Dating

By Scott Estell, M.Div.
Course Description

This is one of the courses in the Tools for Teens curriculum. Dating is an analysis of the American dating scene from a biblical perspective with an emphasis on marriage as the sole purpose for dating. This study will focus on biblical principles and show how they apply to dating.

(1 Quarter)

About “Tools for Teens”

Tools for Teens is a complete discipleship curriculum designed to ground teens in biblical/theological content. The authors of this material believe in the following:

- Teens must be enabled to understand the doctrines of the Bible.
- Teens must be enabled to understand the content of the Bible.
- Teens must be enabled to understand the historical roots of Baptists, Christianity, and Fundamentalism.
- Teens must be enabled to relate to one another, authorities, and their community from a biblical perspective.

This publication is to be distributed free of charge. All we ask is that you complete the survey at the end of this document and send the publisher any comments. This material is to be distributed in unaltered condition with this statement. If one desires to distribute this material in another language format (i.e., a language other than American English), then written authorization should be obtained by contacting the publisher.
# Table of Contents

## Lessons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating, Then Dating</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>True Love</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. or Mrs. Wrong</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Right</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Right</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Intimacy:</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Do’s and Don’t’s of Dating</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whether, When, and Who to Marry</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before and After You Say, “I Do”</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Review

| Review Quiz                                                          | 59   |

## Resources

| For Further Study                                                   | 63   |
BELIEVE the whole purpose of dating is to find someone who would be a good husband or wife for you” (Youthworker Update, March 1995, p. 8). Believe it or not, this wise advice came from the lips of a fourteen year-old girl. Though barely a teen, this young lady understood what many young people fail to understand, namely, that the purpose for dating is marriage.

The Purpose for Dating

Like most young people, you are probably eager to discuss the “how to’s” of dating. Before we discuss the nuts and bolts of dating, however, it is essential that we begin by asking ourselves a very basic question: Why date? This is a question of purpose. No matter what the activity, our purpose for doing so will dictate how we do it. Dating is no exception. Our purpose for dating will profoundly affect every aspect of our dating lives.
As stated above, it is the belief of this writer that the sole purpose for dating is marriage. There are a few basic reasons why I believe this is so:

The tenor of Scripture

Unfortunately for us, the Bible does not have much to say specifically about the subject of dating. In fact, there was no such thing as dating in Bible times. Dating was unnecessary because marriages were arranged by one’s parents. One notable exception is the story of Boaz and Ruth. When reading the book of Ruth, one can clearly see that the relationship undertaken by Boaz and Ruth was undertaken with marriage in mind. Both of them were interested in one thing and one thing only: finding a spouse. This concept is commonly called courtship.1 Nowhere in Scripture can you find a “romantic” male-female relationship undertaken for any other reason.

Common sense

Dating ultimately leads to marriage. It doesn’t take a brain surgeon to figure that out. A guy and a girl establish a relationship, date regularly, get engaged, and then get married (See Holzmann, p. 229 and Kirby, p. 3.). That’s just the way things work in our culture. Whether we consciously realize it or not, dating and marriage are inseparable; one naturally leads to the other. Thus, we inherently understand that dating is for marriage.

Biblical wisdom

Biblical wisdom is the ability to take the teachings of the Word of God and skillfully apply them to life, even to those areas not directly addressed in Scripture. Though the Bible does not explicitly deal with dating (it is extrabiblical), there are a myriad of biblical principles which apply to dating. As we

---

1 This is just the opposite of what is commonly called “recreational dating.” For a good overview of the concept of courtship, see “Courtship Makes a Comeback” by Jim and Anne Ryun in the November 1995 issue of Focus on the Family magazine, pp. 10–12.
shine the spotlight of Scripture upon dating as we know it in the weeks to come, I hope you will agree that the recent, American phenomenon of dating is flawed at its foundation and fraught with problems.

The American way of dating STINKS! The whole basis of it is wrong—looking for someone who will meet your needs and satisfy you, instead of looking to truly love and give and build up (excerpt from a letter in Quest for Love, p. 67).

### Improper Purposes for Dating

There are several inappropriate reasons for dating. Below are just a few of them:

#### To have a good time

There’s nothing wrong with having a good time per se. Contrary to the belief of some, God is not a “cosmic killjoy” who delights in making us miserable. However, He does not want us to seek pleasure for its own sake. Though a beneficial byproduct of dating, having fun should not be our motive for dating (contra Littleton, p. 29 and Kirby, p. 14).

People date those they would never consider marrying and pursue romantic relationships merely for fun, not because they’re ready for commitment (Harris, p. 212).

**For Discussion**

Does one have to date in order to have a good time? What dangers might such a view of dating bring about? no; You’ll date anyone you can have a good time with regardless of their character.
To overcome loneliness

Many people enter into dating relationships simply because they are lonely. Though it is perfectly normal to desire the companionship that a dating relationship brings, loneliness should not be the driving force behind dating.

For Discussion

Why is this reasoning dangerous? What would be a better way to overcome loneliness? Out of desperation, one might go out with anyone just to have someone to do something with; cultivate friendships with members of both genders.

A subtle danger in dating (or in any relationship, for that matter) is the temptation to look to another human being to satisfy the longings of our hearts, rather than to God.

