



Courtship in Crisis: The Case for Traditional Dating

Thomas Umstatt Jr.

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Courtship in Crisis: The Case for Traditional Dating Thomas Umstattd Jr. **The Experiment Failed**

In the 1990s, a huge movement swept through America. Millions of young people stopped dating and embraced something new called “courtship” which promised to usher singles into marriage while avoiding the dangers of dating. It sounded wonderful.

The problem? It didn't work.

The resulting singleness epidemic left a generation with broken hearts and little hope.

There's Another Way

In *Courtship In Crisis*, Thomas Umstattd Jr. explains where the courtship crisis came from, and why it failed. More importantly, he lays out an alternative model that works.

"Courtship in Crisis is a well-reasoned, Spirit-infused breath of fresh air for anyone wanting to re-think their dating habits."

-- Mary DeMuth, author of *The Wall Around Your Heart*

Thomas Umstattd Jr. is the former head of PracticalCourtship.com and co-founder of the Austin Rhetoric Club, a homeschool speech and debate club in Austin, Texas. He is an international speaker and CEO of Castle Media Group, LLC. Thomas sits on the board of directors for several nonprofits, including the Texas Alliance for Life.

Courtship in Crisis: The Case for Traditional Dating Details

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Ashley says

Okay, so I was hesitating to write a review of this book, but here goes anyway.

I really, really enjoyed this. It was super insightful, and seeing the systems used for finding the 'love of your life' laid out in an objective manner really was helpful to me. I've watched the Duggars, and that's how I was even ever introduced to the idea of courting. I can tell you that the author's representation of courting seems pretty accurate to me and really lays everything out.

Before being presented with the idea of traditional dating I thought that if I were to ever be asked out on a date by anyone, it would be a big deal, and of course I would need to know if I actually even *liked* the person who was asking me, as in I'd need to know if I liked them in a more-than-just-a-friend type of way beforehand if I were to say yes to going out with them. So when I first started reading this book, it honestly blew my mind a little.

To think that dating could be casual, but not in a bad way was really kinda crazy to me. And to anyone that doesn't know, traditional dating takes the stance of 'if you don't go out with a person, how do you know if you like them/are compatible with them?' and says how you can't really get to know a person unless you spend one-on-one time with them. It emphasizes the idea of being open to a first date, and after that first date deciding if you'd want to go on another or not. The whole concept is also that the more dates you go on, the more you will know what kind of person is right for you.

Along with that, I would say another key component to things is the idea of you not being committed to any one person. Nowadays with modern dating, 'dating' is the equivalent of 'going steady' or being boyfriend and girlfriend, but with traditional dating it just means you're dating each other...and going on dates with other people. I could explain more, but honestly if you're interested just go ahead and read the book! I really think it's worth it. :)

So after reading the whole thing though, honestly to me traditional dating sounds like the best option here.

Another thing I really liked about the book was how the author just packed his writing full with biblical principles, putting in verses throughout and just bringing God into things. The real life examples and stories were also pretty interesting, and it was cool bringing things back to the fact that this isn't just an *idea*. It's something that's been tried and proven to work. And not in the past few years either. Traditional dating was something everyone did back in the 50s...so yeah!

I might end up bumping my review up to five stars after trying this all out for myself. I first learned about the book and traditional dating in a group, and those of us who want to are going to be doing what we are calling an experiment...where we all try this whole idea of traditional dating. Like, among each other. Soooo...haha, yeah! Should be really interesting.

In closing...if you're considering reading this book, just do it. It's really good and very helpful. I am thinking about buying my own copy of it honestly, I had to keep fighting the urge as I was reading the book to not highlight and underline things as I'm reading since I only borrowed the book and don't own it. But yeah, this is a really good read!

John Otte says

A good book that talks about the current state of romantic relationships within Christianity. Apparently many people have turned to a concept called "Modern Courtship" to protect themselves from heartbreak and sin. But Umstadd's argument is that this movement has done little to actually protect anyone. Instead, he suggests that Christians use a method he calls "Traditional Dating." I find his argument very persuasive.

