

Bestselling author of STOP WAITING FOR PERMISSION

Stephen Chandler

Relationship Road Map



**Step-by-Step
Directions to
Finding Your
Spouse**

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Introduction

Are You Ready for This Journey?

NOWADAYS, THE ONLY WAYS YOU CAN GET LOST WHILE DRIVING are if you leave your phone at home, if it dies and you don't have a way to charge it, or if you find yourself visiting one of the rare places on the globe without cell service. Otherwise, it's impossible.

And yet some of us still get lost.

That's not how it was back in the day. Before we had GPS on our phones, there was MapQuest. If you entered your current location and your destination into this desktop computer site, you were able to print written directions to guide you. And before MapQuest, there were *paper maps*. Your parents or grandparents may have traveled with a huge map that got folded down to the size of a small book. So having a co-pilot was vital—if you didn't have someone to read the directions while you were driving, you would miss an exit. And God help you if you missed a turn, because there was no GPS with that British voice that promises, “Recalculating.” Paper doesn't

recalculate.

Dating for the purpose of finding that person you will marry is a journey.

A lot of us have never typed in our current location. On the dating journey, you identify your current location when you take stock of where you are, *right now*, and how you got here.

These are my hopes.

These are my dreams.

This is how my heart was broken in my last relationship.

These are the ways I may have a tainted view of dating and marriage based on my aunt's divorce. Or my parent's marriage.

Most of us haven't paused to really take stock of where we are today.

And perhaps you've never identified your desired *destination*. You may know vaguely that you want to be married or married again, but you might not be clear on exactly what you want that marriage to look like. What that destination will be.

There are important questions to consider for that future destination:

How will we help each other achieve our hopes and dreams?

How loving and affectionate will our marriage be?

Will we be one of those couples who after twenty years still can't keep our hands off each other?

How often will we have sex? (Hopefully that's not too direct for you. It may not be the first thing you think about—even though it probably is if you're a guy.)

Will we stay up late into the night and have wonderful conversations dreaming about what the future may hold?

How will we manage our money?

What will be our standard of living?
Who will do the majority of the cooking? Are we going
fifty-fifty?
How often are we going to vacation?
If we do have kids, will we both work or will one of us
stay home with them?

So many unknowns! And if we're on a first date or a fifth date with someone, we may not know how to discern where we are in the journey.

We don't know if we've taken a wrong turn.

We don't know when we should abandon the journey and go back home.

We don't know when we've arrived at the destination.

There's vital information we need before embarking on this journey called dating-toward-marriage.

The Only Reason You Should Be on the Road

Before we launch, I want to make one thing clear: The only reason to date is to find the partner, the co-pilot, you will spend the rest of your life with. And I know that's a rare opinion. This may be the first time you are hearing this, but don't shut me out.

If you're a woman, your girls are probably telling you to date so you can get a free meal and not be at home with your cat every weekend.

If you're a man, your boys may be telling you that you should date to get a lil' somethin' somethin'. Hopefully your Christians friends are not saying this. (But let's be real, some of them are.)

However, I want to you to have real clarity and conviction

as you start this journey. The only reason to be dating at all is to find the person you will marry. I believe God's design for romantic relationships between men and women is for them to move toward marriage. And God designed marriage to be a picture of Christ's relationship with the church.¹ In other words, God designed dating to lead to a Christlike marriage, and a Christlike marriage is one of the primary ways God demonstrates the glory of the gospel to the world. So, our culture's view of dating—dating with little-to-no intention of pursuing marriage, dating just for fun, or dating for years without considering marriage—is directly contrary to God's design.

I know that may sound foreign and antiquated, but let me explain. First, you're fooling yourself if you think you can give someone your time but not give them your heart or get emotionally attached. Matthew 6:21 says, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Your greatest treasure is your time. Even if it's just your time, dating someone will always cost you. The person you date will have a piece of your heart. The inevitable disappointment from every breakup will ever so slightly callous your heart. I also believe that God designed sex to be enjoyed in the context of marriage, and it's already extremely difficult for many of us to maintain integrity and not sleep with the person we are dating. Removing the finish line of marriage and the reward of waiting increases our likelihood of falling.

