

A Better Way
A Biblical Approach to Dating

Article 3

Mutual Edification

(Contains Seven Daily devotionals)

Rom 14:19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. NIV

It had been a long semester, but they were all long for me. I tried to keep my grades up, but with a wife, a child, and two part time jobs, it was often a bit of a challenge. I was plenty capable of making the grade given enough time. However, it always seemed like I was juggling and shuffling my schedule, measuring every activity against the weight it would cost me academically. Some classes were a delight to me, and I would overindulge with great delight. I love the study of the Bible and could never seem to get enough of that. The administrative classes, on the other hand, I just managed to tolerate and pass. All this said, grades were significant to me. After all, my main vocation at the time was attending Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. I was there to earn a diploma and with any luck, learn something useful. Well, as I said, it had been a long semester, and I was getting near the end. I could almost feel that diploma in my hand. But I am getting ahead of myself....

William Coble was my favorite professor. He was an old man that seemed to just radiate the fruit of the spirit. I had other favorites as well, but he was at the top of the list. He had a way of bringing the word of God to life for me that was transforming. I remember walking into his class on the Gospel of John, frantic because I was unable to secure the book list and purchase the books prior to starting the class. Evidently, I was not the only one. A hand shot up, and the first question asked was concerning the book list.

The senior professor smiled and said, "You gentlemen have Bibles don't you? Well there is your book list."

I thought to myself no way, a Bible class in which the only text book required was a Bible. I was shocked. I believe I must have read the Gospel of John a thousand times during that eight week class. It became my favorite Gospel. Professor Coble challenged and changed my theology on many levels. What I received in his class was so rich that I knew the value of a theological education to be beyond measure. I was glad God had afforded me the opportunity to study with men such as he. If I could, I would sign up for one of his classes today. But I am no longer up for the scholastic challenge, and he has been gone into the presence of our Lord for some time now. However, there was a day when I would have been his Elisha and he my Elijah if he had but spoken the word. But such idolatry of human beings is foolishness - although the power of a strong wise mentor is a gift not to be received lightly.

So there I was, standing in the small corridor that was really simply a narrow hallway which passed from the outside walkway to the main building. It was laced with mailboxes and served as the postal area for the students. As I made my way down the short hall, I paused at my mailbox. I turned the combination back and forth with quick ease and precision as I had been through this routine many times. I glanced up and down the corridor from door to door as I executed this routine and knew I was alone. I reached into the box and pulled out a slip of paper. I paused for a moment and took a deep breath. I knew the slip held my final grade for a class in which I was desperately seeking an "A." I believed I had acquired it; nevertheless, I knew it would be close. The final exam had not been easy. But this was seminary, and I did not expect it to be. Even though I thought I had done well on the exam, in my heart, I also knew I could have done better. In one quick motion, I opened the card, and immediately my eyes came to rest on the spot where I knew the grade would be located. It was not an

"A." In anger and disgust I slammed the door of the mail box closed while simultaneously crumpling the card and casting a few choice profane words - you know, the kind that would make a sailor blush. But I knew I was alone. Remember, I had checked the hallway. This little fit was just between God and me. I turned abruptly to stomp out, only to face the eyes of my beloved professor. He had slipped through the door while I was preoccupied examining my grade. I suppose I had a bit of a temper and thought those words on numerous occasions; it was just an extreme rarity for me to display them publicly. And my timing on this day could not have been further off. I immediately looked away. He didn't say a word; he just walked by and out the door. I cannot describe to you how I felt in that moment. It was as if my display of rage had been before Jesus Christ himself, which of course it had. I wondered if this was how Peter felt when he caught the eyes of our Lord after the third crowing of the cock. I wondered how I would ever be able to face the man again. I slithered into the commons area and had a cup of coffee. As I stared at the black water, the matter of my scholastic achievement seemed very trivial to me now. I sipped slowly in contemplation of a lifetime spent grasping for self-control. It was a long cup of coffee that I shared with the Lord, nursing an ache that would not soon be healed.

