



Challenging the Unnecessary  
Delay of Marriage

Ted Cunningham

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*To my children,  
Corynn and Carson,  
and their future spouses*



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age twenty-one and telling them about Amy. They were more than enthusiastic. I appreciate my parents' belief in young marriage.

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# Contents

Chapter 1: Chase the Foxes	13
Chapter 2: Please, No More Purity Talks!	25
Chapter 3: The Tone	49
Chapter 4: The Consequences	65
Chapter 5: Necessary Delays	83
Chapter 6: Unnecessary Delays	101
Chapter 7: Age, Privilege, and Responsibility	121
Chapter 8: Character	137
Chapter 9: Chemistry	161
Chapter 10: Competency	175
Chapter 11: Calling	187
Chapter 12: First Signs of Trouble	195
Chapter 13: Eat, Drink, and Be Married	205
Notes	217
Scripture Index	221





## Chapter 1

# Chase the Foxes



Catch for us the foxes,  
the little foxes that ruin the vineyards,  
our vineyards that are in bloom.

—Song of Songs 2:15

I am a promarriage pastor. I believe God created marriage to be enjoyed between a man and woman for a lifetime. The only part of creation that God declared as “not good” was man’s singleness, and throughout Scripture marriage is normative, while singleness is the exception. So young men need to start approaching young women, falling in love, and getting married—*it’s biblical*. I believe Satan has duped our culture into believing the lie that says, “Marriage is the problem, not man.” He has convinced us that one of the best ways to prosper in life is to abstain from marriage or at least delay it as long as possible.

Young people have fallen for the lie. Delay marriage, be independent, finish college, build your career, save up your money, and have sex outside of marriage. You've been told to wait until you have it all figured out and have found someone who has done the same. That's why you keep hearing the words, "You're too young."

I believe that young age is an unnecessary delay of marriage. If you and your fiancé(e) walked into our church today, with budding love in your hearts, we would rejoice with you, even if you were only twenty years old. We would walk you through biblical qualifications for marriage, and if you were ready, we'd give you the pastoral nod. Then we would set a date and throw a raging party.

Once upon a time, a single Shullamite woman desired the love of a shepherd king. Her desire was intensely sexual when she shared,

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—  
 for your love is more delightful than wine.  
 Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes;  
 your name is like perfume poured out.  
 No wonder the maidens love you!  
 Take me away with you—let us hurry!  
 Let the king bring me into his chambers. (Song  
 1:2–4)

Have you experienced such love, and if so, how old were you? Do you have an intense desire to be with that person forever? Do you feel God could be knitting the two of you together? Now, have you ever been invalidated in that love by a friend or family member? Has anyone ever told you, "You'll get over it," "There are lots

of options,” “You don’t know what you need,” or “There’s time for that later”?

I want to validate your love, help you discern whether God is knitting your hearts together, and then encourage you not to let age stop you. If your parents are listening in, I hope they hear my challenge to you. Remember, you are called to honor Mom and Dad. They in turn must guard their hearts from becoming foxes and destroying the buds of your young love. Solomon pictured young marriage as a blossoming vineyard (Song 2:15). There are many foxes that seek to destroy the bud before it can bloom. Some foxes are intentional, and some are not. Some are vicious, while some are simply misinformed.

My daughter, Corynn, is seven years old, and she is my princess. I write this book to give myself plenty of time to prepare her, her mom, and her future husband. But I do not want to be an overreacting, overprotective parent. Today we use the terms *hovering* and *helicopter* to describe parents who give their children no room to breathe, suppressing their emotions. One day, years from now, Corynn will come home and tell me she has met the man she will marry. At that moment, my plan is to pause, take a breath, load a small firearm, and praise what God may be forming in them.

Last year Corynn started kindergarten. The best part of my day was dropping her off at school each morning at eight thirty. The second best part of my day was picking her up from school in the afternoon. I’ll never forget the day she told me about a little boy we’ll call “Jason.”

“He likes me, Dad,” she said.

“Really?” I asked.

“Yep, and I think I like him,” she said with one eye closed and head slightly tilted, waiting for my response.

I’d prepared for this day. I told myself I would validate her and not overreact. Too many parents freak out at the signs of young love, and I was not going to be one of them. I would avoid statements like “You’re too young!” “What! You don’t need to have a boyfriend at this age!” “You can’t like him!” or “Boys are evil!”

What we’re thinking and want to say is, “I wish you didn’t have these feelings at such an early age,” “Stop feeling that way,” or “You’ll get over it and I hope pretty quick!” I rebuke all of those responses in the name of Jesus. Send them back to the pit where they belong!

Corynn was not prepared for my response.

“Well, honey, do you think he is *the one*?” I asked her.

“DAD!” was her reply.

I was prepared to go further. Inspired by my friend Greg Smalley, I was ready to help her work on her first family budget and start looking for their first place. Greg allowed his elementary-school-aged daughter to go so far as to plan where she and her boyfriend would live after they wed, how they would make a living, and even set the date of the wedding. But once they crunched the numbers, it did not seem feasible. He’s a great dad.

