

(Spiritual Guidelines for Courtship) Testimonies of Godly Courtship

by Rick Leibee

A sermon on the importance of having a spiritual foundation and godly authority in a courtship, and how this sets the tone for a healthy and godly marriage.

Duration: 1:18:50

Scripture: Proverbs 21:1, Isaiah 61:3

Topics: "Christian Courtship", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

In this video, a couple shares highlights from their courtship and testimonies. They mention the verse from Isaiah 61 that speaks about God turning ashes into beauty and bringing joy out of mourning. The wife talks about submitting to authority and finding comfort in the verse from Proverbs 21 that says the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord. She shares how she got saved and began her Christian walk while living with her brother-in-law and sister. The husband talks about being disciplined by Emmanuel and learning to serve others, particularly in the children's ministry, which helped him deepen his walk with God and overcome sin.

Transcript

Hello, this is Brother Denny. Welcome to Charity Ministries. Our desire is that your life would be blessed and changed by this message.

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These messages are offered to all without charge by the freewill offerings of God's people. A special thank you to all who support this ministry. Well, just to explain a little bit here in the beginning, Dad, I think gave us a pretty good introduction, but this isn't our extensive courtship testimony, as we don't have time to give that, but Dad asked us if we would share a few highlights from our testimonies and on a few specific principles and hit those things through our testimony.

So that's what we will be doing. So don't be disappointed if it's not the extensive testimony that you were expecting. I'll let my wife share first.

The verse that comes to my mind when I think of our courtship and some of the beautiful things that the Lord has done in my life is a verse from Isaiah, chapter 61, where it says that the Lord makes our ashes into beauty and He makes the joy of heaviness into mourning. He gives us beauty for ashes. And some of what I'd like to share today is I was 19 before I was born again and before I gave my life over to Christ.

And so in the years, I think at age 14 or 15, I became part of the youth group and I was part of what I guess you would call the dating scene among my kind of people, which was maybe a little different from how Dad grew up. But yet it wasn't. The spirit of it was very, very much the same.

And I'd like to share some of that, but I'd also like to compare it with our experiences in our courtship and some of the differences. One of the things that comes to my mind in the years of dating is the difference in walking after the flesh and walking after the spirit. In dating, I would have to say that even though I had some spiritual light, I had some light and I had some right desires and some right intentions, but I wasn't born again.

And I think primarily in those experiences, I was walking after my flesh. I was walking after my own way and what I wanted. I was attracted to this person and so I wanted to pursue a relationship with them and so I was walking after my own way and after my flesh.

And in our courtship, it just wasn't that way. Even the way it started out, I had no idea that Jeremy was even interested in me. And when he came and talked to Dad and then Mom and Dad came to me, it was something that just totally took me by surprise.

And one of the things that was really deeply on my heart was that I said to the Lord, Lord, I've experienced enough in the years of dating that I don't want this to be something that I want. I want this to be something that you want. I want it to be your way.

I want this relationship to be something. If you want me to court and to get married, I want it to be something that would build your kingdom. I don't want what I want, but I want what you want.

And I started it out with that prayer and that desire. And I just kept laying the thing before the Lord and praying and I gave it some time and I said, Lord, I'm just going to let you guide this. And after praying about it for a few weeks, I think it was maybe a month, over that month, I felt the deep assurance of the Lord coming deeper and deeper in my heart.

And by the time that month was over, I knew there was a full and a deep assurance in my heart that this is what God wanted. This wasn't something that I was just seeking after, but this was God's will for me. And I had that peace and that assurance and that went with us through our courtship.

Something else that I really see contrasted is the whole authority issue. In the dating years, there was no authority. We basically did and went and did what we wanted to.

And the choices that I made as a young lady often weren't very wise ones. Or in my younger years, they were often very unwise choices. And there was no buffering authority there to give us guidance and to give us counsel.

And if I had questions, there was really nobody there to ask. And so some of the decisions that I made and the choices that I made were very unwise and led to wrong choices and often led into sin and led into things that I deeply regret now. But we had the rich blessing of being under authority, being fully under authority in our courtship and having a free and open relationship.

And it was so sweet and it gave us protection. Mom and Dad Libby were always there for us when we had questions or they were there when they had concerns. And it was a really rich blessing for us.

And it was an especially rich blessing because I knew what it was like to be dating without authority. And I knew the pain that it had brought to my own life, to my life in those years and the regrets that I still have. And so I counted it a rich privilege.

Walking after the flesh and not having any guidance makes a very weak foundation for walking in purity. And some of the wrong choices that I made in dating and in those years were compromising in purity. It seemed like in some of the relationships, no matter what my resolves were and no matter how good my intentions or my desires were, they always seemed to crumble after a period of time.

And I made many wrong choices and they led to sin and it seemed like one compromise would lead to another. And before you know it, you're at a place or I was at a place that I would have never dreamed that I would have been at. And on the opposite spectrum of that, I feel like walking in the Spirit and walking in the will of God and also walking under authority in our courtship built a strong foundation for purity and for being able to walk in purity.

Just knowing that this was the will of God and that I was walking in the will of God gave me a deep assurance and a confidence and gave me a strong desire. And also the Spirit of God gave us the power that we needed to walk victoriously and to have a pure courtship. And the authority that we had in our courtship also, it was a buffer and it was something that gave us, we had guidance and it was a protection and if there was any concerns that we had and any concerns that they had, that also was something that kept us and that was a real blessing.