Second, dating is time-consuming and requires investment. When you're investing your resources in one place, it means you're not investing elsewhere. I've seen so many people waste years of their lives—neglecting their personal growth or career advancement or their pursuit of their God-given purpose—all for someone they knew they wouldn't spend the

rest of their life with. So, if marriage is not your objective, you really don't need to be wasting your time or theirs dating. I know you may be ticked off at me right now. I can live with that. Just keep reading.

To the Men on the Journey

If you're a man, I want us to be on the same page.

One of my biggest frustrations is a man who has finished college, or has already started his career, who tells me, "Pastor, I'll probably get married one day, but I'm not looking for a wife right now. I'm just chilling."

What is wrong with you?

Seriously, if you're an adult man and you desire to be married but aren't pursuing it, either you are living in sin—and that's why you're chilling, because you've got all your needs met—or your priorities are grossly out of whack.

And this guy might offer an explanation, such as, "You understand, man. I'm just trying to get my career off the ground."

Have you not read the Bible? The Bible says there is one thing that is really hard to find, and that's a virtuous and capable wife. I love the way *The Message* translation says it: "A good woman is hard to find, and worth far more than diamonds."² Not "A good job is hard to find." You can find that in any city in this country. But someone you can build the rest of your life with? That's rare and hard to find.

So many men have a tainted view of marriage. They've given in to the idea that a wife is an unnecessary hassle. These men hear the phrase that married folks love to throw around—"Happy wife, happy life"—and think that their next forty-plus years will be consumed with trying to make someone happy

who is impossible to please. The Bible never says a wife is hard to find. It says a good wife. A virtuous wife. A woman with noble character. If you find a “good” wife, you’ve found a woman who will launch you into a level of influence, joy, and fulfillment that you would never be able to achieve without her. That type of woman is *hard* to find but is one thousand percent worth the search. Start looking now. If you’re an adult and God has not called you to celibate singleness, you need to be ready to date with intention.

Another cause for hesitation may be a fear of commitment. Maybe you have built the habit of sleeping with people you are dating and know that you currently are not capable of being committed to one person in marriage. Maybe you’ve been married before or experienced a tough breakup and trusting someone again isn’t something you can comprehend right now. Whatever your situation, I would encourage you not to sit in your fears. Let’s do the work to get to the place where you are not only ready for the commitment but also excited for it. Hopefully I can stir up some holy jealousy in you. You have no idea what a good and beautiful thing it is when you find the right person to do life with.

To the Women on the Journey

If you’re a woman, I want to encourage you as you embark on this journey.

If you feel like you are a good catch, what do you do when there is absolutely *no one* in sight and it seems like no one is noticing you? Do you just sit and wait? Absolutely not.

I’m going to suggest that you do what Moses did in the desert. Before God ever called him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses was in a season of development. Preparation.

Today you are in a season of preparation. God intends to prepare you spiritually, to make you complete in Him. Ideally, you're also preparing financially by getting out of debt. You're taking care of your physical well-being; you're caring for your body and not allowing intimate access to men who have not committed to honoring you " 'til death do us part."

Sister, I believe God gives us the desires of our hearts. But there are seasons of waiting. Of testing. And your attitude matters during this time. So, while you're waiting, serve. Get busy serving the church, your family, and your friends.

You may say, "I am doing all that. Now what?" I know that it can seem pretty rough on these streets. Maybe you've been putting yourself out there, but all the men you have dated thus far haven't been husband material. Maybe you're not seeing any options, and it's been a while since you've gone on a date. Maybe you live in a small town or attend a small church, and you feel like you've exhausted the options in terms of godly men in your area. Maybe you were dating someone who seemed like the perfect guy, only to be deeply let down by him or even utterly betrayed. Maybe you're recently divorced, widowed, or just past the age that you think is ideal for marriage. I don't care what statistics say. I don't care what our culture says. I know God's Word says that "no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."³ Hold on to those words more tightly than you hold on to whatever statistics you see in the news or on TV or in a book, or whatever foolishness you hear from your bitter auntie. As believers, we live by faith and not by sight.