Several days had passed and the disappointment of that moment was fading a bit. After all, life does go on. I picked up my cute little wife, whose smile at the Campus Book Store had brought me special recognition and envy during my seminary days. No one knew my name, just that I was the man who was lucky enough to be the husband of the book store beauty. Everyone recognized that I was one of those individuals fortunate enough to marry above myself. Together we strolled down the outer walkway toward the administration building. As I looked up ahead, my smile was shattered; Dr. Coble was coming our direction. My wife was all smiles and laughter, for she too had grown to appreciate this man deeply. I had failed to share with her the details of the encounter a few days before, and so my shame was all mine. If there had been a place to run I would have, but there was no way to avoid this coming confrontation. I figured this must be how it will be when folks are crying for the rocks to fall on them to hide from our Lord when he returns. I shall never forget this encounter as long as I live. He never spoke a word to me, nor did he look my direction so far as I could tell with my peripheral vision. He did however pause for a moment and exchange words with my wife, the likes of which I shall never forget.

Upon her bubbly greeting the two conversed briefly and he quite solemnly, with a half smile and eyes focused, that conveyed that he was no longer just making idle conversation, stated, "You have a fine young man there, you better hang on to him."

As quickly as it had come, the moment was over, and he was gone. My heart was encouraged to the point of tears. I truly lacked the mental capacity to even process this unexpected moment.

As I consider the word "edification," I am not really sure how I would define it. I think a definition is beyond words, but I was moved really close to understanding it on this particular day. How do you speak of the power of a moment where one word, one look, one action, convicts beyond the depths of one's soul and simultaneously restores integrity, hope and love? Whatever it is, I want my life desperately to be edification. Consider a passage of scripture with me from the pen of the Apostle Paul. *Rom 14:19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. NIV* Mutual edification - that is a reciprocal thing. You build me up, I build you up. **I am a better person because I know you, and you are a better person because you know me.** Nowhere is this principle more significant than in our relationships with members of the opposite sex. I have taught my children from the cradle that close and intimate friendships are reserved for the few and precious people who understand and practice mutual edification. You can't afford friendships that are not mutually edifying. In fact, scripture teaches me that "*Bad company corrupts good character.*" (*1 Cor 15:33 NIV*) - a topic we have already discussed briefly. Because acquaintance and casual friendships are a necessity for functioning in this world, they do not necessarily have to be brought to such intense scrutiny. But woe to the man who seeks friendship with the world and the counsel of sinners. (James 4:4)

Can you imagine what a marriage relationship would look like where two individuals were spurring *one another on toward love and good deeds (Heb 10:24-25 NIV)* with a heart of genuine compassion and gentleness? Where two people, engaged in the adventure of building a home, continually play off of each other like two seasoned athletes moving toward the goal of love and good works? Take a step back for a moment, take a deep breath and think! Look at that person you are considering for marriage or with whom you have been in some type of courting or dating relationship. Is this a description of what your relationship with that person looks like? I pity the couple that comes to the marriage altar and lacks the seasoned maturity to be a mutually edifying couple.

Over the next few days I will give you some scriptural ideas that I believe are crucial in helping you understand and become an edifying person. Honestly, do you know of any couple who has a solid, strong, stable, love-fill relationship that doesn't practice mutual edification? No, neither do I. Desiring to possess an encouraging and edifying character, is a good step toward becoming a person able to share many mutually edifying relationships. It is pretty solid marriage preparation as well.

Don't Say It!

Week 3 Day 1

Eph 4:29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. NIV

You gotta love small town Texas, or small town anywhere for that matter. That is where I was this day... Blanco, Texas. We had been hanging out at the local state park, but decided it was time to hit the town and ramp up our food supply with a trip to the local grocery store. Rough'in it in America only goes so far you know. When the graham crackers, marshmallows, chocolate and coffee are gone, you are through camping and have tragically fallen into survival mode.

As I got out of the truck with my children, there was a cowboy headed our way with two bags of groceries. From the hat to the boots, this guy was a genuine cowpoke. We were just about to cross paths, when one of his grocery bags exploded. Stuff went every-where. I quickly put my fingers in my daughter's ears knowing what I, a preacher, would say in that situation. I waited for the worst, as cans rolled every which way. The cowboy just stood in silence and watched the mess expanding. Once most of the items had become stationary, he ambled over to the back of a pick-up. He lowered the tailgate and set the one remaining good bag in the bed.

A small group of teenagers had observed the whole episode. They began to laugh and chide the cowboy. Again, I put my fingers back into my child's ears. This time, it was to protect her from the lack of maturity I was experiencing in these teens. The cowboy stared at them without a word as they moved on by. Nothing needed to be said, his look was more than enough to let all bystanders know he was unscathed by their comments and still large and in charge of his character. Somehow, I got the feeling he had herded animals before.

Next, he walked over to the first can, and without a word, bent over and picked it up. After he had gathered a handful, he strolled over to the truck, and deposited them in the bed. Realizing the coast was clear, I pull my fingers out of my daughter's ears. With all of us working, we made short work of retrieving the rest of those cans.

