



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The Search for a Godly Spouse – Part 2

Guest(s): Alistair Begg

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Dr. Dobson: Greetings, everyone, and welcome to Family Talk. I'm your host, Dr. James Dobson. For many young people, the search for spouse is somewhat superficial. It really comes down to whether or not that a member of the opposite sex is attractive enough for me, the viewer, the woman, or the man. But there are better standards to use along this journey. And we're going to continue our examination of them on today's broadcast. We're going to hear the second half of a presentation that we aired last time here on Family talk from pastor and author Alistair Begg. He gave this presentation, this sermon, to a large group of students at Cedarville University in Cedarville, Ohio, on the topic, The Search For a Godly Spouse. Well that's a great topic to deal with. And if I were about 19 or 20, 21 years of age, I would certainly have my ears tuned in to what he was saying because that's a subject most young people care about.

Alistair Begg has served as senior pastor at Parkside Church in Cleveland, Ohio, since he moved across the pond from his native Scotland in 1983. Alistair and his wife, Susan are the parents of three grown children. As we concluded our last broadcast, Alistair Begg was spelling out for women six qualities to look for in a husband. And the first three were: one, the man should be committed to growing in his relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. It is critical to marry somebody who shares your faith and is walking with the Lord. He should also be an individual of obvious integrity. And three, he should be able to lead boldly. Now with that as the beginning, we're not going to go back over that ground because that was yesterday. Let's rejoin this presentation as Alistair Begg shares point number four.

Alistair Begg: You need to look for a husband who displays the ability to love sacrificially. To love sacrificially. Seek out men who display a self-sacrificial dimension, not a person who says, "Well, one of the things I'd like to mention to you is that I'm a very self-sacrificing person." No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Sorry, take that one off your resume. Self-sacrifice is detected in subtle ways that vary from person to person.

For example, watch at the end of an evening with friends to see if this character is quick to organize and spearhead the cleanup or whether he just waits for everybody else to clean up. Listen carefully to his elderly aunt when she tells

you whether her nephew has ever been faithful in visiting her in the nursing home. Observe the way he relates to children and to strangers. See if he possesses a willingness to hold doors for passersby with full arms. Watch his attitude to waitresses and to other people who are involved in serving the public. Watch his eyes as he sits in a cafe and observes the obvious ravages of AIDS in the body of the young man behind the counter.

And in these things, you'll begin to find out what you're dealing with. And incidentally and a blessing gentlemen, married gentlemen, when is the last time that any one of us did anything for our wives that would fit clearly, solidly, under the category of self-abnegation? Fifthly, a husband should be able to laugh heartily. Humor is a vital element in preventing marital failure. The ability to laugh doesn't mean that he's the class clown, or even a joke teller. In fact, he may be hopeless at telling jokes. That may be the funniest part about him. Constantly turning to you and saying, "What was that punchline again?" Finishing his jokes just to be met by vacant stares.

But it is important that he likes to laugh. And a key trait to look for is his willingness to laugh at himself. If he takes himself too seriously, look out. Listen carefully to him. Not necessarily when he's on show, but can he tell us a story where someone else is obviously the hero where he comes off looking foolish. Is he willing to reveal pictures to you of the time when he was less handsome, with his teeth protruding and his ear sticking out? Actually, as you think about it, very similar to what he is right now. When he laughs at the comic misfortunes of others is he able to laugh without being crude and unkind and cruel? Humor is vital. It's way up on the top of my list.

Sixthly, and there are only six. A husband should model genuine humility. Simply put a good husband shouldn't be stuck on himself. Genuine humility keeps us focused on others. You need to watch and see if the other person can share the joy of a competitor's success. And if you find yourself in the company of somebody who cannot be an understudy, who can't sit in the second chair, who can't play second fiddle, who's always going to be the theme of the story, the joke of the party, the success of the event, I want to suggest to you girls that you might want to take a long, hard look at whether you're in the company of the person with whom you want to spend the rest of your life.

