



Have a heart that never hardens, a temper that never tires, and a touch that never hurts.



# Lesson 4

## Qualities of a Great Mate

**W**hat do you want in a mate? Whatever it is, you had better find it already present in someone you date, because you will marry someone you have dated, and seldom do people change for the good after marriage! So what kind of a person are you looking for? One fellow honestly said, "A good Christian who's got a great shape!" Girls are more likely to say, "Someone who's fun to be with and makes me feel good." Both want someone they can respect, someone who makes them feel special, and someone who likes them just the way they are.

What characteristics or qualities would be on your list for the ideal mate? For example, physical attractiveness may top your great-date list, but those with experience know that beauty is not nearly as important to a good marriage as a good moral character, interesting conversational skills, or a pleasing personality.

The following resources may be helpful as you consider qualities that are important to you. Perhaps you could start out with the "fruit of the Spirit" found in Galatians 5:22, 23. Wouldn't you like someone who has these qualities: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control? Another list of character

traits can be found in 2 Peter 1:5-8—faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. Or you could come up with a list of traits based on Bible principles—such as the "one another" texts given in Bible Search 1 in Lesson 2. Or perhaps Colossians 3:13, which mentions, "bear with each other" and forgive one another; or 1 Thessalonians 5:11, which admonishes us to "encourage one another" and "build each other up."

Also, you might discover traits and qualities by identifying those that you admire in your mother (if you're a male) or your father (if you're a female). Or observe married couples you respect and note the traits you admire.

Another place to look for qualities and traits is to read books by marriage-and-family professionals or by inspirational writers. *The Adventist Home* by Ellen G. White may be a good place to start.

The following should be helpful as you formulate your own list of qualities of a great mate. You may want to use the qualities listed to form your own list or prioritize the qualities listed to fit your preferences.

### **Personal Relationship With God**

Finding someone who is outwardly religious is not nearly as important as finding someone who is spiritually sensitive, is will-



ing to follow God's law, and has a personal relationship with God. And don't be fooled into thinking a person is spiritual just because he or she belongs to the same church as you. Here are some behaviors that might give you an indication of your friend's walk with God: Does your date talk about God? Can you discuss religious issues? Does your friend ever mention personal devotions? Do you ever see your date holding or reading a Bible? Do you enjoy going to religious meetings together? Does he or she have any speech or behavior patterns that seem inconsistent with a dedicated Christian? Does he or she dress like a Christian? Can you pray together? Does being together help you grow spiritually?

### **Pure**

Both young men and women respect the person who has made the decision to wait until marriage for his or her first sexual experience. This decision shows that the person respects God, himself or herself, and the opposite sex. However, some have had the gift of virginity stolen from them. Tragically, many of today's youth, both male and female, were sexually abused in childhood. This may have happened to you or someone you know. Victims should not feel guilty for something over which they had no control. If you're troubled by the memory, get professional help so it won't affect your marriage.

Mind purity is equally important. Does your date have pure thoughts and speech, as well as behavior? What about jokes told, music listened to, movies watched, books or

magazines read, and web sites visited? Mind pollution can lead to disrespect of the opposite sex and immoral behavior.

### **Trustworthy**

Almost always on a top-ten list of qualities are openness, honesty, and loyalty. It's impossible to build a stable marriage with a person you can't trust. Yet some people lie without thinking and for no apparent reason. Habitual lying is a very serious character flaw. Others are being two-faced, being true to you only as long as it's in the person's own best interest.

Too often couples play games. "I can't act as if I like him because that would be too forward." "If I told him the truth, he might not like me." Playing games in a relationship is a form of dishonesty, and as long as games are being played—don't get serious.

How truthful should you be? Casual dating does not require full disclosure. It may be enough to say, "I'm not proud of everything I did in my past, but I would like to put that behind me and be judged for the person I have become." But if your relationship continues to grow, it's important to share anything that might affect a marriage. It's better to risk breaking up than to have a marriage haunted by secrets.

### **Responsible**

You want to marry a responsible person who will do what needs to be done, hold down a good job, and help with the children. Some might qualify *responsible* by adding *ambitious* or *industrious* to the list.