"Uh, but, Pastor, I don't see any prospects."

That's right where you need to be. You're living by faith and not by sight.

Later in this book, we will talk about how to position

yourself and identify a potential lifelong partner. Don't neglect building a great life for yourself and pursuing your God-given purpose and potential. Marriage is amazing, but you don't need a partner to start living. Maximize this season of your life to the glory of God.

I want to encourage you to hold out for the man God has for you. When you're *ready* to be married, I know it can be tempting to consider settling. You may think about settling for the guy who's successful, charismatic, and interested in you but who is not walking with God and can't lead you and the family you hope to have one day. Don't compromise out of fear of being alone. God is faithful.

If you are grown and God has not called you to celibate singleness, you also need to be ready to date with intention.

To All the Singles on the Road

If you're single and would like to be married, this is a time of preparation. So, before you meet the person who will be yours, this is the season to be living well. You're becoming the person God made you to be. And as you wait in faith, you can have the confidence that—while you'd like to be married—you don't need marriage to *define* you. (But I don't mean that in a “I don't need a man” or “I don't need a woman” kind of way.) When you are secure in God, when your identity is anchored in Him, then you're ready to embrace this journey toward marriage. And you're ready to be *all in*.

Where We're Headed

If you're single and desire to be married, I want to journey with you. I believe God wants a good, healthy, beautiful, life-

giving, challenging-yet-rewarding, Christlike marriage for you. I really do. Getting there, however, is going to require some intentionality. You need a plan. I would like to walk you through the various mile markers—talking, dating, engagement, marriage—to help you journey well. Specifically, I want you to pay attention to your pace, and I want you to notice the signs along the way. For example, if you're just getting to know someone, stay in the slow lane. You don't need to be hanging out together *every* night. Have fun. Take it slow. You may feel like this person is solid, and you may move to the middle lane. Your relationship might pick up a bit of momentum as you're dating. And if you're in that fast lane, heading toward marriage? That's when you really need to be paying attention to *all the signs*. (And if you're three years into dating someone and still in the slow lane? Start looking for an exit.)

My friend, I care about you. And I want God's best for you. If it's hard to see the road ahead, I got you. My hope is that this book can be a road map to get you to the destination of your dreams.

I'm confident that God has good in store for you.

—Pastor Stephen



Begin with Your Destination in Mind

Know Where You Want to End Up

ABOUT FOUR YEARS AGO, I GOT SOME GREAT NEWS THAT HAD THE potential to impact my life in an extremely good way. When I found out, I knew I needed to stay dignified about it. Stay humble. I wasn't about to go on Instagram and holler, "I'm on top of the world!"

You know what I did in my house when I got that news? I turned on "So Fresh, So Clean" by Outkast, jumped up onto the kitchen countertop, and started shaking what my mama gave me. Guess what my wife, Zai, did? She jumped onto that countertop with me, and we screamed and danced and cut up and had the time of our lives. I want that for you! I want you to have someone to twerk on the kitchen countertop with for the rest of your life. This process of finding the right person to

spend your life with is one of the greatest and most important endeavors you can embark on next to knowing Christ. Why? Because . . .

Life. Is. Amazing.

Life. Is. Hard.

Life is full of so many wonderful ups, but it's also filled with some really difficult downs. When you have someone on your best days to share the joy, it makes a great day one thousand times better. But sometimes you'll be curled up on the couch together in front of the fire, crying your eyes out after a difficult day. Having an amazing person who is committed to you for life on those days is one of the greatest joys a person could have. Remember that the first thing God declared *not* good was for "man to be alone."¹ This tells us that marriage is good. And while not everyone is called to get married, marriage is one of God's most profound gifts to us. Dating, with the goal of finding God's person for you, can be tricky, but I'm here to tell you that the journey you're on is *worth it*. There is no greater joy on planet earth—outside of your relationship with God—than finding your person and building an amazing marriage.