He thanked us, and those were the first words he spoke through the entire encounter.

I thanked him as well, and he questioned, "For What?"

I said, "For demonstrating remarkable self-control. When the bag burst and many of your groceries were ruined and the rest rolling everywhere, you kept your cool. When the juvenile delinquents chided you, you didn't respond harshly. Sir even your countenance didn't change. You handled this whole episode with amazing patience and character."

He smiled real big, which was his first big change in facial through the whole ordeal. Then he climbed in his truck and left.

Sometimes the most edifying words a man can speak are none at all. Speaking words that edify begins for most of us with finding the self-control, like my cowboy friend, to *not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth.*

Then maybe we are in a position to choose carefully those words which are *helpful for building others up*. **Most often I have found edifying words to be words that observe and encourage character.**

Prayer: Lord, give me wisdom and the self-control needed to refrain from unwholesome talk in order to be a friend that can build others up.

Extra Mile: Ask your parents and siblings if they think you are a person that demonstrates good, fair, or poor ability to restrain unwholesome talk from your mouth. To be an edifying friend we must be able to benefit those who listen to us. How are you doing with that?

Noble Character

Week 3 Day 2

Acts 17:11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. NIV

The book of Acts commends the Bereans for being people of noble character. In fact, there is mentioned here a reason for this noble character analysis, "*for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*"

Somewhere along the line I picked up the value of recognizing and complimenting character qualities. It was probably one of the many parenting courses that I took. I still cringe when folks come up to one of my girls and tell them how nice they look, or how pretty they are today. Don't get me wrong, coming from a home that has five girls in it, I understand that "it's all about the dress". And the good Lord knows, as a dad, I have bought my share of them. Looking your best and honoring God with proper modesty and hygiene is never a problem. However, I believe that our society places far too much significance on externals that really count for nothing. As a result, young men feel the need for big muscles and steroids, and girls are anorexic and bulimic. Traumatic experiences or too much media, who knows why exactly, but the devil's lies are permeating our society. Too many folks are believing their value and self-worth are connected to such externals. I still recall a request I received from a young man desiring to "date" my daughter. "She is good looking." "Hot!", he said.

"Sure you can! When Hell freezes over!" Or how about his one... "Over my dead body!" Where does such shallowness come from? My goodness...our world is full of beauty parlors, piercing & tattoo parlors, tanning salons, and outlet malls sporting the latest designer brand items. Even buying a vehicle is more about making a statement than transportation. There is truly much in our world calling us to focus on what is external. In all this madness however, I find there are folks desiring to be noticed and appreciated for something else, something more. Refer back to yesterday's devotion for a moment and the cowboy who dropped his groceries. To say to him "Wow! What Self-control! What Patience! What Character!" put a smile on his face and rightly so.

My dad taught me early on how to recognize folks who were just blowing smoke. You rarely catch them complimenting character, cause they are unable to recognize it. All they can talk about are your accomplishments and all those appealing externals the world seems to want. It is alright to tell some girl or guy you think they are cute; but, if you are not a person who can go beyond that and recognize and compliment character, then the deepest relationship you will ever have with a member of the opposite gender is fleshly lust and infatuation. Why? Because these are the things that are built on an appreciation for the externals. When was the last time you told a friend you appreciated their honesty, integrity, humility, joy, hope, peace, gentleness, kindness, endurance, wisdom, ingenuity, loyalty, love or faith... just to name a few? And if you did, did you give them a specific situation where you observed that character quality at work. The Bereans were complimented specifically for their eagerness to receive the gospel and examine the scriptures. Paul didn't tell them they were a cute bunch but rather complimented their eager diligence. Edification is about building each other up at a character level. Start rating the compliments you are getting from Romeo or Juliette. If their words and actions don't encourage noble character, your relationship with them is just too immature to honestly be considered an edifying friendship. It is certainly no place to allow an intimate friendship or to begin a marriage.

Prayer: Lord give me the ability to appreciate and compliment the noble character that surrounds me. Help me to be a truly edifying friend.

Extra Mile: Compliment the next example of noble character you observe. Count the number of compliments you pass out related to "external items" versus "character items." Make a list of a few friends. Write a couple of character qualities you have seen them demonstrate beside their names. This should help you see how good you are at recognizing character qualities.

Don't Text It!

