

### QUIET TIME

#### Theme: Relationships

- Try to make a specific time every day to meet Jesus Christ through reading and meditating his Word.
- Pray, talk with Jesus Christ and make a few short notes about this Bible passage in your notebook.
- Record what you discover, what speaks to your mind and heart, what you find difficult or what you understand.

- Day 1 Romans 12:9-21  
The relationship with all people
- Day 2 1 John 2:6-11  
The relationship with all Christians
- Day 3 Proverbs 23:22-26  
The relationship with your parents
- Day 4 Ephesians 5:22-33  
The relationship with your spouse
- Day 5 Luke 6:27-35  
The relationship to enemies
- Day 6 1 Corinthians 5:9-13  
Avoid wrong relationships
- Day 7 2 Corinthians 6:14 – 7:1  
Intimate and binding relationships with unbelievers are forbidden (cf. also 1 Corinthians 7:39)
- Day 8 1 Corinthians 7:36-40  
Marriage is no sin, but marry only to a born-again believer
- Day 9<sup>BS</sup> 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8  
Marry only with someone who has self-control (choice of translation)<sup>1</sup>
- Day 10 Matthew 6:25-34  
Marry only with someone who has the same goals in life (cf. also Amos 3:3)
- Think about Colossians 4:3-4.  
A possible prayer for new opportunities and for open hearts.
  - Ask God to give opportunities to witness and for open hearts to receive the message.
  - Pray every day for someone or something specific and wait in expectation for what God is going to do (Psalm 5:3).

### STUDY

#### Theme: Relationships

Read study 26 carefully before the next meeting. If you have questions, write them down and mail them to one of your group leaders. We will seek an answer together.

### BIBLE STUDY

#### Theme: The relationship to the opposite sex

If you like, you may already prepare the Bible Study for the coming meeting by reading through the Bible passage. Make use of the 5-step Bible Study method. The Bible passage is: **1 Thessalonians 4:1-8**

### MEMORISATION

#### 1. Motivation

Jesus memorised Bible verses (Luke 4:4-13). Are you doing that?

#### 2. Memorisation

Memorise this verse in the Bible version of your choice.

#### RELATIONSHIPS

##### Proverbs 27:17

As iron sharpens iron,  
so one man sharpens another.

##### Proverbs 27:17 (NIV)

#### 3. Review and back-review

*Review* the last 5 memorised verses once every day and back-review all other memorised verses once every three weeks.

#### 4. Review of the Bible books

All 39 books of the Old Testament  
All 27 books of the New Testament

<sup>1</sup> **1 Thessalonians 4:4** in the original Greek language says: “that each of you should know (how) to acquire (or: to gain control over) his own vessel in holiness and honour”. The choice of translation is between:

- a. Your ‘vessel’ is your own (future) wife and you must know how to acquire (win, take) her in holiness and honour.
- b. Your ‘vessel’ is your own body and you must know how to control it in holiness and honour. Both translations refer to the sexual and moral area.

## 26. Relationships

The whole human life is holy and precious in God's sight. Also in the area of the relationship between men and women you can glorify God by treating one another in holiness and respect. This study provides information and practical suggestions for getting acquainted with one another, friendship and dating.

### FALLING IN LOVE AND GENUINE LOVE

#### A. Being in love

We live in 'the Age of Romanticism'. People expect immediate intimacy in a relationship with the opposite sex. Many people believe that when a relationship 'feels good', especially in the physical area, they have found a good partner. And yet very many relationships are destroyed because the physical and emotional intimacy proves to be inadequate. This love-sickness or infatuation is a kind of love in which a man and a woman feels attracted to one another in the physical, emotional and social level. They dream and fantasize about one another. They want to be together all the time and touch one another.

Your hormones develop during the teenage years and they let you know that they are present. You fall in love often and quickly. Every time you think: "She/he is the real one for me! With her/him I would like to spend the rest of my life!" But after some time when you get to know one another better, she/he becomes less attractive and your feelings of infatuation disappear. She/he proves not to be the real one! Only then you discover that your feelings have misled you! Infatuation is a nice feeling, but a bad counsellor! Feelings are changeable (fickle) and unpredictable. Amorous feelings put yourself and not the other person in the centre. In order to develop a really good relationship with the opposite sex you need another kind of love, namely, 'agape' love!

