



### **Introduction**

At a Youth Ministry meeting, I happened to mention my wife and I have been married for over 40 years. I heard one of the teens say “That’s what I want.” The leader must have also heard this, as I found myself being asked to give a talk about love and dating.

I agreed to give the talk, although I knew it would be a very difficult topic. Is it really possible to guarantee a relationship will be everlasting? My wife and I sometimes joke about being lucky that we found each other. Does it all boil down to luck? That would not make a good talk.

### **Looking for an Approach**

I looked at the statistics on reasons for divorce, so I could just say “Don’t do these things”. I thought maybe being a good Christian was the answer. But I also read that Christian couples who are active in their church have only slightly lower divorce rates. Then, I realized it’s not just about divorce. What good is a long-lasting marriage if the couple is miserable.

I was striking out. There was no *Dating for Dummies* guide and no phone app to give the answers. There is a lot of advice on the internet, but most of it is contrary to Christian values. There are well-meaning preachers throwing out Bible verses; but I have never been one to believe everyone’s problems can be solved simply by throwing scripture at them.

Feeling lost, I stared out the window of my office and saw my car. I began to daydream. I’ve owned that car over 7 years. I love my car as much now as I did when I bought it. The car has been very good to me and I don’t plan on ever getting rid of it. Wouldn’t it be nice if finding love was as easy as finding a car like that? Wait a minute! Maybe that’s it?

I thought I had the approach, until my wife pointed out that people trade in cars. I was ready to give up when my wife remembered...her cousin purchased a brand new, first year Ford Mustang in 1964. Sure, her cousin traded it in. But had she kept that car in good shape all these years, the car today would be worth ten times what she paid for it. Ah ha! There is value to a good long-lasting relationship!

### **Cars and Dating**

My first new car was a Chevy Beretta, and a mistake. With starry eyes, I saw the car on the lot and pictured myself with it. The salesman had a good pitch and after a quick test drive I bought it. The car was fine for a few years but began spending more and more time getting repaired. After five years the paint began peeling like a bad sunburn and two years later the engine blew out, the relationship was over.

I learned from that and some other mistakes. I have a great car today. But I don’t think anybody really wants to use the “trial and error” method in a relationship. Maybe I can take the lessons I’ve learned about cars and apply them to love and relationships. Let’s see.

### **Step 1. Driver’s Education**

We cannot even get behind the wheel of a car without a license to drive, and cannot get a license without passing some tests. Maybe dating education would improve success. Without going into specific detail, here are some concepts I think would be beneficial.

Prepare for something new. Riding a bike does not prepare us for driving a car. Speed, braking, turning and handling are not the same. Family and friend relationships do not prepare us for dating. Speed, braking, turning and handling are not the same either. We cannot test drive five or six families and pick the one we like. Friendships seldom have the depth of understanding or perpetual commitment necessary in marriage. Love is a new world.

Be big enough to reach the pedals. We cannot drive until we are old enough. Maybe we should not date until we are mature enough, whether that is 16 or 66. Maturity can be measured by how well we control emotions, sacrifice, compromise, plan for the future and especially being able to judge the true nature of others. When considering relationships, we also don’t want to be a passenger in a car being driven by a 7-year-old.

Learn about roads. I remember one time I was driving, before GPS, and saw on the map a “shortcut”. Wow was that a mistake, winding roads through areas that looked like I might get jumped at any moment. Drive the good roads, God’s roadways to love. (See my article xxx.) Avoid the bad, crooked, dangerous roads of Satan. (See my article xxx).

Self-assessment. Nobody schedules their driver’s exam without knowing they are ready. We review the test questions time and time again to be sure to pass the first time. We make sure we are confident that we can turn, park and assess the road before letting that instructor evaluate us. If we considered whether or not we can truly handle a relationship, would we jump into one?

## **Step 2. Test Drives**

The next step in developing a relationship with a car is looking at the possibilities and selecting the right one.

