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**Valentine Sweetheart?...Lifelong Love?
Four Areas of Compatibility
Proverbs 18:22 (part 2)**

In 1996 Disney came out with the box-office hit movie 101 Dalmatians. Many viewers fell in love with the cute little spotted puppies on the big screen and decided to go out and get one for themselves. When they brought those adorable little puppies home, however, they found that living with a Dalmatian is an entirely different experience from watching one on the movie screen. The AP reported that all over the US dog shelters saw a dramatic increase in the number of Dalmatians abandoned by their owners. In Florida an organization called Dalmatian Rescue took in more Dalmatians in the first nine months of 1997 than they had in the previous 2-1/2 years. Dalmatians can be a challenge to own for several reasons. They grow up to be big dogs almost 70 pounds. They are high spirited and require a lot of exercise. They can be moody and restless and destructive if they don't get enough activity. They shed year round and 10 percent of them are born deaf. A spokeswoman for the Wisconsin Humane society says "Although Dalmatians are beautiful puppies, you have to know what you're getting into"

Whether with pets or with people, its wise to spend some time understanding what you are getting into in a relationship. Its far too easy to become infatuated with what you see on the surface and buy into a relationship that you may soon realize its far tougher to live with than you imagined. Just as you need to know what you are looking for in a pet, its wise to know what would make you and your potential mate a good fit. Proverbs 18:22 says, "He who finds a wife finds a good things and obtains favor from the Lord." Finding implies a search and a good and wise search will produce the best results for a lifetime of fulfillment and satisfaction.

How many times have we heard and maybe even experienced that opposites attract. It may be true that they attract, but often the very same things that attract two individuals together later push them apart. We tend to be attracted to the qualities and personality that we see

missing in ourselves. Its not necessarily a bad thing that the couple has different personalities. If everybody was the same it would make for a very boring world, but, marriages that are founded on differences, especially in the core areas of life are usually headed for a load of pain and trouble. Those who have the best relationships over the long haul have areas of similarity in the core areas of life. This morning I want to talk about four areas of compatibility that should be in place before you decide to say "I do" Thinking through these area may help you in deciding whether your Valentine Sweetheart becomes a life long love.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Proverbs. We have been studying Proverbs to help give us practical wisdom that leads to satisfying and fulfilling life. So often we end up shooting ourselves in the foot, because we either don't understand Gods truth, or we think we are smarter than God and it just doesn't apply to our situation. Proverbs was written by a father to give his son principles and guidelines for living life well on this earth.

Turn with me to Proverbs 19:23 "The fear of the Lord leads to life, and he who has it rests satisfied." The first area of core compatibility and the most important in the area of connection spiritually. If the Proverbs say that "knowing God leads to life." then it follows that it must be one the keys to building a satisfying marriage, something that those looking at marriage should share in common. There is some very strong teaching about this in the New Testament. 2 Corinthians 6:14 "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers." Now this can be applied to other relationships but certainly it applies to our closest relationship with are intimately "yoked together" with. Simply what this area of compatibility means is that a person who loves God and follows Christ should never marry a person who doesn't share those same commitments of faith. Why marry someone if you are not spiritually connected to the same source, if you are not spiritually headed the same way that the Proverbs says "leads to life". It makes no sense.

Now many Christian singles start to squirm and chafe when they hear God's Words on this matter for obvious reasons, it shrinks the playing field. It reduces the number of possible marriage candidates. They look around and say there is not a whole lot here in the church that I would be interested in, I think I need to take this one into my own

hands. God's truth in this area of compatibility feels restrictive, punitive and oppressive. They accuse God of having a bad day when He wrote this one into His guidelines for wise living. You may be especially angry with God over this one because you happen to be in love with a person who is not a believer. You may grouse and complain asking why God doesn't want you to marry him or her. You may even shoot at me for not being willing to marry you. But don't go firing at me, I'm just the messenger. You can take it up with God.

Many people who are able to extract the emotion and reflect on God's instruction realize the wisdom of this flows out of this whole area of similarity, being connected spiritually together is a wise way to start a marriage. People who are married and have core values that are deep together tend to have more satisfying marriages and what is more core than a person spiritual beliefs? What transforms a persons heart more than experiencing God's love? What fills a persons life with more meaning than the daily, weekly challenge of relationship with Jesus Christ and following His compelling leadership? If you really want to marry a person who cannot relate to that which confirms your very core identity that moves your beliefs and actions and decisions and gives you meaning in life...then what sense does that make?