#### B. 'Agape' love

Agape is Greek New Testament word for 'love' and refers above all to God's love for us and secondly to the love Christians ought to have for one another. Agape is patient, kind (friendly), content, modest and humble. Agape is tactful (has good manners), is unselfish (not self-seeking), is forbearing (not easily angered/irritated) and forgiving (keeps no record of wrongs). Agape does not gloat, rejoices with the truth (does not pretend), protects the other, trusts the other and expects that God makes all the difference in the relationship. Agape love always perseveres and never fails (1 Corinthians 13:4-8)!

Agape loves the other person for whom she/he is, for what you can contribute (bring to her/his life) and never what you can get out of her/him. Agape is unselfish and self-

sacrificial. Agape builds the other person up instead of breaking her/him down. Agape focuses on helping the other person to become her/his best for God. Agape does the other person good without expecting anything in return! Agape can wait instead of rushing forward without control. While amorous feelings come and go, genuine love is constant.

The purpose of a man and a woman going out with one another is to develop a good (agape) relationship. You share more and more your thoughts, feelings and decisions with one another. You also share your most important relationships (with God, parents and friends) with one another. The purpose of meeting one another is to find out whether God wants you to marry one another or not. The result of a healthy (agape) relationship will be genuine friendship and unselfish intimacy. Physical intimacy (with agreed limitations) is not the goal of your relationship, but is the result of your agape relationship!

### FIRST FRIENDSHIP

#### C. Friendship among Christians

Friendship among Christians is relating to one another as a family, as 'brothers' and 'sisters'. A special friendship relationship between a man and a woman should grow out of an ordinary friendship relationship. This friendship (brother-sister) relationship continues when you get acquainted and when you date and throughout the marriage (husband-wife) relationship. The goal of a healthy friendship between Christians is to build one another up and not to break one another down. Thus the Body of Christ is also built up.

Christians have the following responsibilities:

*You have responsibilities towards yourself:*

- you should do God's will (Mark 3:35)
- and you should follow Jesus Christ as his disciple (Luke 9:23-26).

*You have responsibilities towards other Christians (your friend):*

- you should see to it that she/he does not turn away from the living God or become hardened by sin's deceitfulness (Hebrews 3:12-15)
- you should urge one another to love in relationships and good works in activities (Hebrews 10:24-25)
- you should teach and admonish (correct) one another (Colossians 3:16)
- you should pray with and for one another (Romans 15:30)
- you should contend together for the faith of the gospel and be willing to suffer for Christ (Philippians 1:27-29)
- you should treat one another with absolute purity (1 Timothy 5:1-2)

*You have responsibilities towards people who are insincere (with regard to faith):*

you should avoid contact with people who have a bad influence on you (*Proverbs 4:14-15, Ephesians 5:3-7*)  
you should withdraw from every tempting situation (*2 Thessalonians 3:6-7; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13*).

## D. Suggestions for the development of friendship among Christians

### 1. Join a Christian fellowship

In order to develop a healthy friendship with one person of the opposite sex that could lead to 'dating' together, one must first develop healthy friendships with a number of Christians from both sexes. This is best done in the group setting of a Christian fellowship, which offers more opportunities to compare. As you fellowship, grow and minister (work) together, you get to know the personality, character, strengths and weaknesses of the other. You observe the relationship of the other person to Jesus Christ and to other Christians. And you discover what kind of influence the other has on people and especially on yourself. Thus, join a Christian fellowship!

### 2. Learn to discuss different topics and issues with one another in a group setting

Talk about your relationship to Jesus Christ and particularly how you view the Bible and the truths revealed in it. If you have learned to discuss your faith in a group setting, you will continue to do this when you date one another (and later within your marriage relationship).

### 3. Do things together as a group

Participate with Christians in various activities: participate in a Bible Study group, in a prayer group and in some kind of ministry (e.g. Sunday school or Youth Fellowship). Undertake activities with one another as a group, like eating out together, playing sports together, attending a conference together and going on holiday as a group.