Okay, fellows, here we go. What are we looking for in a wife? Number one, tall. Two, thin. Three... Sorry. I couldn't resist that. That's terrible. Number one, it's the same as number one for the husband, it's obvious. A good wife must have a personal faith and trust in the Lord Jesus. It is the basis for any and all of the other qualities on the list. I can't overstate for you the importance of ensuring that you don't enter into an intimate relationship where one person is a Christian and the other is not. The Bible is clear. Don't get unequally yoked. To be unequally yoked is to be unable to pool together. That means there are two divergent standards, two opposite goals, two radically different interpretations of life. Two incompatible masters to serve. Two contrary powers at work. Unbelief allied with belief in Jesus means just one thing. There can be no real

intimacy in matters that really count. The two cannot pool together because they are not truly together. And so, Paul commands believers to marry, 1 Corinthians 7:39, "Only in the Lord."

And in the course of 27 years of pastoral ministry, I've watched and experienced empathetically the sadness of girls who got themselves way committed into something and felt unable to extricate themselves. They thought that they could evangelize him. They thought that they could bring them round. I sat with them and said, "If he's not about to bow before your savior, while he doesn't have your hand marriage, do you think he's going to do when you marry him?" "Yes. I'm sure. He promised me that when we get married..." And so on, it goes. And I've had occasion just to sit and say to the girl, "You can either cry now, or you can cry later. You can cry now because you've lost them. Or you can cry later because you've got him." And the same is true for a fellow, if he is going to anticipate anything other than a godly wife.

Secondly, we need to look for a wife who possesses beauty that is deeper than the skin. Deeper than the skin. I don't know of anyone who sets out to find a spouse who's physically unattractive, but the importance of a gentle and quiet spirit is almost unquantifiable. A wise fellow looks for a woman who possesses a natural radiance rather than a glow that comes from a bottle. It is less important to find a woman whose beauty comes from time spent in front of a beauty parlor than from time spent in the presence of the Lord Jesus.

I recall walking on the beach with the man who turned out to be my father in law. We were at a place called Rohoboth. I've never been there since. I remember going there. It's perhaps in Maryland, I don't know. And his daughter, one of four daughters, was out swimming in the water on the shore. And I was walking along with him. He liked me, but not a lot. I think he wanted to keep all of his daughters safely in America and get rid of me and anybody like me. And as we reached the spot where she was swimming, she came out of the water and she walked towards us. She tossed her head back and her hair and he turned to me and he said, "What a beautiful girl, inside and outside." The inside is the key. The outside is the bonus.

Thirdly, you need to look for a wife who is an initiative taker with an attitude of submission. An initiative taker with an attitude of submission. This simply parallels what we said previously about a man being a sacrificial leader. Any wise fellow is looking for a woman with ideas, abilities, hopes, plans, gifts, dreams, the whole Panorama of abilities that she brings to marriage. Because in entering into marriage in more areas than we're prepared to admit, we, as the husbands will be dependent upon their knowledge, upon their insight, upon their courage, upon their faith, upon their expertise. So when I hear a noise in the night downstairs, I have a very brave wife for which I'm thankful. Are you maybe the guy that immediately runs down the stairs and takes care of it? I'm the guy that wakes her up and says, "Honey, there's a noise." After all these years, she knows what that means. She dutifully gets out of bed, takes me by the hand. And we go down the stairs together.

I am un-ashamedly dependent upon her not only there. The word submission is so frequently understood, it's become a sensitive issue for many people. It's not uncommon for girls to tell me that they're not going to say that part in their vows. Incidentally, anyone who does, I tell them, "Get married by somebody else because I'm not going to marry you." And that of course goes over very well with the girl's mother. But anyway, who cares. God's intended role for a wife is not to wait around for her husband's directives or somehow or another she was paralyzed without them. You don't think that Adam and Eve in the garden, Eve was sitting around with a bunch of flowers saying, "What am I supposed to do with these?" And Adam said, "Well, put the daffodils on the left, put the tulips on the right and put the begonias over here behind me." No, he said, "Honey, I don't know what you do with flowers."