Week 3 Day 3

Prov 10:19 When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise. NIV

Communication has changed a little since I was a young lad. The very first phone I remember my family having was a party line. To make a call you had to listen, not for a dial tone, but to see if someone was already talking on the line. One never really was quite sure if the neighbors were listening in on your conversations. I remember when we moved to town and got our first private line. We thought we were in high cotton. As we approached the teenage years mom and dad were wise enough to limit our phone time, much to my sister's chagrin. So, for the most part, our phone conversations were limited to communicating information and not idle chatter. Looking back, I am sure that was my parent's intent. Not a bad policy.

We could pass words through the postal service also. It wasn't that we didn't know how to write a letter, it was just way too much trouble. My dad never did tolerate talking smack about others in our home; so, there never was much clamor about who did what to who. Put all this together, I reckon about the only time we were ever tempted to use too many words, was when we were with people in person! However, in real conversation one has to compete with others for air time; so, using too many words wasn't often a problem.

Things have changed a mite since my day. If I want to talk to one of my children, I call them on their cell phone from my cell phone. They rarely answer. If I text them, I usually get an immediate reply. So, I even know how to text now. My big thumbs don't do well at it, so I have learned to just speak, and my phone will write the text out for me. I can e mail; but, I simply refuse to do the "face book" thing, well, so far anyway. If I need to talk to a person, my preference has always been to sit down over a cup of coffee. With all of these new forms of communication, voice tone, facial expression, body language, and everything else that goes with non-verbal communication is missing or diminished. Personally, I am not sure I ever really know what someone is truly saying unless I can actually share some space with them. Emoji's are great, but they just can't take the place of a real smile or shared laughter, LOL. This need to no longer have personal contact has led to a gross amount of mismanaged words floating through cyberspace. We live in a world where words are many, many, many and as one would expect, sin is not absent.

This is a principle from God's word that is absolutely true, every time. (As is true of all of God's word all the time.) If you are one that uses many words, watch out! You will be led into sin with them. Or worse still, you might lead someone else into sin with them. The more words you use, the greater your odds of having some of those words misunderstood or simply saying something you will regret later. Surely this principle applies to words used in texting, e-mail, face book, etc... Perhaps even more so, since so much of the nonverbal communication is lost. Slowing the flood of words in our lives must surely include these modern means of communication as well. Healthy edifying friendships include a responsible volume of word exchange that is reasonable in order to avoid sin. Develop the wisdom and self-control needed to say to yourself, "Shut Up."

Prayer: Lord, help me to keep sin far from my lips and far from my fingers by being responsible with the volume of words I use.

Guard your Heart.

Week 3 Day 4

Prov 4:23 Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. NIV

Among other things, the heart in scripture seems to be the seat of emotion. In just the "Proverbs" I find: the heart aches, the heart is cheerful, the heart is happy, the heart is peaceful, the heart is sick, the heart is proud, the heart rages, the heart is joyful, the heart is discerning, and it is to be kept pure. There is in scripture a heart of: folly, rejoicing, wisdom, knowledge, and purity. The heart seems to be the emotional part of our thinking process. You "know" something with your head, you "own it", "feel it" with your heart. It is here that believing takes place which makes one a Christian. *For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified,... NIV Rom 10:9-10*

The heart is also a part of the equation for truly loving someone. The instruction in scripture is to *"Love the Lord your God **with all your heart** and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; NIV Luke 10:27* The implication is that there exists a kind of love that is not wholehearted, not with all one's soul or strength, and not with all of one's mind. As I looked at this equation for love, I find that the heart often trumps the soul, strength, and mind. Oh how very often, some young person enters into a dead end relationship, because they are "emotionally" attached to some person. Having given their heart away prematurely, they are unable to shake free, even as their mind is telling them to run.

All my life I grew up with the expression, "Don't give your heart away!" So I ask, "How do you know when you have given your heart away?" You gotta love this response, "Cause it hurts like heck when you separate." Ouch, talk about damage control! I would really like to know that I have given my heart away **before** my heart is broken to pieces and scattered all over the floor. Why? Because I believe that every time a heart is broken, damage is done that affects our ability to give our heart "emotionally" and "completely" in love. A broken heart is a traumatic experience! Most will be careful in the future to avoid setting themselves up for more of the same trauma. Imagine, if you waited to give your heart away until the appropriate time, to the appropriate person you could avoid all of this trauma. So here is my rule of thumb. **Edifying friends do not commit their hearts in love to others, or allow others to commit their hearts in love to them, in a manner that is inappropriate or untimely.**

There is a love relationship that is unique to marriage; it stands apart from all other human relationships. Save it for marriage. I have always envied the husband and wife that "fell in love," got married, and lived happily ever after, having never given their heart to another member of the opposite sex. Oh Yeah, they exist,. Are you a person who gives thought and attention to guarding your heart? If not, you will never be able to keep enough distance between you and others to help them guard their heart either, and your male-female relationships will certainly not be mutually edifying. *Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.*

Prayer: Today Lord I choose to love You with all my heart, soul, strength, and mind. Help me to get that right so that I may love my neighbor in an appropriate fashion as well.