I’m sure you have a young-love story. It may be the story you are writing at this very moment. You may be asking, “Have I found the right one?” “How long should we date before talking marriage?” “Will my parents approve?” “What will I be missing out on if I marry now?” “Do I need some time to discover more of life on my own?” “Will my friends think I’m insecure for marrying so young?”

“Maybe some will think I fear being alone?” Great questions! A quick Internet search can give you both the good and bad answers to all of those questions.

I hope to give you answers that are first and foremost biblical and Christ honoring. However, the answers you find in the Scriptures are the complete opposite of what you’ll find through Google. With so many different answers out there, it’s no surprise that people are uncertain and fearful of marriage.

Before we answer the obvious questions, let’s get one thing out on the table: *Marrying young is not the problem*. Love is from our Lord. Being in love is a blessing. If God is arousing love in you for another and you plan to get married, we should be praising what He is doing, not telling you to wait unnecessarily.

Contrary to what you may have been told, marriage is not the reason people divorce. While I am an advocate for marrying young, I’m an even bigger advocate for helping you grow up. Experts call it “eradicating prolonged adolescence.” And the *Young and in Love* message screams, “Take personal responsibility for your life!” Entering adulthood doesn’t require that you wait until you’re twenty-five years old, the age some researchers now believe is the milestone for adulthood. I don’t want that for you because frankly it’s unnecessary. Satan wants you to stay a little boy or girl because it leads you to focus on yourself and results in prolonged adolescence. But God wants you to press on to maturity.

I am blessed that I met my wife, Amy, at Liberty University, a school that was over-the-top pro-love and pro-dating. The founder of Liberty, Dr. Jerry Falwell, taught in chapel every Wednesday and regularly encouraged us not to kiss dating good-bye but to say hello

and start asking girls out. Dr. Falwell went so far with this idea that he would often say, “If you’re interested in a girl on this campus and she is dating someone else, but not yet engaged, then by all means ask her out.” On one occasion he even said, “If the guy she is dating isn’t committed enough to put a ring on her finger, he doesn’t deserve her. Ask her out!” Thank You, Jesus, and thank you, Jerry. Jerry was not only an advocate for young marriage; he believed in a *competitive* dating scene.

So I did exactly as I was told!

Amy was twenty when we met, and I was twenty-one. She was in a serious relationship with a young ministry major. I knew it would be a challenge, but I tried to play it smooth. Now, this next part may cause you to stop reading and throw the book away, and I am okay with that. I didn’t have the guts to ask her out myself, so I had my friend Austin Deloach set it up.

Austin was the senior-class president, and he didn’t seem to enjoy the details that came with his office. I was the junior-class president, and I thrived on the organization and administration that came with mine. So in the spring of 1995, Austin asked me what he could do to help with the junior-senior cruise.

“Get me a date for the cruise with Amy Freitag,” I said to him.

“Will do,” he said. And that was that. He set me up on a blind date with Amy on Smith Mountain Lake outside of Lynchburg, Virginia.

That night I decided she was the one. Later, I told Austin that I would one day ask Amy to marry me, and I did. Twelve months later, in Fremont, Nebraska, after I asked for permission from Amy’s dad, I presented Amy with a marquise-cut diamond ring. The karat size is

an unnecessary detail, but keep in mind, I'd just graduated college. We were married on October 19, 1996. She was twenty-one, and I was twenty-two.

Never once did we think we were too young. Unprepared? *Yes*. Too young? No. Our parents blessed it. So did both of our churches. The idea that we needed to wait another five or even seven years, get good jobs, learn to be independent, and then settle down never once crossed our minds. For us, marriage was a milestone at the front end of adulthood, not the back end, and we genuinely looked forward to marriage and figuring out our lives together.

Shannon Fox, a marriage and family therapist and mom to my son's best friend, recently wrote a book called *Last One Down the Aisle Wins*. In her book, Shannon encourages young people to wait until at least age twenty-five before they marry. In her book, she writes:

What if we told you that we know the key to more than doubling your chances of staying married? And what if we told you that this key was something you can use right now, whether you're single without a prospect in sight, in a serious relationship, or engaged to the love of your life and knee-deep in *Brides* magazines? How much would it be worth to you? Would it be worth five easy payments of \$29.99 plus shipping and handling? Or how about just the price of this book?

Here's the key: **Don't marry young.** In fact, don't get married until you're thirty. According

to the National Center for Health Statistics, your chances of staying married more than double if you get married after the age of twenty-five.<sup>1</sup>

Shannon is not alone in her advocacy for delayed marriage. Campus pastors are challenging students to neglect young budding love in order to focus on their relationship with Christ. Parents push the delay with bribes and the “you’ve got your whole life ahead of you” argument. Friends encourage the delay for fear of losing their buddies. Churches teach the delay as an antidote to divorce. Young lovers delay marriage in order to give cohabitation a shot. Young women delay in hopes of finding the perfect guy. Young men delay to give themselves a few more years to party and “sow their wild oats.” Researchers give us their studies that show the delay is best for your marital longevity and happiness.