And so, yeah, when I look on in the past, those years actually are some of the darkest years in my life and some of the deepest regrets that I've ever, that I experience even to this day are from those years. And yet, our courtship was just such an incredible contrast. It was just so beautiful and so not like that.

And I feel like one of the important things in our relationship also was that even right from the beginning, the foundation of our courtship was built on Jesus Christ. We had a spiritual foundation and it was one of the things that blessed our relationship and that blessed our courtship. We wrote actually for a few, was it two months before we started courting, we wrote to each other just to get to know each other better and we laid a spiritual foundation for our courtship.

We got to know each other on a spiritual level. We would talk to each other about what we were reading in our devotions and we would talk to each other about how we believed about certain things and how we felt about this issue and that issue and what the Lord had been teaching us through our devotions and through His Word and different things. And it really, I feel like it was one of the keys in our relationship and in our courtship.

But in my mind, there's just no comparison. It's just, it's trading ashes for beauty. And I praise God for what He did for me personally and what He's done for us and the beautiful relationship that He's given us.

I don't deserve it and I don't deserve the husband that He's given me, but I praise Him. Amen. Well, I'd like to start out with a little bit before those years in waiting.

I was a little bit older until I started courting. I was 27, I guess, when I started courting. And I'd just like to share a little bit from those years of waiting and give a little bit of a background.

And when I first came into the Charity Circles here, I was about 16 or 17. And almost right away, I guess we were here a year and I started working for Emmanuel, which was a real blessing in my life. I was a young man, void of much understanding, void of much wisdom, lacking a lot in my life, not wandering around in my Christian life.

And I started working for Emmanuel and I was working for him for about a year or two. And he was ordained as minister. And then right on top of that, he became the Mission Board Director.

At that point in my life, I was looking for something to throw my life into. And I realized, and I guess God brought the realization upon my heart, that, you know, one way I can bless the Lord at this time and be a blessing is to throw myself into this business and into Emmanuel's life and bless Him in this way so that He can further the Kingdom of God. Because the Mission Board at that time was asking him to spend half of his working time in the Mission Board and those things.

And I knew that that meant more responsibility for me. And I struggled with that in the beginning. But I realized that, you know, in me doing this and throwing myself more into this and carrying more of the load of the business, I can bless Emmanuel and those things.

And so I did that. I learned to... I believe God taught me many things there. One, He gave me the blessing of being disciplined by Emmanuel and by being taught many spiritual blessings and learning what it meant to be a servant and to serve others.

That was one of the great blessings to my life in my younger years, learning to do that. And as time went on, God sent other opportunities. At that time also, I threw myself into the children's ministry, which was a great blessing in my life.

Just finding something to throw myself into and to learn to deepen my walk with God, for number one, because I began to get questions. I began to see, OK, this thing ain't right in my life. And these young children that I ministered to see through me.

And it was an encouragement for me to dig deeper. And as I did that, it gave me a power to walk in victory over sin. And it did something for my own life.

It brought a stability and brought more of a... Even though I didn't at all times... At times I got discouraged and didn't... How should I say? I wavered a bit in some of that. It was a real blessing to my life to find something to throw myself into in those years. I know as I got older, I realized, you know, I'm getting older.

What about marriage and these things? And I began to evaluate all that and I realized that, you know, the only reason I want to get married... I think I was around 20 or 22 when I just settled over my heart. If I'm going to get married, the reason I want to get married is so I can better serve God. And I had had a wrong perspective of marriage before that time.

I had had a warped view of marriage and kind of even said in my heart, well, I don't even want this marriage thing if this is what it's going to be from what I had seen in my younger years. I had kind of been turned off of it in a sense. But God began to show me that actually marriage can be a beautiful thing if it's done in Him and if the focus is Him and the focus is not one another and the focus is not what gratification can I get out of this for my own flesh or for my own desire.

And it was around the age of 20 or 22, I don't know when exactly, that that settled over my heart. But I continued to endeavor to serve God as a single young man to the fullest. I was a single young man.

And as years went on, I realized my need for a wife. I remember so clearly one day in the children's ministry, I was got in a situation where as a single young man, it was a tough situation. And I said, you know, a wife would really help out.

I realized my singleness very much at that time. And even though I realized that, I was thinking about it this morning. It was five years later until I actually got married.

And I continued to serve God in those five years, you know, in that space of time. And I guess what I was thinking about this morning was, you know, God gave me that revelation that I needed a wife, even though He had a lot of maturing to do in my life before I was actually ready for a wife. And I look at all those times and all those ministry opportunities I had through those years as a time of maturing in my life, a time of stability.

Like Dad was saying this morning, you know, it has brought a lot of stability in my life just through different situations I was in. Then going to Africa and spending six months there basically by myself out in the bush, you know. Many of those things were very good, even though they also awakened the desire or awakened the need for a wife to serve God better.

But it was always all that awakening was on the premises of needing a wife to serve God better. And as we came to the time of courtship, that was one of my very strong desires that we wouldn't just get married so we could settle down and have a good life together. I think I wrote that to her in one of my first letters.

You know, maybe even in the first one, I'm not sure. But just letting her know that my desire was that we could serve God as a couple and not just to get married to have a good life together, even though it's a blessing being married and you can do many more things for Christ. That was my desire.

