

have had to experience, I remind myself that it is so true that every person learns much the hard way. All parents wish they could spare their children as many heartaches as possible. I don't dwell on regrets, but I do pray for them and hope that they will have opportunities to meet Christians who exemplify the great marriage relationship that is possible with God's help and with the commitment of the marriage partners to following his principles. I'm thankful for any and every good and happy marriage they have the opportunity to observe and I know God is and will continue to be working in that way for them. I also pray now for the sake of my grandchildren that my daughters will be more successful than their parents were in breaking free of the baggage of their childhoods.

Someday I hope to have the opportunity to experience marriage that is built on the foundation of phileo first, that can be the example to my daughters that I had hoped my marriage to their father would be. Though no one could or should replace him in their hearts and memories, I know they would be happy to see me in a happy marriage. But if that opportunity never comes, I will still enjoy Christian fellowship and brotherly/sisterly love with many people, and I can be content with that.

Thank you for reading this. I would appreciate any feedback, whether agreement or disagreement. I always want to be open to correction and welcome especially any input regarding the application of Scripture to life. I would also love to hear others' experiences in marriage and in parenting, especially on this topic of dating/courtship and exemplifying a strong marriage for one's children.

May God bless you in your own relationships!

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# *New Love!*

## *Focus on Phileo*

I came to realize at age 46 that I had been missing out on fully experiencing a very important part of life. God has worked several things together for my good to give me the opportunity to become aware of and experience more of this blessing.

What had been missing is phileo. Has it been missing in your life, too? What is "phileo," you ask? Perhaps you know it by experience if not by definition. But most likely, due to the forces against it in our culture, you are like me and haven't experienced it much. And if *you* haven't experienced it, it's unlikely you'll be able to pass on to your children or to anyone else the healthy relationship practices that result in this blessing being experienced.

Phileo (pronounced fill-EH-oh) is one of the four Greek words translated by our one word "love." Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words says that what distinguishes it is "tender affection." It is the love of friendship, of brothers/sisters where there is a bond of emotional closeness that is safe, secure, and pure. It's what is often described as platonic, which the World Book Dictionary defines as, "friendly but not like a lover; designating love or affection of a purely spiritual character, free from sensual desire."

Most people are familiar with "agape," the unconditional, selflessly giving love emphasized in the Bible and demonstrated by Jesus Christ. Most of the time when the Bible talks about love, it's a translation of a form of agape. Another type of love is denoted by the Greek word "storge" (pronounced STORE-geh) referring to family love, especially between parent and child. The third word for love is "eros," which is easily deduced to mean the physical, sexual, "erotic" and romantic attraction usually connoted when we refer to being "in love." It's not found in the Greek New Testament, though the Hebrew Old Testament does describe this type of love in Song of Solomon. Most people are familiar with these three loves, at least by experience if not definition.

But phileo, the fourth type of love, is easy to miss out on without even knowing there is another kind of love, and thus not knowing what one is missing. Agape is rarely experienced, but at least everyone knows there is an ideal of selfless, unconditional love we should aim for even though few seriously make much effort to practice it in daily life. Storge is becoming rarer as family bonds continue to

weaken due to the practice of institutionalizing children in schools and daycare, the high rate of divorce and single-parent families, and the decrease in extended family living nearby. And our culture is focused on and bombarded by the news and entertainment media with eros. It has become accepted as normal to indulge any erotic desire we feel, and anyone who believes that is wrong is written off as judgmental. So there is little opportunity for phileo to be appreciated or experienced.

We all need phileo, to give it and receive it with many people over the course of our whole lives. We need dear friends of the same sex without fearing or assuming the presence of homosexual desires. And we need dear friends who are the opposite sex, whether we are married or not and in addition to our spouse if we are married, also without the fear of or temptation of erotic desires intruding. Is this possible? What happened to our culture that has resulted in any close relationship being assumed to be sexual in nature? Why is it that strong feelings of attraction to and affection for another person are assumed by others and even by ourselves as inevitably leading to romantic and sexual expression? Why does “I love you” always imply romantic feelings when said to someone outside of family?

What has happened to our culture is constant bombardment by Satan’s lies. Jesus said Satan is “a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44) and referred to him as the “prince of this world” (John 12:31). Without God, as Ephesians 2:1-3 says, we are “dead in your transgressions and sins...when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient...gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.”

We know from God’s word in the Bible that his design is for us to have only one relationship that is the right place for eros to be nurtured and expressed. Hebrews 13:4 says, “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.” 1 Corinthians 6:9-7:5 warns against sexual immorality, “...Neither the sexually immoral nor...adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders...will inherit the kingdom of God” (6:9) and provides the solution to temptation, “But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.” (7:2). God designed us to be involved romantically, erotically, sexually with one person—our marriage partner of the opposite sex, to whom we have vowed to stay committed and faithful for life. Within that context, God wants us to find pleasure, intimacy, and freedom from the

often Christians assume that we are, then are shocked when those feelings of attraction to someone other than our spouses arise. When that happens, Christians are just as prone to rationalize giving in to the temptation as is anyone else.

So what do I think now about what I wrote in this booklet? Dr. Harley advises that a married person not have any friendships with a person of the opposite sex. I still believe that a Christian can feel healthy God-given phileo affection for a fellow Christian of the opposite sex without crossing the line into being tempted to desire romantic love (eros). But I am now even more aware of the dangers that must be guarded against. No intimacy can be permitted to creep in, because even emotional intimacy can only be safe with one’s spouse.

What the booklet states about the Scriptural warnings and prescriptions is even more clear to me, and proven true from experience. I was not in a safe place. Now that I am single, I feel free to enjoy close friendships with Christian men but with the conscious awareness of the boundaries that must be in place, both for me and for him. So rather than revising what I wrote originally, it seemed wiser to add this epilogue to add to rather than replace the principles in the booklet that are still true to the degree that they are an accurate application of biblical principles.

One more thing I want to include here is to share lessons learned as a parent in hindsight. Two daughters are now married and parents, and one was married and is divorced. I see ways that our approach to parenting validated the principles in the booklet and ways that the weaknesses in our marriage undermined the true application of these principles. Though I still believe that everything written is true, it is the ideal, and my disclaimer that God can make up for my weaknesses still gives me comfort. The main lesson I have learned looking back is to see the ways that my marriage falling short of being an example to them put baggage on each of them that they have had to be aware of and decide to break free from. We all have baggage from whatever degree of dysfunction was true in our families as we grew up, but I had hoped that John and I might have been able to overcome our own more than we did. I feel sad about what I wasn’t able to show my daughters, knowing that no matter how true these biblical principles may be, without them being able to see their parents putting them into practice, they have little reason to be attracted to the wisdom of God.

As I’ve seen my daughters go through their own struggles and see certain decisions bear out consequences that I wish they wouldn’t

safe after all. I wanted to believe that what I felt was safe, phileo-only, platonic affection. But it soon became clear to me that temptation to wish he would be attracted to me romantically was growing. I was at first shocked at how little attention from him it took to arouse feelings of attraction in myself. It was too humiliating to admit openly even to myself, because I knew that it confirmed that my vulnerability was a symptom of my marriage not providing the strong and secure, and therefore I believed safe, sense of freedom to enjoy other relationships. The good lesson I learned, or I should say confirmed, was that as I had written in this booklet, time did diminish the feelings of attraction to the other man when I didn't indulge in any action on them. I was very fortunate that he clearly showed no reciprocation of any feelings for me. I did take what was a courageous step for me and told him that he needed to be careful about how he relates to women because he could be unwittingly causing temptation.

Because my marriage wasn't healthy, it took a long time, about four years, to reach the point that all feelings of attraction were gone (and to look back with amazement that I could have ever felt them for him). I have the perspective on that experience that it was humbling in a good way for me to learn without a doubt that I am as humanly weak as anyone else, that I am as easily tempted and that I can feel strong emotions even when they're misdirected. So though I am not thankful to have been vulnerable due to the weaknesses in my marriage, I am thankful for the lessons learned both about the importance of keeping one's marriage strong and the dangers of friendship with someone of the opposite sex.

Dr. Harley uses the concept of a "love bank," into which "love units" can be deposited by anyone. When someone makes enough deposits to reach the romantic love threshold, then the person whose love bank is being filled will feel in love with the one who is making the deposits. What happens so often in marriage is that the rate of deposits decreases, often innocently in the busyness of life and due to the mistaken assumption that once married, being in love will continue naturally. Or worse, the lie that romantic love is destined to fade is allowed to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Love units can also be withdrawn when someone commits "love busters" which he lists. In his work, he has learned how easy it is for someone of the opposite sex to make love bank deposits that arouse romantic feelings. When that person is one's spouse, it works for good, but when that person is not one's spouse, it still works but leads to the temptation to indulge in an emotionally and/or physically intimate relationship—an affair. Nobody is immune to the temptation, but so

boundaries that define all other relationships. Those boundaries are what have become either moved or removed.

When God tells us there are boundaries, it is for our good. Just as we try to teach our children, there is safety and freedom and happiness within the boundaries of rules that are made for good reasons. God has given us rules for relationships that are based on wisdom. He created us and knows how we function best. And he wants us to function well and find pleasure and peace and freedom from painful consequences.

