

WAITING While Dating

CHRISTIAN COUPLES WHO KEPT GOD FIRST
FROM COURTSHIP TO MARRIAGE



LINDSEY HOLDER

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AMBASSADOR INTERNATIONAL
GREENVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA & BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND

www.ambassador-international.com

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From Courtship to Marriage

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ISBN: 978-1-62020-563-1

eISBN: 978-1-62020-494-8

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Cover Design and Page Layout by Hannah Nichols

eBook Conversion by Anna Riebe Raats

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to You, Lord. You sought me out to be a voice for others. After my hurts, protests, and anger, You molded me into a woman who has grown toward You in unimaginable ways. You never cease to bewilder me, Your love is endless, Your grace abounds for me, and Your kindness overwhelms me. I see clearly how every piece of my life has fallen into place, even when I got the puzzle out of order. Your wisdom knew I was going to do that. Thank You. I humbly look forward to what will happen next.

This book is dedicated to *your* new beginnings, grace, discovering biblical wisdom, growing closer to our Heavenly Father, trusting He knows best, overcoming obstacles, and discovering a beautiful lit path ahead for your future.

It is also dedicated to Kerry H. Thank you for your guidance, your counsel, and showing me what a Proverbs 31 woman looks like and the beauty and gift of waiting for a godly man. You made a tremendous impact on my life; I thank you.

To my parents: thank you for showing me the strength of a Christian couple who has endured the trials of life and weathered every challenge together.

To my sister: you are my daily advisor and confidant. How grateful I am to have you in my life.

The book is dedicated to December 2012, the month and year God spoke to me and drew me to Himself. Little did I know that You would take me through painful trials, test my endurance, and reveal unforeseen truth, sinfulness, and brokenness. This book is also dedicated to what came out of my trials: grace, light, wisdom, mercy, joy, forgiveness, redemption, friendships, strength, and, most importantly, the lesson of putting God first.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

An overwhelming thank you to the six couples who took time out of their lives to sit down with me and share their path to meeting their spouses. What an incredible honor to know you and hear your stories. Every couple had a different way of meeting and courting, but the one common factor they had was seeking this through God's way. Thank you for personally showing me the strengths and godly mindset of both the male and female perspective.

Thank you to Grace Church for being an abundant source of tools, resources, staff, community, leadership, wisdom, encouragement, strength, and support. A special thank you to Matt Williams and Chrystie Cole for meeting with me and having a *significant* impact on this book. I am grateful for a church that speaks about topics often overlooked and gives me honest answers when I'm seeking truth. Thank you for leading not only our youth but followers of Christ of all ages so that we may continually grow in His strength and always strive to seek God's best.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	11
MOM AND DAD: [BACK IN THOSE DAYS]	17
PATRICK AND KATHRYN: [ALMOST 30]	33
JONATHAN AND OLIVIA: [LONG-DISTANCE PURSUIT]	55
COLIN AND ELIZA: [MODERN MIX]	81
AIDEN AND REBEKAH: [SCREENSHOT]	101
ETHAN AND SARA: [SECOND CHANCES]	123
CONCLUSION	143
RECOMMENDED READING	149
SCRIPTURE	153

INTRODUCTION



I have been through the emotional pain of a divorce, but as of this writing have never been married.

How is that possible? Simple: I concentrated on my personal desires rather than God's instruction clearly laid out in His Word. He is not to be argued with, half listened to, or disputed against. You do not doubt God's direction. There is no option of partially obeying the Lord without bearing the consequences of shame and separation. Partial faithfulness is non-existent. It is one way to believe God's Word, and it is another to obey it. It is one way to believe God's Word and another to *admit* what you are actually doing.

The Lord expects us to do what He says without debate. God's requirements are timeless, with no bearing on age or our past. It is disheartening when we take matters into our own hands and allow relationships to occur and develop that were not selected by God. How vital to know God has a plan for us and has not forgotten us. Trust His guidance and rely on His promises. He expects us to seek and find, but He will never forget or forsake us during our journey.

A few of the rewards of following His Word? Less pain, fewer regrets, and the most surprising? Fewer memories. You may be

forgiven, but the memories remain as a reminder of your disobedience and lack of discipline and judgment. In a spontaneous heated moment, an easy, feel-good choice seems effortless to make. Did you stop and think if that relationship did not work out? In that moment everything can appear wonderful, and it is easy to “live in the moment” and see where it goes. But in the end, the “moment(s)” will last forever, imprinted on your heart. It will also affect future moments with the husband or wife God has planned for you.