Any time we allow someone to displace God as the focus of our affection, we’ve moved from innocent appreciation of someone’s beauty or personality to the dangerous realm of infatuation. Instead of making God the object of our longing, we wrongly direct these feelings toward another human. We become idolaters, bowing to someone other than God, hoping that this person will meet our needs and bring fulfillment (Harris, p. 141).

To make oneself look good

Though we would like to think otherwise, there are some people who date in order to improve their self-image. Such individuals think that dating will make them more popular or prove their manhood. Like the previous two, this is a very selfish reason for dating.

For Discussion

What negative consequences might such reasoning have upon both parties in a dating relationship? 
the “victim”—will make him or her feel used; for the “perpetrator”—will delude him or her

One of the biggest, if not the biggest, pitfalls of dating as we know it is its self-orientation. As Harris states: “I lived ‘dumb love’—choosing what felt good for me instead of what was good for others and what pleased God” (p. 22).

**To have sex**

Another selfish reason for dating is to satisfy one’s sex drive. As we will learn later on, sex is a good thing if done within the confines of marriage. Many young people (especially guys), however, enter into a dating relationship for this reason and this reason only.

*When we see a man dress himself out and draw near to flatter and wheedle, and whisper in the ears of a woman with no pretension to lawful marriage, without doubt it is in order to incite her to impurity (St. Francis de Sales, qtd. in Quest for Love, p. 61).*

**To satisfy one’s parents and/or peers**

Unlike the previous reasons, this motive for dating is external in nature.

Though they may not realize it, parents often pressure their teens into dating:

Parents should be low-key about boyfriend and girlfriend talk. Unconsciously, parents may push their teen into pseudo-dating relationships by focusing too much on “Who’s your boyfriend now?” or “Did I hear that you and Lisa broke up? What happened?” Teens may get the unspoken message, even unintended, that you place high value on their ability to catch and hold a romantic interest (Lane Powell in Living with Teenagers, October 1995, p. 29).

An even greater external pressure to date comes from one’s peers. Many teens feel like “dweebs” or “losers” if they don’t have a boyfriend or girlfriend.
For Discussion

What pitfalls can result if one dates because of parental or peer pressure? dating too soon; dating someone you’re really not all that interested in

Conclusion

In this lesson, we’ve learned that there are many reasons why people choose to date. Improper reasons for dating include: to have a good time, to overcome loneliness, to make oneself look good, to have sex, and to satisfy one’s parents and/or peers. However, there is only one legitimate purpose for dating, and that is marriage. DATING IS FOR MARRIAGE. With this purpose in mind, we are now ready to proceed with our study on dating.
BEFORE ONE BUILDS the superstructure of a building, he must first lay a foundation. In Lesson One, we began laying the foundation for dating by establishing the purpose for dating, marriage. Another part of the foundation of dating is getting along with members of the opposite gender. Dating begins with relating . . . relating properly and effectively toward members of the opposite gender. In this lesson, we’re going to learn how to do just that by viewing opposite-gender relationships from three different vantage points.

Treating One Another Like Brothers and Sisters

In 1 Timothy 5:1–2, Paul instructs Timothy to “treat younger men as brothers” and “younger women as sisters.” This is a good way of summarizing how one
should treat members of the opposite gender. If you are a guy, you should treat all girls as you would treat (or should treat) your biological sister. Likewise, if you are a girl, you should treat all guys as you would treat your biological brother. In other words, you should not do anything with, to, or for another person that you would not do with, to, or for a sibling (Holzmann, p. 48).

This principle especially applies to the way we treat our “brothers” and “sisters” in Christ. Just as there is a physical bond between ourselves and our biological siblings, so there is a spiritual bond between ourselves and our spiritual siblings. Therefore, we must learn to treat other believers as family.

*I stopped viewing girls as potential girlfriends and started treating them as sisters in Christ* (Harris, p. 24).

**For Discussion**

Apply this principle of treating others like brothers and sisters to a dating relationship. In other words, what are some ways in which such a perspective might affect how one treats members of the opposite gender? Be specific. guys protecting girls—physically, emotionally, and reputationally.

**Treating One Another Like Ladies and Gentlemen**

**How guys should treat girls**

Guys should be gentlemanly and treat girls like ladies. The root word of “gentleman” is “gentle.” Guys should treat girls gently in keeping with a female’s God-given constitution:

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner. - 1 Peter 3:7

Here are some ways in which this can be done, guys:
• Open doors for girls.  
• Let them go first in line.  
• Help them with their coats.  
• Don’t talk or act toward them in a crude or vulgar way.  
• Be protective of them.

How girls should treat guys

Girls should be ladylike and allow guys to be gentlemen. Here are some of the ways in which this can be done, girls:

• Don’t be overly aggressive.
• Have a quiet demeanor.
• Dress like a lady.
• Don’t let a guy mistreat you.

Treating One Another Like Friends

Before starting a dating relationship with a member of the opposite gender, it is vitally important that you first of all strike up a friendship with that person. Many relationships never get off the ground because the individuals involved have not become friends before trying to become boyfriend and girlfriend.