But the deception that was first used on Adam and Eve is still working on us today. Just as the serpent tricked Eve, and then Adam, into doubting and then flouting God's boundaries around the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil," we are blitzed constantly with the temptation to doubt and flout God's boundaries around sex. We're led to believe that sex is the foundation for relationships. But it's not. It's the dessert, not the main course. Agape and phileo are the "meat and potatoes" of all relationships, including and especially marriage. Eros is the dessert, agape and phileo are the main course. And only one relationship, marriage, gives dessert privileges. But so many other relationships can and should be special as a substantial and satisfying part of our relationship "diet." We just need to go into the other relationships knowing in advance that no dessert is allowed. We can savor every other part of the diet and appreciate them in their own right. Not getting dessert in addition to the main course won't hurt us. In our society, we've even gotten to the point of eating dessert first and then wondering why the meat and potatoes aren't savored or appreciated. When eros is indulged in before phileo and agape have matured and a marriage vow is made, it is like eating dessert and spoiling one's appetite for the main course. Just as a steady diet of dessert isn't physically healthy, indulging eros outside of the God-designed context of the safety, security and commitment of a marriage founded on agape and phileo makes one emotionally and spiritually stunted, malnourished, and ultimately unhappy, as well as guilty of sin.

The principle of phileo is the answer to the problems our world has with relationships of all types. We need to reset our default to phileo, from the world's default of eros. We all need love, and Satan is shrewd about twisting God's truth to destroy us with his perversions and lies. The love we all need and most don't get is phileo and agape. The love the world focuses on is eros. God created us to need all three, plus the family-love of storge, but in their right place. Eros is to be limited to marriage—period. When it is indulged in

outside of marriage, relationship patterns get completely messed up and we are destroyed rather than fulfilled, as we can see the evidence of all around us in the world: Divorce (often resulting from primarily eros-based marriage choices), abortions, immorality, homosexuality, and dating practices that undermine marriage.

We all need to examine our own lives to see what patterns we've been following, whether we are defaulting to eros. We need to see and experience God's better way. And we need to apply that to all relationships. Especially to break the worldly pattern, we need to apply it to our children's lives. We need to help them to see through the dysfunction and temptation of the world, to put eros in its place so that it can be experienced as the blessing God designed for it to be, and to develop life-long patterns of relationships that are phileo-based and fulfilling with many, both male and female.

### *Beginning to Question*

When my oldest daughter hit adolescence, she started talking about her friends "going out with" each other. I got my first "Oh, Mom, you don't understand" response to asking what she meant. I knew they were hanging out as a group of friends, but they were all too young to have the means or transportation to actually "go out" anywhere. What she meant was one of the guys was pairing off in a romantic relationship with one of the girls.

That experience prompted me to take an even closer look at our American cultural norms for teenage relationships. The memory of my own teen years and what temptation and angst I experienced even as what I thought was a "good Christian girl" haunted me. The thought of my own girls facing the same or worse experiences and confusion terrified me.

I am by nature a questioner and ponderer. My dread and fear of parenting a daughter through the teen years raised the question of whether there is a better way of approaching relationships with the opposite sex. When my oldest told me about her friends pairing off—they were 14 and 15 at the time—it struck me as ridiculous to get romantically involved when they'd have to wait many years to marry. Of course the idea that romance should lead to marriage is not the norm in our culture now. But why not?

One question led to another, as I find is often the case once I start paying attention to a particular issue. As is also often true, what seemed to be a narrow subject has turned out to have much broader implications. What started as an examination of teenage dating has led to examining the assumptions we operate from about friendships,

before writing it, I got up enough courage to tell John that I didn't feel loved by him and he rebuked me for saying such a thing and shouted his belief that no wife should say that to her husband. That was a blow to my hope that someday we could rekindle the feelings of being in love with each other or even feel genuine affection on any level for each other. I went into endurance mode, believing that as a Christian I was stuck in a marriage for the rest of my life in which I had to continue to live up to my vows to love him "until God, by death, does separate us," even if he didn't live up to his own vows to me.

So I must confess that I know from experience the predicament of desiring to have phileo in my life but not having a safe way to allow myself to enjoy that depth of friendship with anyone, either female or male. I had a couple of friendships with women from church but as we got to know each other and allowed ourselves to share more openly about the sad state of our marriages, I was thankful for the friendships but they were raising my consciousness of how unhappy I was at home. I knew, too, that John was suspicious of me because he didn't want anyone else to know anything that went on inside our family. He must have known on some level that I would have negative rather than positive things to reveal to anyone I became close to, but he never reached the point of becoming open to facing and then seeking help to overcome them together.

A year after his rebuke of my honest expression of not feeling loved, I gained a glimmer of hope again from the resources available from Dr. Willard Harley, who had been my professor of psychology and statistics in college. I remembered that he mentioned in class about his work in marriage counseling and how he had been having success in helping couples who were even on the brink of divorce. He was departing from traditional approaches to marriage counseling and was discovering how he could guide them into falling back in love with each other. When our oldest daughter got married, I thought of Dr. Harley's first book, His Needs, Her Needs, and gave it to her and her new husband in hopes they could find it helpful to develop good habits from the start. Then I hoped that John would be willing to use the guidance of Dr. Harley's wisdom and experience to improve our marriage, too. He was reluctant and unwilling to go beyond the first steps. At that point I really lost hope for our relationship ever improving, and remained in endurance mode until his death.

I must also confess, because I hope all of my experiences may serve as object lessons of both caution and encouragement to others, that a friendship with a man I got to know through my job was not

that results in a full, loving, joyful life.

I'm very grateful to God for that in my own life. He has blessed me with marriage to my best friend, the safety and freedom to experience deep and affection-filled friendships in my church family, and opportunities to cultivate friendships with men and women outside of my church family that are deepening over time.

And that's what I want for my children, too!



## *Epilogue*

I wrote this 13 years ago, and dedicated this booklet: “to John, my best friend for over 30 years, for 26 years my husband, and the father of our three wonderful daughters. We have learned together the principles described herein. I thank God for bringing us together, for using him to help me learn how to be born again to become His child, and for giving me a mate that is ‘more than all I asked and imagined’ (Ephesians 3:20).”

But John died suddenly of a cerebral hemorrhage seven years later, and in my grieving process I finally was free to be completely honest with myself (and others). I realized that in my marriage I felt stuck trying to make the best of a bad situation, that we had made the all too common slide into being mostly house-mates and not lovers or even best friends. I had withdrawn into settling for avoidance of conflict and being nice to each other in platonic companionship, and I hadn't let myself face the fact that I didn't feel anything deeply and there was no real intimacy between us.

When I wrote this booklet, I knew in my head that everything I wrote and saw from Scriptures is true. It just wasn't true in my experience. Part of the desire to research and write about this subject came from some semiconscious level of knowing that I hoped to understand more about it and I hoped that would lead to experiencing it. Not long

marriage, unmarried sex, extramarital sex, and even homosexuality.

What has become apparent in many life issues I've faced over 29 years as a Christian is a pattern of paradoxes. God says his ways are higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:9) and that he has “made foolish the wisdom of the world” (1 Corinthians 1:20). What seems right to us in our own efforts to figure out life often is the opposite of what God says is true. Proverbs 16:25 says, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.” When we are exposed to what God says, we often miss the point and think his intention is to make life hard and boring. What he forbids seems fun and exciting. Hebrews 11:25 refers to the “pleasures of sin.” If what God forbids didn't feel good when we're indulging in it, no one would sin!

We have to really want to understand the wisdom behind the instructions God gives, and we have to be willing to learn a new and different perspective on life in order to begin to see why God's way is best. And even when we want to understand, we're told that we need the help of God's Spirit: “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). Therefore, before any of the rest of this booklet can make sense or be understood in the positive sense it is intended, a decision must be made: Will you be open to a different perspective?

It doesn't take much honesty to admit that the results of our American way of going about romantic relationships are disastrous. The rates of unwed pregnancies, abortion, divorce, and homosexuality are, or should be, alarming. The comfortable way of making sense of all this is to rationalize the problems away as being normal and to be accepted. We're bombarded constantly by the media, both news and entertainment, with just that view. It's easy to look at the big picture in that way and not be bothered by it. But ask the perspective of anyone who has had first-hand experience with a relationship break-up, an unplanned and unwanted pregnancy, an unfaithful spouse, parents who divorced, confusion over sexual identity, or the after-effects of being in an adulterous affair. They'll confirm that there are very real, painful consequences suffered by everyone who learns the hard way that something doesn't work right in our way of relating to each other.

The amazing thing to me is that we don't seem to take the hint. We see the tragic consequences of our ways of relating. Almost every movie or TV show is at least honest about portraying the pain of the characters' experiences in relationships that go bad. We all know

someone in real life who has suffered real pain from relationship problems. And most of us have had our own experience of a relationship that didn't work out like we hoped it would, and it hurt.

Am I saying that God has a way that guarantees no pain or suffering? No. But what I am saying is that much of what most of us suffer could be avoided by following God's way. Much of our pain is brought on ourselves by ignoring his wise teachings. Yet most of us don't learn the lesson or even ask the question of what God might say that could guide us to better, happier relationships. We don't think we need God's advice about love and sex. After all, what could he know about it? When we think of Jesus and his teachings, we often have a hard time thinking it could relate to our love lives. Jesus never even had a romantic love life, so how could he relate? We rationalize that it's easy for him to say we shouldn't have sex outside of marriage, but that surely Jesus couldn't relate to what it's like for normal human beings, who naturally want love and sex. We assume the Bible is not the place to find answers for our love lives.