And as we courted, we talked about that actually many times, how we would serve God together, different ways. But also the whole aspect, as we have gotten married, it has been such a blessing. Seeing that we had laid that foundation, and she had laid that foundation a bit in her life also, but seeing that foundation was laid of serving God as two single young people as we came through courtship and walked through courtship with that on our hearts, even our courtship, I believe, was some of the time was spent reaching out to others and trying to bless others.

But even since we've gotten married, it's been such a blessing to... and even though we've only been married nine months, it's been a blessing to find ways to bless others and serve others even in our marriage. And I expect that that's what our life will be made up of, of serving others and blessing others through our life, married life together. The other aspect that really blessed me in our courtship, more specifically to our courtship, was the blessing in the relationship I had with Dad.

And I know Dad mentioned this morning about not courting the Father and all those things, and I don't feel like I did that with Dad, but I really appreciated the relationship I had with Dad before we started courting. He didn't know I was coming to ask for divina when I did, but after I did, we continued our relationship, and he knew me very well. But as things came up and as we walked through the whole thing of courtship, I heard his heart on how he wanted us to do things, and he heard my heart and all those.

We had a very open, free relationship, and I never felt like... Some people say, well, we have these restrictions. Yes, there were some guidelines given, but I never looked at them as restrictions. I just looked at them more as protection and some guidelines.

But it was a blessing to me to know... For me, it was more just knowing what he expected and knowing what was expected of us as a couple together. I really appreciated that kind of relationship. At times, I had to go to him and say, Hey Dad, this is what I'm thinking.

What do you think? I found that such a blessing and a freedom in our courtship to be able to go to him and call him up and say, Hey Dad, tomorrow we're thinking of doing this and this. What do you think? Is it okay? And have him say, Yeah, that sounds great. Or have him say, Well, maybe you do it this and this.

And I found such a freedom in that as we had our time together and went through our courtship to know that the blessing was upon this and what we were doing was blessed and we weren't trying to hide anything. Everything was out in the honest and open. That was one of the things that just so really blessed me in our courtship.

Just to have that blessing of authority but also to know that everything is clear. Everything is out in the open. I have nothing to hide.

They have nothing to hide. We're communicating. I was really, really blessed with that through our courtship.

I would lift that up to any young man. Don't look at the father as someone that you have to get around to get to the girl. But look at it as another blessing in your life.

That is how it was in my life. And I just thank God for that. And praise God for these meetings.

Amen. Well, Dad had asked us if we could share a testimony on authority. It was one area in our lives that seemed like God dealt with me especially.

And I'm very thankful for looking back. And so he asked if we would share our testimonies on how God dealt with us and how everything came out. So I'll let my wife share first and then I'll share.

Okay. Well, one of the things that really stood out to me in my submitting to authority was the verse in Proverbs 21.1 where it says, The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord as the rivers of water. He turneth it wither so ever he will.

And that verse was very precious to me during my time of submitting to my authority which wasn't necessarily... I had some authority that was godly but my father wasn't necessarily a spiritual young man, a spiritual man. And so this verse really was precious to me because I knew that whatever would happen, his heart was in the hand of the Lord. And when I was 18, I had lived with my brother-in-law and sister for nearly two years.

There I got saved. The Lord changed my life. And I began my Christian walk there.

And just because he was my spiritual authority, I had asked him before I left if ever there was a young man that would come, if he would be willing to talk to him or help me out because I wasn't sure how all those things would work with my father and everything. But toward the end of my stay, my parents really, really wanted me to come back home again. And in my heart, my first thought, I didn't really want to because it meant two things.

In my own heart, it meant going back to my old church where there was a lot of, it was a setting of tradition and a lot of spiritual deadness. And I wasn't sure how all those things were going to work out. And the second thing was it meant submitting myself to my parents.

And since God had changed my life, I wanted to submit myself to them. But it was a situation where it was less than a desirable home situation. And I wasn't sure how all those things would work out.

But God gave me grace to go home and to live there. It actually grew my Christian walk in many ways to submit myself to my dad's authority in many areas of my life where it actually helped me to grow in my Christian walk and made my Christian walk with, or my walk with Christ stronger. And nearly a year, nearly a year later, after I had gone home, Billy came.

And he had talked to my brother-in-laws and my dad and had asked permission to start a courtship. And it wasn't necessarily a cultural practice for a young man to come and ask the father if they could court their daughter. And so that was very much of a blessing to me that Billy went and asked my dad, even though he wasn't spiritual.

And it was a blessing in my life for that reason. Since my dad didn't know Billy, I had just left the church a few months earlier and got baptized. And so it was another big thing in his life that he wasn't interested right away.

And Billy might share more, but he actually asked us if we would be willing to wait for six months. And he had written a letter to me. And I took a while and prayed about it.

And my spiritual authorities were clear on it. In my heart, I felt the Lord leading in it all. And yet my dad didn't give us permission to start at that time.

And not knowing what to do, I shared my heart with my spiritual authority, which was my brother-in-law. And we decided that it might be a better thing to wait. Because in my former life, I had been rebellious against my parents and in many areas had gone against them.

But now since I was born again, I could no longer feel right to just go against them in that area. I felt it would ruin my testimony for Christ. It would ruin many of the things that had just happened a few years before in my life.

And I just didn't feel clear in my own heart of going against them in that way. And so my spiritual authorities talked it over and we decided to wait. During that time, there were things in my life that God did.