Here are some practical suggestions for developing friendships with members of the opposite gender (Dockrey, Johnson, Krafft, et al., pp. 43–44):

Spend time with each other.

Instead of dropping out of your regular routines to spend time together, look for opportunities to include one another in your real lives (Harris, p. 209).
Make eye contact.

Investigate (ask questions).

Listen.

Express esteem (value what is important to the other person).

**Conclusion**

In this lesson, we have learned that getting along with the opposite gender is foundational to dating and that getting along with the opposite gender is done properly and effectively if we treat one another as brothers and sisters, as ladies and gentlemen, and as friends.
FROM THE MOMENT Mortimer and Gertrude laid eyes on one another, they knew they were in love. Mortimer’s legs buckled. Gertrude couldn’t swallow. Both stared into one another’s eyes for hours on end without saying a word. Yesiree, it was “love at first sight.” Or was it? Like many young people, Mortimer and Gertrude don’t understand what true love is all about.

What True Love is.

The Greeks had three different words for love: eros, philos, and agape. Not found in the New Testament, eros love was passionate love. It was used to describe the sexual love that existed between members of the opposite gender. Philos love was affectionate love. It was used to describe the brotherly love that existed between family members. Agape love was sacrificial love. It was used to describe the love that God has for His
people. It is this third type of love, agape love, that most clearly describes for us what true love is all about.

Characteristics of true love

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul lists some of the characteristics of agape love:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. - 1 Corinthians 13:4–8

What is true love? True love is:

Patient

Many couples “force” their relationship rather than allowing it to progress at a natural pace. True love means being willing to wait. Wait for God’s timing. Wait until the other person is ready to progress to the next level.

So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel [talk about waiting!], but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her. - Genesis 29:20

It gets down to this question: Do you trust God? Don’t just give a knee-jerk, Sunday school answer. Do you really trust Him? Do you live your life as if you trust Him? Do you believe that by passing up something good now because it’s the wrong time God will bring you something better when it is the right time? (Harris, p. 82).

Kind

If you truly love someone, you will treat him kindly and gently.

For Discussion

Ever hear an abusive husband insist that he loves his wife? Why doesn’t such a claim hold any water? If he really loved her, he would treat her kindly.
Not envious

To envy is to desire that which rightfully belongs to another. In other words, it is to be possessive of something that doesn’t belong to you. Many dating couples mistakenly believe that they belong to one another and, as a result, treat one another as personal possessions.

Not proud

True love is marked by a humble appreciation for the opportunity to be a part of another’s life, not an arrogant attitude which thinks one is doing the other person a favor by allowing him or her the privilege of dating someone like you.

Not rude

If you truly love someone, you will treat him or her with respect and consideration. You won’t act in a discourteous or offensive way while around them.

For Discussion

What are some ways in which one might act rudely toward his or her date? embarrass him or her; not take his or her interests into consideration when planning a date

Not self-seeking

In a word, agape love is unselfish. It is concerned with giving, not getting. It is interested with what one can contribute to a relationship, not with what one can get out of it.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son. - John 3:16

Not easily angered

Love and a quick temper do not go hand-in-hand.

Forgiving

Love does not hold grudges. It forgives and forgets when a wrong has been committed against it. “When offended, loving, mature people will
acknowledge the offense, recognize the power it gives them, forgive the offender, and throw away the power they gained from the offense” (Coleman, p. 75).

Protecting

If you truly love someone, you will do all you can to protect them. This not only includes physical protection, but emotional and reputational protection as well.

Guys, it’s time we stood up to defend the honor and righteousness of our sisters. We need to stop acting like “hunters” trying to catch girls and begin seeing ourselves as warriors standing guard over them (Harris, p. 97).

I want to weep when I think of the many times I have neglected my responsibility to guard girls’ hearts. Instead of playing the role of a warrior, I played the thief, stealing their focus from God for myself. I’m determined to do better. I want to be the kind of friend to whom girls’ future husbands could one day say, “Thank you for standing watch over my wife’s heart. Thank you for guarding her purity” (Harris, pp. 98–99).

Trusting

Love means being able to trust your partner when you are apart. Agape love is a secure love.

For Discussion

How might one demonstrate a lack of trust toward his or her partner? by keeping tabs on him or her; never letting him or her out of one’s sight; always interrogating him or her

Unfailing

True love lasts. It is not fickle, changing from day to day due to changing circumstances. It is unfailing. Such is God’s love for His people:

“I have loved you with an everlasting love.” - Jeremiah 31:3
A definition of true love

What is true love? True love is choosing to do what is best for another.

What True Love is Not.

There are two common misconceptions as to what love is:

Love is not a romantic feeling.

As the definition of love above indicates, true love is a choice. It is not a feeling. It is a commitment. “Agape—real for-you love—is wholly and completely a choice. It is not, as many believe, just a good feeling or an emotion. Agape is an act of the will. If you want to measure how much real love there is in a relationship, measure the commitment” (Clark, p. 103). You do not “fall into love”1 (a feeling); rather, you “jump into love” (a commitment). Like Mortimer and Gertrude in our Introduction, many young people misinterpret romantic feelings for love. These feelings can be called many things: puppy love, a crush, infatuation, or simply being in love with being in love. One thing they should not be called, however, is love. This does not mean that true love is void of feelings. It does mean, however, that true love is not based upon feelings. Feelings change. Love does not. “A relationship lives or dies at the point of distinguishing between falling in love and choosing to love. If a couple enters a relationship swept away by overpowering romantic feelings, chances are those partners are more in love with their feelings than they are with the other person. Feelings are a fun, exciting byproduct of a healthy relationship—but as a relationship’s foundation, they’re deadly because they are focused on oneself instead of the other person” (Clark, p. 139).