There will seldom be a day, as a man, when we do not have occasion to depend on multiple levels upon the wisdom, insight, initiative, grace, courage, faithfulness, integrity, skill, giftedness of our wives. All of that said it does not negate the fact that in the order of God's plan for marriage, the man is entrusted with the awesome responsibility of being held accountable as leader in the home. It is therefore imperative that you do not fall into the clutches of a bossy, self-opinionated woman. You will see it in relationship to her father, you will see it in relationship to her peers, you will see it that she's unprepared to submit her heart and her mind and her lifestyle, ultimately to the clear teaching of the word of God. The roles of husband and wife in more ways than physically are not in the scriptures interchangeable. And therefore certain expectations for the individual role of each other needs to be understood and worked out.

Fourthly, a wife, the kind for which we look, should build her husband's confidence. Trustworthiness stems from character. A woman's intrinsic qualities are revealed by her actions. A girl knows the difference between dressing in a way that is attractive and dressing in a way that is deliberately seductive. Girls know the difference. So do we men. If you find in dating a girl that it is clear from the way she carries herself, that she enjoys the possibility of creating titillation in the minds of other men who are around in the context, whether it be of the swimming pool or whether it be of the coffee shop, whatever it may be, let that be to you a gigantic warning sign. It may be an opportunity for learning and growth. It may however be the occasion when you slip out the back, Jack.

We're looking for wife who displays kindness that touches others. Looking for a kindness that touches others. Women don't have the exclusive ownership of the characteristic of kindness, but often they do a much better job in expressing compassion than most men. It would appear, I don't think this devalues indeed I think it exalts women to say that God has fashioned them to be capable of special tenderness. Men are frequently intent on "Keep moving. Let's get going." Women are far more willing to stop in the cause of compassion. In fact, probably if you think about it, women that have marked our lives have often marked our thinking on account of their tenderness.

And as our culture continues to promote effeminate men and masculine women, as Christian people, we must be prepared in the face of ridicule, abuse and possibly persecution to be unashamed in holding firm to the guidelines of scripture when it comes to these things. There were very, very clear reasons for the Old Testament commands relating to the distinction between the sexes. And actually, we do well to pay more attention to them than we're prone to do in an increasingly androgynous culture. Girls should look like girls and will always be their best when they do. And of course men should be like men. It seems almost impossible that we have to say these things, doesn't it?

Finally, a wife, like a husband should have a sense of humor that braves adversity. The ability to laugh will get couples through more than a few rough spots. I think about Susan, when she came to Scotland with me after we were married, first of all, I had no money. She had a little money that she'd saved. I took all her money and we used it to get back to Scotland. We cruised to London from the Port of New York. Don't get any illusions about how beautiful it was. It was horrendous. We were on a Russian sailing ship called the Mikhail Lermontov. In 1986 in Zurich I was reading the Herald Tribune with a doctor as we headed for Kenya together. As we sat on the plane, I saw a tiny paragraph, it said "Russian motor vessel sinks off the coast of New Zealand." I put my hand over it. I said "the Mikhail Lermontov." And then I looked down and that's exactly what it was.

I don't know whether we were on its maiden voyage, but it was close. To say that this thing was backward is an understatement. I couldn't use up your time describing how horrendous it was. As I ushered my young bride, lower and lower and lower into the belly of this cavernous thing. And then finally into our state room where you had to go in and then step back and then let the second person in. And then at that point you were here and so were your bunk beds. Neither of us have ever done drugs except on that particular 10 day voyage. I don't know what it was we took, but it was a combination of anything that was available from the gift shop: Dramamine, and anything that went with it. And in a semi-comatose state, we celebrated our marriage. She on the top and me on the bottom and then me on the top and she on the bottom, sailing towards London, leaving America behind, leaving her family behind, leaving all those boys in Michigan behind, leaving the whole thing behind.