Here are some questions that might help



you detect irresponsibility: Does he finish classes and projects he starts? Does she choose to complete homework and study for exams rather than party? Has he ever held a steady job? Does she see things that need to be done and do them? Does he volunteer to help? Does she get to places on time? Does he make lame excuses to get out of responsibilities? Does she take her talents seriously and work to improve her skills? Does he take care of his car or other personal possessions? Does she brag about getting out of work?

### **Not Easily Angered**

Anger is an important emotion that needs to be expressed in appropriate ways without hurting others. But uncontrolled temper outbursts, like blasting the horn when a car cuts in too close or yelling at a person, or the opposite extreme of withdrawing and pouting can be the symptoms of internal hostility that in a marriage becomes abusive and controlling.

Because dating couples are on their best behavior, you should take seriously any uncontrolled outburst you observe. Don't date someone with a history of hurting anyone (parent, sibling, friend) verbally or physically, unless the person has received effective counseling to deal with the underlying causes. If it can happen once, it can happen again, and after marriage you are likely to be the victim. The way a woman treats her younger brother and the way a man treats his mother and sisters is a strong indication of the person's character and how a spouse or children will be treated.

### **Willing to Solve Problems and Change, if Change Is Beneficial**

It's almost impossible to solve relationship problems when a spouse is inflexible and "knows" all the answers. Marry someone who will be honest enough to admit to being wrong, who doesn't have a habit of blaming others, and who is interested in solving problems, even if it means getting professional help. Marriage always poses new problems, but a "teachable spirit" is considered one of the best predictors of success in a marriage. That's why it's important to seek the advice of experienced individuals, counsel with professionals if there is a need, attend marriage, birthing, or child-rearing classes, read self-improvement books, or join growth groups.

### **Positive Self-Worth**

What do the following behaviors suggest?

Sue has a sharp tongue. Clint talks about himself and how great he is. Lori always puts herself down. Todd is a name dropper. Jessie won't try anything new. Marta withdraws when she is in group situations and won't ask questions in class. Tim is constantly asking for affirmation, "How do you think I did?" Frank is a gossip. Leslie has a knack for slamming others and pouting. James is always getting his feelings hurt. All of the persons have something in common. They are all suffering from a poor self-concept. If you don't want to live a lifetime having to tiptoe around a person's fragile self-concept or have to hold yourself back for fear of how the other will react, then be careful not to get emotionally involved with



someone who has a low sense of self-worth. People with a low sense of self-worth don't make good marriage partners!

### **Pleasing Personality**

Happiness is a choice; it springs from a contented heart, not from things. Marrying a person with a negative attitude, one who has uncontrolled bouts of depression, or one who ties personal happiness to the circumstances of life, can be psychologically exhausting. It's not much fun to live with a negative, critical, pessimistic, complaining person or someone who habitually puts self, you, or others down. Beware of the person who is happy only when you are around or when you act a certain way. You're going to get tired of being responsible for another person's happiness, and you could end up feeling guilty when life brings disappointments and depression.

### **Accepts You Unconditionally**

You want to find someone who loves and accepts you just the way you are, regardless of your weight, what you eat, whether or not you have a high-paying job, or how proper your grammar is! Shy away from the person who wants to improve you. Watch the person who is always picking lint off your jacket or straightening your tie. If this behavior is irritating before marriage, you can be sure it will get significantly worse afterward!

### **Affectionate**

How can you assess whether or not the person you are dating is an affectionate per-

son when his or her restraint may actually be a choice so your physical relationship doesn't advance too fast? And on the opposite side, how can you be sure the affection shown to you is not just to entice you to provide sexual favors? The answer is to look for tender words, acts, and touches that are given naturally and appropriately throughout the day, not just in private to initiate petting.

### **Thoughtfulness**

Thoughtfulness for others is shown in many ways. How does your date treat his or her parents and yours? Chances are you'll get treated very much the same way. Does she see things that need to be done and offer to help, or does he put his own needs first? Does he open the car door or wait to seat you at the table? Manners are important—and they seldom get better after marriage!

### **Good Health Habits**

Teens sometimes shirk health habits, feeling they are invincible. But by forty or fifty, such things as overeating, snacking between meals, little or no exercise, and smoking begin to take their toll, and you can find yourself married to health problems that could have been prevented. Bad health practices are difficult to break; that is why it's best to look for a date who has already established simple habits of cleanliness and hygiene such as brushing and flossing teeth and frequent bathing. In addition, look for the following health habits:

1. Sleeps approximately seven or eight



hours out of twenty-four (too little sleep or too much may be a symptom of other problems).