1 “The danger of believing that you ‘fall in love’ is that it also means you can ‘fall out of love’ just as unexpectedly” (Harris, p. 65).
When we make feelings the litmus test of love, we place ourselves at the center of importance (Harris, p. 63).

**Love is not sexual passion.**

In our sex-crazed society, love is virtually synonymous with sex. Though sex is a natural expression of marital love, it is not indicative of true love. One can truly love someone without having sexual relations with him or her. Likewise, one can have sexual relations with another without truly loving him or her.

**Conclusion**

What is love? Love is choosing to do what is best for another. It is a commitment. It is not a romantic feeling or sexual passion.
IN THE VERY FIRST lesson of this series, we established the principle that dating is for marriage. This makes dating a serious matter. Perhaps the most important decision you will make in regards to dating is who to date. One person said, “The most important aspect about dating is who you go out with—because you marry who you date. If you date a loser, you will marry a loser. If you date a winner, you will marry a winner.” In Lessons Five and Six, we will discuss the kind of person you should date. In this fourth lesson, however, we will consider the kind of person you should not date.

A Believer Should Not Date an Unbeliever.

“Why can’t I date a non-Christian?” is a question sometimes asked by Christian teens (especially after
meeting that special unsaved someone). “After all, I can win him to Christ if I date him!” Though certainly a noble desire, evangelism is not the purpose of dating. More often than not, the unbeliever ends up adversely influencing the believer (Proverb 13:20, 1 Corinthians 15:33), rather than the believer positively impacting the unbeliever. It is always easier to pull down than to pull up. A prime example of this was Solomon. First Kings 11:4 tells us that “as Solomon grew old, his [unbelieving] wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God.” Poor Solomon should have known better. After all, God had warned about this very danger in the Law (Deuteronomy 7:3–4). Samson made the same mistake (see Judges 14:1–3).1 Following are some of the reasons why a Christian should not date a non-Christian.

**Scriptural commands**

_Negatively-speaking, the Bible commands us not to marry (and, thus, date) unbelievers:_

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? - 2 Corinthians 6:14–16

Paul is not telling us not to associate with unbelievers. Rather, he is commanding us not to unite with them. This is the idea behind a yoke (see Holzmann, p. 190). There is no more intimate human union than marriage. How vital, therefore, that we make sure we unite with one who is pulling in the same direction as we are.

1 Though Judges 14:4 tells us that this was “of the LORD,” it was only so in the sense that God in His sovereignty used Samson’s sinful choice (as He does every sinful choice) to accomplish His perfect will.
Positively-speaking, the Bible commands us to marry (and, thus, date) only believers:

A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord. - 1 Corinthians 7:39

Don’t we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord’s brothers and Cephas? - 1 Corinthians 9:5

Practical considerations

Besides disobeying the clear commands of Scripture, one who marries an unbeliever brings upon himself a host of practical problems. Consider the following two:

Loneliness

As mentioned above, marriage is a very intimate relationship. Such intimacy is hindered, however, when the two individuals involved share a completely different set of values and desires. An unbelieving spouse will never be able to fully appreciate your commitment to Christ because he or she does not share such a commitment. Thus, you will often have to “go it alone.” Though one in body, you and your spouse will never be one in spirit.

Child rearing

Assuming you and your spouse are willing and able to have children, your children will to some degree be adversely affected by your “mixed” marriage. While you work hard to win your kids to Christ and instill Christian values in them, your spouse will more than likely encourage just the opposite by his manner of life. Though God in His grace can and sometimes does use the mixed message of a mixed marriage to further the spiritual growth of the children, many times the result is kids who have no interest in the things of God.

For Discussion
Consider the following excerpts:

“If one of you is not a Christian and has no desire to become one, slow down, back off, and reconsider the relationship” (Coleman, p. 93).

“It was their third date, and John felt he had to find out whether Stephanie was a Christian or not. So far, they’d never talked about it. He didn’t want to put her off. He really liked her. But he wasn’t sure how to broach the subject” (Littleton, p. 147).

Why are the above statements problematic? What is the chief danger inherent in the thinking behind them? If they didn’t know the other was a Christian, why did they begin dating in the first place? If one begins dating an unsaved person, he may very well end up marrying one.

**A Believer Should Not Date Certain Believers.**

Not only should believers refrain from dating unbelievers, they should also avoid dating certain believers. Among these are the following:

**Disobedient believers**

The Bible commands us to keep our distance from believers who are openly living in sin.

> I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. - Romans 16:17

> In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. - 2 Thessalonians 3:6

> If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. - 2 Thessalonians 3:14

> Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. - Titus 3:10
As mentioned previously, it is much easier to pull down than to pull up. Besides disobeying the above commands to separate from disobedient believers, the one who chooses to date such an individual runs the risk of being adversely affected spiritually. Remember the words of 1 Corinthians 15:33. Only date believers who are living for the Lord.