For me, having my own children approach their teen years was what shook me up enough to question what patterns of male-female and even same-sex relationships are wholesome and have the results we all really are seeking. The teen years are when patterns are learned that are followed for the rest of our lives unless something shakes us up enough to get us to question and re-examine those patterns. I felt fortunate that I survived my own teen years with fewer scars and less pain than many others I know. But for my own children, I wanted to offer them a positive, clear, practical and life-long perspective that would lessen the angst and confusion of their teen years. I wanted to help them have the best possible foundation for a great marriage someday. So it seemed important to put thought and care into what patterns of relationships they were to follow.

### **God's Pattern for Relationships**

Perhaps the best way to re-examine relationships is to look at the patterns that God reveals as ideal in the Bible. Then the perversions of the world will be easier to see through, and we'll be able to have a positive goal to aim for.

Many have some exposure to the word "phileo" from the city name Philadelphia, a compound of "phileo" and "adelphos," meaning brothers. The use of this compound, meaning "brotherly love," is found in several places in the Bible: "Be devoted to one another in *brotherly love*" (Romans 12:10). "Now about *brotherly love* we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God

important one—with God—is voluntary. So if we want others to choose us to be their friends, we need to try to be likeable and loveable. At work, even more so than at church activities, I'm aware of the freedom of choice others have. In the church, there's the temptation to take for granted that we're supposed to love each other. So even though it's wonderful to be treated in a friendly and loving way at church, it means even more when those who don't have any command to love me choose to be my friend. It's exciting to have the hope that someday the friendships I cultivate outside of my church congregation will become brother-sister or sister-sister bonds of Christian fellowship. That would be even more special.

I have seen my daughters experience good friendships with boys and have hoped they'd appreciate the value of that. There is a difference in what it's like to have female friends versus male friends. Both are needed to be a well-rounded, loving human being. My hope is that by practicing what I preach and being able to share from my own life, my example will inspire them to want to develop the life-long pattern of healthy friendships that I wish I'd appreciated earlier.

God has taught me a lot through the principles of the Bible being applied to relationships and through experiences both good and bad. I can now appreciate even more the blessing of phileo-based relationships in the church, where it's especially safe and encouraged. I look forward to cultivating friendships with men and women and to enjoying the family bonds of sisters and brothers in Christ. And I want to be unafraid to develop friendships anywhere God gives the opportunity to interact and develop bonds of "tender affection."

### **"Now That You Have Sincere Love . . ."**

In our culture, the word "love" needs to be defined more clearly and better understood. I'm thankful that the Greek language, which was used in recording the New Testament, has several different words for love that help us distinguish, appreciate, and enjoy the experience of different kinds of relationships. If we can make the conscious effort to reset our default from eros to phileo in how we think of and relate to members of the opposite sex, we can enjoy many friendships throughout life that are pure, wholesome, affectionate, and deep. If we help our children develop the norm of having boy and girl friends as children and through their teen years, then eventually a friendship with someone of the opposite sex may grow into a courtship that results in a great marriage, where eros can be enjoyed in its right context. And marriage to one's best friend encourages rather than discourages phileo-based friendships with others throughout life. All of

friendships became possible. It's been good for me to have a safe environment for gradually getting to know the men who work there. After many years of seeing myself mostly as wife, mother, and church member, it's been new to relate to others as just myself, an individual separate from the other roles and identities. I've found myself dealing with many of the same insecure feelings of my single years, wondering if I can find comfortable ways of relating to others, if I'll be liked, if others are finding reasons to gossip to each other about me. My natural aversion to small talk has had to be faced, and I try to stay patient with it, knowing that it's a necessary part of getting to know each other. In the past several years, I've enjoyed the deepening of conversations and connections, and I'm thankful to feel that several, both men and women, have become friends.

Another aspect of developing friendships at work has been that I've enjoyed the pleasure of sometimes being liked for who I am. We all want to and need to feel that. We're social beings, and much of our social interactions involve trying to get a feel for what others think of us and trying to pick up cues to know how to become more likeable. We all know people with weak social skills, and we try to avoid their mistakes while we imitate those with social skills that make them likeable. It's a lifelong process.

It's even a Biblical concept. Paul said, "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings" (1 Corinthians 9:22-23). He had an unselfish motive in trying to be easy to relate to, to draw people to God, not turn them off needlessly. He advised Timothy along the same lines: "And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will" (2 Timothy 2:24-26). When people have strong convictions (as I do, obviously!) about what they understand to be true, it's easy to become pushy and offensive, repelling rather than drawing others to reconsider their own convictions. So these principles are good reminders to stay motivated by a desire to have a positive effect on others and not by selfishness. It is a good feeling when I see reason to believe that others are happy to know me, and I always hope to be a good influence to draw them closer to God and not turn them off.

Christians, more than anyone, should recognize that God gives humans freedom of choice. Every relationship including the most

to love each other" (1 Thessalonians 4:9). "Keep on *loving each other as brothers*" (Hebrews 13:1). ". . . Make every effort to add to your faith . . . *brotherly kindness*; and to *brotherly kindness*, love (agape)" (2 Peter 1:5-7).

The Bible describes believers in Jesus as brothers, fellow children of God. Now, if you grew up with siblings but didn't feel close to them, this concept might not be attractive! But if we think of how we wish our own families were closer and let ourselves dream of and imagine what an ideal family relationship would be like, we can begin to glimpse the blessing God promises to give us in the family of God. In our world, we learn early to give up on dreams and settle for reality as we experience it and as we see everyone around us experiencing it. But most people have at least had exposure to someone else's close-knit family and have felt a twinge of envy. God encourages everyone to pay attention to the heartfelt yearnings for close bonds in our relationships with others and understand the great way that he provides for that to become a realized dream, an experienced reality.

Phileo is a gift from God. 1 Peter 1:22 says, "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love (phileo) for your brothers, love (agapao) one another deeply, from the heart." The implication is that when we obey God's truth and are purified, we do have sincere phileo. It seems that when we're not obeying God's truth and when we are still polluted by the world's ways of thinking and acting, we don't or can't have phileo. We probably don't even know we don't have it. My own experience has been that the relationships I've developed since becoming a Christian have given me a taste of phileo that has been surprising and amazing because I didn't know friendships like that were possible.

When we see God's promise to us to be able to have pure and sincere friendships, we can take advantage of opportunities to get to know people with an exciting anticipation. We can approach meeting a new person with the hope of making a new friend. And when that friend is also a believer in Jesus and a follower of his teachings, then the friendship offers the deeper dimension of being like family. As in physical families, we have baggage to overcome and struggles to be real and honest and not dysfunctional. But in a spiritual family where everyone has come to be a part of it through choice and after facing their weaknesses, sins, and need for the help and rescue God offers, there is an added dimension. The family of God offers a safe place to be real, to discover that others want to be supportive and encouraging, and that they care about us in ways our physical families often don't.

It's said that we can't choose our families. That's true of our

physical families, but we do choose to be part of a spiritual family. Granted, even spiritual families—church congregations—have members that are hard to like and require agape when phileo isn't easily felt. But within a group of children of God, there can usually be found brothers and sisters to connect with, where “tender affection” deepens as time is spent together and a connection forms. Within the safety of knowing where the other is coming from and what values are held in common, one can experience the wonder of friendships that are deep and free of the default to eros that the world assumes. We can say “I love you” and know that we'll be understood to mean agape and phileo, not eros.

Phileo is tied to agape by this verse (1 Peter 1:22) also. Phileo is described as a quality we are assumed to possess when we have been purified by obeying the truth of Jesus. It's like the condition of our hearts has been changed, transformed to be full of “tender affection” toward siblings in God's family. It must be part of the “new creation” we become in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). Yet the action it prompts is to love (agapao) deeply, from our hearts. We have, within the family relationships in the church, a relatively safe place to start taking the risk of loving selflessly, of investing our hearts in relationships with others. And as we grow in our experience of loving brothers and sisters—both having the tender affection of phileo and practicing the unconditionally-giving love of agape—we will grow in our ability to love the riskier, harder-to-love people of the world that we are in contact with.

If we develop good friendships with brothers and sisters in our church fellowships, then we can be the light and example to the world that Jesus promised in John 13:34-35: “A new command I give you: Love (agapao) one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All men will know you are my disciples if you love one another.”

How will they know who Jesus' disciples are? Perhaps they'll see them relating to each other with love they don't see anywhere else. But also, perhaps they'll see and experience that love expressed toward them, too, and know that they are being loved by someone who has experienced, learned and practiced it somewhere. And the only place that is possible is in the family of God, the church that Jesus loved enough to die for. They may not know enough to say, “Aha, this person must be a disciple of Jesus!” But when the good news about Jesus is shared with them, they will know his love for them is real because they've experienced it from his disciples—who learned to give it first to each other because of the phileo, the tender

times given in to. I'd rather have reserved for my husband the “firsts” that I gave to others who took without appreciating what I was giving and who in the end threw them away. God's forgiveness and renewal helped me to focus on starting over and wanting to have a giving and morally pure courtship so I could arrive at my wedding day without guilt or regrets. But if one can avoid having to overcome regrets and guilt by not having any, how much better that would be! That's what I want for my children. That's the ideal to aim for, while extending to them the same gracious, forgiving and encouraging attitude that God has extended to me when the reality falls short of the ideal.

