEN HE SAYS "We might not get another chance."

YOU SAY *"If you really loved me, you wouldn't ask me to*

person. When the servant saw how kind and generous Rebekah was, he knew he had found the right woman for Isaac. **He found the right wife by praying and trusting in God.**

This story isn't meant to teach us that we should use tests to find out what God desires. What is important is that we consult with God about our decisions. Do we remember to pray about our search for a suitable marriage partner? Do we pray earnestly before making a decision about marriage? Or do we only trust in our desires and ambitions to guide us?

2. Rebekah's parents saw God acting through extraordinary events.

Rebekah's parents, Laban and Bethuel, also trusted in God. This is what they said when Abraham's servant told them his story:

"The LORD has done this. We have no choice in the matter. Take Rebekah with you; she can marry your master's son, just as the LORD has said."

Genesis 24:50-1, NLT

Laban and Bethuel recognized God's desire for the two children to marry. In some way they were convinced in their hearts that the marriage was God's will. Rather than making decisions based only on human logic or reason, they looked to God for guidance. And God's Holy Spirit spoke to their hearts.

There is a danger here: Many times clever people tell lies about God in order to deceive gullible (easily-deceived) religious people. For example, there are young men who say, "God told me to marry you." They pretend they have visions from God. They do this to pressure young women to marry them. But we must not allow ourselves to be fooled by such people. As we see from our passage, it is important for each person to be convinced of God's leading. We should become suspicious when others tell us that God told *them* what *we* should do, when God hasn't made it clear to us. To find out God's will, we do the

take chances.

WHEN HE SAYS "It's the only way to prove you're a real woman!"

YOU SAY "I don't have to prove anything to you!"

WHEN HE SAYS "If you won't do it, I'll find someone who will." YOU SAY "If that's all I mean to you, then you should find someone else. I want someone who will be faithful to me."

WHEN HE SAYS "You can't get pregnant the first time!"

YOU SAY "You won't get pregnant, that's for sure; but I could!"

WHEN HE SAYS "If you get pregnant, I'll marry you."

YOU SAY "Why wait? If you want to marry me, let's talk about marriage with our parents now."

WHEN HE SAYS "I love you so much, I want to give you more!"

YOU SAY "GREAT! Give me your self-control!"

following things:

- we pray,
- we read his Word,
- we seek the advice of mature, trustworthy Christians,
- we thoughtfully and cautiously consider the decision before us,
- and we listen to the Spirit God has given us.

Parents, Do you do these things for your children? Do you pray that God will guide them to virtuous husbands and wives? Do you ask for his guidance as you seek a spouse for your children? Do you turn to the Bible? Do you seek advice from people you trust? Or do you only rely on your own wisdom?

Young people, Do you pray that God will bless your future husbands and wives and lead you to the person of his choice? Do you pray for God's wisdom in your search? Or do you allow yourselves to be overcome by emotions?

God has loving plans for your life. He wants to lead you to good decisions. Let us seek his favor and his guidance by turning to him in prayer. Listen to him as he speaks to our hearts by his Spirit.

[Producer: end this message with an appropriate prayer for God to guide and bless young people as they prepare for marriage]