**Doctrinally-different believers**

If you are a Christian, you hold to certain doctrines which distinguish you from those of other faiths (for one author’s list of such doctrines, see Littleton, pp. 153–154). Besides such “major” beliefs, there are many other doctrines which distinguish one Christian group or denomination from another. Contrary to the sentiment of some (such as Littleton, p. 154), such beliefs are important. Therefore, it is wise to date only those believers who hold doctrinal beliefs similar to yours, even in those areas which some might consider “minor.” Consider Amos 3:3. This is why it is best to date only those who share the same religious tradition as you, i.e., those who are similar to you in faith and practice.

**For Discussion**

What are some of the problems one might run into if he or she decides to date someone of another faith or one who practices his or her faith differently? If they eventually get married, what church will they join? In which faith will they rear their children?

**Conclusion**

There are some people that you should not date. Among these are unbelievers and believers who are disobedient or doctrinally different.
In Our Last Lesson, we identified certain types of individuals that you should not date. In this lesson and the next, we will discuss the type of person you should date. More specifically, we will examine some important character qualities mentioned in Scripture which will aid us in both being the right kind of date and finding the right kind of date. We will first turn our attention to the guys. Tall. Dark. Handsome. Muscular. Intelligent. Wealthy. Athletic. According to popular opinion, such are the characteristics of “Mr. Right.” The Bible, however, paints a very different portrait. What does Mr. Right really look like?

Mr. Right is a Man of Character.

In 1 Samuel 16, the prophet Samuel was commissioned by God to go to the household of Jesse in order to anoint one of his sons to be Saul’s successor as king over Israel. Like many of us, Samuel made the mistake of judging the new king’s ability to rule the nation solely upon his outward
appearance (v. 6). God, however, valued something much more important:

But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” - 1 Samuel 16:7

What does God value in a man more than anything else? Character. Character is internal. Thus, character is something any guy can develop, regardless of his physical appearance. This does not imply, however, that one’s physical appearance is inconsequential. David, the one whom God chose to succeed Saul, was physically attractive (v. 12). There’s nothing wrong with a girl wanting to date a handsome guy. The problem comes when the girl begins valuing the outward or external over the inward or internal.

So, what constitutes good character? In 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, Paul lists several qualities which should characterize any man who desires to serve as a pastor or a deacon in a local church. Though we will not take the time to list or explain them here, these character qualities are not just for pastors and deacons; they are qualities that should be present in the life of every Christian male. Therefore, girls, these two lists would be a good place to start when scrutinizing potential dates.

For Discussion

When is the time to determine whether or not a guy has the kind of character that makes him worth dating? How can a girl determine whether or not a particular guy has good character? before the first date; watch him (what he says; how he treats other girls, his mom, etc.; how he acts in a group setting, etc.)
Mr. Right is a Leader.

Contrary to the beliefs of the feminist movement, God has created men and women differently in order to fulfill different roles. The primary role of the man is that of submission, while the primary role of the woman is that of leadership. This is to be the case both in the local church (see 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 and 1 Timothy 2:11–12) and in the home (see Ephesians 5:22–24 and Colossians 3:18). This should also be the case in a dating relationship. Girls, look to date guys who are leaders. Don’t date any guy whom you would have a difficult time submitting to.

For Discussion

Does the fact that God has given men the responsibility to lead and women the responsibility to follow imply that men are superior to women? Why or why not? no; Men and women are equal in essence (who they are), but unequal in function (what they do).

What constitutes a good leader? Unfortunately, our society gives the impression that a leader is one who “throws his weight around,” ordering others what to do. According to Scripture, however, a leader is one who lovingly does what is best for those under his watchcare, even if it means doing that which is unpopular. In other words, a leader is both tough and tender. Accordingly, God says:

Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. - Colossians 3:19

Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life. - 1 Peter 3:7

See chapter 23 of Passion and Purity by Elisabeth Elliot.
For Discussion

What are some ways in which a guy can take the lead in a dating relationship? deciding where to go and what to do on a date; leading in Bible study and prayer

Mr. Right is Industrious.

From the very start, it was God’s intention that the man should be the one who provides for his family’s needs (Genesis 2:15). This is a responsibility that should be taken seriously. As 1 Timothy 5:8 states:

If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Girls, don’t date a guy if he’s lazy or slothful. The book of Proverbs repeatedly warns about such men (6:6–11, 13:4, 19:15). Rather, seek to date guys who are hard-working or diligent.

Conclusion

What does Mr. Right look like? He’s a man of character, a leader, and industrious. This is the type of man every guy should strive to be and the type of man every girl should look to date.
IN LAST WEEK’S lesson, we considered those qualities which God values in a man. This week, we will consider those qualities which God values in a woman. What should a guy look for in a date? Once again, the Bible gives us the answers.

Mrs. Right is a Woman of Character.

