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Her Hand in Marriage Details

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Josiah says

This is one of the stronger arguments for courtship that I've read, but, in the end, still relies on a questionable application of the Old Testament civil law to the modern believer, which, if applied consistently, would really more make the case for betrothal than the case for courtship. In addition, one of Wilson's central arguments, that if God commands something greater, how much more does it apply to something lesser (e.g., if God gives fathers the right to deny marriage to a prospective suitor of their daughter, how much more does he have the right to have a say in the more minute details of their relationship beforehand) seems to be founded on very shaky ground.

While I thus disagreed with a fair bit of the book, there were numerous good bits in it. In particular, the second chapter on the duties of sons/men was pretty good. In addition, as normal, Wilson is an engaging writer and the book was a fairly enjoyable one to read, despite my disagreements. (Which probably added an additional star to my rating of this book.)

Overall, Wilson presented a stronger defense of courtship, but ultimately falls prey to the same faults inherent in the more traditional notion of courtship.

Rating: 2.5 Stars. (Okay)

Lianna Scott says

My parents and I used this approach which enabled me to enter into my marriage with a a clean conscience, whole and untouched. I even had my heart all in one piece to give to my husband.

I will always treasure these gifts, because by saying "No" to temptation before marriage - it has given my marriage a better foundation to rest upon than I could have hoped for.

No person or marriage is perfect, but being pure as you approach marriage will enhance your marriage beyond what you can imagine. It will give you and your spouse a more light-hardheartedness and an extra boost of joy when one has stayed pure all the way up the alter!

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### **Zack says**

It's short and simple. The contents remind me of a bit lax version of Paul Washer's take on such things crossed with a bit of Chestertonian (i.e., humorous at times) writing.

I was impressed with this book. Doug Wilson does a good job of presenting solid principles with which to use in the dating/courting realm. And even if you disagree with his framework of courtship, there is *plenty* of healthy meat left in this book. He advises with balance and wisdom.

I appreciated how he talks about (after modestly) women and **physical** beauty. He brought up lots of good bible verses talking about beauty and appropriate and valued adornment. (This is all good for me because I'm more intellectual it'd be easy for me to fall into the looks-are-evil camp)

Anyways, there's a lot of good stuff in this little book, and it's a pleasant read with quite a few chuckles.

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### **Andrew Nicholson says**

Once I picked this book up I couldn't put it down. I have friends who went down the courtship road and made it look dorky, and friends who set their relationships ablaze. It may seem like this is an old-fashioned approach to things, but there's a large part of me that really resonates with the wisdom in this book. If as a man I truly desire the best for the a woman I desire to marry, then why wouldn't I want to pursue her in a selfless way, in a way that maintains her protection?

If you're a single Christian guy, read this book.

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### **Carleton Raisbeck says**

As a Christian who didn't grow up with 18 years or so of experiencing a good way to treat women at home, as one might have experienced growing up in a God fearing household, I found this book informative and challenging.

Pastor Wilson speaks about the different roles of men and woman when courting, marrying, and preparing their subsequent children to do the same. Those of us who do it are called to do it in a Godly way, and this book of Wilson's has helped instil in me a reverence for they way God instructs us to carry out these duties.

On the one hand in our culture there is a date-who-you-like-and-do-as-you-please-whatdoesitreallymatter anyway kind of attitude to dating, and on the other hand there are the cultures with the pre-arranged marriages and what appears to be no freedom at all. But, as is sometimes the way with wisdom, it is found somewhere in the middle. Respect for the daughter's father and a realistic awareness of man's

default, sinful nature, as well as human attraction and suitable partners, are just a few of the ideas covered in this short book, and they are all things we should be aware of. That's not to say that we ought to make marriage seem too serious an affair, because it's meant to be fun and delightful too, but there are certain things we need to learn about and respect when seeking to establish a new household. Which is what Doug has written about! So check it out!