Just submitting myself and waiting on God and trusting God that if it was His will that He would bring all those things, He would work all those things out. And maybe you wonder why all of this or why. But one blessing was that we waited for five months and before our six months were up, my dad actually gave

permission and he said, Go ahead.

He had gotten to know Billy a little bit during that time and that was just an answer and a blessing before we expected it. And now as I look back on it all, I'm very thankful to have submitted myself to that authority because number one, it drew me closer to Christ. And many times of praying and just waiting and crying out to the Lord, it drew me closer to Christ and it taught me that God's way is best and I can trust Him.

And it also, now as I look back, there's no regrets of waiting. There's no regrets of why we did it that way. Just waiting on God and waiting till my dad was clear with it all.

And also now, it makes a difference in our relationship now. Even going back home now, they're free with us, they're kind to us and there's no tension in us being married. And that is truly a blessing.

So, I praise the Lord and give all the glory for all those things. I didn't know how to do all those things right every time but God was faithful and He gave me grace to walk through those things. So, thank you.

Amen. Mine is very much the same way but a little different. But first of all, I'd like to say that young people, if you look at authority as something dreadful, may I say your view of God is wrong.

Because ultimately God is the authority and God puts you in a certain home not by accident. And so, as I look back at dad as my authority, I want to say thank you for being my authority. And I want to say, parents, I want to beg you don't let your children not let you be their authority.

Because as I look back again, if dad would have been soft in his heart toward me with what I wanted, it wouldn't have come out this way. And we wouldn't be standing here this morning. So, I'm thankful for that.

But, yeah, as she was sharing, you know, we had gone through some of those things, talked with dad about courtship and he asked me if I'm ready and all those things. And I wrote her brother-in-law a letter and saying, you know, I'm interested in Alta and how's your heart, what do you feel about it? And a couple of weeks went by and I talked with him. He was clear about it.

But he wanted me to ask her father. It's not a cultural thing to do that. And none of her brother-in-laws did that.

They just went ahead and started courting. And that's just a cultural thing. But because, you know, he had left the church and he was born again and saw these things differently now and she was born again and, you know, I come from a different church, he felt it was good to do it right.

And so, you know, I went ahead and I wrote him a letter explaining my heart and what my desire is, that I'm interested in his daughter, not for just pleasure but with marriage in mind. And I told him that I'll call him in a couple of weeks and I now talk to him. And in about three weeks I called him and it was a pretty brief conversation.

Basically he said, you know, as soon as he knew who it was, he just kind of quieted down and he said, I want you to wait six months. And there was no reason given, no explanation. He just said no.

And it was hard for me to swallow, I will say that. But then I went and talked to my spiritual authorities, my dad and her brother-in-law, and they talked and they felt it good at that time that we would find out from Alta how she feels. Because if, you know, they felt sort of leaning that, yeah, maybe we should wait.

So they wanted to know, okay, is she clear with it? Why wait six months and in the end she's not interested? So I did write her a letter and after a week or so I got the response back and, you know, it was a yes and all those things. But, yeah, we were like, okay, what do we do now? She had left the Beecher Church and was going to Union County. But they felt, you know, with her sharing her heart that she would like, she wants to submit to her parents that it would be best to wait six months.

And that was a hard thing for me. And that was a time where, at that time, I appreciated dad's authority in saying, you know, I think it's good for you. God was dealing in my heart with some specific areas I wasn't totally clear with that I believe, looking back, God wanted to deal with me a little bit more in this specific area.

And so that's what happened. And I struggled with it for a while. But I submitted myself.

We'd had no contact whatsoever as far as writing or on the phone during this time. And then about two or three months into our waiting time, I went and met with him again, with Nate, and asked if I can come and start visiting him, getting to know him. And he felt, yeah, that would be a good idea.

So I went, I think, three times during that, the rest of our time. And the first time was a little awkward, but, you know, I can't remember what we did, maybe, but he has a great interest in bees, and so I showed interest in bees. And it was a great communicating point, and getting to know him, and things loosened up.

You know, the next time we went out, I think we went out mushroom hunting out in the woods, and we were by ourselves, you know, him and I were out looking for mushrooms, and it was just a good time of connecting, and there wasn't a whole lot of spiritual talk, but yet there was a connection there. And so during that, we just, you know, and as she said, his heart was warmed towards me, and all those things, and even before the time was up, he gave permission to just go ahead and start recording. And so it was a blessing to do all those things, because now I had a relationship with her father, and we wouldn't have necessarily had to do all those things, but out of respect, out of, you know, God's way, and submitting ourselves, and saying, okay Lord, you know, here we are, we want to submit, we want to do what's right, and submitting, I had a relationship with her father, and to this day, I have a very good relationship with him, and we can freely talk, and we can go up there and spend the day, and as I look back, I am very thankful that I submitted my heart to this whole thing, and said, okay, I know it's hard, I know it's not easy, he's not born again, and yet all my spiritual authorities are clear.

Why this? But yet, okay Lord, just bowing my heart for no reason, but yet for the ultimate reason of God wanted me to trust Him. Billy, do you trust me? And I believe that is what God put in my path. Do you trust me? Now you're willing to submit with not a cause.

And so I look back and say, thank you Lord for bringing that into my life, because I learned a valuable lesson. And so I hope that's an encouragement to you all, the young people, that maybe your situation is not perfect. God is still God, and He's still in control.