2. Eats breakfast.
3. Doesn't eat between meals.
4. Keeps a moderate weight—not too fat or too thin.
5. Exercises.
6. Doesn't smoke.
7. Doesn't drink.

### **Attitude About Children**

Finding someone who likes children, understands them, and enjoys having them around is important if you choose to have children—and chances are you will, even though you might not think so now.

### **Good Conversationalist**

What men and women are looking for in this area may differ. Typically, men enjoy women who participate in a stimulating conversation on a variety of subjects. You won't do this easily unless you are well read and keep in touch with what is happening in the world. When women identify the characteristics of a "good conversationalist," they are generally referring to someone who is willing to listen and communicate feelings.

### **Intelligence**

Being a genius is not as important as one's thirst for knowledge and one's common sense. But if you enjoy reading, getting good grades, advancing your educational opportunities, and participating in intellectual discussions, chances are you'd like to

find someone who would enjoy these same activities.

### **Physical Attractiveness**

Looks are important, especially a neat and well-groomed appearance. But looks can change! What's really important is what's on the inside. You'll be surprised how attractive a person can become when you see the beauty of his or her character! Far too many young people use appearance as a sole criterion for judging a potential date and in doing so are overlooking individuals who would make great marriage partners.

In addition to desiring certain qualities in a mate, you need to do some self-analysis about your own traits and whether you are a desirable person. The following points may help you evaluate qualities you need to be a great mate.

### **How to Be a Great Mate**

- 1. Become the person you'd like to find in a great date.** Finding the right person will not necessarily ensure your marriage happiness; being the right mate, however, may. So before going in search of your "Mr. Right" or "Ms. Everything," take a good look at yourself and ask, "Would I make a great mate?" How do you measure up on the traits you want to find in a potential mate? One tends to marry someone with similar values and ideals. One of the best ways to ensure finding what you want is to become that kind of person yourself. A challenge for



many teens is to overcome self-centeredness and be concerned about the interests of others.

**2. Value and accept yourself.** The only way you can make sure you won't marry another person because you need that person is to develop your own personal sense of value. You can accept and value someone else only as much as you accept and value yourself. If you don't like who you are, the chances are great that you will try to find a partner who makes you feel better about yourself. You use that person to meet your unmet needs. This is how unhealthy emotional dependence begins. Rather than falling into an emotional dependence, concentrate on developing personal value.

How is personal value developed? By the Triple A method suggested by Eugene H. Peterson, author of *The Message Bible: Acceptance, Affection, and Approval*.

**Acceptance:** You must feel unconditionally accepted by at least one significant other (parents, grandparents, teachers, or friends).

**Affection:** You must feel your presence is desired by at least one significant other.

**Approval:** You must feel that someone approves of you. If you don't get it from your parents, the temptation is to become a chameleon and do whatever is necessary to gain approval from your friends.

If you do not feel the Triple A's

from your parents, you have a responsibility to let them know and work on correcting this oversight. Many parents have no idea how their teens really feel and don't realize that they lack understanding. If it takes family counseling, urge your parents to go with you! If they are unwilling, discuss your concerns with your school counselor, Bible teacher, or pastor. And in the meantime, practice showing the Triple A's to your parents. They, too, need Acceptance, Affection, and Approval!

About a hundred years ago a farmer outside Beaumont, Texas, began selling parcels of his land to provide for his family. One day an oil executive told him there might be oil on his land and offered to pay him royalties for drilling rights. The result was a gusher—Spindletop, the most famous well in history. The farmer became an instant millionaire. The truth was, the oil was there all the time, but he didn't realize the value of what he had until the resource was tapped. We're a lot like that farmer. Sometimes we think we have to "sell" or compromise ourselves to be valued by someone. Our value, however, is in the fact that Jesus created us, died for us, and has a plan for us. Because of Christ we have inherent value. But it won't do us much good if we don't believe it!

When you value and accept yourself, you will have the courage to begin making changes in your life. Only when you are willing to accept the fact



that you aren't perfect and, therefore, are willing to change for the better will you make a great mate.