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### **Jimmy says**

Once again Doug Wilson hits a home run with this book. Here is a work that addresses Biblical courtship in the Modern world. The book is filled with Wilson's insight from Scripture, practical wisdom and instructional humor, and applicable for all who read this whether you are the guy, the girl or the parents involved with Christian courtship. I appreciated Wilson pointing out that courtship takes place with the authority of the daughter's parents which is the subject of the first chapter. As I have a young daughter at this time, it's a sobering admonition for my wife and I to consider in our daughter's future. Here in chapter one Wilson brings some relevant Biblical passages including those from the Old Testament that I've never thought about it before. Chapter one alone is worth the price of the book. In the second chapter Wilson addresses the topic of preparing sons for courtship in which the big points I took away from it was to prepare sons by modeling it in the family by the father, teaching on sexual purity and being a gentleman. A plus for his insight on young men and the issue of self-control. The third chapter then focus on preparing daughters for courtship including the discussion of modesty, biblical femininity and parental protection. This is followed by two other chapters on courtship itself and a beautiful allegorical story as an appendix that hallmarks Wilson's desire to communicate Christian truth through great literature and other literary forms. There is too many good things I've learned from this book to share in this review (I've read this work together a devotional with my wife and we highlighted so many parts of the book) but he takes the topic of courtship beyond just the guy asking the father's permission to court his daughter. If more Christians were to read and apply this book, we would see a dramatic turn for the better of Christians and sanctification when it comes to the family and purity rather than the current recreational dating patterned after the World. Excellent work, I highly recommend it and give a five star. It's a work I plan to re-read in the future or at least thumb through the highlighted portion.

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### **Judah Ivy says**

Read this the month before I began courting my now-wife-of-six-years. I was working at the Billy Graham association as an order processor and had made friends with the (then) manager of the BGEA bookstore. His name is Michael Lyman, but I called him Mike the Bookstore Calvinist, because he would stock the shelves with mostly reformed fare and always make an effort to steer me in that direction when I wandered in. I had met a young devoted christian woman (who also happened to be gorgeous) while we both served at our churches's coffeeshop, and after serving with her for about four months time and praying about the possibilities for three and a half, I got what I believe to have been the divine communication "If you don't ask her someone else will". So naturally I decided to do the preliminary reading on the "courtship" thing ASAP. I asked Mike, who showed me the small "courtship" section. This book stood out after reading the back, and it was also thin, which helped as I was in a hurry. It was very straightforward and scripturally sound, and its lessons have stuck with me for the good. Brandy (my now-wife's name) and I have been happily and holily married for six years and have three kids, Josiah, Jaelle, and Enoch.

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## Shantelle says

Not sure what to rate this yet (I think I should read more of Douglas Wilson's books before deciding). There were some great, and seemingly Biblically-sound lessons in "Her Hand in Marriage". It really did dig deep and respects no person's pride or rebellion. But there were also a few things that were unhelpful, and even could be detrimental because of their wording.

I don't feel I should be afraid to read any book, even if it seems a bit hard and radical. Just take what I can, and line up its message against the Bible. Is it Christ-glorifying? Is it Christ-like? Is it what God teaches? Does it reflect His character described throughout the Bible?

This book has given me some things to ponder, and I'd like to discuss it with godly friends!

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## Devin says

I was first exposed to Doug Wilson when he gave a lecture at Bethlehem College and Seminary during his time in Minneapolis, MN for Desiring God's 2009 National Conference. My first impressions of Wilson were that he was a boisterously funny man with much wise counsel who had an out-dated theological approach that didn't adequately address the issues that are important to people today. I do not think I could have been more incorrect.

In *Her Hand in Marriage: Biblical Courtship in the Modern World*, Wilson engages all of the issues that are important to people today on the subjects of dating, relationships, and romance. From the start, Wilson is relevant, exploring the dating system from the inside out indicating where the dangers lie:

"Consider how our system works. A young man notices a girl who attracts him. He asks her out, and she agrees. They start going together, and one of two things happens. Either they like each other or they don't, and both possibilities bring problems in their train. If neither one likes the other, then they both have had a bad experience. If they both hit it off, then the eventual temptation to immorality is strong, *especially* if they happen to pair off young--fourteen, say. 'Glad you kids like each other! Now don't touch anything for eight more years!' 'Okay, Mom!' And of course, if one is interested in staying together and the other one isn't, the possibilities for emotional snarls and interesting complications are almost endless."

This is only a small piece of Wilson's critique of dating.

