

Every Nation Church Seattle

Dating, Engagement, & Marriage



The Bible teaches us that marriage was designed by God in the beginning to be both bring glory to Himself and blessing to us. Next to the decision to believe in Jesus Christ and fully commit to following Him, the choice of a marriage partner will be one of the most important decisions of our lives.

It is our desire therefore to promote godly marriage, with all its joys and challenges, prepare people for a lifetime of marriage, and help people to discern whether God is calling them into marriage at this time in their lives. To this end we have written for your benefit a brief overview of the philosophy of dating, engagement and getting married at Every Nation Church Seattle.

We want God's best to be yours!
Pastor Perry & Danielle Burkholder and the Leadership of ENCS

SINGLEHOOD

The Bible teaches us that far from being inferior to marriage, being single is a gift from God, and that those who are single should live "in undivided devotion to the Lord." (1 Cor. 7:35) The best use of your time as a single person would be to focus on developing a strong dynamic relationship with Jesus, developing Christ-like character & giftedness through the relational challenges of loving and serving others in His church, and by joining Jesus on mission to reach others for the gospel.

DATING WITH PURPOSE

We support the concept of two single persons developing a friendship and pursuing a closer relationship in absolute purity for the specific purpose of making a prayerful, counseled decision concerning engagement and marriage.

Thus, when a man desires to develop a deeper friendship with a woman for the purpose of seeking to discern God's will regarding possible marriage, we encourage him to "define the relationship." The first step is to state his intentions to the woman. He should then commit to honoring her and the Lord in his pursuit of a closer relationship with her.

The purpose of developing this kind of intentional, exclusive, dating relationship is to seek to answer the question: "Is God calling us to pursue engagement and marriage?" The answer to this question may not become clear all at once. But over time, as the couple spends time together in a variety of settings, the individuals can begin to discern whether they really like one another, feel they could be compatible, and whether God may be calling them to a life together in marriage.

If after a period of time the two do not agree that it is either God's will or timing for them to be engaged, then they should refrain from developing a "possessive" relationship. The two individuals need to pull back from the level of relationship they were at, and need to recommit themselves to a friendship or brother-sister relationship in Christ, maintaining absolute purity and avoiding any deeper emotional entanglement.

Because the purpose of dating relationships is to discern God's will regarding a life-long partnership in marriage, we do not encourage "hooking up" or "worldly dating" where there is no serious, mature consideration of God's will concerning engagement and marriage. Too often it is observed throughout the Christian church in America that such casual approaches to relationships, when not followed through to engagement and marriage, result in broken hearts and damaged emotions, and all too often sexual impurity. Such results call the practice into serious question as to its wisdom and propriety.

BECOMING ENGAGED

Engagement, while not binding, is nevertheless a serious decision because it is a time of preparation for marriage.

There are several important factors to weigh when seeking to determine God's will concerning getting engaged. Consider: the level of your current relationship, the length of time you've known each other, personal life goals, compatibility, and finances, among other things. Generally, it is not wise to become engaged until you have known each other at some depth for 6 months to a year or longer.

Furthermore, the Bible advises us to seek wise counsel prior to making important decisions and to honor our fathers and mothers. We strongly believe that persons seriously considering engagement and marriage should first seek the counsel of their parents, if possible, as well as their church pastors and other godly, mature Christians whom they know and respect, before they become engaged.

PREMARITAL COUNSELING

Our Premarital Counseling consists of 5 sessions with a mentor couple, typically occurring once per month for 5 months. Generally either a pastor or a trained couple that is part of ENCS' leadership will meet with you for these appointments. (However, if you would prefer to receive premarital counseling from another source, you may do so, but we would still like you to meet at least once with a pastor or a trained couple from our leadership team.)

In our experience, we have found that it can be very beneficial to begin the process of Premarital Counseling *before* engagement. You are thinking of getting married and you have been dating for a while, we would strongly encourage you to sign up for our Pre-Marital Counseling and complete the first 3 sessions. This is a proven process to help you decide to move forward into engagement with strong confidence that it is God's will for you to be married.

In these first 3 sessions you will talk about many topics such as your family backgrounds, what drew you together, the purpose of marriage, biblical roles of husbands and wives, the nature of covenant, and more. You'll also take the online *Prepare-Enrich* assessment to objectively measure your relationship strengths, similarities and differences, as well as growth areas.

After the third session, you'll use a "decision making guide" in order to evaluate your relationship and discuss the decision to move forward into engagement (or not). If you decide to become engaged, you can complete sessions 4 and 5 in the months leading up to your wedding date.

Another matter of extreme importance is that you prepare for marriage with reverence for God, respect for one another, and with moral purity. To assist you in doing this we will advise you to develop a "Purity

Covenant" which would express in practical terms how you intend to fulfill your commitment to purity. Together with the leaders' pastoral care, a purity covenant proves to be very helpful for many couples as they seek to honor the Lord and preserve the gift of sexual intimacy for their marriage.

WEDDING CEREMONY

We will provide you with a copy of a general wedding ceremony which you are welcome to modify or use as is. Many couples enjoy writing up their own vows. If you do choose to modify, please be sure to do so with the advice and approval of both the counselors & the pastor officiating the wedding. We would like the wedding to reflect your own individuality, while also being scripturally sound and glorifying to the Lord Jesus.

MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, REMARRIAGE

The Bible is very clear in teaching that God's purpose and design for marriage is a lifelong commitment. Furthermore, it teaches that a Christian should only marry another Christian (2 Cor 6:14; 1 Cor 7:39).

While divorce is never commanded by God for the Christian, it is permitted in certain circumstances (marital unfaithfulness, abandonment; Mt 19:3-9; 1 Cor 7:15-16). Remarriage after divorce by a Christian however is not permissible in certain circumstances (Mt 19:3-9), and where reconciliation is still possible (1 Cor 7:10-14). When these conditions are not a problem, remarriage is a possibility for the person with divorce in their Christian background.

If any of this applies to you, or if divorce is a part of your background, we would like to dialogue with and help you understand how God's Word applies to your particular situation that you might have a clearer sense of God's will for your life.

PASTORAL APPROVAL

Because the pastor who officiates the wedding will be putting his blessing on the marriage, it is important that he be able to do so with a clear conscience. We will not violate our own consciences and spiritual discernment by performing marriages in cases where counseling reveals that the marriage would be either unscriptural, or inadvisable due to such things as immaturity, gross incompatibility, and/or rebellion and sin. To this end we require a reasonable dating and engagement period to allow for mutual relational, emotional and spiritual growth. This typically needs to be at least a year or longer (inclusive of dating and engagement). It is essential that couples demonstrate maturity in problem-solving, communication and their willingness to learn.

MISCELLANEOUS RESPONSIBILITIES

Since the pastoral counseling will focus primarily on your relationship, the wedding ceremony, and your preparation for marriage, you should plan on being responsible for procuring such things as: a valid marriage license; building facilities for the wedding, rehearsal and reception; music, photos and flowers for the ceremony; other things related to the rehearsal and reception; etc. Because this can often be an overwhelming responsibility at a time when it is important to focus on developing your relationship for marriage, you may want to consider hiring a wedding coordinator from the church whose building you will be renting.

FINAL NOTE

From friendship as singles to dating, from engagement to the wedding day, from the honeymoon to the many years to come, we encourage you throughout this entire journey to seek to honor our Lord Jesus by walking obediently with Him in grace through faith. By doing this you will be committing your lives to His loving care, and He will make all things beautiful in His time.

May God bless you richly!

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