My husband became my best friend the day we met, and he still is so to this day, more and more as we experience life together. I'm very thankful for that, but in sorting through all this about phileo, what became apparent to me for the first time was the fact that my husband had become my only good male friend. I'm thankful for the opportunity to have regular interaction with males in church fellowship, but no brother in Christ had ever become a real friend.

One way I define a real friendship is when every opportunity to interact is comfortable and there's not the feeling of having to get reacquainted. When we can pick up where we left off last time we talked, an acquaintance has matured into a friendship. Another hallmark of a friendship is when silences are not uncomfortable. Of course that requires that enough time is spent together to allow for a natural flow of conversation to develop, with give and take.

At about the same time I started researching phileo, I hit it off with a brother in Christ at church. We both liked hashing through questions and talking about deeper issues than the usual small talk. One time we got into a conversation after class and came in to the worship service just as it was starting and everyone else was already sitting. I found myself wondering what others assumed about the relationship they could see we had. Then I realized how sad it would be if anyone read anything romantic or improper into anything.

That was the first inkling I had that the issue of friendships versus romance that I was beginning to ponder for my daughters' sakes had implications for my own life. I could see that our eros-based culture had even wormed its way into how relationships between Christians may be viewed. It's too bad that all of this has to be sorted through at all, but it does. And the great thing is that once we do sort out the differences between the four types of love, we can enjoy each of them in their place with a pure heart and clear conscience.

When I started a new job at about that same time, it was the first time in many years that I had enough regular contact with men that



It took one month for me to see how controlled I was by my desire to be loved. I became self-conscious, wondered what guys thought of me, and worried that I was unattractive when no one had called to ask me out by Tuesday night. I was shocked at how much my self-esteem depended on whether or not I could attract male attention. And the worst part was that I didn't feel free, uninhibited, and able to be friends with guys anymore. When I had a boyfriend, I felt free to enjoy friendships with other guys because I knew I wasn't flirting. But unattached, I didn't know how to keep the dating game from controlling me, making me unreal and not true to myself.

After one month of "looking for love," I realized I was going about it backwards. One of God's many paradoxes is that we don't find love when we're seeking to get it. God's way is to be a giver, a lover of others, a selfless servant. As he said, "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it" (Luke 9:24). Also, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33). It dawned on me that seeking to be loved was not only selfish, it was not likely to attract the kind of godly man I hoped to find. And it was faithless, not trusting that God would provide what he knows I really need if I were to seek his kingdom and righteousness. If he someday were to provide a mate, then I'd be able to be confident that he loved me for who I am and not for how I tried to impress him to get my own needs gratified. So I turned my future over to God. I was prepared to wait patiently and turned my focus to using my single life to become the person I needed to be, whether I ever married or not.

When I was introduced to my future husband a week later, we instantly connected. I knew time would have to prove out what I suspected from the start (though I didn't know we'd have four years to prove the solidity of the relationship before marriage would be possible!). What sounds like love at first sight really was a long time coming. I can look back on my years of boyfriends and the month of dating and be thankful that God brought good out of it. I was able to know more clearly what my standards and requirements for compatibility were. So when I met and got to know my husband-to-be, it didn't take long to recognize that he was put in my path by God to become my mate.

But in spite of how my single life ended well and in spite of our neat story of mutually knowing we'd found "the one" by the end of the day we met, I'd rather my own children wouldn't imitate the path I took to get there. I'd rather have brought myself to that point without the past experiences, angst, and temptations struggled with and at

affection, which God put in their hearts for each other. So what we experience and practice in the family of God will be salt and light to the world (Matthew 5:13-16) as we become like Jesus in our love.

The pattern of relationships that is possible to experience with brothers and sisters in Christ resets our default from the world's focus on eros—romantic, sexual overtones and undercurrents permeating every new relationship—to the pure and wholesome affection of *phileo*. In 1 Timothy 5:1-2, Paul sets a pattern for Timothy (and us) to follow in relating to others in the church: "Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity." We're freed by that mindset to focus on the attractive qualities in others—qualities of heart, spirit, character, values, and personality.

If we follow God's patterns, we'll not only be happier, but we'll be freer to enjoy every relationship for what pleasure it is designed by God to give. Outside of marriage, God wants us to experience *phileo* and *agape* with many male and female friends. We can experience the pure pleasure of a hug that conveys affection (and even a kiss in more expressive cultures, as mentioned about the early days of the church in 1 Corinthians 16:20).

I recently read about a new discovery being researched about how we're wired physically. We've been discovered to have a nerve system that is separate from our sense of touch. The article I read told of a woman who had no sensations from her nose down—she couldn't feel anything touching her. But when her arm was stroked, she reported a sense of pleasure that was obviously a result of some different type of nerve-to-brain response. Though much more research needs to be done, it's intriguing. It has seemed that being touched or hugged in friendship produces an emotional response that can't be directly attributed to the actual physical skin sensations. It's as if some deeper, different, emotion-producing nerves are triggered by the touch of a friend. If you've ever experienced a good friendly hug, with no sexual meaning attached, you can probably understand this.

What if we all experienced more platonic affection? Wouldn't we be less tempted to desire or assume erotic meanings from being touched? Our culture now is so eros-focused that touching is rare and is therefore too often interpreted as having erotic meaning, so it produces erotic responses. We can't freely show affection to friends of the same sex without homosexual overtones being assumed. (Remember when it was normal for girl friends to hold hands?) And we can't show affection to members of the opposite sex without

worrying that romantic feelings will be interpreted. How many immoral relationships are indulged in by people who assume they must have romantic feelings for someone just because they don't know how to handle affection felt for a friend? How sad, and how deprived we are.

Carrying this logic one step further, is it possible that our culture is so sex-crazed because we are wired to need the touch of others and don't realize that it doesn't have to be erotic in meaning when touch is experienced? If we all received plenty of hugs and touches that were phileo-based, I suspect we'd see less sexual immorality.

I have a friend who is a very affectionate daddy to his daughters. Sadly, some of his friends have been critical of the way he pours on the hugs and affection. But perhaps those girls will have their need for wholesome affection and touch satiated, and they may be in much less danger of looking for the need to be met wrongly by sex out of the right context as they grow up.

It's the affection-starved that seek connection through sex without regard to or without a good foundation to marriage. Someone who has received affection from family and friends can wait for marriage and can have the healthy focus on building a relationship that leads to a good marriage—where sex is an expression of the emotional intimacy that has been built through friendship and courtship, rather than using sex prematurely to try to find or make it as is so rampant in our culture.

Therefore, in our families and our platonic friendships, we can be helped to avoid the temptation to look for romance with the wrong person, at the wrong time, for the wrong reason. We can focus on and enjoy being “in like” with many and wait for the right person, at the right time, for the right reason, to “fall in love” with, as our culture calls it. If it does happen, it will add a dimension to life that enhances our lives. And if it doesn't happen, we won't feel unloved or unlovable or desperately deprived. The best marriages are between two people who don't *need* romance to be content, but who find joy and pleasure in romance if it arrives. Two complete and content people result in a couple being more than the sum of its parts.

### *Heavenly Perspective*

Have you ever felt pity for Jesus and for the apostle Paul because they were single and never got to experience romance? As stated earlier, our human nature is to think that Jesus couldn't relate to our need and desire for sex, so we have a hard time trusting the rules the Bible gives. To condemn adultery, unmarried sex, and homosexuality as sin

were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” Once I realized that, such a weight was lifted off. My perspective changed from the negative focus on how far from perfect I was and how immature I felt when I was supposedly an adult. Instead of being discouraged at how far I had yet to go, I became encouraged by every victory and step of growth.

The freeing thing about being a child of God is that one doesn't have to pretend to be perfect and strong. It's wonderful to be able to be honest about one's weaknesses and struggles, knowing that help and strength is what God offers. God gets the glory and credit for being a perfect and loving Father and for providing help to change.

I grew up in a large but emotionally distant family. I wasn't close to any of my six siblings, and my parents didn't express affection to me until I was an adult and started to initiate it with them. I craved attention and affection perhaps more than most because the lack of it at home left a vacuum. As a child through my preteen years, I had a best friend that met some of the need. We grew apart when we had to go to different schools in sixth grade, and when we were together again in junior high school, she had other friends and was trying to get her own cravings for love met through boyfriends. When she got pregnant at 15 and married at 16, it was clearly impossible to stay close friends living in such different worlds. The wound caused by losing her as my best friend was very painful, and I longed to find another friendship like what we had.

During my teen years, I found other girls to be superficial and shallow. So when a boy showed interest in me, I was flattered and seized the chance to be loved. Eventually it became obvious that I didn't really like him, much less love him, and we broke up. But I had already struggled with the question of how to define immorality, and no adults at home or church were offering any answers. I went on to a couple of other boyfriends, repeating the cycle of being flattered by someone being attracted to me, getting attached long enough to see that we really weren't compatible and had mainly physical attraction or need for affection in common, and breaking up. Then in my first year of college I had my first opportunity to really “date around.” When someone asked me out, not knowing I had a boyfriend from home at a nearby university, I realized I may have been settling for any guy who wanted to be my boyfriend. So I broke up with him and set out to date other guys.

tions prove that one is “in love” and therefore sexual expression is the natural and best way to express that love. That’s the lie Satan has repeated so often that the world doesn’t even question it. But that “love” isn’t any true love—not agape, not storge, not phileo, and not even eros as God intended. Romans 1:18-32 talks about how people can and do miss the point and “exchange the truth of God for a lie” and “exchange natural relations for unnatural ones.”

