

"The variety of perspectives gathered here will help you sharpen your thinking, clarify your convictions, and pursue integrity and godliness as you seek healthy, mature Christian relationships."

—ALBERT Y. HSU

author of *Singles at the Crossroads*

"*5 Paths to the Love of Your Life* shows there is no 'one size fits all' in this adventure, and we are shown illuminating points of comparison and contrast among the options. This book details in clear language the ways serious believers may think about the paths to marriage."

—BEN PATTERSON

campus pastor, Westmont College, Santa Barbara, California

"Biblical, practical, contemporary. Those three words came to mind as I read *5 Paths to the Love of Your Life*. Pastors, youth workers, parents, and single adults will find it an invaluable resource on the difficult questions surrounding dating, courtship, and marriage in the twenty-first century. Get ready to have your thinking stretched and challenged."

—DR. RAY PRITCHARD

senior pastor; author of *An Anchor for Your Soul*,
Discovering God's Will for Your Life, and *He's God and We're Not*

"Dating is an issue of Christian controversy—and for good reason. This fascinating new book brings together some of the most important thinkers and writers on this issue, producing a dialogue that will stretch the mind and encourage Christian thinking. Read this book—it's sure to become a focus of much conversation."

—R. ALBERT MOHLER JR.

president, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky

"Recent books on courtship and dating have raised some difficult questions about the proper approach Christians should take for finding a life partner. This book lays out the major views and unpacks their scriptural arguments. If you're trying to understand all the views and think carefully through their biblical merit, here is the book you are looking for."

—JOHN MACARTHUR

pastor, Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, California;
president, The Master's College and Seminary

DEFINING YOUR DATING STYLE

5 PATHS TO THE LOVE OF YOUR LIFE

LAUREN F. WINNER | DOUGLAS WILSON | RICK HOLLAND
JONATHAN LINDVALL | JERAMY & JERUSHA CLARK
GENERAL EDITOR **ALEX CHEDIAK**



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Alex Chediak

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INTRODUCTION TO THE 5 PATHS

Alex Chediak

MATT AND STACY LIKE EACH OTHER – A LOT. YOU KNOW HOW IT GOES. After some flirting and hinting, Matt finally asks Stacy out. But Stacy isn't sure what to do. Part of her wants to say yes because she'd like to get to know Matt better. But the thing is, Stacy's good friends Kent and Julie are influencing her otherwise. They've sworn off dating because of all the junk that goes with relationships, especially ones that break up. Apparently, both Kent and Julie were recently burned in a relationship.

Kent was completely "in love" with his girlfriend, Samantha, but she suddenly decided he wasn't the one for her, and she wanted to see other people. Julie and her boyfriend were getting along great until he got a bit too physical. Julie felt used. She had been wanting to feel close to him and loved by him, yet ironically, she felt anything but. Both couples broke up, leaving Kent and Julie bruised, battered, and determined to prevent this mess from ever happening again. They kissed dating good-bye and are encouraging Stacy to do the same. They suggest that instead of dating, Stacy should require Matt to do the "biblical" thing and approach her father for permission to see her, spend time with her only in groups, and follow the typical steps of courtship.

On the other hand, Stacy's best friend, Emily, is a huge proponent of dating. She's been assuring Stacy that the only way to know if Matt

is right for her is to go out with him alone as a couple. Emily believes dating is a fun and innocent way to find “the one.” She has experienced plenty of breakups but continues to date, hoping she’ll find a diamond in the rough. Stacy knows, however, that Emily has given up quite a bit as far as sexuality is concerned, and she fears that if she’s too quick to date Matt, she may end up compromising her purity as well.

Stacy is frustrated that falling in love, such a seemingly simple thing (at least in the movies), can be so complicated. She thinks, *I like Matt, but if dating is such a bad option, how in the world can I get to know him in a way that could lead to something permanent? But what happens if we get to know each other too well and then break up?* With these questions bouncing around in Stacy’s mind, Matt continues to pursue her. Finally succumbing to her growing feelings for Matt, Stacy decides to go out with him. Confused, she thinks, *Would dating him really hurt? Does God actually have an answer on how this is supposed to work?*

This scenario is fictional, but the dilemmas it illustrates and the questions it raises are familiar to many Christian singles. The question, *If dating is okay, which I’m not sure it is, how do I date and still honor God?* has become important to single people everywhere. With the number of singles in America increasing each year,¹ interest in issues pertaining to dating and romance has likewise risen to unprecedented levels. Since Joshua Harris’s instant bestseller *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*, a plethora of books have appeared, claiming a wide variety of approaches to finding a marriage partner.

Many of these books disagree with each other. Some argue that kissing dating good-bye is not the answer. Many Christians, after all, think dating is a great environment where you can learn more about your strengths, weaknesses, and preferences. They think you can fondly remember your first dates and high school dances without feeling

hardened or embarrassed. Some maintain that rather than contributing to emotional baggage, breakup experiences can make you stronger and more prepared for marriage.

Others believe that the institution of dating is fundamentally flawed. From their perspective, no matter how careful you are to stay emotionally and physically pure, dating will still cause damage. The thought process goes something like this: If you succeed at staying pure, you learn a bad habit of guarding yourself in an environment where God intended you to be unabashedly open. Even if your relationship succeeds, this will make it harder for you to be emotionally vulnerable in marriage. And if your relationship ends, the breakup experience can harden your heart and make it easier for you to divorce when a future marriage becomes difficult.