God bless you. One other little part of their testimony that involves me, that I guess I'll share, is I remember I was driving down the road one day with Billy, I think we were going to the Mannheim lot, in that back way, and we were talking about marriage and courtship. One thing led to another over the next few days.

I don't remember how I said it all now, Billy, because that was three years ago now I guess. It was 2004, wasn't it? But somehow the subject came up of who. Okay, we established with Billy, okay, he was ready.

And I think it was me who brought it up first, or was it Mom, about Alta. I think we asked you had you considered her. I forget how it was all brought up now.

And I think his answer was yes. I mean, it wasn't like, yes, she's the only one, but I think she had caught his attention in some areas. The story behind the story is, how she caught our attention was when she went back home to her father who, as she says, is not spiritual.

We knew her before then because of her brother, where she was living. She had been down here, I think she had even maybe stayed in our house at Bible school or something. Alta, is that right? And so we had gotten to know her, and we really appreciated her.

We thought, what a precious girl, what a precious gem, and she's a sweetheart, and loves the Lord and all these things. And then when we heard she was going home, at first we were like, oh, you know, this is going to be hard. Then all of a sudden as we thought about it, we thought, wow, okay, there is really some depth to this girl.

And then we got to talk to her after she went home, and she never complained. She didn't fuss about it. And it wasn't easy there, but she had a good attitude.

She chose to submit, and God gave her, I think her testimony would be, as she said here, grace, to do it with joy. She didn't do it as a grief. She did it with joy.

And then I thought, whoa, there really is depth here. You know, this is exciting. This is spiritual stuff going on here.

And so about all this same time is when Billy and I were driving down the road one day on our way to the Manhattan lot, and she was the first girl that came to my mind, you know, for Billy, because I thought, wow, this girl is, you know, very precious. And so then when we brought it up, he quickly concurred, and one thing led to another, and then you heard the rest of the story. So sometimes, my point is, sometimes when you do things and you think nobody's watching you, and you're walking out your Christian life and making decisions that are even hard decisions, you might be surprised who's watching you.

I don't know how to say all that, but, you know, other people do notice, you know, our lives. Well, kind of a privilege to share our testimonies. About a, you know, we were asked to share about how to maintain a pure relationship, of how we as a couple kept ourselves pure during our courtship.

I guess, first of all, it started when we had our first date. We decided that we want hands-off courtship, and we set a guideline for ourselves that we will not touch. And we did shake hands for the first couple times, but after that, we decided that we best to refrain from that because we both love touch, and it was for our good and benefit to refrain from that.

And my encouragement to each one of the young people here is that if you are tempted to even touch or even shake hands, if you are tempted with those thoughts of, you know, keep yourselves pure for that. And when we would rub shoulders or even bump into each other a little bit, we did apologize. You know, we apologized for, you know, touching.

And I'm glad we did that, and we have no regrets on our courtship of how we did, kept ourselves pure. And we have no guilt either. And the first time we hugged each other after our wedding, that was a blessing to do that for the first time.

To even touch for the first time, that was a blessing. And I have a verse, actually three verses to read that in our start of our courtship, I made this our prayer. It's Psalms 105, verses 3 to 5. It says, Glory ye in His holy name.

Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord, seek the Lord in His strength, seek His face evermore. Remember His marvelous works that He has done, His wonders and the judgments of His mouth. Now, if we seek the Lord in our courtship, God will be there with us.

And that was our prayer at the beginning of our courtship, or at least it was my prayer anyway. So, God bless you all. Let my wife share now.

For me, I had an impure past, not necessarily committing deeds in my body, but in my heart I was very impure. And so the Lord granted me repentance just two weeks before we started courting, before I even knew that Eli was interested in me. It was Bible school and the Lord worked in my heart and I was able to dump it all out and repent.

And I felt clean and in my right mind for the first time in my life. And so I was so, when my dad brought Eli's wishes to me, that he was wanting to court me, I was so glad that I had dealt with all that, because if I had gone into courtship impure in my heart, it would have been awful, but I was totally free and clear and able to, I mean my thoughts weren't even impure in our courtship, it was such a blessing. And because we had set those guidelines to have a hands-off courtship, I mean there were times, especially after we were engaged, that I longed to hold his hand or hug him.

I knew we couldn't, and I wanted to save that for after we were married, and it was such a blessing to be able to, on our wedding day, finally touch each other and know that we had no guilt and no regret, especially on our engagement. I really wanted to give him a hug, but it was a blessing to be pure in my heart and come to marriage pure. Yeah, we praise God that he did keep ourselves pure through our courtship.

I know there's been times that we were tempted to even touch, but we were like, we can't do it. And we praise God that he kept us pure throughout our courtship. May God bless you.

Greetings to each of you this morning, it's a privilege to stand here and to have some of those godly roots, those godly desires and roots, and I appreciate what Brother Eli shared, and that was our heart, and it's like Jenny has said already, it wasn't even a temptation. If those desires were there, it was so set in our hearts that there wasn't much of a temptation there. We were asked to share a little bit of some difficulties or some differences that we faced and how to work through them.

We titled our courtship testimony, When It Takes a While to Fall in Love. And really, that was, you know, we tend to look at, as young people, we see these glorious courtship testimonies, and I was that way. I remember when I was 19, and so I thought, I won't be able to, God won't be able to speak to me that way.