Wilson goes on to formulate a biblical model for "courtship," a term that is no more holy than the word "dating" but which is used simply to distinguish between the two different approaches to finding a mate. Wilson does not dumb his message down. Within the first few pages of the first chapter, he quotes Numbers 30:3-16 to show the biblical setup of authority within a household. In this first chapter, Wilson mainly speaks of the authority of that parents, according to the Bible's teaching, have over their children and how they operate in his model of courtship. Later, he does similar biblical exposition to show what men ought to be in

order to be prepared for marriage and how a daughter should be brought up so that she can be ready to be taken as someone's wife.

The author of a logic textbook, Wilson's argumentation seems impregnable. His style reads smoothly and quickly, convincing and convicting on every page. In a day when many Christian authors put out books that seem to be little more than glorified self-help titles, Wilson's heavier and quite technical approach to this subject is, in my opinion, very refreshing. After finishing the final chapter, as I looked at the back cover, I was not left wondering if Wilson's method might work, but I had almost full confidence that Wilson's courtship, which oftentimes seems simply to be dating-according-to-her-dad's-rules, will work.

If marriage is something you would like in your future, read this book. If marriage is something you hope for your son or daughter, read this book. If you are not sure you know what the Bible's teaching on marriage and relationships is, read this book. If you think you heard the word "marriage" on the radio one time, read this book. I cannot think of anyone who would find nothing significant to gain by reading this book. Wilson is brilliant and delightful. I only wish that more people would approach the Bible and contemporary ideas with the same charitable scrutiny that he does.

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## **Reagan Ramm says**

This was a fantastic book! Therefore, prepare ye self for a long review/summary!

I've heard a lot of people talk about "Biblical courtship" but they have often failed to really give any Biblical support other than the basic Biblical principles of love and serving others, which obviously go contrary to the modern dating model which is typically about self-gratification.

The book is great from the start, opening with a fantastic introduction which I can easily relate to. Wilson lays down some ground rules about how he is going to approach the topic, and makes some great points.

1. He points out how there are success stories hidden among all of the bad of modern recreational dating. As Wilson says, "Nothing said in the following pages should be taken as directed against godly Christians who came together within the dating system." Sometimes people can take offense when you say you think courtship is more Biblical than dating, and they think you are saying they automatically were sinning by dating. Criticism of dating is not meant to criticize individuals, but the system as a whole. "People survive plane crashes too, some of them without a scratch, and we should all be happy about it. But this acknowledgement does not disqualify us from opposing the general habit of crashing airplanes." - pg.10

2. Wilson also points out how "generalizations are legitimate if they honestly describe an overall pattern. Generalizations are consequently NOT refuted through particular and individual counter examples." So many people think that just because "I did it, and I turned out fine" that everything is just peachy. Deviants from the pattern don't change the fact that there is still a pattern.

3. Sadly, "success stories" are not as abundant as they are assumed to be. "The modern dating system does

not train young people to form a relationship...at the very least, this system is as much prep for divorce as it is marriage...."

Still lingering in the introduction, I loved what Wilson said on the topic of feminism and how, "The beauty of Biblical courtship is that it never leaves women unprotected." - pg.13. This is just the opposite in dating, where there are relatively few risks for the young man, and many risks for the young woman. Wilson also touches on how men and women are created differently, and have different roles in courtship, as with life: men initiate, women respond. He also touches on the subject of "submission" in courtship and marriage, and how "headship in marriage does NOT mean that women submit to men; it means ONE woman submits to ONE man. Her submission to her husband protects her from having to submit to other men. Prior to marriage, her submission to her father protects her from having to submit to other men...the so-called 'independent' woman is not under any kind of protection. She is truly on her own, but with the result being that she is buffeted about by all sorts of men."

Moving into chapter 1:

The book begins to focus on the authority of parents (especially the father of the young woman) in a courtship. The relationship between the courting pair should not be founded on romance. As Wilson says, "Romance is believed to be 'the thing' which ties a marriage together, and it is further thought that young people understand the dynamics of romance far better than their elders...What establishes the foundation for any godly marriage is /covenantal faithfulness/ to the God who gives us marriage." My translation is that marriage should be based on committed LOVE, not romance. Our culture gets the two mixed up. Consequently, founding a marriage on this covenant leads to strong emotional and romantic attachments. The world gets it backwards, which one reason there is so much divorce. Those marriages are "self" focused, rather than "other" focused.