This relates to emotional, physical, and spiritual oversharing before it's time.

In today's culture we plan and prepare for our future with education, training, and working diligently to be successful in our business ventures and career. We thirst for knowledge, crave to be the best, and chip at it every day to be the guru in our field. But in relationships, we tend to fail ourselves so easily. We allow our hearts to be carefree, not planning for our heart's future, for our emotional health, for the memories we make. We easily connect, giving so much of ourselves before it is time without truly understanding who we are giving that to and without having received an ordained commitment of marriage in return. Why are the most precious gifts given so freely?

Yes, forgiveness and redemption are wonderful. Thank you God for allowing us countless chances to strive for obedience and faithfulness. What if you gave yourself a chance to be faithful? How freeing would that be?

If this is on the man's end, Chrystie Cole points out in *Redeeming Sexuality*, “By engaging in sex prior to marriage, you are

not encouraging him to be a man and take responsibility for your relationship. On the contrary, you enable him to remain a boy.”

Matt Williams states in *Eden Derailed*, “Intimacy flourishes in the content of commitment.” Chrystie Cole responds, “This is true of relational intimacy, emotional intimacy, and sexual intimacy.”

So what does that look like? Just as your future is planned, how is your future heart planned? God is clear in His answers: you follow His Word.

In the Bible, there isn’t anything listed besides marriage and un-marriage. That’s it, no in between—no gray area. It is simple: you are not married to this person, so therefore do not do things married people do. Period.

What lie are you telling yourself? If you are unable to stand in front of God Himself and be proud of your actions, then there is your answer. If He would not have approved it, then anything else is just an excuse you are telling yourself.

So how is that established? It’s easy to read and be clear on paper prior to reality. To get to know someone requires you to share gradually to establish if indeed *they are* that marriage partner. What questions do you ask your potential partner and when? What boundaries do you set? At what point in the relationship do you bring Christ into it? What is over the limit and appropriate?

As you study His Word, you will find God provides you all of the wisdom you need to find the qualities and characteristics of a marriage partner. But He expects you to study His Word, obey His Word, and have a faithful heart in the interim. Through Scripture, God provides the wisdom on what type of character,

values, and morals to seek in a person: someone not in anger, equally yoked, etc.

In reality, on a real date, when chemistry is involved, you are fighting off your naturally produced endorphins and endless supply of dopamine. So while your brain wants to know all of these answers to specific questions, your eyes are bewildered by attractive features and you are fighting the urge to get closer, faster. You are responding naturally; the attraction is there. How are you supposed to keep it together and composed?

Boundaries and a plan.

If clear boundaries and a plan are set from the start, both partners can hold each other accountable. There is a catch: *both* partners *have* to be on the *same* page about the boundaries. If your partner pressures you or makes you feel guilty for keeping to those boundaries, you need to question their real motives and intentions. The ultimate goal should be marriage. No need to pursue someone unless you are ready to commit to that goal. Otherwise, you are merely using that person to meet your own selfish desires. Even God has boundaries and allows consequences when they are crossed. He is clear.

False reasons to engage in physical intimacy before marriage? Among others, I have heard these lies on why their partner or their selves “approved” the intimacy. Notice they are man-made, not ordained by God:

- It’s not like you are a virgin.
- I’m not your first, so what’s the big deal?
- I don’t want to marry someone without knowing what it will be like.

- It's how I show I love someone.
- It makes me feel loved.
- Those commandments applied to those back then; it's outdated now. They were so young when they married.
- Those might apply to teenagers. We are adults.
- I need to have my needs met. (Note: These are not needs; they are desires.)

Examples of boundaries in dating? Details. My goal in writing this was to discover a few concrete details on how six Christian-based couples did just that. They got to know each other with an eye toward marriage. Note that all couples were dating while the ultimate goal was marriage. Was it hard? Absolutely. Were they wildly attracted to each other? Yes. They were not unlike most dating people; they all had the same raging desires. If they didn't, that would be a problem since physical oneness is an essential part of marriage. But they also courted with faithfulness and took the time to ask and answer hard questions and be on the same page physically, spiritually, and emotionally. It takes work on both parties with both equally open to doing the work prior to the commitment. Relationships are work, but anything worth having is work. Isn't work worth having? The key is to wait for the ultimate partner who will do the work with you. As Andy Stanley says, "Every kiss is a part of your permanent story." So make it a story you will be proud to tell.