The problem is that my particular corner of Christendom hasn't really been affected by the Modern Courtship movement. Or, if it has been, I haven't seen it. So while I appreciated the ideas that Umstadd presented, I suspect it would be difficult to sell this to folks in my little corner of the faith.

Still a very good book and worthy of being read, even by those who may be wondering what Courtship is.

Dina Sleiman says

There was a lot about this book that I really loved, and some parts I loved less, but overall I would recommend it for anyone in the courtship movement, curious about the courtship movement, or just interested in relational and societal trends. This book was all about breaking people out of bondage and extra-Biblical rules that have been foisted onto segments of the Christian population. For that I stand, climb up on my chair, loudly applaud, as well as hoot, holler, and whistle!!!! That part of the book was wonderful and incredibly well stated from someone who had been in the courtship movement and bought it in full along with all the accompanying shame, guilt, and heartache, even preaching for it at some point. I loved the chapters about the history of dating and courtship and found them fascinating. I would also mention that the book is very well-written.

Now for the part that I loved less. In place of "modern courtship" or "modern dating," the author offers a different, somewhat rule-based, system he calls "traditional dating." There's nothing wrong with the guidelines he suggests, and he does mention that they're just practical suggestions and that you should be free to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I just don't understand why he needed a new prescriptive system at all. I guess this part will make more sense to those who so vehemently rejected dating at some point. And/or to those who love and need rules. It will serve as a bridge for them back to a sane way of finding a spouse. I come from a different more freedom and grace loving side of Christianity. My daughter and I read one of the Josh Harris books which encouraged courtship when she was in 10th grade. Although there was some good stuff in the book, we could both immediately see that it was Biblically unbalanced. My parents, I, and now my college-aged children all practiced what I would call, for lack of a better term, "Christian dating." Basically, being a Christian and applying Christian principles while dating. We didn't need a list of rules, and it worked fine for all of us.

Other things that stood out to me: I feel I understand the courtship mindset better now. I've been concerned about how to handle things if any of my children ever want a relationship with a courtship-minded person. I see more clearly now the dangers and concerns. Also, I liked that the author didn't shy away from the fact that courtship fathers are domineering, that girls having their fathers as gatekeepers in marriage stunts their emotional maturity, and that too many courtship marriages have resulted in emotional and/or physical abuse. He mentions, rather tongue in cheek I think, that to his knowledge at least no courtship father's are charging money to marry their daughters, which illustrates how these girls are subtly being treated like property. In his question and answer section, he even offers advice for women in abusive marriages to get out and find support. I'm standing on the actual table now and clapping for that part. I do wish he'd gone even more into the core issues of such a patriarchal system and how it really fosters and facilitates abuse and even draws men with abusive tendencies, but I realize that wasn't the purpose of this book.

Wow, I rarely write reviews this long, but I think you can tell that this book really affected me. I will also mention that as a Christian author, I have recently been pretty harshly slapped by what the author calls the "Purity Police." This book was a balm to my battle-weary soul, and now I will better know how to pray for these people so trapped in and weighed down by bondage. Honestly, it grieves me. All Christians who understand freedom, grace, and true relationship with God need to be praying for these "Purity Police" type of people.

Rachelle Cobb says

I've always been on the fringes of the courtship movement, so this extensive look into the culture was fascinating. The author breaks down just what courtship is and isn't (and where the thought processes that led to the idea come from). Then he breaks down other methods of courtship or getting-to-marriage, too. Including arranged marriage and, gasp, traditional and modern dating. His defense is logical, thought-provoking, and made me think long and hard about the methodology used to approach this thing we call marriage. I recommend it to those looking to get a closer look at courtship culture--and perhaps return to a pre-modern, friendship-centered relationship foundation.