Guard your Heart.

Week 3 Day 5

Matt 6:24 "No one can serve two masters..... NIV

We have already discuss how what you love will guide everything you do and determine every person you choose to be around and call friend. When God is your first love this is the best formula for life possible. Let some other love slide in there and everything becomes blurred and we don't know who we are or what we think or what we believe or what we like anymore.

Have you ever had a deep fried Pacific Coast Razor Clam. If you are a seafood lover your mouth is starting to salivate about now. I cook mine on the back porch in a "Fry Daddy." There is always a jar or two of Cocktail Sauce by the deep fryer and pre-meal dipping is welcomed. Most times when I get to the meal I am not even hungry as the pre-meal dipping can get a little excessive. So how do I cook clams.....by the ton. Whatever I think we will need for the meal, I triple. Experience has taught me that a family of seven and a few guests can wade through a hundred or more clam strips before we ever even get to the supper table. Folks, there is nobody that can devour these little pre-meal critters hot out of the grease like my son and I. He is over six foot tall and I am over six foot around so it is always a close race. Except.....for that one day.... He had been smitten for some time by yon fair maiden who in the matter of clams had chosen to be kosher. Her presence on this occasion caused him to refrain from eating said morsels. This of course I understood as a polite and gracious gesture. However, when he waltzed through the kitchen and announced to all that he didn't really enjoy these succulent little Razors. My wife's jaw dropped. Then, when he stated that since he didn't like clams they were going out for pizza, my guest got to see a side of my wife rarely seen. I was concerned myself. I was wondering what other likes, values, and beliefs he might be changing because of this female as well. In every relationship consideration must be made for accommodating others. Scripture commands that we esteem others higher than ourselves. I understand this; however, one's accommodations are to be made on the basis of one's Love Relationship with Jesus Christ and a proper understanding of his word. To lose your identity in Christ and to push his word to second place in your life should be a screaming beacon to you that you have failed to guard your heart and present it in loving worshipful obedience to Christ. So guarding you heart means keeping it pure and wholly devoted to Christ. In this position your likes and dislikes for the things of this world will be determined by your love relationship with him and not change with every whimsical romance that falls into your life. Always be sure you are serving the one true Lord and Master.

So, are you guarding your Heart? Is your God Given Ministry losing importance to you? Do you find yourself ceasing to pray for those that God has entrusted to you care? Is Godly Parental Input no longer significant to you? Do you find yourself falling out from under God ordained authority? Have you lost the Ability to think rationally about something as simple as a Deep Fried Razor Clam? God never ask you to check your mind at the door.

Are you making changes in your value system based on another's input and not the word of God and your love relationship with him? Does the way you spend money seem to say your priorities and value system are changing? Then Guard you heart for it is the well spring of Life and spend a little more time with the Lord in His Word. Once you have master this you can edify others as you grow with them together in the things of the Lord. You may still go get Pizza, but you will not be lying to yourself and others on your way out the door.

Prayer: Today Lord, I choose You as my first love and the master to whom I choose to cling. Help me guard my heart and love others in a timely and appropriate Manner.

Speaking the Truth in Love.

Week 3 Day 6

Eph 4:15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

Speaking the truth in love with our brothers and sisters in Christ is part of the equation that moves us toward maturity. We can get an idea of what it means to speak with an attitude of Love from 1 Corinthians 13 *If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal..... Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.* Speaking with love is not enough however, our speaking must contain truth. So, there is both **content** and **attitude** in the voice of edification. For a relationship to be mutually edifying this speaking of the Truth in Love must go both ways. Most of our friendships never reach this level. Why? Because there are very few people we allow to speak to character issues in our lives.