A final note: Of course more questions could be asked, but the questions in this book are a good base to get your mind and heart in shape for how you will behave during your courtship.

Hopefully it will reduce your heartache (as that is inevitable) along the way.

Put Christ first in your relationship. Live out emotional, spiritual, and sexual integrity in your dating relationship to give you a strong foundation into your marriage.

Restore your relationship with your Father first and focus on His Word. The rest will fall

Give yourself a chance to find the person willing to serve in the trenches with you.



into place. Marriage is messy, complicated, and downright dirty at times. Give yourself a chance to find the person willing to serve in the trenches with you.

MOM AND DAD:

[BACK IN THOSE DAYS]



MEET COUPLE ONE: MOM AND DAD

AGES WHEN MARRIED:

Both were 21

LENGTH DATED:

7 months

LENGTH ENGAGED:

8 months

HOW LONG MARRIED NOW:

48 years

HOW THEY MET:

My father's sister suggested my mother was a nice girl and from a nice family. My aunt thought my father should ask my mother out since he was home from college for the summer.

Mom and I were sitting at Applebee's, dining on one of their lighter fare selections as we seem to always be trying the latest low-calorie trend. As we waited for our meal, I thought I would tell her about my new book and my vision for it. As I listed a few couples I thought would be ideal for the book, Mom stopped me

and said something I never expected: “Well, what about your father and I? You know, *we* could be in the book.”

That thought had never occurred to me. I felt a little disappointed in myself that I had never considered my parents. Once my mom mentioned the idea, it dawned on me—of course they should be in the book! It was the perfect fit, especially for me. What other couple had I been given a front row seat to personally witness the ups and downs, the trials of marriage, the healings of marriage, the bonds that one spouse can have for another? I have watched my dad court my mom my entire life. He always brings her a dessert (in fact, these days she will get upset if he doesn’t), have a random, thoughtful card at her chair at dinner, and Friday night has been date night for as long as I can remember.

It is fascinating to me that even after forty-eight years of marriage, they still have questions for one another, their quirks still drive each other crazy, and they talk to each other a ridiculous amount during the day. It amazes me there is not a loss for words. They are NOT that quiet couple at the dinner table that stare at their food in silence. There has always, *always* been something to chat about, dispute about, story tell, or laugh about. So I guess that is what good friends do; they always want that person by their side, and their friendship is a never ending conversation. Sometimes their conversations are louder than others, but they are always ongoing, entertaining, and filled with love.

After observing these years of my parents’ marriage, it was a must to interview them and find out how the beginnings all came about. It was time I learned some history and details about my folks.

PART I - ATTRACTION

What attracted you to this person in the beginning?

My dad said, “She was very pretty and available.” For the record, this is not the romantic serenade I had imagined. My mom, in return, liked my dad because he was in church and had a nice family. She liked how he believed the same as she did. She said, “His family was a lot like mine, and I wanted to marry someone that acted like my daddy.” It’s worth noting that Mom also came back saying, “I also liked that he was tall and had dark brown eyes.” Oh goodness. The giggles started to kick in with my parents as they started down memory lane after the first question.

What characteristics were you looking for in your future partner?

Dad said Mom was someone that was from a good, stable family that would be compatible. Mom agreed and felt the same way about Dad.

Did he automatically lead from the start of contact? What did that look like (from the woman’s perspective)?

He made all the moves. If he had not called, that would have been the end of it. Mom would have not pursued him. He called her, made all the plans, and always paid for her.

What form of communication had been your primary one? Did you talk about if you prefer to text, see each other, or talk on the phone?

Both agreed they communicated both by phone and in person. Dad also said he would take her for sweet tea and hushpuppies at the drive-thru after church, occasionally ice cream, and then take

her home. I asked my dad if he walked my mom to the front door after a date. He replied, “*Of course*, I wanted to get my sugar.”

My mom said my dad knew he would see her in church on Sunday morning and Sunday night. My mom would sing in the choir on Sunday nights so she would sit with him after she came down from the choir.

