

Appropriate ways to interact with the opposite sex (I)

Developing brotherly and sisterly friendship

Teenagers entering puberty grow in interest in their relationship with the opposite sex. Thus they tend to interact with the opposite sex to serve their emotional needs. Therefore, we should learn to interact with the opposite sex adequately.

Society today takes a casual view towards sex, not to mention those who are lovestruck. The Bible, however, teaches us 'not [to] be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct' (1 Peter 1:14-15 ESV). Therefore we should be alert to guard our hearts!

In 1 Timothy 5:12, Paul taught the young pastor Timothy to develop relationship with younger women in church 'in all purity'. In the conversation, Paul described in great detail about the brotherly and sisterly friendship mentioned by many believers. This kind of friendship could be a huge blessing to single Christians.

First of all, a sibling-like friendship provides healthy, complete and threat-free interactions among single Christians. This kind of friendship brings about emotional healing and helps young people to develop a healthy and functional social network. For example, you might have lacked some basic social skills with the opposite sex in your growth, or that you were greatly wounded throughout your growth. In these cases, brotherly and sisterly friendship would help in healing your past wounds in your family of origin while also developing better social qualities in your life.

Second, friendship among brothers and sisters meet the basic needs humans have towards intimate partners. There are many lonely people in the world still, and not everyone would get married, but somehow everybody needs a certain kind of 'intimate relationship'. This 'intimacy' in human relationships is the basic need of humankind. The lack of such intimacy indicates problems aroused in life. Whether people get married or not, a non-romantic friendship critically serves to satisfy the needs of intimacy.

Here are some suggestions to develop healthy interactions between the two sexes:

1. Maintain a healthy distance: don't allow this friendship to be exclusive to others, because this would deliver a message to others that your relationship with this person has surpassed any ordinary friendship while also conveying to the other person that you believe your relationship has gone beyond a 'brotherly and sisterly friendship'. A pure friendship wouldn't ask the other person to solely belong to oneself and restricting others from participating.
2. Desensitisation: it's not the same to interact with the opposite sex and to date. Don't follow today's culture where people would wonder if the person in front of them would become their future spouse whenever they interact with the opposite sex. If you feel attracted to someone in the opposite sex, it is important to admit this feeling with honesty. People tend to deny these feelings; they would easily get controlled by

these feelings and eventually get hurt if they fail to face their true feelings inside. Being attracted to someone from the opposite sex does not mean you should start a relationship surpassing normal friendship with this person – because he/she might not be a suitable fit to you, and even if so, this might not be a good time to date them.

For example, a certain single brother/sister might be attracted to someone who has completely different values, or someone who is a non-believer, or even somebody who is married. Very obviously, not only would this be a foolish decision to date these people; this is also forbidden in the Bible. When these feelings come, therefore, it is very important to confess once again that Jesus Christ is the Lord of your life; otherwise you would easily be affected and controlled by the feelings inside your heart. Sometimes these feelings might appear consistently inside your heart – in this case, you must ask God to give you wisdom to deal with them. It is absolutely necessary to submit these feelings to God in order to maintain the freedom inside you.

3. Expressing the true self: you must remain sincere and open to maintain this precious friendship with the opposite sex. Take away the hypocrisy and show your true self; especially if you are extroverted and outspoken, there is no need at all to act introverted and shy in front of the opposite sex. To communicate with them, you would need self-affirmation: don't be ambiguous and unclear, don't feel sorry to say no and accept effortfully. This would add perplexity to the both of you.
 - a. In church gatherings, brothers and sisters should be able to sit freely; there is no need to separate from the opposite sex on purpose. If you sit next to someone in the opposite sex, you should be able to get to know each other, greet and share naturally.
 - b. Whether you dine in church or in restaurants, brothers and sisters should be able to dine naturally and normally and serve one another.
 - c. Whether we conduct games or tasks indoor or outdoor, it is reasonable to have minimal and adequate physical contact (e.g. hold hands to form a circle). There is no need to be overly sensitive and act abnormally; it is also fine to play mixed sex sports games.
 - d. In general, telephone conversations or keeping in touch using other means are entirely normal. If there are illnesses, brothers and sisters are by all means allowed to visit and encourage each other in groups.
 - e. In general, there is no need for the congregation to put too much skepticism or questions when someone asks to take photos with the opposite sex on their own.
 - f. Regular interactions within the cell group, such as body workouts, meals together and birthday celebrations are normal social activities within the body of Christ. These events are normal opportunities to develop romantic relationships – it is most important that brothers and sisters hold a correct view and attitude towards romance and marriage. If you do not plan to start a romantic relationship yet, then you shouldn't have too many exclusive interactions with people in the opposite sex to avoid misunderstanding.