I hate the delay, and I firmly believe it is unnecessary. My heart is to validate young love and provide a framework to make sure you are ready and the one you have chosen is *wedable*. Ultimately, *Young and in Love* honors marriage and encourages marriages in the making. This is not another purity book teaching you how to suppress any and all feelings of love. No way! I want you to express your love and then enjoy marriage.

So if you kissed dating good-bye, it’s time to say hello! If you have kept true love waiting, I tell you now, *wait no more*. Get married!

The *Young and in Love* message comes with a warning label. You are reading *Young and in Love*, not *Young and Looking for Love* or *Young and Not Looking for Love*. Reader discretion is advised.



This book is not for the intentional single, the guy or gal who has decided not to marry. You will get extremely frustrated with this book.

This is not a dating book covering the how-tos of dating or courting.

This is not a book to give to your single friends and say, “Read this, find someone, and get married.”

This is not a book about cohabitation.

This is not a book about the woes of society.

This book will not help you find a soul mate.

This book is not for the single person who wants to be married but can't find someone.

This is not an abstinence book with a purity message for your youth group.

This book is not intended to teach singles how to be content and productive while they wait patiently for God to send them the right person.

*Then who is it for?*

This book is for the single man or woman who is in love and wants to get married but is being told by everyone around him or her, “You're too young!” This book is for the person in his or her late teens or early twenties who needs to say “so long” to prolonged adolescence. If you are in love but the one you want to marry feels irresponsible marrying young, then I hope you both will be equipped to chase the foxes and avoid unnecessary delay.

This book is a primer for your premarital counseling. However, I won't make you sit in a pastor's office, burdening you with budgets, personality tests, or wedding planning. I want to challenge you to embrace maturity and adulthood at an early age. This book honors

Scripture. The Bible honors marriage, prepares us to be adults, and keeps family and friends from becoming foxes. I am a pastor. My heart is to bless your young love, correct, rebuke, and teach through Scripture. My daughter, Corynn, is seven years old, and my son, Carson, is five. She is my princess, and he is my mighty warrior. I advocate for young marriage with both of them in mind, and I do not take that lightly.

And finally, in all honesty, I hope this book starts a movement that honors marriage, eradicates prolonged adolescence, embraces adulthood, and builds lifelong committed marriages.

While there are many valid reasons to delay marriage, your age should not be on that list. Marriages fall apart for all sorts of reasons: unmet expectations, unrealistic expectations, buying into the “soul mate” myth, prolonged adolescence, lack of commitment, and a culture that devalues marriage. But to say those all go away with age is a fallacy. The issue is maturity, not age.

### A Special Note to the Frustrated Female Reader

The purpose of this book is to help couples chase away the foxes of young love. Perhaps many single readers will set the book down in frustration. That is completely understandable. Several single women read this book toward the end of the writing process. Janae Bass, a young woman from our church, sent me the following message on Facebook:

Okay, so I just finished reading your book *Young and in Love*. I really liked it a lot, and I agree that to be “young and in love” would be great. I know

that you said in the book and I've heard you say lots of times at church that men should be men and ask girls out. So my question is, what do you suggest for single girls in the meantime? I'm not a hermit; I'm involved at church and in the community. I don't sit in my apartment at night and wait for Prince Charming to knock on the door—but still no men.... If you have any advice for us single women while we wait for men to be men, please let me know.

When I read this message to my wife, she said, "Girls need to learn how to appropriately flirt." Her answer did not surprise me.

I get the frustration of waiting for men to initiate. I encouraged the young woman from our church to express her interest. And no, I do not consider showing interest and chasing the same thing. Flirting says, "I'm interested and would like to explore the possibilities." Chasing says, "I want you and will pursue you." Big difference! Showing and expressing interest in a guy can be extremely difficult for young women who have been raised to be independent and to allow men to take the lead. You may fear that flirting communicates desperation, weakness, or too much strength.

I believe God can use you in the maturing process of young men. He used Amy in my life to solidify my calling and vocation. It is absolutely permissible for you to begin spending time with a guy, whether you call that dating or something else, and expressing your interest. Don't allow your frustration over the immaturity of young men to turn your heart cold, aloof, or distant to the prospects of marriage.

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Check out [www.youngandinlove.com](http://www.youngandinlove.com) for video podcasts, articles, and resources to help you prepare for marriage.

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## Young and in Love Marriage Journal

*What are your beliefs about marriage and singleness?*

*If you are young and in love, when did you know this was the guy/gal you wanted to marry?*

*What are several good reasons to delay marriage?*

*What are several bad reasons to delay marriage?*

## *Fox Alerts*

Throughout this book, “foxes” are not hot chicks. Foxes are individuals, groups, or things that seek to destroy or delay your blossoming marriage. I have included twenty-four fox alerts in this book. As a pastor, my role is that of shepherd and teacher, and in that role, I will help you identify and protect yourself from these savage beasts. My staff is in hand, and I am ready to go!