The rest of the chapter focused on providing Biblical support for the authority a father has over his daughter, and his responsibility to protect and seek out his daughter's best interests. Additionally, Wilson explains how in courtship, "the courting activity is publicly connected to the life of the family, most likely the family of the young daughter. With recreational dating, the privacy of the couple is paramount." Not only does the privacy of dating create an unrealistic environment, but it almost unfailingly leads to sin.

Chapter 2:

This chapter focused on preparing sons for courtship, and how a man is meant to "grow up, leave his parents, and cleave to his wife. The wife, having been /given/ in marriage, has transferred her allegiance from her father to her husband."

Before a son can leave to take a wife, he must be instructed in certain key areas.

First, he must understand what the Bible teaches about marriage itself. "A son should know what constitutes the formation of a marriage, the obligations of a marriage, the boundaries of marriage, etc...."

Second, he must be taught what godly married life is like.

Third, he must be masculine.

Wilson gives an interesting example on this third point: "Courtship reveals how necessary this masculinity is. Many modern young men approach a girl, and they are quite serious as far as /their/ intentions go, but they are



afraid of interfering with /her/ life. 'You know, she is going to graduate soon, but she wants to go to school at Notre Dame, and I don't really want to go to Notre Dame, and showing interest in her would really disrupt all her plans.' But the whole /point/ of courtship is to disrupt a young lady's plans. A godly young woman is not going to stand around waiting for marriage. Rather, she will be preparing herself for marriage. This means she will be heading in some particular direction, and not just marking time. A young man should not be afraid of disrupting, because marriage is by its very nature a disruption of her previous way of life. But there are many guys who have an 'excuse me for existing' kind of attitude--which is not very masculine--when it comes to a potentially serious relationship with a young woman...A son must not be afraid to take the initiative in such matters."

I really like this idea, and it fits with what I've experienced. I have come across a lot of godly young ladies who are interested in marrying young, but there aren't any marriageable young men around. Rather than wasting their time waiting, these young women put themselves to work for the kingdom. Yet if one is called to marriage, that takes a higher importance than any career or other ministry. How sad it would be if a young woman who wants to get married is never approached because all the young men are afraid to "disrupt" her plans.

This doesn't mean, however, that he should be inconsiderate of her plans or her calling, but it does speak to the roles of men and women in marriage.

"Suppose John wants to marry Susan. But he knows that after she graduates, she is going to try to get a job in Seattle where her grandparents live. He goes to her father and says that he would like to ask her to marry him, but she has /other plans/. Now if John is really interested in Susan, and if he is masculine, he should cheerfully /want/ to interfere with her plans. If she is not interested in marriage, she will not mind if he asks her father; there will be no imposition. Her father will just say /no/. If she is interested in him, it will not be an imposition either. Women are not supposed to sit on the couch and wait for somebody to marry them. They should always seek to do something productive with their lives in the meantime. Consequently, men who are seeking a helper are going to have to seek this helpmate from among women who are going in other directions at the time. A man who understands masculinity and marriage should know generally what he wants to do, and he should be seeking a woman who agrees to /come with him/. It is not the other way around. He is not coming into her life in order to help her with her vocational calling. Of course if a husband loves his wife as Christ loves the church, he is going to help her in many ways...The Bible teaches that the woman was made for man, not man for the woman (1 Cor. 11:9)."

### Chapter 3:

This chapter addressed preparing daughters for courtship. The importance of creating the habit of submission and trust with her father is stressed, and then Wilson moves into the topic of modesty, which I found very good. He points out how it's not wrong or a sin to look beautiful and to wear jewelry or make-up, but it becomes immodest when women attempt to make a display of themselves. "Women should seek to be beautiful by a certain means, through the hidden person of the heart...A man's daughters should be taught to cultivate an inner beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit. Peace should pervade a young woman's demeanor. There should be an absence of anxiety, so that the inner calm will work its way out. And such calm daughters will be beautiful on the outside."

However, today, modesty is not valued, and fathers are allowing their daughters to date and interact with men and boys unprotected. As Wilson quotes C.S. Lewis, "a society in which conjugal infidelity is tolerated must always be, in the long run, a society adverse to women."

Wilson also goes into the difference between morality and prudishness, which was also very interesting.