Don’t fall in love. I already mentioned my disastrous first attempt with a car relationship. I was completely blinded to the truth by feelings and the salesman’s excellent pitch. Jumping into a relationship at first sight ignores all the important things that promote long-term happiness. There is immediate satisfaction, but it might not last.

Don’t settle on options. In buying my first car gas mileage, reliability and safety were not even considerations. I made higher standards each time I bought a car. I am thrilled with my current car. I’m sure it is because I stuck to everything that was important to me when considering it. Studies have shown the things people want most in a relationship, the “basic five”, are: honesty, loyalty, trust, respect and kindness. So back to the previous point...how are any of these known by love at first sight? Decide on options and don’t test drive anything that falls short.

Know what is important. My first car had a manual transmission. I would not even consider an automatic. I did not realize my mistake until driving in heavy traffic and putting on the clutch every 2 minutes. Dating sites are infamous for telling us what options are important. They want us to decide on compatibility and having all the same likes, dislikes and experiences. Truth be told, if my wife and I looked at the other’s profile on a dating site we would have never dated. Be cautious of options like physical appearance, finances, fun, etc. Consider options like sharing the same faith, raising children, etc.

Multiple road tests. Since that first car, I have never test driven only one car. I felt like that would be settling. There are cars I liked after the test drive, but how would I know it was “the one”? The test drive had to be more than around the block. I had to see how it handled city, highway, etc. I would slam on the brakes and gun it, to the dismay of the salesperson. Every relationship needs to be fully tested to make sure all the standards are met. Rushing into the first relationship that seems good might not work.

## **Step 3. Engagement**

When we choose a car and sign the paperwork it would appear as though the deal is done, but it is not. There is this thing called a warranty period that comes with every car to protect us from buying a clunker. Becoming engaged and saying “I will” is not the same as saying “I do”. Engagement is only the warranty period, and allows for more scrutiny. The relationship can still be ended.

New experiences. After signing on the bottom line, we have different experiences with the car than in the test drive. Relationships are no different. Engagement will bring new experiences, new opportunities to put the “basic five” qualities to the test. We can learn who the other person truly is, and not just what they appear to be. Pay attention to how the other person treats their enemies, as you might be one some day.

Handling breakdowns. It doesn’t always happen, but it sure is nice if the car has its first breakdown while under warranty. It helps us determine what kinds of problems we might have and if there is a serious problem. My wife and I had two issues of note before we were married. My wife says it was the best thing for us, because we learned how each other handled things like that and knew we could work things out together.

Always aware. From the moment we sign for the car to the moment the warranty ends, we can be diligent in looking for anything that would tell us to return the car before it’s too late. Engagements are not usually viewed this way. Engagement is simply time to plan a wedding. The wedding day should be anticipated



with joy, but that is no reason to ignore any issues. Eyes and ears must not be closed to signs of a clunker. And there must be a willingness to abandon the clunker before it's too late.

### **Step 4. Commitment**

The "I Do" has been said and the warranty has ended. Its now a matter of keeping things going smoothly.

Keep up maintenance. Cars need regular oil changes and gas to avoid breakdowns. When a couple ignores the little things, breakdowns can happen. Thank you, do you need anything, how are you feeling keep the relationship moving.

Fix it before it breaks. The Check Engine light comes on and there are two choices...Ignore it until the car dies or find the issue and take care of it to avoid a breakdown. When couples stay aware of Check Engine lights in the relationship, and are willing to work it out sooner than later, the ride can be a lot smoother.

Don't be too critical. The car I love today has scratches, dents and an upholstery issue. But that car faithfully gets me where I am going without breaking down. Seven years and I have never been towed once. I can overlook the signs of age and wear because it is still good to me. We both treat each other well. After 40 years, my wife overlooks my signs of age and wear, and still loves me.

### **Conclusion**

Nobody can guarantee happiness with cars or relationships. But taking positive steps instead of relying on luck can improve our chances of happiness. It's not science. Love and feelings will, and should, always be a part of the equation. But, relying only on feelings or luck might get us a clunker.