## E. Important decisions before marriage

Because the Christian marriage is life-long (*Malachi 2:14-16*) you need to make a well thought through decision in each of the following areas:

### 1. Do you want to marry or not (*1 Corinthians 7:1-7,32-35; Matthew 19:10-12*).

The advantage of remaining unmarried is that you can dedicate yourself completely to Christ and his kingdom and still have many spiritual children (*Isaiah 54:1-5*). The disadvantages of remaining unmarried are that you can be lonely and that you can burn with desire (*1 Corinthians 7:9*).

### 2. Marry only with a born-again believers in Jesus Christ (*1 Corinthians 7:39; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1*).

A Christian marriage is a continuous witness to Jesus Christ (*Ephesians 5:22-25*).

### 3. Marry only someone you really know well (*Proverbs 27:19,23*).

Find out whether there is a history of spiritual (sectarian), social (divorce), psychological (depression, autism), or physical (addictions) problems in the other person's life or family.

### 4. Marry only with someone who can control himself (*1 Thessalonians 4:1-8; Hebrews 13:4*).

You will reap what you sow (*Galatians 6:7-8*).

### 5. Marry only with someone who has the same life-goals (*Amos 3:3; Matthew 6:33; Philippians 1:27*).

### 6. Marry only with someone who has cleared his/her dark past (*Exodus 20:5-6; 2 Chronicles 22:3-4*).

### 7. Marry only when you are both ready (*Ecclesiastes 3:5; 8:5b-6a; 1 Corinthians 13:4*).

E.g. you have completed your education, have a job that earns money, have gained sufficient wisdom in life, have become a disciple of Jesus Christ. True love can wait!

## F. Suggestions when you fall in love

When you fall in love, learn to distinguish between your feelings and the facts. Do you get infatuated because of the other person's physical attraction or do you have genuine (agape) love for the other person's personality and character? The Bible warns not to be hasty and miss the way (*Proverbs 19:1-2*), but to investigate the facts of the matter and search out wisdom (*Ecclesiastes 7:25-26*).

Before you approach the other person, do the following:

### 1. Pray to God with regard to her/him

Ask God to help you get to know her/him well and to give you genuine love for the other if that is his will. And if it is not God's will to stop your interest for her/him. Pray for eyes that look beyond what merely appears.

### 2. Get to know her/him well

Get to know the other person in different circumstances and in a variety of group activities, without making known how you feel about her/him. Observe, listen and pray. Who is the other person in her/his relationship to God, to other people and to herself/himself? Get to know her/his personality and character, strengths and weaknesses, and especially what kind of influence she/he has on other people.

What influence does she/he have on you?

Is she/he someone with biblical convictions (beliefs) and does she/he stimulate my relationship to Jesus Christ and people?

Is she/he someone that has positive influence on me? Does she/he make me more joyful? Does she/he have self-control and encourage self-discipline? Does she/he cause me to live a more creative and meaningful life? Does she/he let me down or build me up?

Is she/he someone that listens to me, takes me serious and accepts me?

Is she/he too busy with a career or available? Is she/he withdrawn or approachable? Can I always go to her/him to talk and ask for advice?

Is she/he someone with whom I feel completely at home, with whom I can laugh and cry and do enjoyable things together?

Is she/he honest and upright? Or is she/he prone to tell lies and pretend to be someone she/he is not? Does she/he have a healthy self-esteem?

Does she/he have self-respect and show respect to others? How does she/he speak about other people?

Is she/he someone who can and will share her/his friends with me; who will never shut me out; but will always draw me into healthy relationships?

Do I notice that I am doing her/him good and contribute to her/his well-being?

### 3. Ask advice with regard to her/him

In matters of your spirit (relating to God) and heart (relating to the opposite sex) always ask advice from more mature and wise Christians than yourself, preferably people who also know you or both of you well (Proverbs 19:20-21). Gather facts about the other person. This will help you to remain objective.

### 3. Never date an unbeliever!

When you fall in love with an unbeliever never go on a date with her/him and keep your distance from her/him. (2 Corinthians 6:14 - 7:1; Deuteronomy 7:3-4). Invite her/him to your Christian fellowship and introduce her/him to other Christian women/men who can win her/him to Christ. It is best to meet unbelievers from the opposite sex whom you find attractive only in a group with other people. Never agree to separate from the group.