According to our culture, Mrs. Right is a 5’9” blue-eyed blonde with an hour-glass figure. According to the Bible, however, Mrs. Right’s beauty goes far deeper than the skin. As 1 Peter 3:3–5 tells women:

Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful.
As with a man, God values a woman’s inner beauty far more than her outward appearance. This is not to say, however, that a woman’s physical appearance is unimportant. Men are attracted to attractive women. God made men that way. One sixteen year-old put it rather bluntly: “I have to be honest. I think your date should be pretty good looking. Even if they have the right values, big deal, if they are ugly to look at” (Living with Teenagers, October 1995, p. 9). Guys, there’s nothing wrong with wanting to date and eventually marry a “babe.” Just don’t make this the overriding factor in your search for Mrs. Right.

Proverbs 31 gives us an excellent description of the kind of woman God values. She is a woman of “noble character” (v. 1).

A woman of character is uncommon.

A wife of noble character who can find? - Proverb 31:10

A woman of character is valuable.

She is worth far more than rubies. - Proverb 31:10

A woman of character is trustworthy.

Her husband has full confidence in her. - Proverb 31:11

A woman of character is industrious.

She gets up while it is still dark; she provides food for her family and portions for her servant girls. - Proverb 31:15

She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks. - Proverb 31:17

Her lamp does not go out at night. - Proverb 31:18

A woman of character is compassionate.

She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy. - Proverb 31:20

Note: There is a difference between pity and compassion. Pity is an emotion, while compassion
is an action. Pity is feeling sorry for someone else, while compassion is doing something about it.

Several more characteristics could be added to this list, all of them internal in nature. God values character, and so should we. Proverbs 31 concludes the description of the “virtuous” woman by stating in verse thirty:

Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.

Mrs. Right Has a Submissive Spirit.

As mentioned in Lesson Five, God has created men and women to fulfill distinct roles. The role of the man is loving leadership. The role of the woman is sweet submission. Notice the words of Ephesians 5:22–24:

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything (See also Colossians 3:18, Titus 2:5, and 1 Peter 3:1–6).

Contrary to popular opinion, submission is not a dirty word. None other than Christ Himself practiced submission, submitting to the authority of God the Father (1 Corinthians 11:3). A woman will never know true fulfillment until she learns to fulfill her God-given function of eagerly submitting to her husband’s leadership.

Conclusion

What does Mrs. Right look like? She is a woman of character and has a submissive spirit.
According to today’s thinking, physical intimacy is a natural part of a dating relationship. From hand-holding to “going all the way,” many people don’t think twice about the appropriateness of such activities. Sadly, many Christians have adopted the same mentality. In this lesson, we will examine some Scriptural principles regarding physical intimacy and develop some guidelines regarding physical intimacy in a dating relationship.
Some Principles Regarding Physical Intimacy

The Bible is very clear that physical intimacy outside the bounds of marriage is sinful. Notice the following verses:

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. - 1 Corinthians 6:18–20

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. - Ephesians 5:3

It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit. - 1 Thessalonians 4:3–8

Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. - Hebrews 13:4

Several principles can be derived from the above verses:

**Physical intimacy is for marriage.**

Sex is a good thing. Sinful man, however, has tarnished it by engaging in it outside of the boundaries God has set. As Hebrews 13:4 clearly teaches, sex is acceptable only between a man and his wife.

It is a powerful lie that, because sexual desire is natural, healthy, and God given, anything I do
because of that desire is natural, healthy, and God given (Elliot, Passion and Purity, p. 129).

**God will judge those who engage in physical intimacy outside the bounds of marriage.**

As both 1 Thessalonians 4:6 and Hebrews 13:4 teach, those who are sexually immoral will be judged by God. God judges sexual immorality in at least three ways:

**Physically**

Look no further than the current AIDS epidemic and you will see the physical devastation that comes upon those who are sexually immoral. AIDS is only one of a long list of sexually-transmitted diseases which man has inflicted upon himself as a natural result of his promiscuity.

**Emotionally**

Perhaps even more devastating than the physical scars of sexual immorality are the emotional scars. The heartache and shame which result from such behavior is impossible to erase. As Proverbs 6:32–33 states:

> But a man who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever does so destroys himself. Blows and disgrace are his lot, and his shame will never be wiped away.

Intimate behavior always harms. By its nature, it implies a commitment to a private world of only two. Moving in and out of several private worlds hurts feelings and cripples future commitments (Susan A. Lanford in Living with Teenagers, October 1995, p. 16).

“Sexual immorality can be forgiven, but it causes pain like no other sin can (1 Cor. 6:18). I carried it around for fifteen years and as much as I wanted it to go away, it didn’t. A girl’s body and virginity are precious treasures, and when they are given away before marriage, it is a painful mistake and can never be reclaimed. Anyone who says different is a
liar” (Anonymous woman, qtd. in Elliot, Quest for Love, p. 209).

Spiritually

Romans 1 teaches that sexual perversion is a natural consequence of sexual immorality. God judges those who are promiscuous by further giving them over to their depraved desires.

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. - Romans 1:26–27

Believers should differ from unbelievers in the realm of physical intimacy.

Believers do not own themselves—God does. This includes the believer’s body (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). Therefore, believers should act differently than unbelievers when it comes to physical intimacy (Ephesians 5:3, 1 Thessalonians 4:5).