I'm just too carnal, he won't be able to speak to me. But for a few years, I waited, but what we tend to do is, even courtship, we tend to look at it as smooth and perfect, and from the outside, it often looks that way. You know, how many of us see a courtship and we know they're struggling with something? You just

don't see it.

We usually don't see the bumps and questions, when in reality, there's nothing wrong with having questions when you're going through your courtship. I stepped into courtship in faith and peace. Not having a sure, like a light from heaven, or a, just, this is the way, you know, this is for sure God's will, but I walked into it in peace.

Taking steps of faith that this was the right thing to do. I spent time in, I spent time in prayer, and also spent a lot of time talking with Jenny's daddy. Just spent time getting to, they got to know me, I got to know them some, and you would think after that much time that things would go smoothly.

Once you know it's in God's will and so on, but really we are human, we need to get to know each other. We went into courtship not knowing each other very well at all, Jenny hardly knew me, and as time went on we started seeing who we were, who each other was, more and more, and things started coming out that we weren't, we weren't really ready for. We wondered, we started wondering how things would work out.

I remember a time when we parted and we didn't know if things would go on, but the blessing was our parents and that peace that stayed there. Some of our differences, there were some differences in personality, differences in make-up and so on, and some of those things faced us, but the blessing was we faced them head-on, we talked about it. We didn't just hide them, we didn't just bottle up and, well, I don't understand this, but I'm not supposed to be feeling this way in courtship, so I'm just going to be quiet.

We talked about it. Just some of our differences, one thing is decision-making. I like to take time and think through things and I'm slower to make decisions, where Jenny soon knows what she wants to do.

We think differently. I tend to just take time, you know, and it takes me a while to think through things and Jenny's much quicker just to have something together, you know. Know what she wants to do.

Jenny is generally more talkative than I am, and some of these things, as being a leader and feeling a little, those things seem to be a threat to me. I was afraid I wouldn't be able to lead out properly, but that blessing of authority, and that's so important, is learn to be under authority before you get there, so that you know how to relate to them when you need help. That and the assurance that God will have his way were great blessings.

You know, yes, there were questions. There were times when I went home from that time and I didn't know what's going to happen, but there was that peace, there was something in my heart I expected will go on, but I didn't know for sure. And it wasn't an easy time to go through, but God knew that we needed that and I told Jenny over that time, I said, we may find that this was the best thing that could have happened.

We were encouraged to face them now. We were encouraged to face these differences and these issues now, rather than getting to marriage and after marriage, these things really get out and then what do you do? We were encouraged to face them now, and we took time to look at them squarely, to look at them, look at ourselves. What is my need in this? And we were encouraged to limit our contact for a little bit, just slow down our writing and so on, so we can focus on ourselves, because it's a distraction.

Just face it. If you're in a relationship like that, it can be a distraction. And if you take time to say, what is my need? As we, as time went on, we looked at things squarely and consulting our authorities and so on.

Our hearts were drawing closer together, but we were curbing that. We were taking it slowly for a little bit. I'll let you share.

Well, like Marvin said, you tend to think that everybody's courtship is going well and then when it comes to your turn and you have these bumps, it's like, okay, what's wrong with me? Why am I facing these things? Am I normal? Is this really going to work out? I know I cried a lot of tears wondering, what's wrong with me? How is this all going to work out? Yet I believe it was God's way for us. Like Marvin said, we didn't step into our courtship, we stepped into it with the peace of God. And I had that too.

As we faced these uncertainties, as I prayed it through, the bottom line always came back to the peace of God in my heart. And just letting that peace rule, okay, Lord, I have peace for the next step. I have peace for the next step.

And I don't know where for sure this is going to end, but I do have peace for the next step. So that was a blessing. Like Marvin said, as we discovered that our personalities were very different and how that affected the way we related to each other, I was very blessed.

Papa encouraged me. He said, you are both spiritual young people. Face these things now rather than waiting until after you're married.

You might as well work through them now. That's what courtship is for. I was very blessed with that.

Marvin mentioned some of the things where I was different. Another thing that I really faced was through our courtship, for some reason, God brought up into my heart my independence. I had a very independent, strong-willed personality.

And I needed to work through some of those things. I'm blessed. I don't know why God used courtship to bring that out, but He did.

And it was a blessing. Like Marvin said too, as we went on faith, it took a while to fall in love. It took a while.

We just built that friendship. We built our relationship. But then, you know, maybe it's just because that's the way I am.

But when I fell in love, I really fell in love. So the feelings did come. I guess back to, you know, the falling in love.

We started by faith. We started in it. We didn't know each other very well, but I felt this is God's will.

And we walked ahead in faith. And yes, our authorities were... There was something they did not want, and that is going into marriage without that love. That bubbling, you know, where we just figured, feel this is God's will and walk into it.

And that came. As time went on, that love matured. Our courtship was a happy, sweet year in life.

From beginning to end, it was about 13 months. Some courtships are short. Some are longer.

But we learned to give our hearts to each other. And we were ready for our wedding. And we had a very wonderful day.

And those differences are still there. But we weren't surprised with them. We weren't shocked after we were married that this is the person that I married.

We worked through those things. We didn't hide them. We didn't wear our Sunday clothes all the time in our courtship.

The way that we worked through these things, I would say, was authority. Number one, authority. And these aren't really in a special order, but being honest with them and letting them guide us.

Being willing to say, this is where things are at. Communication, that's very important. Time.