When you've got a lover you can cut up with, it makes all the difference. The way Zai and I cut up is absolutely ridiculous sometimes. The Bible says that laughter is like medicine, and in a healthy marriage, you have someone to laugh with.² You'll have your inside jokes, your secret handshakes. You were made to enjoy life with that person as long as you both live. The first relationship God established, after a relationship with Himself, was between a husband and a wife. And God created that union to be *good*.

This doesn't mean that there won't be difficult days. But it does mean that the number of those days will be cut in half.

Had a hard day at work? In conflict with a friend? Get a scary diagnosis? There is someone at home who will hold you, encourage you, and feed you apple pie after one of those bad days. That person is in your corner. They'll listen to you. And this person is also going to double your good days! Dancing on our kitchen countertop with Zai? My joy was doubled. When you've got a committed lover in your corner, your bad days are cut in half and the good ones are *more* than doubled.

You've also got someone to build with. God hasn't given every gift to every person. In fact, I think that God purposefully doesn't give you all the tools you need to fulfill your destiny. He has placed some of the tools you lack in your spouse! For example, I'm proud to be an introvert; I think we have the deepest relationships with others. The amount of people who introverts know can be limited because of our discomfort in engaging new people. In ministry, what I started to find was that Zai would bring people into our world with her beautiful extroversion. That expanded our sphere of influence in our community. It expanded our support system. You hear it? I benefited from a gift I didn't possess. My partner is gifted in ways I am not. She has experience I don't. And that has been a blessing in all that God has called us to build.

I mentioned that life is hard, right? It's full of setbacks, disappointments, delays. And sometimes you can get discouraged and overwhelmed. In marriage, you have someone who can cheer you on and pick you up and remind you of the days that you won. When you're married, you have someone gifted by God to inspire and encourage you to accomplish the plan God has for you. When my strength is faltering, Zai is there for me and vice versa.

Have you ever seen a video of two people driving a stake or post into the ground? They might be setting up a tent or

driving the spike on a train track. You'll see that one person will hit the top with a sledgehammer and then the other person takes a turn. Then the first person again. And while one person is hitting it, the other person is winding up. And next thing you know, they've got this rhythm of hitting it over and over and over and over. That stake gets driven into the ground so quickly because there are two hammers heading in the same direction. I love what the Bible says in *The Message* translation of Ecclesiastes 4:9–10: “It’s better to have a partner than go it alone. Share the work, share the wealth. And if one falls down, the other helps.”

Finally, in marriage, you have an ally who can watch your back. Because the Enemy doesn't want to see you accomplish the plans God has for you. And when the Enemy attacks our house? I have a wife who is watching my back, and I am watching hers. We cover each other in prayer. Not only does she pray for me, but she is also vigilant, watching for people who may be sent by the Enemy to take advantage of me, drain my energy, or distract me from or undermine God's call on my life. Zai senses it, and she warns me. You better believe I am doing the same for her, though not in an overprotective or jealous-husband type of way; I'm prayerfully looking for the people divinely sent by God to advance my wife toward her calling and watching out for those who are not.

While there is no foolproof plan for finding the perfect spouse, I believe that if you will date with intentionality and purpose, God's got somebody who is going to blow your mind and give above and beyond all that you can ever ask, think, or imagine. So as you begin this journey of dating—or you decide to reset the way you've been dating after reading this book!—I want you to travel with the destination in mind. God made marriage to be *good*.

If you follow the road map, you will get there.

And when you get there, you need to arrive in good shape. That means I want you to check your engine *now*, as you begin the journey, so that your eventual partner is meeting someone who is—at least *relatively*—whole and healthy and thriving. Keep reading to discover how!

Lies You May Hear About Marriage and Parenting

It's fine for married couples to sleep in separate rooms or even live in separate houses.

Co-parenting is easier than committing to someone in marriage.

Your lustful habits will instantly be resolved once you're married.

Getting married will solve all your single-life problems (financial, emotional, codependent relatives, life planning, loneliness, travel aspirations, and everything in between).