Vaughn Ohlman says

My impression of Mr. Umstatt's book basically has three parts: he correctly analyzes that Modern Courtship is a disaster; ; he proposes an alternative, "Traditional Dating" that is no better, and even less Biblical; and he fails to truly recognize what Scripture truly says about the path to marriage. Modern Courtship has been a disaster. It has left literally thousands of 'Courtiers' unmarried and heartbroken. It has left thousands more confusedly thinking that their unmarried and fruitless state is actually a 'success'. It was a failure both because it was irrational and because it was unBiblical. Of course, being unBiblical meant, by definition, that it was irrational, since all true knowledge and wisdom come from God. The Modern Courtship advocates abandoned a Scriptural foundation for their 'system' and instead founded it upon an idyllic mix of Jane Austen and King Arthur. Books like 'The Princess Kiss' literally brought forward as 'successes' a system that, by its own admission, left dozens unmarried and rejected. The answers to this crisis are found in Scripture, but 'Traditional Dating' is not what is taught there. Even by Mr. Umstatt's own admission, if you search Scripture you will not find anyone 'Traditional Dating' (or courting). Mr. Umstatt's response to the Scriptural pattern and precept can be summed up as 'American's won't like it'. That, in those same words, can be said about a lot of what the Scriptures teach. Indeed the words 'the Jews' (or Romans, or Greeks) 'won't like it' can pretty much summarize the standard response to what the Scriptures have taught over pretty much all of history. We Christians should not be afraid of teaching, or following, things that the world around us, or even the people in the pews around us, 'won't like'. To paraphrase the famous quote, "The Scriptures views on marriage have not been tried and found unworkable, they have been found unlikable and not tried." It is a very good thing that Mr. Umstatt and his followers have rejected courtship. There is nothing Biblical about courtship. But it would be very, very good if they did not also reject Scripture. (This review of the edition available for free on noisetrade.com)

Brandon H. says

We have as many singles in America as were around just after WWII but unlike the marriage boom that took place back then, many Christians these days are remaining single. In an effort to push back against the characteristics of modern dating, a new approach called, "courtship" swept through the church in the late 1990s. It promised to help keep people pure and offered a better way to find a spouse.

In this book, Thomas Umstadd, a former passionate proponent of courtship, discusses why courtship is fundamentally flawed and contributing to the decline of new marriages in the church. Mr. Umstadd also shows how courtship is doing GREAT HARM to people. Besides making a strong case against courtship, he also compares it with three other approaches and strongly encourages traditional dating.

I LOVED this book!! It was so refreshing to read something that was full of practical and sound advice. I loved the fact that he addressed so many of the fears singles have and that he challenged people to wisely co-labor with God, (and others) in their pursuit of the relationships He has for them. It's my hope and prayer that books like this will take root in the church in such a way that the fear based pernicious passivity that has been dominating the single scene in the church will be seen for the toxic smokescreen that it is.

Here's a few quotes to whet your appetite -

"This (worldly) culture embraces pleasure and passion as the foundation of relationship. Commitment is trumped by chemistry, and loyalty is replaced with lust. It's a mentality that tends to live in the moment, forsaking the building of a future. It's no wonder that Christians freak out about dating. And it's no wonder that we're dealing with the highest numbers of single men and women we've ever had in our country. We spend years pouring fear into their lives about relationships and then wonder why so many are still single!"

"The promise of less heartbreak in courtship is sadly unfulfillable unless you marry the first person you court. Otherwise, Modern Courtship can prove just as heartbreaking as Modern Dating."

"I've received multiple comments from young women who had no idea how abusive and controlling their boyfriends were, because they didn't have enough time to get to know them. When they did spend time together, the girl's father supervised and the man stayed on his best behavior."

"Everyone should have friends and mentors who hold them accountable. We all need someone to challenge and encourage us. But the girl's father serving as the accountability partner for the young man isn't healthy accountability. It's awkward accountability."

"...for years I also felt Modern Courtship was "the holy way," and dating was "evil." Once I dug into the historical and biblical examples of courtship, I realized I was wrong. Modern Courtship is not in the Bible. Calling it "biblical dating" doesn't make it biblical."

Hope says

I've had a few misgivings about courtship ever since I first heard about it so I was interested in what Umstadd had to say. Originally he was a catalyst for the movement but has now done a complete about-face. He writes about the damage done by the various emphases of the movement and offers a healthier model for dating. This book is meant to help the thousands who followed all the courtship rules and ended up still single or unhappily married.