Don't rush ahead. We took time with it. A settled peace.

And recognizing and dealing with ourselves. Psalm 37.5 says, Commit thy way unto the Lord, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass. And I would say, for us, that underlying peace was probably the main foundation.

Because if we wouldn't have had that, And we would have faced these things, we would have wondered, Is this really the right thing to do? But there was that underlying peace. Thank you and God bless you. Yeah, we were supposed to share family verses and songs today, But I guess our testimony got so long that we decided to just share that.

And we'd like to, you know, we think it's a miracle that we even got together. But we were 1600 miles apart. She was in a different country.

And I was here in Pennsylvania. I had just left the colony maybe two years before. And she had been working in Haiti for about five years.

And, you know, I think a lot of those things were really, We feel like they were really a miracle that we even got to know each other. And, you know, I'd like to start out by saying that I lived about ten years of my adult life. And I was not converted.

I was living in sin. I was living in bad relationships. And living in a way that was very ungodly.

And, you know, when I moved here I had a desire to start a new life. And to please God with everything that I knew. I was walking in all the light that I had.

You know, as this opportunity came up for me to go to Haiti, I was really excited about it. Marriage was the last thing on my mind. I went there as, this is going to be a wonderful experience.

I'll be able to, you know, experience a different country. And I was really looking forward to it. As far as teaching me how missions work.

Just a whole picture of serving and being involved in other people's lives. And I can say that marriage was the last thing on my mind when I, you know, went there. And what I'd like to do here today is kind of, she'll share and then I'll share.

And then I'd like to just bring, you know, our hearts together to share with you how we came together. So we'll just take turns and go back and forth where both of us were at at certain times and how it worked out. Yeah, I went to Haiti in the fall of 98.

And it was a vision of my heart for years to serve in a missions field. So it was kind of an answer to prayer. I always thought I would never get married.

For some reason I just didn't think that was God's calling for my life. So I was very excited when I went to Haiti. I was serving the Lord.

I was busy with ministering. I was very fulfilled in what I was doing. But it seemed like the longer I was there, the more I felt my singleness and how alone I was.

And it wasn't until towards the end of my five years there that I realized that the Lord is preparing my heart for something else. And I wasn't sure what it was. And I wasn't really to even face that it might be marriage because after all, I can do this by myself.

I don't really need someone else. But the Lord was slowly breaking my independent spirit and preparing me for my precious husband. I would say when I got there, I quickly really respected and honored what she was doing.

She didn't really catch my attention at that time, but I did really have a high respect and honor which I very rarely felt towards her. The way she was pouring out her life, leaving the house at 6.30 in the morning and ministering to 100, 150 people every day that had walked across 3, 4, 5 miles of mountains when it's hot. They typically didn't smell that good.

I felt like it was really something that I had never seen before. And I would say probably after about a little while, I started really enjoying her sweet personality. I started enjoying her friendship.

And it was probably about two months when I realized that this is really a wonderful person here. And I realized that I loved her and that I wouldn't mind spending the rest of my life with her. And that was about two months into my stay.

And I was there for a total of four months. So I was kind of in a really hard position there. Her dad wasn't around.

I didn't even know her dad personally. And I started struggling. Should I talk to her? Should I tell her how I feel? Should I hint? Should I feel her out? And I kind of reasoned it out.

Well, I can't really talk to her dad. She's not really accountable anymore. She's down here, her own person.

And I was really tempted to show how I feel and to go in that direction. But something always warned me that you shouldn't do that. I don't think that's right.

So I stayed there the next two months. And God protected me from talking to her and from letting her know how I feel. It was a really... I guess you could call it a bittersweet experience.

I really enjoyed being there. I really enjoyed her company. But yet I wasn't allowed to let my heart go.

I wasn't allowed to share with her how I really feel. And then after those two months I came home and I was still struggling with some of the same things. How can I pull her away from what she's doing there? She was serving 100, 150 people a day.

How can I pull her out of this work? Just for myself. So I was struggling with those things for about two months which were a real test in my life and a real time of walking and obedience to the best of my knowledge, the best that I knew at that time. When Gary first came to Haiti he was just another of the many visitors that came.

We had a lot of visitors in and out. Because of my heavy work schedule just the busyness of keeping up with Cline I didn't often get real involved with the visitors. But he had actually come with a two-week ticket and was going to go home.

He enjoyed himself so much there interacting and just learning a new culture and learning about the mission that he decided to stay for. He extended his ticket a little longer. But I'm not really sure how long it was.

It probably was only a couple weeks until I was noticing this young man. First I denied it in my heart. He'll go home soon.

This will just be one of the many. One of the crowd. But the longer he stayed there I started noticing especially his godliness, his earnest... He seemed to have such a fervor for the Lord.

He was so interested in what was happening in the church there. He was interested in the people, in the culture. I especially remember the one time we were dealing with a girl that was possessed with demons.

He took a week out to fast and pray for her. It caught my attention that he would be so interested in the work of the Lord there. I really enjoyed his boyish spirit just how he got involved in things and how he served us missionaries.

I came to a point where I realized that I'm allowing something to happen in my heart and I didn't want to because I had had experiences before where I allowed my heart to go out and it didn't work. It wasn't right. It takes away from your devotion to the Lord.

It allows something to take place in your heart that later you regret because you have to deal with it. You have to put it somewhere. I surrendered it to the Lord.

I gave it up. It kept coming back. I would lay it down again and surrender to the Lord again.