What makes me sad is that all that homosexuals hear Christians say is that it’s wrong, but they don’t hear the better alternative, just like the point is missed when Christians say sex outside of marriage is wrong but don’t explain why only sex in marriage is the way to experience real erotic love. And sadly, there isn’t much comment about either type of immorality from Christians nowadays, so Satan’s lies and his definition of “normal” and “natural” and “love” are what the world hears and accepts.

### *My Own Perspective*

I said that at age 46 I realized something had been missing from my own life. God has used sorting through all of this for the sake of my children to make me aware of my own need.

The wonderful thing about being a Christian is that we can always grow and change. We may have weaknesses, deprivations and dysfunctional habits from our own childhood experiences, but it’s never too late to “grow up.” As Ephesians 4:11-16 says, leaders in the church “prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ....Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things *grow up* into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body...grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

God, our Heavenly Father, picks up where our parents left off and fills in the gaps left by their parenting weaknesses. (This is comforting as a parent also, to know that God can make up for my weaknesses if my children let him be their Father.) Hebrews 12, dealing with God’s discipline, is meant as an encouragement to remember that as our Father, “the Lord disciplines those whom he loves” (v. 6) and “God disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness” (v. 10).

We can take great comfort in knowing that God doesn’t expect us to be perfect when we reach age 21. Our adult life is a continuing process of transformation, as described in Ephesians 4:22-24: “You

is ridiculed as out of date and judgmental in our culture now. But have you also wondered about the fact that there will be no sex in heaven, since “At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven” (Matthew 22:30)? How can something so intensely intimate, something that God created that is pleasurable and which many people crave to the point of obsession and preoccupation, be left behind to mortal life? How could heaven be something to look forward to without romantic love being part of it?

If eros is such an intense physical and emotional pleasure here on earth, then the pleasure and joy of heaven must be even greater—God wouldn’t create a pleasure here on earth that is something we’ll miss in heaven. We have to trust that heaven will be indescribably better than anything we experience here. And it’s only logical to conclude that Jesus and Paul enjoyed something spiritually—on a higher plane—that was “better than sex.” We are thinking from a worldly point of view when we feel they were deprived rather than realizing they’d have pity on us if we are deprived of experiencing spiritual intimacy and affection with God and with his children that’s deeply fulfilling and satisfying, that makes it possible to be content and joyful without indulging sexual desires.

When Paul says he wishes all were as he was, in 1 Corinthians 7:7-8, we think he must not have realized what he was missing. But then we see the deep affection he experienced with the Ephesian elders as they parted, weeping, embracing and kissing (Acts 20:37), or the heart-felt emotion he expressed in Philippians 1:3-8 where he concludes, “God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.” David’s grief for Jonathan in 2 Samuel 1:26 is another example of pure and deep brotherly affection: “You were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women.” And they weren’t gay!

Jesus himself had what might be considered a best friend. The apostle John refers to himself three times in his gospel as “the one Jesus loved” (John 13:23, 20:2, 21:20), where both agape and phileo are used. He was the one next to Jesus who “leaned back against Jesus at the [last] supper.” John’s affection for Jesus and the preciousness of Jesus’ affection for him is obvious.

The admonition and promise of 1 Peter 1:22, “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart,” goes on in verse 23 to explain where the love comes from: “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable.” That gets to

the source of the “higher plane” of existence that God wants us to experience. We’re “new creations” and “regard no one from a worldly point of view” (2 Corinthians 5:16-17). Paul, in trying to help the Corinthians understand that, demonstrated the new life and new ability to love and appealed to them to let go and experience godly affection, too: “We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also” (2 Corinthians 6:11-13). “Make room for us in your hearts....I have said before that you have such a place in our hearts that we would live or die with you. I have great confidence in you; I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged; in all our troubles my joy knows no bounds....He [Titus] told us about your affection, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever....And his [Titus’] affection for you is all the greater when he remembers that you were all obedient” (2 Corinthians 7:2-4,7,15).

The Thessalonians were also objects of Paul’s godly affection: “We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us....Out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you....He [Timothy] told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you....Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more” (1 Thessalonians 2:8,17, 3:6, 4:9-10).

Jesus set the example that Paul followed: “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All men will know you are my disciples if you love one another....The world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me” (John 13:34-35, 14:31). Jesus’ love for the Father and in turn for the disciples was something that was unique and different, something that was so much higher than the love in the world that the world would take note of the fact that the disciples had learned about and were experiencing Jesus’ quality of love. It is something never seen before and only possible for humans to experience with the help of God himself as a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

Love is the theme of the New Testament—God’s love for us (John 3:16) and our love for him that is expressed in our love for others (1 Corinthians 13). When we really grasp how great it is to have

One good test of the rightness and purity of a friendship is whether there’s any temptation to hide it from others, especially from a spouse. John 3:20-21 says, “Whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.” Ephesians 5:8-15 admonishes us to “live as children of light” and to “be very careful, then how you live—not as unwise but as wise.” If the love is pure and godly and the affection is platonic and not erotic, there will be nothing to hide or fear, especially if one’s spouse is always kept as one’s best friend. If there is weakness in one’s marriage, it’s very tempting to turn to someone else to meet needs that should be met in the marriage. A friendship with someone of the opposite sex is only safe when it is in addition to a solid marriage, if one is married. The marriage always needs to get one’s best effort and attention. And the best way to have both a solid marriage and good friendships is to let a marriage grow out of a great friendship and a sexually pure courtship.

Sometimes Satan throws darts of false guilt at us. When a woman meets a man who is handsome or nice or both, in our eros-based culture, her natural assumption is to think she must be attracted to him romantically. And of course vice versa is also true. That wrong assumption is the cause of two ways we can lose out. One way is to give in to the assumption by pursuing a romantic and probably eventually also a sexually immoral relationship. That scenario is so common now that our culture has tried to normalize it to avoid real guilt. The other way we can be hurt is by not experiencing the better alternative of phileo-based friendship. Rather than either giving in to the temptation or struggling against it with no alternative and feeling guilty about feeling attraction, God provides the better way. Once we know that God does offer the possibility of a pure, wholesome, affectionate but not erotic way to love others, we can resist the devil’s schemes and the twisted, perverted, so-called “love” the world knows.

This is a good point to touch on the twisted thinking that leads to homosexuality. The same principles apply here as to heterosexual immorality. The only difference is that those who call themselves homosexual have felt an attraction to and affection for someone of the same sex and have assumed that must mean they’re homosexual. Then they act on that assumption. God created us to be sexually involved only with a marriage partner of the opposite sex.

Homosexuality, just like heterosexual immorality (defined as sexual activity outside of marriage) results from not having phileo-based love for a friend. And the bottom-line error in both forms of sexual immorality is to assume that deep, affectionate, emotional connec-

there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity” (Ephesians 5:3). “Everything is permissible, but not everything is beneficial” (1 Corinthians 6:12, 10:23). “To the pure, all things are pure” (Titus 1:15). We have to be honest with ourselves if we find we can’t keep our thoughts or actions pure, and then we have to be resolved to act in ways that will remove us from the force of the temptation. The most obvious example of this is to avoid being alone with someone with whom we may be tempted to indulge in physical affection.

1 Corinthians 10:12-13 gives us a warning and a promise: “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.” We’re all susceptible to the temptation to give in to inappropriate eros, at any age, married or single.

The Bible gives guidance for resisting temptation when it arises. God’s “way out” depends somewhat on the form the temptation takes. “Flee from sexual immorality” (1 Corinthians 6:18) is appropriate when it’s clear that a friend is tempted to desire romance when courtship and marriage is not possible. Before any boundaries are crossed, the best defense is to escape. That may mean pulling away from topics of conversation that are too personal, staying in public and never being alone together, or ending the friendship altogether, for the sake of not causing the friend to stumble or sin. Jesus said in Luke 17:1-3, “Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves.” Knowing how serious it is to cause someone else to be tempted or to sin is a healthy motivation to be on guard and to take any action necessary.

On the other hand, if the friend seems contentedly platonic and you are tempted to want romance, the best defense is a good offense: “Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). In other words, believe and act on the promise of being able to enjoy brotherly love (phileo), and don’t say or do anything to tempt the friend to become interested in romance. Satan will try to ruin a good friendship by tempting with eros. Resisting that and aiming for the wholesome and long-term, upbuilding affection of phileo will eventually result in romantic/erotic infatuation fading and the friendship remaining intact. But if you ever sense that you are wavering, then the only escape is to flee, figuratively or literally.

the opportunity and ability to love others “deeply, from the heart,” the worldly perspective of wanting to be loved in a selfish, physical, fleeting-pleasures way is crowded out. It is replaced by the experience of pure, godly, giving love that builds bonds of affection and connection with others who also are in the body, the church. Ephesians 4:15-16 describes this: “Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

God calls us to a “higher plane” of life, the heavenly perspective here on earth that made it possible for Jesus and Paul to be happy though single, to do without sex because they had what was even better. They were not against sex expressed as God designed and allows—in marriage—but they lived on a plane the rest of us won’t really appreciate until we get to heaven. They had both been there (John 13:3, 2 Corinthians 12:1-7). And they both longed to be there again (John 17, Philippians 1:23).