Do you think she's got a sense of humor? And if you're looking for a girl that can put up with your strange peculiarities, you better look for one who can laugh as well. Because I've seen you, and you're pretty funny. Chances are you will meet your mate in the next three or four years. Do not assume that a friendship has to be more than a friendship when it begins. Do you know how many people got married and they weren't even friends? Covenant before God that you will not add to the statistics, but God helping you, you will please him whether in singleness or in marriage, living according to the principles of His word.

Let's pray together. Father, I pray that out of a multitude of words, it may be your Word that we look. I pray that anything that is unhelpful or foolish or trivial

may be banished from our recollection, and all that is of Yourself and encouraging and up building maybe woven into the fabric of our lives. I pray for these young people, Lord, as they're surrounded by so much in our culture that drives them in directions that are clearly alien to the principles of the Bible. And where they've already found themselves in bypath meadow I pray that you will give to them a repentant heart and a fresh start and a clean page.

And may tonight be for them a new day. Don't allow the evil one to cause them to rummage around in the garbage cans of sin that has been forgiven and dealt with. And bring them together, Lord, in purity and in joy and in humor and in fullness. And may we, as Christians, in this particular way, be as salt and light in our community, showing to a world of broken relationships and shattered homes and unfulfilled dreams and aspirations, the difference that the Lordship of Jesus makes within a heart and within a home. For we ask it in His precious name.

Dr. Dobson: Well, you've been listening to Alistair Begg who's just a marvelous speaker. And he had great advice today for young couples who are considering getting married and setting up a home and family. They're so excited about it. They're just thrilled to be in each other's company and never would they believe that the first fight would occur on the honeymoon, perhaps, and then they get home and set up housekeeping, and before you know it, there's a bigger fight. Then the woman calls her mother and the man leaves home for two hours. And from there to the end, it's often a downhill slide with disillusionment and anger and far too often, divorce.

I've seen it happen too many times, but the question is why and how did it happen? Well, maybe one of the best places to begin is with the advice that Alistair Begg gave to young couples today, the principal's Alistair Begg mentioned in his talk today were also referenced in his book *Lasting Love, How to Avoid Marital Failure*. Get a copy of it, read it, absorb it before you get married. That's the time to minimize the mistakes. We'll all make them, but that's the place where you start. God bless you all. Thanks for being with us yesterday and today.

Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.

Dr. Clinton: Hi everyone, Dr. Tim Clinton here. When you think about your family and where they'll be when you're no longer living, are you worried? Are you confident? You hopeful? What kind of a legacy are you leaving for your children and their children right now? Here at Family Talk, we're committed to helping you understand the legacy that you're leaving your family. Join us today at drjamesdobson.org. You're going to find helpful insights, tips, and advice from Dr. Dobson himself. And remember: your legacy matters.

Dr. Dobson: The key to a healthy marriage is to keep your eyes wide open before you wed and half closed thereafter.

Roger Marsh: For Family Talk, here's Dr. James Dobson.

Dr. Dobson: Well, I know a typical couple talks for countless hours before the courtship period, and they believe they know each other, but a dating relationship is designed to conceal information, not reveal it. Consequently, the bride and groom often enter into marriage with an array of private opinions about how life will be lived after the wedding, and the stage is set for major problems. For this reason, I strongly believe that each engaged couple should participate in at least six to 10 sessions with a competent marriage counselor in order to identify the assumptions that each partner holds, and to work through areas of potential conflict. Some couples discover through this process that they have major problems that hadn't surfaced until then, and they agreed to either postpone or call off the wedding. Others work through their conflicts and proceed toward marriage with increased confidence. Premarital counseling is the key. If the tragedy of divorce could be reduced by even 5%, it would certainly be worth the effort.

Roger Marsh: Hear more at drjamesdobson.org .