It was a time of really testing my faith because all of a sudden I realized that some of the singleness I had been feeling in the last couple of months was related to this. I'm not quite sure how to put it all in words but it was a time of the Lord just me giving up and walking in faith and allowing the Lord to just strip me and break me. I was back home by then and still not sure if I should go ahead with this.

I felt in my heart that it's the right direction to go but yet there were so many things that I wasn't clear with. I hadn't talked to anybody about it at that point. About that time the political situation in Haiti turned really bad and all the missionaries from CAM, the missionaries from ILIG they all had to come home.

For me I think that was all the encouragement I needed to say, OK, she's home now and I think I had heard that she'll be home for about a year. In my heart I thought OK, that's just a little open door I'll walk through that one. So I talked to my first authority which at that time would have been Ed I was living with him at the time and he was encouraging and I talked to one of the elders how they felt about it and I got some more encouragement and it seemed like there were just little steps I took and all the doors started

opening up and at that point I didn't even know your dad and Ed was nice enough to call the first time for me and introduce me, who I was and we went out to meet him at a restaurant and we sat down and I kicked my feet under the table and very nervous and intimidated and he looks at me with that mop of grey hair and blue eyes and so, Gary what exactly is it that you want?

I you know, I kind of crouched down and said I'd like to start seeing your daughter and one of the first things he told me, he said well I hope she doesn't know anything about this you know, and I was just like, whew you know, yeah as far as I know she doesn't I kept my heart as good as I could and you know I didn't talk to her about it and at that time I was really glad I started seeing the wisdom of the way I kept myself and I really think just that one little point made a big difference to him because he said all his daughters, she's the second youngest before all the boys had come to him first so I would have been the first one to not do it that way it would have been hard for him I think I would have been off to a rough start so I felt like that was you know even though it was a real

struggle for me to do that, yet I felt like in my heart at that time that was the right way to go and I I walked in obedience and I definitely received the blessing a very short time later Gary came home the end of January and very soon after like he said things began happening in the country and the mission board decided that we're just going to come home I had kind of been feeling burnout before that and I had actually asked to come home for six months to a year I felt like I just needed some time to just collect myself and just have some time for I felt like the busyness of the work there had really allowed me to drift in my relationship with the Lord it seemed like often there was so much ministering and pouring out that there was not much time left to replenish that that you were

pouring out and so it wasn't maybe two or three weeks after Gary came home that I also came home and the first couple weeks were taken up with just adjusting back to American life and reconnecting with my family and but through it all he was still kind of on my heart and I didn't quite understand why you know I kept laying it down and I kept surrendering it and God used that time to work a closeness in my relationship with the Lord that was very sweet to me it seemed like I I came to the end of my independence and feeling like I can do this by myself that independence has often even gone into my walk with the Lord where I kind of took things into my own hand and the Lord really that was a time of just really seeing myself and bringing me to the end of myself and I just maybe a week or two

before Gary came to Dad I came to a place of such sweet contentment and just being totally content in the Lord in His love and just experiencing a freedom in my heart that you know whatever the future holds I was the Lord's Gary had Brother Ed actually had called Dad about a week before I knew anything about it and this one Saturday Dad went off to this mysterious brothers meeting he was meeting with some brethren from the church that's all Mom told me I had no clue what was going on but anyway he came home pretty late that evening and came walking into the room where I was sitting and he said well Aunt Jo you'll never guess who I was with and I said no because I was still under the impression that he was at a brothers meeting and I figured it was something to do with the church or

something and he said well I met with Gary Wirtz yeah okay when she knew about it I guess when he told you about it I had to wait three whole days for my answer I'm still not sure what took her that long to decide I guess the Lord knew I was a very task oriented person and he gave me a woman a girl that really goes at it and from there on it was a real blessing our courtship went I would say very smooth one thing that I want to share that was a real blessing to us about half way through I think we courted for about three months before we got engaged and when I started thinking about getting engaged the Lord brought to my

attention some things from my past that she didn't know about and I started struggling in my spirit with it how can I marry this girl and she doesn't even know who I was

what I was involved in and yet for some reason at that time I thought if I share those things with her I'm history she'll walk away from everything but then I couldn't really live with myself to in a sense deceive her into marrying this godly young man that was a totally different person four years ago so I finally decided I'm going to share it with her I don't care even if we don't get married I feel like that's something I have to do and I opened up to her and told her who I had been things that had happened in my life and I think that was one of the highlights of our courtship the love I received the acceptance I received was to me almost shocking and I think what it did for us was I never struggled to be vulnerable again I never struggled to be honest to confess things to talk about

temptations in my life and I feel like that thing propelled us so far in our courtship and also into our marriage that we've always been clear with each other there's nothing between us I'm not hiding anything I praise the Lord that I walked in those little steps of obedience and was able to establish that kind of trust yeah that was a very growing time for us it was very precious I grew up in a my parents were Amish and they were converted before I was born I grew up actually in a Mennonite home so I was very protected growing up because of mom and dad's upbringing they were very protective of us children we were very innocent and so first when Gary told me some of these things I was you know a little shocked in my mind in my heart and yet the honesty that he shared it with brought a

trust between that I felt towards him that was it has been very sweet I feel like it is like he said it has really even through our marriage it established a trust that he would be willing to open himself up and share like that even before he had to and that was a big stepping stone for us Thank you

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