When into the relationship did you discuss your intentions and expectations for the relationship? Who brought it up?

Both my parents agreed that he did. Six weeks into the relationship, he asked my mom to go steady and wear his high school ring. She said no. He waited four more months and asked her again. She then said yes—emphatically.

When do you think you grew close to each other?

My dad was instantly infatuated with my mom. For my mom, she was ready when the four months came and he asked her to go steady.

When did you first say *I love you*? Did you have the intention at that point for marriage?

It was between months four and eight of dating for my dad, but he could not recall the exact moment. He had marriage on his mind after the first few dates. My mom could not recall when she told him she loved him first. She did, however, have the intention at that point for marriage.

At what point in the relationship did you “know” you desired each other as your marriage partner? What was it that made you know? Was it a feeling or was something done?

My dad felt my mom was “the one” about the second date. My mom was more cautious but felt he was “the one” after several months.

Did you discuss what love language you responded to? When did you start acting upon that (e.g., cards that expressed your emotion, acts of kindness, cooking for one another etc.)? Was this done before, during, or after the engagement?

Both exchanged Valentine, birthday, Christmas, and the occasional “sweetheart” cards. My father would mail them to her. They did not discuss an actual love language. There was no cooking for each other as they both lived at home with their parents.

Do you feel waiting for sexual intimacy sped up the dating process?

Both unanimously said no.

How hard was it to maintain the commitment before sexual intimacy?

For them, waiting wasn’t hard at all. It was the common understanding to wait.

Did you discuss your sexual past or past partners, if any? When did you start to discuss this?

My dad said no, as there was no need. He knew how she was raised and who she had dated in the past. He just knew. Mom also said no and pretty much gave the same answer. She also knew who he was and how he was raised.

PART II - BOUNDARIES AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Going into these questions with my parents made me both a little squeamish and curious at the same time. Asking your dad how long he waited “to make a move” on Mom is a bit uncomfortable. On the other hand, I was eager to know both how my dad respected my mother as well as how my mother required him to treat her. I enjoyed learning about their hush puppy outings, how my grandmother kept them in check and that old-fashioned cards are hard to beat. It surprised me that certain questions were never brought up or discussed, but at the same time it impressed me how well they kept their boundaries and clarity in the relationship.

Describe your first date:

They went on a double date to a rhythm and blues beach music club with live entertainers, which was apparently something considered out of the ordinary back then.

Did you establish boundaries from the get go? Who led that conversation?

No, there was no discussion. They just knew and had their own personal boundaries and moral code.

What boundaries did you create? Did you have the same boundaries?

Yes, they both had the same boundaries.

How did you hold each other accountable to those boundaries?

Living with their parents made a difference. Also her mother never went to sleep until my mom came

Asking your dad how long he waited “to make a move” on Mom is a bit uncomfortable.



home. Her curfew was midnight. My mother said every time she would come home, her mother always seemed to have to go to the bathroom down the hall at that exact time and asked her how her night had been. It was my grandmother's way of checking up on my mom.

They both went to the same church and held the same church beliefs. The weekly church sermons also held them accountable.

When did you start holding hands? What date was your first kiss?

They held hands on the second date and had their first kiss on either the third or fourth date.

How did you control your sexual desires for each other? Did you discuss the difficulty of controlling your desire for each other?

They did not discuss their desires; they knew they desired each other. They both used personal restraint to control those desires.

Was this a local or long-distance relationship?

It was a local relationship.

Did you ever spend the night at each other's house? Was this in the same bed? Were there other people in the house at the time? What was the situation?

No, they never spent the night at each other's house.

Did you mainly do daytime dates? Did you do more group or one-on-one dating? Any overnight trips?

Mainly it was evening, one-on-one dates. He would take her to a drive-in movie or would come and sit on the front porch swing at night. My dad did not like group dates; he did not want

to share her with anyone. He wanted her attention focused on him. There were no overnight trips.

At what point did you have a relationship and open discussions with his family, including seeing you involved as a part of the future family unit?

This happened only for my dad when he asked for her hand in marriage. They had dinner every Sunday at one of their parents' houses, so they were actively involved in each other's families. My dad also went on a camping trip with my mother's family so was well known with her family.

Did you have a close person in your life who held you accountable, truly had your best interest in mind, and gave you advice?

