

Book Review

Boy Meets Girl (Say Hello to Courtship), 2nd ed. by Joshua Harris. Multnomah Books, 2005. Paperback, 247 pp. ISBN 1-57673-709-8. £9 (15\$ US).

When Josh Harris got his first book entitled *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* published at the amazingly young age of twenty-one, it became clear from the response he received (it was a Christian best-seller) that he would have to write a sequel. His first book had trashed the idea of Christian dating as the best way to get to know and marry someone because as he showed, it was fraught with unnecessary temptation and betrayed a worldly attitude toward relationships that was for the most part selfish and sinful. Too often these “romances” were fleeting, heart-breaking, and destructive. So what is the alternative? Thus he penned *Boy Meets Girl* as a guide to young people who are moving beyond friendship into the realm of courtship, which he adamantly defines as a relationship that tests whether marriage is appropriate for a couple. He clearly states that courtship should only be embarked upon when two people desire and are ready for marriage. The aim is marriage. Harris emphasizes that the correct focus of courtship is to be God himself, and our aim is to love the other, unselfishly desiring their best.

This contrasts markedly with the self-centeredness and impatience and frequently wrong physical expressions of lust in dating. The aim of courtship is to get to know the other’s character, convictions, aims, and spirituality, and careful listening is vital. He sensibly explains the need for frankness concerning past relationships. He is very practical, listing standards of physical contact that should not be exceeded, and gives ideas for “courtship conversations” (dates). The man is to lead. Courtship should occur in the sphere of accountability in the church and to both sets of parents, with advice being sought from close family and church leaders before it is embarked upon. It is best for couples to pursue courtship in the sphere of the Christian community and friendship with others, and not cut themselves off and become exclusive.

Theologically, Harris is head pastor of Covenant Life Church, Gaithersburg, Maryland, a Reformed Charismatic church! Hence you would expect some differences from Protestant Reformed teaching.

His quotation from a book entitled *When God Weeps* makes us wary, though the description of what happened on the cross is very vivid and biblical. The errors here, one major and one minor, concern the mistaken idea that “God is on display in his underwear” when we know Christ was shamefully naked, but more importantly, “Jesus will be treated as if personally responsible for every sin ever committed.” If he had added, “by his flock” or “by his people,” we would heartily concur.

Throughout the book Harris uses real life examples of couples who courted well and others badly, and many of the stories teach serious lessons. Mistakes in this area can be forgiven and rectified, but there is also long-term fallout. He lists good questions to ask that assess whether the relationship is heading toward marriage, but he mistakenly quotes from other writers who give apparent support to the erroneous idea that marriages can be broken and that remarriage is permissible apart from the death of a spouse, quoting Matthew 5:31–32 and 1 Corinthians 7:12–16, which actually teach the opposite.

Nevertheless, this book is highly recommended for Reformed young people who want to honor God in their courtships. It gives not only a sound basis or ethos to courtship, but also good practical guidelines to follow. It is also a worthwhile read for parents of young people of marriageable age and church leaders who may be called upon to advise their single young people in this vitally important area of life.