Of course its one thing if you don't share a mutual love for football games, shopping for shoes or antiques, or hunting for that trophy bull. Shared mutual interest are helpful in the compatibility of relationships, but when one spouse places God at the center of life and the other spouse doesn't, it creates great dissonance in the relationship that becomes more and more apparent. Sure I have heard all the arguments for missionary dating. I know you think that they will come to belief after you are married, and that has happened. I have seen it happen even here, but I would say that is more the exception than the norm.

My point this morning in this area of compatibility is this. I challenge you to wait for that gal or guy that shares your same heart and love for God. God's best is for you to be able to share the most important things in life together, worshipping together, praying together, ministering together. Some are already in marriages where you are a believer and you spouse is not. My heart goes out to you. Its not easy, but you can show your love by the way you respond well to your mate,

the last thing you want to do is leave. Perhaps God will show himself to your mate as you pray for his coming to belief.

I have talked to those who feel so lonely coming to church and sitting all alone, looking at the other couples just wishing your mate would be sitting next to you and worshipping. I have heard those whose faith is mocked by their spouse and my heart goes out to you. I know you would probably agree with me one of the greatest sadness in your life is that part of your core being is not shared by the one you love. So for those who are searching for a mate and are seeking the "way of God that leads to life." don't connect with one in marriage whom you are not connected to by God spiritually. Make sure both of you are heading the same way in your pursuit of God.

First area of compatibility is a similar connection spiritually. The second area of compatibility is character. Turn with me to Proverbs 11:3 "The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the falseness of the treacherous will destroy them." It is the character and integrity of the honest and truthful that keeps them on track, bringing rewards and the deviousness of liars that brings them to ruin. The unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity, saying one thing, appearing to be one thing and yet doing another. When choosing someone to marry, you must apply the character test. For how can you possibly hope to enjoy a lasting and satisfying marriage with someone who lacks integrity, lacks character. You are joining yourself to this person. They become part of you. You in some sense are becoming part of that persons character for it reflects then strongly upon you. You must have some sense of compatible character and integrity. I suppose a relationship could have some kind of happiness if they were both equally deceptive and both lied to each other, but that's kind of a sick way to base similar values on. Comedian Jerry Seinfeld said, "No healthy person would want the neglect I have to offer."

Think about a relationship where one person is committed to honesty and the other mate is one who lies or shades the truth. Think about a relationship where one honors commitment and the other breaks his or her promise almost recreationally without remorse. What about one partner who uses money wisely and sees the value of saving and tithing and planning and the other throws money away in careless wild spending. What about the compatibility of one partner who is extremely

hard working and diligent and the other is lazy and does little or nothing to add to the marriage. What about one who is committed to sexual purity but the other sees that keeping things pure within a marriage relationship as kind of an option.

Without character, without integrity, Without trust, Without honesty. Without commitment there is no foundation to build a marriage on. Unless you can completely trust the character and integrity of the one you are joining yourself to. Fully trust them in every way, then don't consider marriage until you have seen them live character out. Don't count on it getting better once you are married.

Several years ago a young couple came in to talk. The young wife was weeping because she couldn't trust the one she married. He sat there and finally admitted that he was a habitual liar. She would catch him at things one wouldn't even have to lie about, but he would lie and then look at you straight in the eye and speak the lie as if it were the gospel truth. This guy was an industrial strength liar. She loved him but he had shattered the trust with his dishonesty. The foundation for their marriage was in rubble. It could be put back together, but when trust and honesty is shattered it takes a long time and a lot of hard work to win back trust and integrity. Bricks of Truth no matter how hard it may hurt is what build the foundation of a strong marriage. If that even hints at being a problem...don't even consider walking down the aisle until that gets resolved. Compatible tests for finding a great mate. First, Ask do we connect spiritually, are we heading the same way in our relationship with God. Second, Ask the character questions. Is this a woman I can trust? Is this man honest and truthful? Do we have the same values and priorities in regards to work, and money, and commitments. Remember Proverbs 11:3 "The integrity of the upright guides them and brings reward, the deceitful ones lead people to ruin."