### **3. Deal with the hurts and pains in your past.**

A forty-six-year-old physician once said, "Both of my marriage failures could have been prevented if I had gotten the psychological counseling I needed before my first marriage. Love and prayer are not enough to overcome the wounds of past misfortunes."

After the breakup of his second marriage, he finally got help. He was stunned to learn that on a battery of personality tests, he went off the scale on the dominance factor. As he began to work with a counselor to bring his need for dominance into the healthy range, he recalled that his parents controlled his life with harsh punishment. Hatred and bitterness grew until he rebelled. Then during his teen years he found himself controlling others by cool, calculated, standoffish types of behavior that caused people to become uncomfortable and finally give in to him. He became highly opinionated and would not give up until he convinced others that he was right. The problem continued when he carried this behavior into marriage. How unfortunate Bob didn't discover his problem before he got married the first time!

Is psychological help the only way to clean up a painful past? No. Learn all you can about yourself from person-

ality or temperament tests you'll be given in high school, and if there are areas that need improvement, ask your teacher to give you helpful assignments. You may also wish to join a teen support group or a twelve-step spiritual recovery group. Perhaps a counselor or another trusted adult can help you locate such a group.

Is prayer enough? Probably not. These behavior traits are set in motion in early childhood, and it is only through feedback, accountability, and total submission to God that character defects can be overcome. This will be discussed again in Lesson 10.

Becoming the person you'd like to find in a great date, valuing and accepting yourself, and dealing with the pathology of your past are important factors that will help you become a great mate. Conquer these, and someday some special person is going to be mighty lucky to win your love.



### **Anchor Text**

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22, 23).



### **Bible Search**

#### **1. Finding your value in Christ**

Begin your search for personal value by soaking up the positive texts in the Bible that will give you an indication of how valuable you are to God. Look up the following texts and write what you find



about why you are valuable.

A. Psalm 139:13-16.

B. Jeremiah 1:5.

C. John 3:16.

D. John 14:1-3.

E. 1 John 3:1.

F. Isaiah 64:6.

## 2. Building your personal value

Look up the following texts, underline them in your Bible, and write out the thoughts in your own words. You may want to read these passages from a number of different versions.

A. Psalm 8:3-5.

B. Jeremiah 29:11.

C. Jeremiah 31:3.

D. Zephaniah 3:17.

E. Matthew 17:20.

F. Luke 15:8-10.

G. Galatians 2:20.

H. Philippians 3:20, 21.

I. Philippians 4:13.

J. 1 John 3:2.

K. 1 John 3:24.

L. 1 John 5:19, 20.

## 3. What does it mean to be perfect?

Sometimes people doubt God's acceptance of them because they aren't perfect and don't feel worthy. The Bible clearly teaches that God treats us as if we had already attained perfection even though we are still growing Christians, struggling in many areas. However, numerous Bible texts demonstrate on one hand that various Bible characters were thought of as "perfect" in God's sight, while on the other hand they still struggled in one or more areas of life.

A favorite expression of Ellen G. White as she tried to describe this reality was "the robe of Christ's righteousness."

When you wear a coat, someone looking on sees the coat, not the shirt under it.

Christ puts on us His perfect robe of righteousness, covering our sin. Read thoughtfully the following statement from her book *Christ's Object Lessons*:

The white robe of innocence was worn by our first parents when they were placed by God in holy Eden.... But when sin entered, they severed their connection with God, and the light that had encircled them departed....

Nothing can man devise to supply the place of his lost robe of innocence....

Only the covering which Christ Himself has provided can make us meet to appear in God's presence. This covering, the robe of His own righteousness, Christ will put upon every repenting, believing soul.... This robe, woven in the loom of heaven, has in it not one thread of human devising. Christ in His humanity wrought out a perfect character, and this character He offers to impart to us.<sup>1</sup>

So don't give up on yourself or ever think God has given up on you because you're not perfect. **Allow your behavior to catch up to your new perfect status with God. But never base your status with God on your**



## What to look for in a husband

It may surprise you to discover the relevance of Ellen White's counsel written more than a hundred years ago.

"Let a young woman accept as a life companion one who possesses pure, manly traits of character, one who is diligent, aspiring, and honest, one who loves and fears God" (*The Ministry of Healing*, 359).