## ONLY THEN COURTSHIP

When you fall in love with another born-again Christian you may like to consider the following practical suggestions for dividing your approach to dating in three stages: acquaintanceship, courtship and engagement.

### G. Suggestions for acquaintanceship

'Acquaintanceship' refers to the stage after friendship in a group setting. It refers to the stage in which you begin to meet one another and develop a friendship relationship without physical intimacy. The goal is to gather facts about one another that will help you to decide whether you should continue or terminate the relationship.

#### 1. Approach

When you are genuinely interested in a Christian young woman/young man, you could do the following:

Differentiate between infatuation and genuine love.

Ask advice from mature believers who know you both.

Ask her/him whether she/he is willing to meet one another with a view to getting better acquainted.

If she/he agrees, make an appointment to meet one another at a set time (say: once a week) at a neutral place where there are other people around.

When your family arrange the marriage, meet one another in their house, in their presence or under their supervision, in order to get well acquainted, especially to find out whether the other is a genuine believer in Jesus Christ or not!

In some cultures where a man and a woman are not supposed to meet in public, meet one another in the house and under the supervision of an elder in the church.

#### 2. Practical advice

Do not forget to get acquainted with one another's beliefs, dreams and peculiarities.

Here follows some tips for maintaining self-control:

#### *No physical contact*

It is better not to have any physical contact.

Infatuation colours physical contact and makes you a prisoner of your emotions. You would like to be completely free to develop your own convictions and make your own decisions, wouldn't you?

### *No binding agreement*

It is better not to make any binding agreements with one another or to give room to have certain expectations from one another. Talk about your relationship as ‘friendship’ instead of ‘courtship’. This will lessen the pressure other people put on your relationship.

### *No fantasising*

It is better not to fantasise about one another or to speak about your feelings for one another. Wait until you really know one another well enough. “Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires” (Song of Songs 2:7).

If you begin too early with expressing your love in words or touch, you may create unrealistic expectations in the other person and may hurt one another. You are friends – no more, no less.

## **3. End**

When one or both of you feel or believe that for some reason you should stop, then this period of preparation should end. You are under no compulsion to state the reason. You continue as brother and sister.

However, when both of you believe that you need to change your friendship, you may decide together to begin your period of courtship.

## **H. Suggestions for courtship**

‘Courtship’ refers to the stage in which you build up a special and strong friendship with a view to a possible marriage in the future. The goal is to discover whether it is God’s will that you marry or not (Ephesians 5:17).

### **1. Approach**

You agree that from now on you are special friends that are officially courting one another.

Communicate clearly to others that you are courting.

Develop your courtship openly, but within clearly defined and agreed limits.

When your marriage is arranged, court one another only in the house of the woman’s parents, in their presence or under their supervision.

In a culture where a man and a woman are not supposed to meet in public, court one another only in the house and under the supervision of an elder in the church.

## **2. Practical advice**

### *Set limits*

Together discuss with one another and draw up some clearly defined limits for your courtship that are based on what God says in the Bible, on what is appropriate in your society and on what is helpful for one another. Setting limits in the following areas is wise:

*Time.* How often do you meet together? What is the best time to leave?

*Place.* In which places do you meet one another? Which places are forbidden?

*Physical intimacy.* What kind of physical contact does God allow before marriage? What kind of physical contact is appropriate within your culture? What kind of physical contact is helpful to both of you? What kind of touching may be good, but not helpful to your friend?

*Activities.* Which things do you do together (e.g. reading the Bible and praying). Which things do you decide not to do? Promise one another in God’s presence not to go beyond the limits you have set together, but to help one another keep those limits (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8). Your respect for one another will grow!

### *Build*

Encourage one another; build one another up spiritually; develop one another’s character; serve God together; make friends together.

### *Do not create expectations*

Only discuss a possible marriage when you both are ready to discuss the question. Otherwise the castles you build in the air may create expectations which you cannot realise later and you will hurt one another.

## **3. End**

When one or both of you feel or believe that for some reason you should stop, then this period of courtship should end. You are under no compulsion to state the reason. You may not want to see one another again, but you still are one another’s brother and sister. Ending a courtship that once blossomed is painful, but always better than a divorce later.

However, when both of you believe that God wants you to marry, you may decide together to begin your period of engagement, which is a preparation for marriage.