Mr. Wilson brings up the topic of "godly responses", as well, and how Christian girls should be equipped to respond to suitors well. I liked how Wilson says, "Christian girls need to learn a godly rudeness. In a corrupt culture such as ours, this ability is increasingly necessary." I definitely agree. Sometimes, rudeness is definitely called for.

#### Chapter 4: The Culmination of Courtship

This chapter focused on "what standard should a future spouse be chosen?" I thought Mr. Wilson explained the drive of courtship well when he said, "Our situation would not be very much improved if it were to go from a system based upon a young girl 'liking' a guy--from the system of 'recreational dating' to a pattern of courtship based upon parental prejudice and whim. Such decisions are very important, and cannot be left to /anyone's/ current whims."

I found this quote very interesting, since many I know consider courtship to mean parents wield power tyrannically and with absolute authority. Of course, a father can still veto a courtship if there are some legitimate concerns with his daughter's suitor, or their compatibility of beliefs. However, the decision of who you are going to spend the rest of your life with is very important and serious. It will impact generations to come. Therefore, there should be a lot of things and a lot of people involved in the process, not just the whims of the courting pair or the parents. Ideally, all parties involved would work together to arrive at what is best and God-honoring. No one person's feelings should settle the matter.

Wilson also points out how the gravity of the situation and the future implications also should not factor in. "We cannot make our decision based on what /we/ predict might happen twenty years from now. Rather, we must proceed on what God has revealed in His Word. God /does/ know the future so we must obey Him."

Mr. Wilson goes on to explain how we must not be unequally yoked in marriage. Both the man and woman must be Christians, but not only that, but their beliefs about God must be compatible. A father, for example, should not let his daughter be courted by a man who disputes the sovereignty of God. "When a young couple has a child who dies in the first year, how will the young husband comfort his wife? How can he, if he has a theology which says that God wanted to prevent this tragedy but couldn't?"

Likemindedness is key, not only in beliefs, but in actions. Beliefs mean nothing if one does not live by them. If one does not act on their beliefs, they are not really beliefs at all (A very Dallas Willard idea). A man must be obedient to God for a father to permit his daughter to court him.

A man must also have financial stability. It was fascinating to learn more about how courtship was done in Biblical times, and how a man was expected to pay the "bride-price" before he could court. This demonstrates that a man can put his money where his mouth is, and he is serious, while also providing financial protection for a woman in the event of a divorce. Many in our day, however, don't like this idea.

"The romantic propaganda of our day typically portrays all such concerns as mean-spirited and materialistic--everyone knows 'all you need is love.'"

Finally, Wilson also stresses physical attractiveness as being a Biblical principle, which I found interesting, as I've not heard many people stress this idea. However, he provided some very good arguments which make sense and stand with the Bible. Obviously, physical appearance should take its place in line behind more important attributes, because what if something happens and suddenly your spouse isn't so attractive

anymore? Accidents can happen. Now you're stuck with someone who you married mostly on the basis of physical appearance, and now they don't even have that anymore. All the same, attractiveness has importance.

In the 5th and final chapter, Wilson digs into the details of courtship.

It was fascinating to read about how Wilson described a father should interact with a suitor, and it also made a lot of sense. He makes it very clear that if a daughter is not interested in a young man, then in virtually all circumstances, the father should get back to the suitor and simply say /no/. However, if the daughter IS interested in the young man, then the young man should be given permission to spend time with the family. Wilson continues, "If that goes well, he may begin to spend time alone with the daughter under the watchful oversight of the father. The young man is being invited to spend time with the family. Younger siblings get a good example of courtship lived out in front of them..."

Wilson also clarifies that these are not hard fast rules, but depend on the circumstances. "The father may give the young man permission to take his daughter to dinner, or to go out on what some people would call 'a date.' The point is not 'how many times to the house before there is a proposal,' but rather whether or not the father would be foolish to give permission to date, and other times such permission is wise."

I found this part very interesting, and made me pause. I was wondering if this would be the one thing I disagreed with. But upon further reflection, I realized I agreed. Wilson is clear it depends on the circumstances, and I have to say I agree. I'm sure there would be some certain circumstances where that kind of interaction would be appropriate and helpful. No doubt, there would have to be a serious trust and commitment level, however.