"True love is a plant that needs culture. Let the woman who desires a peaceful, happy union, who would escape future misery and sorrow, inquire before she yields her affections, Has my lover a mother? What is the stamp of her character? Does he recognize his filial obligations to her? Is he mindful of her wishes and happiness? If he does not respect and honor his parents, he will not manifest respect and love and kindness and attention towards his wife. When the novelty of marriage is over, will he love me still? Will he be patient with my mistakes, or will he be critical, overbearing, and dictatorial? True affection will overlook many mistakes; love will not discern them" (*Manuscript Releases*, 18:312, 313).

"Before giving her hand in marriage, every woman should inquire whether he with whom she is about to unite her destiny is worthy. What has been his past record? Is his life pure? Is the love which he expresses of a noble, elevated character, or is it a mere emotional fondness? Has he the traits of character that will make her happy? Can she find true peace and joy in his affection? **Will she be allowed to preserve her individuality, or must her judgment and conscience be surrendered to the control of her husband? As a disciple of Christ, she is not her own; she has been bought with a price. Can she honor the Savior's claims as supreme?**... Will body and soul, thoughts and purposes, be preserved pure and holy? These questions have a vital bearing upon the well-being of every woman who enters the marriage relation" (*Testimonies for the Church*, 5:362, emphasis supplied).

## What to look for in a wife

"Let a young man seek one to stand by his side who is fitted to bear her share of life's burdens, one whose influence will ennoble and refine him and who will make him happy in her love" (*The Ministry of Healing*, 359).

"In your choice of a wife study her character. Will she be one who will be patient and painstaking?" "Will the one you marry bring happiness to your home? Is [she] an economist, or will she, if married, not only use all her own earnings, but all of yours to gratify a vanity, a love of appearance? ...These things should be duly considered, for they have a bearing upon your future life" (*The Adventist Home*, 46).

**behavior.** Focus on the robe of Christ's righteousness. In it alone is the assurance of salvation.

Complete the worksheet provided by your teacher on which you will consider four Bible characters and how they are

viewed as "perfect" and "not yet perfect."

## Endnotes

1. Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1941), 310, 311.



# Reaction

## Discussion Questions

1. Do you think men and women would list the same traits as important in a date? If not, how do you think they would differ?
2. What traits do you feel are most important for a great date? Would your list differ for a great mate?
3. Why is it important to develop the same traits you are looking for in a potential mate?
4. Why is it important to have a positive self-concept before marriage?
5. If you don't have a positive self-concept, how can you get it?
6. Why should a person get rid of the pathology of his or her past before marriage?

## Personal Response

1. How did you measure up on the great-mate traits given in the narrative? What traits could use some improvement?
2. Spend at least ten minutes each day for a month reading your Bible and record the texts you find that make you feel valuable and loved. Write them down so you can read them again and again.

## Practical Application

### 1. Essentials for a Future Mate

- A. Make a list of essential characteristics you want in a future mate. If you feel comfortable, exchange lists with a friend or two; then add to your list whatever you feel you may have missed.
- B. Now that you have your list, you should realize you'll never find your "perfect" mate—because there is no such thing! Therefore, you must decide which of the things you have listed are absolutely essential. You can do this by either rank ordering your list, putting the most important traits at the top, or by breaking your list into two categories: those traits that are absolutely essential, and those that would be nice—but that you could live without.



## 2. Personal Traits

- A. Under the following two headings, list traits you like about yourself and those you dislike.

Traits I Like About Myself

Traits I Dislike About Myself

- B. Now compare your two lists. Which one is longer?
- C. Ask two friends to confidentially and honestly tell you three qualities that you have and three qualities that you don't have. Listen carefully to their input and then write out your response. What did you like? What would you like to change about yourself?
- D. Now take your "dislike" list and think of one thing you could do to help you overcome each negative trait. If you are actively working on a self-improvement plan, you will feel better about yourself. WARNING! Don't try to be perfect. It's the process of

working toward becoming a better person that counts, not the ability to never make a mistake.

- E. Post your "like" list in a place where you will see it often, such as on your bathroom mirror. Each time you see it, read it and say, "Thanks, Lord, for making me with these traits!"
- F. God made you special. How must He feel when you don't value His creation?