No, but having a curfew, being a part of the church together, and knowing each other's family helped them with accountability.

PART III - A CHRIST-CENTERED RELATIONSHIP

I knew my parents met at church, but learning how *much* time they spent together at church was new to me. I had pictured in my mind my mom and dad hanging out on Sunday a few times, seeing each other at service, or attending a congregation dinner here and there. Hearing the details of their church life and finding out how involved they were, made all of the other chapters and answers fall into place

A great admiration on what a Christ-centered relationship looks like was right in front of me the whole time. I just needed to open my eyes and watch.



for me. They had surrounded themselves with faith and people who shared their morals and values. Christ was always at the center of their relationship, so a lot of the boundary questions seemed to answer themselves. My parents raised the bar for me after knowing their answers and listening to their dating stories. A great admiration on what a Christ-centered relationship looks like was right in front of me the whole time. I just needed to open my eyes and watch.

The first time you shared a meal; did he offer to bless the meal?

Yes, he said the blessing at every meal.

Were you raised with the same religious backgrounds and values?

Yes, they had exactly the same backgrounds and values.

Did you come from the same faith or denomination?

Yes, they are both Baptist.

Did you attend the same church when you met? If not, whose church did you start attending and when did you start attending together?

Yes. Both went to the same church. They really didn't have a choice as both sets of parents went to the same church.

When did you start praying together?

They said the blessing and prayed communally at church. They started praying together only after their engagement.

Did you serve together while you were dating? Were they the same roles?

No, they did not serve together. (Mom sang in the choir, and Dad was an usher sometimes.)

Did you establish a mentor relationship with other strong Christian married couples while dating?

They didn't have any mentor relationships outside of their parents.

Did you do any type of workbook or study together? If so, when was this into the relationship? Did you think this was valuable?

No, they didn't complete any type of workbook.

Did you participate in premarital counseling after engagement?

No premarital counseling was done. They spoke to their preacher for about one hour regarding marital responsibilities. This occurred about thirty days prior to their marriage.

Were you a part of a study or Bible group? If so, when was this into the relationship?

Yes, they went to a Bible class on Sunday nights, which they both attended even prior to dating each other.

Were you a part of a weekly community group? If so, when was this into the relationship?

No, but they had Sunday school, Wednesday night prayer meeting, and church on Sunday night.

Did you discuss what religion would look like in your family (e.g., go to church weekly or more than weekly; involvement

of church in daily life and finances; if children would go to Christian schooling, etc.)?

No, it was an understood attitude that they would continue church after marriage.

When into the relationship did you discuss any obstacles or addictions that you needed to overcome (finances, anger, abuse, pornography, alcoholism, gambling, etc.)? Was the elimination of these addictions expected? How were these problems resolved?

There were never any issues, and they did not discuss this.

PART IV - DAILY LIFE

Surprisingly, my parents spent a great deal of time together early into their relationship. I thought my dad would have taken it slow and played it cool, but he desired my mom and was not going to let her get away. He pursued her with persistence and a plan. In these days of “*I need my space and independence,*” learning how much quality time my parents spent alone and with each other’s families was refreshing. It allowed my parents to get to know each other, finding out about each other’s personality and character through quality time. You can hide only so much from someone for so long, and learning of their daily communication and frequent visits won me over. Their interview not only opened my eyes to how well my parents got to know each other before marriage but also made me realize how involved both sets of my grandparents were. Both sides of my family embraced my parents, welcomed them into their homes, and had a place at the dinner table for both of them.

Through hospitality and generosity, my grandparents played a large part in setting my parents' boundaries without speaking a word.

Did you speak daily, early into the relationship? How long were your conversations at the beginning? When did this increase to a daily occurrence?

Yes, they spoke at least every day by phone. Each time they talked, it lasted one to two hours. They also saw each other three to four times a week.

What form of communication did you mainly use? How long were your conversations typically? Very quick and general or more in-depth, longer ones. How did your communication change as your relationship grew?

Social media did not exist back then. They mainly talked in person.

Dad sent Mom cards in the mail. Most of their conversations were deep, and the communication was constant; it did not change.

How many times a week did you see each other?

They saw each other between three and four times a week.

When did you meet each other's core group of friends?

They already knew each other's friends.