If we have the attitude of Colossians 3, we can experience the foretaste of heaven on earth that will make us long to be there, too: “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust...you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator....Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience....And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity” (Colossians 3:1-5, 9-10, 12, 14).

We can be complete and content without eros—as were Jesus and Paul—when our lives are full of the love and affection that God gives us for him and for our brothers and sisters in Christ. If or when God does bless us with the opportunity to experience eros in a marriage relationship as well, it is a wonderful added dimension to our lives here on earth. Eros must be experienced as complementary to phileo rather than in isolation for it to be truly fulfilling. It can never be a substitute for the godly affection that is a glimpse of heaven on earth and that we’ll carry with us when we go there.

### *Making Love vs. Taking Love*

In marriage, we build on the foundation of being “in like”—the pure, godly, emotional affection of *phileo*—and add the dimension of being “in love”—the sexual affection of *eros*. Sex in marriage is aptly described as “making love.” It does build love and intimacy when it’s experienced as mutually giving, unselfish, sensitive, and uninhibited. Outside of marriage, sex is best described as an effort to “take love.” It’s self-serving, presumptuous, an end in itself that destructs rather than constructs love. God knows we’re that way, because that’s how he designed us to be.

There are plenty of marriages that are built on bad foundations. One of the worst foundations is physical attraction and pleasure. It just can’t sustain a marriage through life’s many stages and stresses. Physical attraction will of course be a part of what draws two people to each other. But if there turns out to be not much more than that, the relationship is destined to fade when the looks do and the sex gets challenged by life’s demands. So waiting to experience sexual pleasure until marriage is a healthy way to keep the focus on what a marriage must be built on to be strong. It’s a wonderful thing to know that one is attracted to someone’s heart, spirit, character, personality and values as well as his or her beauty. To hold off indulging in physical intimacy until those other qualities are proven and marriage vows are made results in sexual union that is a God-given, mutually pleasurable, and connection-strengthening act, truly *love-making*.

Also, waiting until marriage gives great reassurance that one’s beloved has a selfless, giving heart. Sex outside of marriage is a selfish act. No matter which partner initiates it, it is a request to be given to, to have one’s physical cravings satisfied. It always leaves the responder feeling used. In some God-designed way, we know that giving physical intimacy and pleasure is a very big gift to give. And we know innately when that has been cheapened. We may not even be able to put it into words, but we know when someone has crossed the line and claimed to be giving love when they were really taking it wrongly from us. Waiting for marriage and life-long commitment proves that one’s partner and oneself are givers, not takers.

All this is great in theory. If our culture suddenly redefined and practiced relationships on a foundation of *phileo*, rather than *eros*, everyone would be happier and marriages would be more like what God intended. But that won’t happen. Our culture is “the world.” It will never help us be what God intended, but will only draw us into destructive and hurtful patterns. That’s why we have to pay attention to what our culture, “the world,” holds out as true and normal. We

now married to was off for awhile. In 2005, this daughter arrived at her wedding, after three more years of further maturing and courtship, with confidence that they both became the right person for each other by keeping their priorities right and focusing on giving rather than taking. As a parent, it’s hard to describe the joy I felt knowing that they arrived at their wedding day with a healthy balance of *agape*, *phileo* and *eros*. It was wonderful to feel no regrets about the principles we followed as parents. And their faith to put their trust in God to provide the right partner for life, at the right time, was rewarded.

As a family, we’ve learned a lot as we have gone through life’s challenges, often with hard lessons and in hindsight. Fortunately, other people have started to rethink the subject of dating and courtship, too, so we haven’t felt like complete oddballs. Two books written by Josh Harris have offered encouragement and practical advice based on his own experiences. The first, *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*, chronicles his own decision to pull out of the dating game and wait for courtship. When he eventually married, he and his wife wrote *Boy Meets Girl* about their courtship. Though we didn’t base our philosophy on these books, it was encouraging to know that others have come to the same conclusion about the value of waiting for romance until marriage is a realistic result.

My hope is that others will begin to question the worldly culture we live in and recognize its effects on their lives and families, too. It would be much easier for all children to not have to go against the tide of our culture, at least within the safe haven of their congregation, where God designed *phileo* to be the norm for all ages.

### *Dealing with Temptation*

The primary motivation that prompted our family to rethink how we wanted our children to approach relationships was the very real and strong temptations that we knew they would be bombarded with in our increasingly immoral and amoral culture. But even with proactively choosing *phileo*-based friendships rather than seeking romance when it is not appropriate, temptation may be lessened but can never be eliminated. Our human desire to love and be loved romantically will always make us vulnerable if we don’t watch for it and plan ahead for how to resist it until maturity and circumstances would make yielding to it both wise and blessed by God. There will always be the need to be on guard against *phileo* crossing over into *eros* outside of courtship or marriage.

God does give us practical principles to follow, but we are responsible to discern the wisest ways to apply them. “But among you

know someone else is attracted to me.

“I don’t recall a specific time when I realized my parents’ position on dating. Being fairly private about my feelings, the last thing I wanted to do was talk about being attracted to a guy. It would have been way too awkward—I imagined that my parents had no clue that I was even capable of having those feelings because I had never been the least bit open about such things. So, though I knew my parents wouldn’t allow me to have a romantic relationship with a guy, I don’t think I understood what the reasons were. Instead of trying to understand, I opted to just write them off as out of touch and old-fashioned.

“When a guy I like told me he felt the same way, I began what would turn out to be nearly a year of living a lie as I dated him without my parents’ knowledge [at school and doing things supposedly as ‘just friends’ when she was 16-17]. Looking back, my relationship with him was nowhere near being worth the stress of deceiving my family, or the loss of their trust when all was finally revealed. It was silly and superficial. The feelings were real and strong, but the cost was heavy. I learned that real love isn’t selfish and shouldn’t require me to lie or compromise other relationships. My parents suddenly seemed a lot more wise than I had given them credit for.

“I decided that indulging in feelings of attraction to a person and starting a romantic relationship before there is any possibility of it leading to its logical conclusion (being marriage) is actually *illogical* and is asking for a lot more stress than it’s worth. There is the stress of appearing impressive which often results in acting fake or not being oneself, the stress of breaking up if one or the other wants out for whatever reason, and the stress of temptation for physical intimacy as well as the guilt when strength doesn’t prevail.

“I have heard many people say that dating around in high school is a good idea because it allows people to see what they like or don’t like in a mate. I personally cannot accept that rationale. I believe that the important things about a person—their character and values, how they treat people and how they behave in all types of situations—can be learned in friendship. I have discovered many things about my likes and dislikes from my male friends.

“I am learning to be content that God will bring a man into my life at the right time if I trust him. And I recognize that when two people love each other, they will act in ways that benefit the other person first. This will promote honesty, purity, and respect. For now, I am thankful for the ways I can learn about myself and the things I can do while being single.”

She wrote that in 2002, when her courtship with the man she’s

have to examine how we have personally been duped and admit when we’ve been believing the lies about what will make us happy.

Please take the time to examine and discern what you really believe about relationships. And you need to have convictions about friendships as well as about marriage and sex. It takes good friendship practices to lead to a good marriage, to complement a good marriage, and to help it stay good.

When I got married, I walked down the aisle to the words, “On Saturday morning, I’m going away with my friend. . .” That’s how I felt—that I was marrying my best friend. And knowing he’s my best friend has freed me to enjoy other friendships without fearing that they take away from my marriage. They add to it. They are safe to enjoy because my marriage is secure and whatever adds to me as a person adds to my marriage.

The reason I feel so secure in my marriage is that I wasn’t looking for romance when I found my husband-to-be. I had finally gotten to the point, a week before I met him, of leaving it up to God to provide a husband if and when he saw fit, and I got to the peaceful state of mind that I was content to just be me and not worry about who was or wasn’t attracted to me. I wanted to have the confidence that if I met someone who grew to love me and wanted to marry me, he’d be attracted to the real me and not someone I was trying to be to impress him. I expected to wait a long time or never find that. It was an amazing gift to meet him a week later. Was God waiting for me to get to that point? All I can say is that it was a wonderful thing to come to my wedding day with confidence that I hadn’t been desperately seeking romance and to be loved, but instead it was a gift from God that I’ll always treasure. I’ll always have confidence that the foundation of our marriage is attraction to one another’s heart, spirit, character, personality, and values as well as to the physical beauty we see in each other. And I am especially thankful for his willingness to wait for eros to be expressed in marriage, for giving me the experience of making love rather than taking love.

### *The Goal of Marriage*

Let us be very clear what the goal is: That if we find a marriage partner, it is for life. Though the last few generations have had to struggle with changing philosophies of male and female roles both in relationships with each other and in the work arena, no one would be able to deny that the yearning to find a mate for life is still as strong today as it ever was. No one goes into a relationship hoping it will end someday. But it’s not “politically correct” nowadays to admit

that. Carmen Electra, a former “Baywatch” star and Playboy model, got married again recently and the wedding was broadcast on MTV, which is an icon of popular American culture. Amazingly, the series is called “‘Til Death Do Us Part.” When asked about the show’s title, her answer was very telling: “I do believe it’s forever. I’m such a *girl* in that way. But you’re allowed to change your mind! Hopefully, it’s until death do us part. If not, maybe that’s a show, too.” (Newsweek 1/19/04, p. 83) It’s so sad to see her candidly reveal her heartfelt hope then feel the need to qualify it, as if she’s embarrassed to have been caught admitting it.