To understand what it is to speak truth with love into another's life let's consider the opposite of truth for a moment, the lie. Lies most often come to us from the devil. He is the master of lies and when he lies he is speaking his native language. (Jn. 8:44) On the other hand, God never lies, and his word is truth and can always be trusted. When He says, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved," it is so. (Rm. 10:13) Who we chose to believe and what we believe will greatly impact the course of our lives. If the devil can get us to believe even one lie, say something like, "Your Worthless" he can yank our chain every way but silly! He knows this and so he has his tricks for embedding his lies into our lives.

Let's pull together another concept we have talked about this week, Guarding your heart. Failure in this endeavor will likely leave you and someone else with a traumatic experience and a traumatized heart. Most of us who pursued a marriage partner through the Traditional American Dating Paradigm have at least one painful experience where we gave our heart away lock, stock and barrel. My dad said, I grieved like someone had died for at least six months. It felt more like a year and a half to me. **The Devil loves Traumatic Experiences as they serve as a great platform for him to burn his lies into our lives.** So again, I question, Is it really edifying of me to set some member of the opposite sex up for this sort of a traumatic experience? Oh, that I had learned this sooner. How often I have sat and pondered the gravity of my immaturity and my sinfulness in this matter both to myself and others. So here are a couple of lies that could come out of such an experience and what a truthful loving response might look like.

Lie: I am worthless. Truthful Response: "No! You're Not! You are so valuable to God that He sent His son to die on a cross for you...forgive your sin...and restore your broken relationship with Him."

Lie: God mess up when he made me...I have a mirror...I get a report card. Truthful Response: "No, He did not! You are fearfully and wonderfully made for a purpose! Before you were born he formed you in the womb! Look around at creation! God hasn't mess up. He said of what He made, 'it is all Good' and of you...you are 'Very Good.'"

You get the idea. Lies come in various shapes and sizes and it is our responsibility not to speak them but to expose and defuse them as we help others replace them with truth.

Recognizing lies can be tricky at times so let me give you a heads up. "If you loved me you would.....", "Respecting your parents is great, but your 17 years old....", "Everybody does it.....". I have observed that what most often follows those statements and others like them, are some of the most unedifying lies that are straight from the pit of hell itself. Are you one who speaks the truth in Love?

Prayer: Lord Help me to be a edifying friend who recognizes and deals in truth with love.

Hey Sis!

Week 3 Day 7

1 Tim 5:1 Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity. NIV

There is no way Paul could have made himself any clearer to Timothy or to me. I was the older brother of one younger sister. I understand very clearly how I am to treat women.

Let me give you the list of "I nevers" that related to my sister:

- 1) I never flirted with my sister. That's just gross.
- 2) I never kissed my sister, except on the cheek and only when I had to.
- 3) I never hit my sister - well, except for that once. I learned the hard way - don't hit your sister. (Everybody should have a dad like mine.)
- 4) I never held her hand, unless it was an emergency where sticking close together demanded it.
- 5) I never talked bad about her to others - just directly to her face.

Now let me give you my list of "I always" concerning my sister:

- 1) I always loved and cared about my sister. She was family after all.
- 2) I was always good friends with my sister. We even double - dated on occasion.
- 3) I always watched out for my sister. I even ran off a couple boyfriends who I didn't like. (To this day she doesn't even know about it, and I'm not gonna tell her. Well, I guess if she reads this she will.)
- 4) I always wanted the best for my sister. I still do.
- 5) I guarded her reputation and stood off a bully or two on her behalf. (She doesn't know about that either.)
- 6) I included her in my world. We shared a lot of laughter together.

Believe it or not, my sister was one of my best friends. I never had one intention to damage or harm her, even though we have been known to fuss and quarrel a bit ever now and again. I remember one time we were arguing in college, and one of her friends took her side and start agreeing with all the things she was a call'en me. Well, that was a mistake. She turned on that friend and started sticking up for me. I suppose it was that old, *I can kick my dog, but there sure not better be nobody else be kickin' him*, mentality.

According to Paul, a mutually edifying relationship between members the opposite sex should emulate the relationship between a brother and sister, especially, but not exclusively, in the area of purity. Based on my experience, that is amazingly similar to the way one is expected to treat women other than one's wife after they are married. Consider again the radical idea that was introduced earlier. **If it is not appropriate behavior after marriage, then it is not appropriate behavior before marriage.** Yep, I am suggesting again that you consider doing away with any premarital standard of behavior that is different from our post-married standard of behavior. To treat members of the opposite sex in this fashion would certainly qualify the friendship as one that would be mutually edifying.

Prayer: Lord please give me many mutually edifying friendships with members of the opposite sex, that honor you in every way and cause the world to marvel at the difference Christ makes in relationships.