Note: When the Bible talks about sexual immorality (adultery, fornication, etc.), it is referring not only to sexual intercourse in the technical sense, but also to activities leading up to it (like “petting”). Any activity which is designed to stimulate a sexual response is sinful (outside of marriage, of course). Jesus went so far as to say that even thinking about such is sinful (Matthew 5:27–28). A good article on this is entitled “Outercourse” by Susan A. Lanford in the October 1995 issue of Living with Teenagers.

Some Guidelines Regarding Physical Intimacy

Having examined some of the principles taught in Scripture regarding physical intimacy, we can now begin to develop some appropriate guidelines.
regarding physical intimacy in dating. Here are some suggestions:

Develop your standards ahead of time.

It is crucial that you write out your standards regarding physical intimacy before you enter a dating relationship. It is very difficult (if not impossible) to objectively do so in the midst of the strong feelings which tend to develop between a man and a woman. As Littleton states: “As you enter the world of dating, resolve now what you believe in, what you won’t compromise on, and what path you’ll pursue. Now is the time for thinking and planning. The heat of passion is no time to make such moves” (p. 163). Your parents, pastor, and youth leaders would be good people to go to for help in developing dating standards.

Stick to your standards.

Setting dating standards means nothing if you don’t follow them. Resolve to abide by the standards you have developed, even if it means losing dates.

Living a pure life before God requires the teamwork of your heart and your feet. The direction of purity begins within; you must support it in practical everyday decisions of where, when, and with whom you choose to be. Many couples have made commitments to sexual purity, but instead of adopting a lifestyle that supports this commitment, they continue relationships that encourage physical expression and place themselves in dangerous settings (Harris, p. 92).

Honor the standards of your date.

This implies that you discuss with your date his or her standards regarding physical intimacy. It also would be wise to discuss these matters with both sets of parents.
Set high standards.

It is in the best interests of you and your date to set high standards in regards to physical intimacy. Don’t attempt to see how far you can go without getting burned. As Holzmann states: “If you’re worried about falling over the edge of the cliff when it comes to your relationships with members of the opposite sex, quit looking at the guardrail—‘how far you can go’; keep your eye on the center line: God’s purpose for your life and relationships” (p. 126).

If we were honest with ourselves, many of us would admit that we’re not really interested in purity at all. Instead, we feel satisfied by meeting the minimum requirements, content with spending our time in the “gray areas,” flirting with darkness and never daring to step into the light of righteousness (Harris, p. 88).

Flee if need be.

2 Timothy 2:22 states: “Flee the evil desires of youth.” Like Joseph (see Genesis 39:7–12), we must run as fast and far as we can from sexual temptation. Be a Joseph, not a David (see 2 Samuel 11:2–5).

Better yet, don’t ever put yourself in a position to find out whether you’re a Joseph or a David. Avoid placing yourself in tempting situations (unlike the young man in Proverbs 7:6–8). Make no provision for the flesh (Romans 13:14). If you do, you will more than likely get burned (Proverbs 6:27–28).

*It is no good praying, “Lead us not into temptation” and then deliberately walking straight into it* (Elliot, *Quest for Love*, p. 189).

*I avoid one-on-one dating because it encourages physical intimacy and places me in an isolated setting with a girl. Can’t I handle it? Don’t I have any self-control? Yeah, maybe I could handle it, but that’s not the point. God says, “Flee the evil desires of youth . . .” (2 Timothy 2:22). I won’t stick around to see how much temptation I can take. God is*
not impressed by my ability to stand up to sin. He’s more impressed by the obedience I show when I run from it" (Harris, p. 95).

If virginity is to be preserved, lines must be drawn. Why put yourself in any situation where the lines become smudged and obscure? Why take the risks? Why accept the pressure of tremendous temptation when you can easily avoid it by refusing to be anywhere where compromise is possible? (Elliot, *Passion and Purity*, p. 147).

Some suggested standards

Now the moment you’ve all been waiting for: a list of standards regarding physical intimacy in a dating relationship. Keep in mind that these are merely suggestions. It is up to you to develop your own set (but feel free to use these).

Don’t engage in physical intimacy in any form prior to engagement.

In our culture, engagement is the visible expression of the commitment to marry another person; “going steady” is not. Therefore, it is wise to refrain from giving part of yourself away to one who may not end up marrying you. For example, Holzmann decided not to hold hands or kiss a girl until after he was engaged to her (p. 127). Jim and Elisabeth Elliot didn’t kiss for the first time until engagement (Elliot, *Passion and Purity*, p. 172). Harris goes even a step further, purposing to refrain from kissing until marriage (p. 219).¹

¹ Is kissing appropriate in a dating relationship? “Can I say categorically that a kiss is a sin? I can say that it might be” (Elliot, *Passion and Purity*, p. 132). “I am truly grateful that God has kept me physically pure by sparing me from giving away a part of my heart in kissing” (Anonymous woman, qtd. in Elliot, *Quest for Love*, p. 180). Consider the “law of diminishing returns.” “The law of diminishing returns tells us that when something ceases to accomplish what we want it to accomplish, we search for more. In the case of sex, it means that something which previously brought pleasure (for example, kissing) will eventually lose its glamor. More physical activity will be needed to reach the same level of pleasure. The progression of a physical relationship is as follows: holding hands, hugging, kissing, French kissing, petting, and finally intercourse. It is like drugs and alcohol; you need a little more each time to get a bigger high.”
Don’t engage in any form of physical intimacy with your date which you would feel uncomfortable engaging in with someone other than your spouse.