Harris's book struck a chord for one simple reason: Deep down inside, many Christians are frustrated with their dating experiences. They've been wounded. They've given in to sexual temptation. They've compromised their standards to avoid being lonely. They know, instinctively, that it should not be this way. Most do not desire to position themselves for lifelong singleness, but very few know how to go about finding true, lasting, committed, exclusive love.

This book is here to help. Our goal is not to proselytize you to any particular position but instead to provide the big picture: the logic behind five of the most widespread perspectives on relationships held by Christians today (some more controversial than others, depending on your personal point of view). That way, you can make your own biblically informed decisions, being fully educated and, Lord willing, more mature and intentional about the way you approach relationships.

THE FIVE PATHS

We've selected top-notch representatives of each viewpoint to share their perspectives with you. This is what you'll read:

Chapter 1: The Countercultural Path—To date or not to date isn't the question for Lauren F. Winner. Instead, she suggests that dating can be a godly practice but, like many other Christian practices, should cut against the grain of typical American dating habits. She says dating can be godly when done within the context of community, chastity, love, and orientation toward marriage (although she does not claim that every dating relationship will or should end in marriage).

Chapter 2: The Courtship Path—Methods and principles only get you so far, Douglas Wilson says, but still, some methods are better than others. Douglas suggests the best principle is courtship, in which the head of the household holds the authority over a couple's relationship. Courtship is a serious business in which both parties are committed to pursuing marriage, although breaking up is acceptable under some circumstances.

Chapter 3: The Guided Path—Rick Holland provides ten principles he believes set the standard for a healthy relationship leading toward marriage. He suggests that dating, within the context of these ten principles, can be a godly way to find "the one," but only when marriage is a realistic and age-appropriate outcome. Casual dating is therefore inappropriate.

Chapter 4: The Betrothal Path—Dating not only is unacceptable, says Jonathan Lindvall, but also actually defrauds the other person (as does flirting). Jonathan suggests the only scripturally normative path to pursue a relationship is through betrothal, in which the couple enters a permanent commitment to marry one another at the start of their relationship. The relationship proceeds under the authority

of the woman's father, and breaking up is unacceptable under any circumstances.

Chapter 5: **The Purposeful Path**—Dating doesn't have to be serious, claim Jeremy and Jerusha Clark, but it does need to be taken seriously. Based on the belief that dating can be a fun and godly way to get to know members of the opposite sex, the Clarks suggest general guidelines for going about a dating relationship with the purpose of personal and spiritual refinement. As men and women date purposefully, they will be shaped into more godly individuals better able to relate to the opposite sex and well prepared for the adventure and crucible of marriage.

THE STRUCTURE

Each chapter will focus on one perspective. Within each chapter, the authors will provide:

- The key definition and distinctives of their perspective
- The reasons they hold their opinions
- Key scriptural and spiritual implications
- The benefits of their approach
- Potential weaknesses of their approach
- An overview of their approach and some helpful suggestions for practicing it

Additionally, I've asked each author to address the scenarios that follow for a couple of reasons. First, each of these scenarios is common

among Christians, so it will turn the conversation to where the rubber meets the road. Second, it will further clarify each author's approach by looking at common scenarios from different points of view.

Though the contributors will be highlighting their differences, they do possess a common foundation. Each is a Christian and thus understands the Bible to be authoritative for matters of faith and practice. Consequently, each author holds marriage in high honor and is convinced that sexual activity outside of marriage is both contrary to God's will and with God's help can be avoided (see Hebrews 13:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:3). The contributors also maintain that a Christian should not marry a non-Christian (see 2 Corinthians 6:14).

THE SCENARIOS

Scenario 1: Jenny and David are high school juniors in the same church youth group. Both come from Christian families and have involved, caring Christian parents. Their friends have told them they'd make a cute couple. They're really social and have group-dated a lot but have never spent time dating one-on-one. What should they do, if anything?

Scenario 2: Steve and Rachel are college students at a state university. Steve became a Christian in high school; Rachel just became a Christian through friends in a campus ministry. Neither of their families is Christian. They are very attracted to each other. How should they proceed, if at all?

Scenario 3: Denise just turned thirty. She is a business professional working in a big city across the country from her parents. She is active in her local church and busy with friends and activities but has not had

any real experience with romantic relationships. Like many women her age, she feels her biological clock ticking and wants to get married and have children. What would you advise her to do, if anything?

THE ROLE OF SCRIPTURE

If the Bible is our guide for living, then interpreting the Bible and applying it are of paramount importance. So it is really a question of hermeneutics—a big word that simply refers to the rules we use to determine what the Bible means. It is not news that Christians who are committed to Scripture disagree on many of the things it says. Depending on the rules used, it can be interpreted differently. And that's one reason the right way to conduct Christian relationships is a disputable matter.

YOUR OWN PERSONAL DATING STYLE

So now that you've got the scoop, read on! As you read, you'll probably find yourself both nodding and glaring at the book in your hands. But, overall, I'm confident you'll find this book helpful, confirming, and probably even motivating. As you read, try to appreciate the strengths of each of the views. Even if you don't agree, ask yourself, *Why might someone want to practice that? Or, How can this help me in my relationships?* My hope is that you'll become more informed, relational, and God-honoring and that you'll trade any confusion you might have for clarity on your path to finding "the one."