If the family is impressed and the young man continues to show interest, then more one-on-one time can be spent together under the father's oversight.

"If it becomes obvious during the courtship that the young man is not suitable, then it is the father's duty to /explain/ to him that he is not free to continue to come around in the same way." - pg.78

Wilson then briefly touches on what the wedding should be like, that is, focusing on the covenantal aspect of it. A wedding is a ceremony where two people are making vows before the Lord, which are not to be made lightly, "the church therefore has an interest in /witnessing/ these vows, and insisting they be kept."

Mr. Wilson concludes the book by providing some counter arguments to typical concerns with courtship, and then ends with an allegorical short story painting a beautiful picture of the relationship between a father, his daughter, a suitor, and God.

I can't think of anything I really disagreed with in this book, which is rare for me. While a lot of these concepts I've heard before, Wilson's perspective was new to me, and he also gave a lot of interesting practical insight and advice. I definitely would recommend this book for anyone considering going about courtship in a god-honoring manner.

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## Daniel Eggert says

I was given this book as a prerequisite to dating my first girlfriend by father of said, along with another Doug Wilson book and a third by Elizabeth Elliot.

*Per my old blog, at the time of reading, "I found the book to be little more than a pitched retort to Joshua Harris' very popular I Kissed Dating Goodbye emphasizing a Covenant Theological approach to semi-arranged marriage, but naively labelled "Biblical Courtship" in an attempt to make it palatable to the boy & girl."*

Before you dismiss my opinion as too flippantly dismissive, let me clarify that, at that time, I was only beginning to investigate Covenant Theology and found much of the conversation very confusing compared to the Southern Baptist Dispensationalism I was raised in. Further, both I and the young lady were miles away at college and the concept of reading three books, a phone interview, then driving all the way back home to obtain "permission to court" before I could take her out for coffee went over like a lead balloon.

Back then, I would've given it two stars.

After the relationship, (view spoiler), I realized that, while this book may help the father of a 14 year old as he guides his child through high-school, *if the child buys in*, Wilson's "biblical courtship" model just will not function for an adult child miles away from the family at college.

It was much later that I came to learn about Wilson's involvement in the "Federal Vision." I will fault him on that account, unlike others, and bump the rating from 2 stars to one.

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## CJ Bowen says

Clear and provocative intro to biblical relationships. Wilson is not championing one possible method among many, but explaining the biblical principles that undergird the marriage process. These principles need to be applied differently in different situations, but cannot be *ignored* if God is to be honored in the way a man takes a woman to wife. Wilson articulates a vision in which a covenantal system provides freedom and protection for a young woman under the loving authority of her father, while challenging young men to step up and take risks in pursuing a godly wife. He roots these patterns in Scripture, clears away wrong principles with a firm but gracious hand, and refutes stupid ideas with biting wit. Parents will be challenged, humbled, and encouraged, young women will be strengthened and given peaceful confidence, and young men will be scared out of their folly and exhorted to play the man.

"We have provided our children with enough Christianity to ensure their guilt when they fornicate, but not enough to ensure their purity." 9

"What establishes the foundation for any godly marriage is *covenantal faithfulness* to the God who gives us marriage." 23

Also read July 23, 2010

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**Chris Comis says**

Another great one by Wilson. Could use some revising though to cover those cases where a daughter has not been raised by a godly father; how should older single women who are no longer living at home approach courtship; etc. I think he actually touches on these issues, but not in depth. All around great groundwork being laid here for a biblical courtship model.

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**Jonathan Seger says**

Doug Wilson taught me two things thru this book. One which I assumed I would learn, and another which I hadn't the slightest I would get from a book on courting. First, Mr. Wilson introduced me to the concept of courting, which is a brand new concept to me having grown up in the modern form of dating. He gave me a lot to chew on, and I can honestly say that it only took 100 pages to convince me of the advantages of courting as well as the clear commands in Scripture on the formation of families.

The second thing that I really took away from this book were Mr. Wilson's helpful teaching on parenting and the authority & leadership of a father. Reading this book made me read more of his teachings on fatherhood. Awesome & extremely helpful!

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**Sarah Oldland says**

A wonderful book that lays the basics out for courting. A must read for those who are planning to or beginning to court.

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