If you are NOT one of those people, I would suggest that you skip this book and read a very succinct article

by Tim Challies on the subject. He summed it up well here: <https://www.challies.com/articles/the...>

Grace says

Although I did not grow up in the conservative Christian homeschool circuit, through church, I was introduced to the book *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*. To a highly logical teenager who didn't like to get her emotions jumbled, courtship seemed like a fantastic way to skip all the messy bits of a relationship. I liked the idea of being intentional with my relationships and looking towards marriage as an end goal.

Eventually, I abandoned the idea of courtship in favor of practicality. But I still found myself paralyzed or slow to move in some aspects of dating. This book hits the nail on the head when it talks about how much more difficult and scary something can be when you add, "for the purpose of marriage" to the end of each statement.

I stumbled upon the author's initial article about a year ago and it expressed many of the concerns I had regarding courtship as well as several I had never considered. Even today, I consider that particular article to be one of the primary sources I draw from when it comes to thinking about romantic relationships.

That being said, I don't think the book did much for me that the article didn't. It added pieces here and there, but overall, I think the article was the best medium for the message. Still, super happy to support the author through this purchase since his thoughts were so integral in shaping my own methods when it comes to dating.

J.T. Stoll says

Courtship in Crisis was good. It presented very clearly the history of courtship in Western culture and gave some wisdom as to how to move to a more healthy place in our own time.

I'm really glad that Umstatt didn't try to set out, once and for all, some eternal "Biblical" standard of how to court. That is, after all, what has led the Modern Courtship movement into error. Rather, he tried to say what works in our own time and our own culture based on wisdom.

He also gave good practical advice and a strong how-to. As a single guy, I'm emboldened by his book.

On the minus side, there was some repetitiveness, such as phrases like, "Modern Courtship has resulted in a generation of perpetual singles and Modern Dating has left many brokenhearted, while Traditional Dating..." And so forth. He repeated something like that phrase a number of times. The concepts were definitely repeated often.

The chapter describing Modern Dating also was similar to stuff I've heard a million times in sermons. That could have been more concise.

I was worried the book would carry some serious angst and anger at the Modern Courtship movement. There was some of that, but it wasn't overpowering. He generally respected the system that he argued against.

I believe that if our culture adopted dating as outlined in this book, our relationships would find new health and vitality, and a great part of the heartbreak and pain of modern romance (or lack thereof) would vanish

like night before daybreak.

Martha says

To say this topic is a highly sensitive one, would be putting it mildly. When Thomas posted his article on his blog addressing some issues he saw with the modern method of courtship, he poked a bear.

Thomas is a well-educated, godly man that without malice has addressed a topic that needed to be brought to our attention.

The one greatly misunderstood item on the agenda when this is discussed is that Thomas is promoting modern dating, lack of parental involvement, and rebellion among other things. This could not be further from the truth.

This book is well thought out. Each chapter was carefully prayed over and gone over by people that are from a variety of backgrounds and experiences.

I would encourage you, even if you have had wonderful experiences with courtship and love it, to read this book, especially before you discuss it.

My own courtship experience was less than ideal, and I know many others with similar experiences. But on the flip side, modern dating holds all the drawbacks that it always did. When courtship came on the scene with "I Kissed Dating Goodbye", there were good reasons for that. However, the pendulum swung broadly and the other side of that has not been good for all those involved. This book brings some of those flaws to light and offers a guide for young people and their parents to find a healthier way for relationships to be formed.

Mr. Umstatt does not claim to have all the answers or put down all other methods. The book is laid out in an easy to read format, which teens or busy parents will find not hard to read a chapter and discuss. This book is well thought out, relatable, and so important for us to weigh and consider.

As the mother of three teenage sons, I found it very thought provoking. I would love to see this offered as a discussion group with parents and teens in local churches, homeschool groups and other places. I highly recommend this book to be read by all, even those that believe they oppose this. I believe you will be pleasantly surprised by the godliness shown forth in this book. I would not be surprised if it will make your beliefs stronger in the Lord.