Third area of compatibility that you want to fully explore before you marry is the area of communication, talking with each other. So many marriages fail simply because that "just couldn't talk to each other." Now talking is not as easy as it sounds. Its sounds like talking should be a piece of cake...but after that initial drive of the attraction during the courtship phase...often the things that seemed to come so easily now take flat out work. The man may have worked all day and his

job may force him to talk to people. Many men only have so many words they speak each day and then their brain simply shuts down. They don't feel like coming home and doing the hard work of interacting and listening to their wife, they are exhausted so they grab a drink and sit down in front of the TV to veg. Their wife on the other hand is also exhausted, either from working hard out of the home in her career or working hard in the home chasing around little nippers who babble monosyllabic short phrases. We force ourselves into situations where we fall exhausted into bed and we allow the TV or tiredness to rob us of our communication with our spouse. Failing to communicate in a marriage doesn't just "happen" its a slow gradual slide, a silent and deadly mystery that can prove quite deadly to a marriage.

Couples who are satisfied and fulfilled in their marriages usually list their ability to talk about everything. Not just the weather, work and the kids...but the deep things of life. Goals for the year, priorities, areas of woundedness and pain, struggles, joys. They challenge each other mentally and socially. They are fascinating in hearing the other persons opinion on all sorts of topics. They listen and speak to them and about them with respect. There is a desire to draw out the deep things in their life. Proverbs 20:5 "The purposes of the human mind are like deep water, the intelligent draw them out." NRSV. They have great joy in knowing their mate and being known by them. And at the same time being known but also loved unconditionally. What a great feeling of security. People in loving relationships are not stuck on themselves and only talk about your own stuff, but they are great at asking lovingly probing questions into people feelings and thoughts. They listen well, they take their time, affirm, encourage, challenge. They provide a safe environment to allow transparency. They never violate a confidence.

Typically, there will be one person who is more assertive then the other. If allowed, the one who says little will over time be bullied into silence, or criticized into silence. Is that what you want? Do you want a partner that says nothing because everytime he has tried to share his opinion you are right there to jump all over him and give him or her 20 reasons why its wrong or won't work or a lawyer rebuttal when he is just trying to express how he feels? After a while they learn. Keep your mouth shut..they aren't listening to understand. They just want to win.

Communicating well is a two way deal. Listen to understand, not to judge. If something is unclear or a tension area in your relationship, then take great care to overcommunicate. Many conflicts in relationships are simply a matter of not being able to communicate and actually hear what the other person is really trying to say. Listen well. Don't attack in your comments. Remember you are a team, the one you love is not your enemy. Listen to understand not to judge.

As you can see this compatibility question applies directly to those who are already married, how so must it be for those who are thinking about marriage. If you are not communicating all that well do not think that getting married is going to help this out. Just living under the same roof does little to improve your communication skills. In fact, it could well be more difficult. Your courtship time is the place to begin forging excellent communication habits into your relationship that will serve you well. Your ability to communicate will help weather the relationship storms that will inevitably come sweeping into your life.

We have looked at the connection spiritually, the character, the communication of compatibility for those trying to decide if this gal or this guy is the one your want to spend the rest of your life with. But there is a fourth that many people take for granted. Its the chemistry component to a relationship. Yes, I'm talking about the spark, the attraction. There is nothing sinful about this. It is not an illegal topic to discuss in church. God has created us with an attraction to each other. Physical attraction came from God. Back in Genesis 29:11 we read about a guy named Jacob. He felt such a powerful attraction to a gal named Rachael when he saw her at the town well that he began to weep aloud. This guy was hooked. He was hooked so bad that he volunteered to work for her father for 7 years to win her hand in marriage. Yet we read in Genesis 29:20 that he was so smitten that seven years seemed like just a day. Proverbs gives a very clear picture of physical love. The wise father in Proverbs 5:18 tells his son to "let her breasts satisfy you at all times" a clear picture of physical marital love.

Is there chemistry in the one you are thinking about marrying? The bible makes it clear its more than just a business deal. There is a physical attraction part of the deal and I believe God puts a spark in there to help us through difficult times. God attract different people to

each other because He is so creative. Now this does not give any justification to marry the first person that makes your heart race wild, remember relationships are far more than about feelings, but don't underestimate the importance of physical attraction...for that too is from God.

Will your sweetheart become a life long love? Check out these four areas of compatibility. Is there a similar connection spiritually? Is there character compatibility? Is there communication compatibility? Is there chemistry compatibility. I often tell people, marriage is so wonderfully difficult, don't just marry a guy you could live with. Don't just marry a gal that you could live with. Marry a guy or gal that you couldn't possibly live without. That's the Valentine sweetheart you want to turn into your lifelong love.