We long for intimacy and connection, and we all feel the need for the safety and security of having a mate sincerely pledge to stay committed to the relationship for the rest of our lives. If we know we can really believe the other’s vows, there is an effect for good which strengthens the marriage, especially through hard times. If we don’t know, there is the opposite effect of causing insecurity that often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy which leads to the end of the relationship when faced with difficult challenges.

The American approach to finding a partner for life is a paradox. The goal is to find someone to whom one can make a vow of lifetime commitment. Yet the process our culture considers to be normal is more of a training-ground for how to break up than how to commit. An inherent flaw in the design of the system is that pairing up is not only tolerated but encouraged at an age when making a commitment is impossible. A friend described it to me as “going shopping with no money.” It only makes one want what one can’t have. What is the point of having a romantic relationship when one can’t hope to marry for several years? Why indulge in physical affection with someone not likely to become one’s spouse? Why give away intimacies in relationships not committed to last?

As I said, when my first daughter reached her teen years, I became very motivated to sort through the nagging questions and even regrets lingering from my own teenage and young adult years. Did I want to go through my teens’ years just hoping for the best, wondering if they’d make it through years of dating and falling in and out of love with their souls, spirits, and purity intact? Or could there be a better approach, something both we as parents and they as teens could view as positive and not arbitrarily restrictive? Could we say “no” to what “everyone else is doing” without tempting them to rebel or deceive?

Our first instinct as parents of teens is to dread the battles over dating and romantic relationships. That dread often leads to one of

marrying a nonbeliever is revealing that his or her mind and heart are not so focused on “seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33) that the same focus would be what would be most attractive in their choice of mate. Yes, there are many other qualities that may attract a person to another. But if the most important thing to a Christian is not also the most important thing to one’s potential mate, how can there be true intimacy?

Many Christians enter into a romantic relationship with someone whom they are attracted to even if they are not also a Christian by rationalizing from hope that the other will become a Christian through his or her influence. But what has proven to be faulty reasoning is that the nonbeliever is put in a position of not being able to make an objective decision about seeking God. There is no way he or she can be confident that the motivation is pure and not out of seeking to please the lover. That’s an unfair burden to place on someone, and I’ve seen it prevent the very thing hoped for!

When a relationship is heading toward marriage, one of the best ways to fight temptation is to keep the positive perspective of how good the marriage will be if it is arrived at with no regrets, with confidence that purity was maintained. Looking forward to the good and right expression of erotic love in the way God created us to experience it can help one make decisions about how to keep the relationship from crossing the line into immorality or impurity. If the attitude is one of staying as far away from temptation as possible rather than one of “playing with fire,” sexual desire can be controlled and foundations for a strong marriage can be worked on until the wedding ceremony and wedding night.

Does anybody else wonder how a wedding night can feel special when sex is not new because of indulging in it or even living together before marriage? Our culture has gotten so far away from God’s design that waiting for sexual expression until marriage is assumed to be the exception rather than the norm. But individuals and our society are paying the price for not believing and following God’s design.

When our oldest daughter grew out of her teens, this is the perspective she developed and how she came to it:

“I’m 20 years old now...I remember spending most of my play time as a child with some neighborhood boys my age. I think I had a small crush on one of them, but it was never acted on or even mentioned, so our friendship wasn’t damaged or anything but platonic. As I grew older I made new friends after we moved to a new place. Until then I had never been around anyone my age that was actually ‘dating’ someone. I also got my first taste of what it feels like to



that will give the stability and security that eros needs in order to be truly love-making. If eros is built on a solid foundation of agape and phileo, it feels wonderful. God certainly wants us to enjoy the emotions of being in love—he created us to feel them. No one can read Song of Solomon and miss that point!

But once the emotions are engaged, one's convictions about sexual morality are tested. It takes self-control to enjoy the love and maintain sexual purity at the same time. God knows it's hard. When Paul was giving advice about whether marriage would be wise in the circumstances the Corinthian Christians were in, he conceded that "it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1 Corinthians 7:9). So the challenge is to keep a relationship from moving toward physical desire becoming too strong before marriage vows can be or are made.

No one can make rules for anyone else. Indeed, man-made rules "lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence" (Colossians 2:23). But being a Christian gives the solution, a completely different perspective: "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things....Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust....Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (Colossians 3:2,5,12). When our minds are set on "things above, not on earthly things," good and wise choices become easier to discern and act on.

It seems that it should go without saying that a Christian would naturally choose another Christian as a marriage partner. But so many do not, so we do need to consider the subject as a decision that needs to be made before the situation arises. Many people have reasoned that the Bible doesn't specifically forbid a Christian marrying a non-believer. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 says not to be "yoked together with unbelievers" and uses the logic, "What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?" There is no relationship that is more "yoked together" than marriage, so though marriage is not specifically mentioned, the principle surely applies. The only place that specifically mentions boundaries for choosing a marriage partner is 1 Corinthians 7:39, at the end of that whole chapter devoted to marriage: "A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord." If a widow is commanded to restrict remarriage to choosing a man who "belongs to the Lord," then surely we would need to infer that the principle would also apply to any situation where someone is choosing a spouse. It seems unnecessary for God to spell it out any more clearly. Anyone who is seeking to justify

two extremes: Abdication ("if I ignore it, maybe it will go away or work out okay by itself") or authoritarianism ("I'm the parent and you *will* obey"). Either of these approaches invites disaster.

It's amazing to me when a happy and lifelong relationship results from coming through our culture's practices of dating and romance. Rather than being shocked that half of all marriages end in divorce, I'm amazed that 50% stay together! It's become more the norm to break up time after time than to stay together. I wish someone would do a survey to find the average number of romantic relationships Americans have. My theory is that we've used a process to try to reach the goal of marriage that paradoxically works against the very thing we're seeking. Yet few people consciously question the process or even seem to connect the process to the dismal rate at which it leads to success in achieving the goal.

### Parenting

Now that we've examined a different pattern in the Bible, phileo-based rather than eros-based as the world follows, how can those patterns apply to preparing our children for marriage? We have to look closely at how the world is influencing our children. Especially in the past 100 years or so, children have been put in the care of and under the influence of institutions other than the family for large chunks of their days. At one time, parents could—or thought they could—safely assume that their children would be molded and shaped by those institutions, by good values and strong authorities they agreed with, especially in church and school. But that bubble has burst, and now parents are less trusting or naïve. Now it takes even more concern and involvement to watch for, discern, and counteract the constant bombardment their children face from the world and Satan's lies. Children are exposed more thoroughly and at a younger age than ever before to the realities of our sinful, fallen world.

The scariest influence to me is the worldly view of love, marriage and sex. And I don't see many churches or those calling themselves Christians either believing or standing up for what God says is true about those very real human needs. I see parents accepting as normal and even cute that their children are seeking romance.

Children need help to see through the ways of the world. There are plenty of object lessons in movies, TV, and life to use to help them see the destructive results of bad relationship practices. We need to be sure our children know our different perspective and why we are upset when a supposedly family-oriented TV show has sex outside of marriage or an unmarried couple living together. The world blitzes

our children constantly, so we have to constantly be on the watch for potential influences. If we're silent, we give tacit approval and consent to worldly and destructive lifestyles.

But parents have to go further. We have to decide early what we will and won't allow and why. In my own family, it's been easier for my second child than my first to see through the dating/romantic practices of her fellow teens. It's even easier for my youngest to see it before she gets to that age. We've had to learn by experience and figuring it out as we go with our oldest, who was already a teenager before we started realizing the need to examine this subject and apply it to our parenting of her. It's never too late to address our own and our children's relationship patterns. But the younger they are when we parent from biblical rather than worldly convictions, the fewer destructive experiences they'll have and the more time there is for them to build the kind of friendships that can lead to and add to a good marriage.

When children are helped to develop buddies of the opposite sex, they build a good foundation for being able to navigate the teen years safely. They'll still need help as teens to recognize and avoid giving in to the peer pressure and media pressure to seek romance. And they'll have to deal with their own desires to be loved and their hormonal, natural awakening to sexual desires. But in a culture such as ours where physical maturity arrives earlier than social maturity, a proactive plan for how to wait for sex and how to relate to the opposite sex is needed.

It's obvious that very few people plan for the need. Very few even recognize that there is a need. Most parents are finally hit in the face with it when their teenage child is in the middle of a romantic relationship, when it's usually too late to question or address the issue. And if the issue is addressed at that point—often because of parental horror at the choice their child has made—it's not surprising when rebellion and disrespect is the response.

The time to plan for what path we set our children on that will offer the best hope for good friendships and a great marriage is—well, as early as possible! The earlier we decide our convictions in this area, the earlier we can cultivate patterns and perspectives that will be assumed to be normal by our children. They'll still be faced with sorting through the different norms of the world. But strong and consistent parenting can offset and protect them from much more of the pressure than parents give themselves credit for.