Heidi Kelsch says

This is one of the best books I have read on relationships. Being someone who has tried Courtship as well as Modern Day Dating, I could relate to what Umstatt says about the downfalls of both types of relationships. I've been there and done it and walked away hurt. I didn't want to do things the same, but everywhere I looked the message was either, just date and become serious quickly, or court and always have marriage on your mind. The author of this book does an excellent job making the material interesting - I read it in two days! He provides real stories and examples as well as scientific research to back up his points. One of my favorite parts of the books was his history on relationships starting during Biblical times and moving forward to the present. I found it to be an eye-opener for how things have changed over the years. If you have tried dating or courtship and are tired of being drug through all that 'mess, awkwardness, pain, and/or regret,' or if

you haven't tried any of them yet but want to understand the different options, this book will shed light on the positives and negatives for all of them, and present the information in a non-pushing/demanding way that will leave you thinking.

Callie says

When I first read the blog post, "How Courtship Is Fundamentally Flawed", it was like a lightbulb turned on in my head. I am happily married now, but through my teenage years I remember being puzzled at why I was never asked out much, and I was frustrated by the passivity of the Christian guys in my circles. I never associated the rarity of going on an actual date with Modern Courtship, but this book explains how that model of finding a spouse actually leads to less interaction with the opposite sex, and ultimately, less marriages. There are no studies on this topic as of yet, since the courtship mindset is so hard to pin down and courtship itself is hard to define, but after reading this book and reflecting on my personal experiences, it is easy to see how Modern Courtship has backfired by adding too much commitment to relationships, too soon. The courtship movement came on the scene in response to Modern Dating, which also makes relationships too involved too soon by bringing physical intimacy into the dating relationship. This book to proposes a third model, Traditional Dating, and explains what that is, and why it worked for so many couples in the 40's and 50's when it was most popular. Traditional Dating encourages young people to delay "going steady" in order to date multiple people and determine what kind of person is the best match. It keeps things light because dating multiple people comes with built-in safeguards against getting too serious with one person too fast. And bonus - Traditional Dating is a lot of fun, without the physical or emotional pressure that comes with Modern Dating or Courtship! After reading this book, I think I will definitely be encouraging my kids toward Traditional Dating as they reach their teenage years, and I sincerely hope it catches on - this is the kind of innocent dating fun that I wished for when I was a teenager. I highly recommend this book to any parents who are looking ahead to how they want to handle their children's romantic interests in the teenage years.

I received a copy of this book for free on NoiseTrade.

Tom Boyer says

Useful for moms and dads

As a dad these ideas adjusted my direction for our three girls. I appreciate Thomas authentic opinions on dating and courting

Megan says

I liked reading this and seeing another, though drastically different, way of getting to know someone romantically. Though I didn't agree with everything, the book definitely makes you think about things. I thought it was a really good read.

4.5 stars

Mattaniah Gibson says

Umstadd presents a clear thesis and sound argument for why traditional dating works better than modern courtship. As a now former courtship advocate, I can say he does not present strawmen, which given the broad spectrum of practices and beliefs included in this method, is an impressive accomplishment. His critique of courtship's fundamental flaw drives the presentation and brings it to a satisfactory conclusion. Basically, traditional dating (the type practiced in 1940s and 50s America) has two rules or guidelines:

- 1- Don't go out with the same person twice in a row
- 2- Don't stay out past ten (or whatever time you know your willpower will wane)

Simple, and serves as a better antidote to broken hearts and early strong attachment.

I am not certain the historical chapter was needed, but it was intriguing and definitely added to his rebuttal of some common courtship rhetoric.

Throughout the book, he is respectful of the concerns raised by the courtship movement but shows how their solutions have not worked quite as splendidly as they might have hoped. He acknowledges that the method has worked for some (and, personally, I know several couples who practiced courtship), but maintains that while it might work for some people, we cannot mandate it for all, Biblically speaking.

All in all, a fantastic read that actually changed my view, and helped bring clarity to my already somewhat conflicted and dissatisfied opinions of courtship.