Did you discuss what type of movies to watch together? How did you handle it when one partner was uncomfortable with the content of the movie? What about TV shows, magazines, Internet activity?

Mom usually picked out the movie and Dad paid. Back then, there was generally only one movie showing at one time. In

addition, those movie options were not mainstream at that time. There was no Internet back then.

Did you go to each other's house? When watching movies or TV, did you lie down side by side, sit up right, or on separate couches?

Yes, they went to each other's house. They typically sat side by side and held hands.

Did you have other friends of the opposite sex while dating? Did you agree that as you became more intimately involved, those relationships would need to change? How did you handle that? When into the relationship was this? How were those relationships changed?

No, neither one had friends of the opposite sex.

What were your boundaries with the opposite sex (e.g., no lunch alone, no private phone calls, etc.)?

There were no boundaries because there were no other relationships.

Did you establish to set an open and safe conversation when one partner felt the other partner crossed the line with the opposite sex or made them feel uncomfortable?

No, as that never happened.

PART V - SOCIAL MEDIA BOUNDARIES, EXPECTATIONS, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Envisioning my mom and dad chatting online when they first met seems so far beyond unimaginable from nowadays. It also would be hysterical. My mom would most likely wink at the

wrong person, and my dad would probably accidentally delete my mom's profile. It would be a mess. God knew what He was doing to have them meet when they did. Social media has not been an issue with them, and it was nice to hear that. I have made myself very prevalent on social media, and with that comes great responsibility and accountability that I have to accept. Hearing their answers on openness and honesty in those areas is exactly what I was hoping they would say. I look forward to seeking those same traits in a future spouse.

How did you keep each other accountable with social media while dating? Did this change after you were married?

They did not have social media or the Internet until much later in their marriage. Now, they do have each other's passwords to any account if desired to hold each other accountable.

Did you discuss how you would handle your social media interactions and accounts including, but not limited to, emails, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram while dating? If so, when into the relationship was this?

This didn't apply until long after they were married. They are free to check any social media platform and emails if desired.

Did you keep each other accountable on web browsing and viewing while dating? If you found something that made you feel uncomfortable, did you have open communication lines with your partner? What about after marriage?

This was not an issue during dating as they did not have the Internet. After marriage, both of them use the same computer in the main living room and they each have access to the other's

passwords. They have an open communication and ask each other any questions if needed.

FINAL THOUGHTS FROM MOM AND DAD

“We were ready to commit to a permanent relationship when we met. It was God who brought us together, and everything that followed is a result of His plan. God always provides, whether it

God has a plan for all of us, and if we trust Him, He will be faithful and bring to us only His best.



is a relationship, family, or keeping us well and away from harm. In Genesis 17:16 God gave Sarah not only a son but made her the mother of the nation of Israel long after she should have been too old to have

children. In 1 Kings 17 God hid and provided Elijah with food and drink during a drought that lasted several years so he could continue being His prophet. God has a plan for all of us, and if we trust Him, He will be faithful and bring to us only His best.”

It seemed so simple back then. You liked a girl, you knew her family, and you asked her out. You spent time with her family and got to know them. During my parents’ time, there were fewer broken marriages, so most of *their* friends’ parents were still together, and relationships just seemed easier. Having so many options now, in a time where you can swipe left or right based on if you like someone’s hair or their killer smile, may result in the man having less of an opportunity to lead. Why should he make the effort to connect and pursue a girl in church when he can wink at one

online? The rejection will be over in an instant, without seeing the sting on her face. But what if he wasn't rejected, or what if she was worth the chance to speak to her? I know so many amazing single gals sitting on that church bench, waiting for that nice guy to walk up to them and say, "Good morning." Listening to my parents' story is bittersweet to me. It's an era, a way of thinking, that is a rare find nowadays. Maybe that can change. Maybe we *can* have some of those good ol' days back in a simpler time. Maybe I will start to hear more stories of "good mornings" being said to those gals on Sundays. Just maybe. That would be nice.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How much quality time during the week do you think is needed to get to know a potential spouse on a deeper level?
- What type of communication do you generally prefer: in-person conversations, longer phone calls, or short bursts of texts throughout the day? What type of communication does he or she prefer?
- Do you desire a more traditional courtship like this couple shared, or a more modern type of relationship?
- How involved would you like the family of your potential mate to be?

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