I've been so thankful for circumstances in my girls' childhoods when we've lived near boys for them to play with in a natural and

are mature enough and in the right circumstances to indulge those feelings responsibly has been put to the test. We've been happy to watch our daughters enjoy friendships with teen guys. There have been times when they have misunderstood the reasoning behind the boundaries we've set and times when they have rebelled against obeying our rules. But good has come out of the consequences of those times, because they have confirmed in hindsight that phileo is best at this age.

### Adult Years

Once a person reaches an age or circumstances when marriage would become possible if a romantic relationship were to develop, it becomes important to know in advance how one would go about courtship. "Courtship" sounds very old-fashioned, doesn't it?! But it helps me think of aiming for and preparing for marriage in a more serious way than to call it "dating."

By this age, every person will have to make his or her own decisions about how to cultivate friendships with members of the opposite sex. Finding ways to do that is a challenge. Group activities are great! Or one may decide to date in the sense of going out to spend fun time with different people to get to know them and test out possible interest in pursuing a relationship. But keeping the focus on friendship as the foundation of marriage will help one to avoid the pressure to seek romance prematurely that our culture associates with dating.

With a focus on *being* the right person rather than *finding* the right person, along with faith and trust in God to provide if or when the time and circumstances are right for marriage, one can stay patient, peaceful, and content to enjoy being single. And if a friendship does develop with someone that seems to be "the one," then resisting the temptation to move toward eros without a solid foundation of agape and phileo is crucial. So much can be learned about another person as a friend, good and bad, that often is overlooked once eros is indulged. The more certain one is that a friend is compatible in areas of values, interests, tastes, communication, etc., and that the attraction one feels is more than physical, the more solid the foundation for a life-long relationship will be.

What do I mean by indulging eros? Thinking of eros as the "in love," romantic emotion that includes sexual attraction and the desire to be together forever, it's the love God designed to be expressed in marriage, and only in marriage. Attraction and emotions obviously are felt before marriage. They are what God intended to motivate us to make the lifetime commitment of marriage vows to our beloved

For me, it still all boils down to prayer and connecting every day, dealing with each day's needs. What Jesus said in Matthew 6:34 comes to mind: "Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

What if a teen does have a good friendship with someone of the opposite sex and romantic feelings do develop? Am I saying that they can't find "the one" at this age? It's surely possible that God in his Providential wisdom may provide a relationship that leads ultimately to marriage. We went through that situation with our oldest daughter, who met the man she's married to when she was eighteen. She clearly knew our philosophy by then, and she was far from circumstances where marriage would be possible. She had just become a Christian, also, which called for serious care to be taken in how this relationship was handled. She knew that he had romantic feelings for her, but she kept things platonic, inviting him to church activities and even encouraging him to study the Bible with her dad. We all wanted to be sure that he wasn't put in a position of uncertainty about his own motives for pursuing a relationship with God; he may already have had to deal with mixed motives, but we didn't want to add to his struggle. He did become a Christian, before they allowed their romantic feelings to be acknowledged and acted on.

We wished they hadn't met so long before marriage would be feasible because that put added struggles and temptations above and beyond what would be involved in any courtship. But we could see the hand of God in using our daughter to help him find God. And because he didn't grow up in a Christian family, we were able to provide some parenting for him that reassured us that his motives were truly to put God first and that he would be a mature and responsible man of God who could be a godly husband for our daughter.

When teenagers believe they have found the one they will someday marry, it is such a big responsibility to handle the relationship wisely! It certainly is not something to be hoped for or sought out at this age because the goal of marriage is usually a long way off in terms of practical feasibility as well as in terms of maturity. Our culture of expecting and even encouraging romantic attachments in the teen years does need to be challenged. The point is not to follow legalistic rules but rather to arrive at a great marriage with moral purity and love—agape, phileo, and eros—in a godly balance. Thank God that he offers wisdom if we ask for it, because his wisdom is certainly needed in these years by the teens and by their parents.

Each of our daughters has reassured us that our approach has been good for them. The wisdom of waiting for romance until they

uninhibited, friendly way. They had the opportunity to develop the norm that they can have buddies. In fact, having those circumstances come our way has partly been what nudged me into starting to think about this whole issue. I often have felt, as I'm sure others have, that though I want to be a good mother and I know how I want my daughters to turn out, I haven't had a clear vision of how to get them there. I've kept a sense of sometimes vague and sometimes specific prayerfulness about it, hoping God can and will guide us as we go. So when circumstances work together for even greater good than I could have asked for or imagined, I'm so grateful for God's hand in our lives.

It's then that God's promises become more than ethereal, fancy church talk. Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." When I see God work providentially to help us see and meet our children's needs, I feel so reassured of what Paul goes on to say in Romans 8:31-39: "... If God is for us, who can be against us? ... Jesus Christ ... is also interceding for us ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ..." Ephesians 3:20-21 offers the encouragement that with God's help, we can overcome our weaknesses: "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory. ..." He is our children's Heavenly Father, and he wants them to grow up well even more than we do. So if we rely on him—on his teachings, his strength and his providential involvement—we can have real hope of winning the war for our children's souls and spirits.

Yes, we have to face the reality that our children are being warred against, just as we all are. 1 Peter 5:8 says, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." And Ephesians 6:12 helps us see the bigger picture: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Satan doesn't wait until we reach adulthood to try to influence us. By that time, we've already gone so far down whichever path we started on as children that getting off the wrong one and onto the right one becomes more and more difficult. So we have to be on guard, "in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes" (2 Corinthians 2:11).

So, once we decide to guide our children toward phileo and away from inappropriate or premature eros, how can we go about it? Is it possible to break the worldly and destructive patterns of our culture?

### *Pre-Teen Years*

Each age and stage of our children's lives has its own challenges. Parents of young children can set a tone and a pattern that will become what they define as normal. Friendships with males and females, with no suggestion of romantic "boyfriend" or "girlfriend," can begin to be cultivated as soon as toddlers become aware of age-mates. If children are involved in preschool or play groups, it's not too early to watch for signs of influence, such as when another parent sees a boy and girl playing together or hugging and puts a romantic spin on it. When adults "ooh" and "aah" about how cute that is and ask Johnnie if Susie is his girlfriend, the pattern of associating affection with romance has already begun.

Young children need to have "normal" defined—not in so many words at first, but in actions—as platonic friendships with both sexes. Once a parent decides to follow that norm, it becomes easier to catch and counteract the worldly norms that permeate our society. That will be a constant job, especially if children are schooled institutionally. Homeschoolers have it a bit easier to at least know what the children are being exposed to. (I hope homeschooling's protective quality can by now be accepted and appreciated since the socialization that public and even private schools provide is often more negative than positive.)

As children develop more ability to understand abstract concepts, parents need to articulate more of the reasons for God's commands and why some things are wrong. The positive effect of avoiding sin and following God's way needs to be emphasized, and they need to see that parents have reasons for rules.

In practical terms of how to go about cultivating children's understanding and ability to reason, my own approach has been pretty simplistic. The main thing I've done is to put each child to bed every night, with time to talk, special traditions (ours was a back scratch and a special song), praying together, and ending the day with a hug and kiss and an "I love you." Staying connected every night has had an amazing cumulative effect. The other main parenting principle I stick to is prayer—for them, for us as parents, and occasionally for their future spouses.

We've been thankful that each of our daughters has had opportunities to have boy neighbors who were good buddies during their pre-teen years. We've been careful to encourage their platonic friendships. The younger ones have had the advantage of having our philosophy of parenting in this area more clearly formulated by that age, and they learned much by seeing their oldest sister lead the way. We

all learned together, and we tried to articulate the what and the why of our views as our convictions as parents were clarified.

As our younger two daughters have moved on to their teen years, it has helped them to already have platonic friendships as the norm in our family. We wish we had sorted this issue out before any of our children reached their teens, but we're at least thankful that we had the opportunity to realize the need to do so before any of them got drawn into romance prematurely.

### *Teen Years*

At the beginning of the teen years, it's time to be very clear about what kind of relationship practices will and won't be allowed and why. They need to know that romance is not allowed because it's not time yet to marry; friendship is better for now. To know and be able to tell friends up-front that dating isn't allowed can be freeing for a teen. It defuses the romantic pressure our culture puts on boy-girl friendships, and it frees a teen to be himself or herself without the issue of flirting or self-focused attention-seeking that the dating game requires. Also, they'll get experience in self-control as they go through inevitable infatuations and learn that the emotions do fade over time when they're not indulged. Crushes will come and go for most teens, and parents should be sure teens know to expect them. "Falling in love" feels wonderful, but it's not a guarantee that the attraction is wise or meant to be. Whenever possible, get them doing things with a group of friends, guys and girls. Encourage good friendships, don't just forbid dating.

There's no easy way to navigate the teen years. Being a teen is a necessary but angst-filled stage of development. The main encouragement I can share from our experiences is to know what's going on and probe if necessary when you sense something not right. Also, it's to be expected and should be accepted as normal that they'll go through times of knowing what's right but being pulled by strong desires for romance, popularity, and acceptance. So parents will need to draw out their feelings, who they feel attracted to, and how they're handling it.

They're figuring out who they are and there's no shortcut to that. Reasoning with them when they're respectful and willing to learn helps them internalize their own convictions. It does them no favors to be pushovers or to try to be a friend rather than a parent. It will backfire to preach at them or to lord it over them, but they do need firm, authoritative, loving parenting, age-appropriate boundaries, and gradually increasing freedom coupled with increasing responsibility.