One of Holzmann’s standards reads: “I will do nothing with members of the opposite sex now, while we are unmarried, that we cannot continue to do in good conscience later, after one or the other of us has married someone else” (p. 33). For example, if you would feel uncomfortable kissing a woman other than your wife on the lips, don’t do so with your date.

We need to ask ourselves a serious question. If another person’s body doesn’t belong to us (that is, we’re not married), what right do we have to treat the people we date any differently than a married person would treat someone who wasn’t his or her spouse (Harris, p. 94)?

Don’t engage in any form of physical intimacy with your date which you would feel uncomfortable engaging in if your parents were to suddenly enter the room.

Such embarrassment or lack thereof is usually a good indicator as to whether or not your activity is appropriate.

Young people who indulge in looks and caresses, or speak words in which they would be unwilling to be surprised (i.e., overheard) by their fathers, mothers, husbands or wives, bear witness that their conduct is not that of honor and conscience (St. Francis de Sales, qtd. in Elliot, Quest for Love, p. 61).

Conclusion

In this lesson, we’ve learned that physical intimacy is for marriage, that God will judge those who engage in physical intimacy outside the bounds of marriage, and that believers should differ from unbelievers in the realm of physical intimacy. We’ve also learned the importance of setting high standards in this area and sticking to them.
IN ANY ACTIVITY, there are certain do’s and don’t’s. Dating is no exception. Throughout this series, we’ve already learned many things we should do, as well as many things we should not do, when it comes to dating. In this lesson, we’re going to discuss a few more areas that are important pieces in the dating puzzle.

Parental Involvement

There are two extremes when it comes to parental involvement in a child’s dating life. On the one
extreme is total control. In the Jewish culture of the Old Testament, as well as in many Eastern cultures today, parents have complete say over their children’s dating lives. In reality, there is no such thing as dating in this scenario, as one’s marriage is arranged by one’s parents. At the other extreme is no control. In this scenario, parents have absolutely no say over a child’s dating life. Whereas Eastern culture strongly favors the first extreme, Western culture strongly favors the second. What is needed is something in between (albeit closer to the Eastern model). While it may seem absurd to us for a child to have no say over his or her dating life, it is equally foolish to allow for no parental input in a child’s dating life. A passage which parents love to remind their children of is Ephesians 6:1–3, which reads:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise—“that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.”

As long as you are under the authority of your parents (i.e., as long as you are living under their roof), you are required to obey their wishes, provided such wishes are consistent with Scripture. Therefore, you must honor the wishes of your parents when it comes to your dating life. This includes such things as when you start dating, who you date, what you do on a date, and where you go on a date. Remember, your parents probably know a thing or two about dating, and they probably know much more about it than you do. Therefore, accept their guidance.

For Discussion

What if you have unsaved parents? What if your parents don’t take the initiative of expressing their wishes for your dating life? What if you are no longer living at home? makes no difference, unless they ask you to violate Scripture; you take the initiative; seek their counsel.
When to Start

How old should one be when he or she starts dating? Admittedly, there is no magic age at which one suddenly becomes “dateable.” This does not mean, however, that it is wrong to set an age restriction (for example, no dating until age 16). The problem with setting age restrictions, however, is that age is often a poor indicator of dateability. Whereas one may be ready to date at age 16, another may not be ready until age 21. While age does indicate how long one has traveled on the road of life, it does not indicate how far he’s traveled. Therefore, there are many other factors which should be considered when determining whether or not one is ready to date. Here are some suggestions:

You are ready to start dating when you understand the purpose for dating.

As learned in Lesson One, the sole purpose for dating is marriage. Therefore, you should not start dating until you are nearing the age of marriageability. Again, this age may vary from person to person. Most people do not reach this age until at least their college years.¹ Thus, it would be wise to hold off on dating until graduating from high school.

You are ready to start dating when you have established a set of dating standards and are committed to abiding by them.

As mentioned in Lesson Seven, it’s a good idea to write out your dating standards before you start dating and then tenaciously abide by them.

¹ According to one educator (Pat Griffiths), the median age for marriage in the 1990’s is 26 for men and 24 for women.
You are ready to start dating when you have the full blessing of your parents.

As mentioned above, your parents ought to have a big say in your dating life. To violate their wishes is to invite God’s displeasure.

Take It Slow

One of the biggest reasons why relationships “self-destruct” is because one or both partners unnaturally push the relationship along. Just as it takes time to build a sturdy house, so it takes time to build a healthy relationship. Don’t rush a relationship. Let it develop. Here are two ways to prevent a relationship from going too fast:

Guard your emotions.

“Guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” So says Proverbs 4:23. Wise is the individual who keeps his emotions in check while dating. Make sure any expressions of intimacy, whether words or actions, do not exceed the level of commitment in your relationship. Don’t say “I love you” until you really mean it (See Lesson Three for an explanation of what true love really is.). Don’t share your most intimate feelings right away. Doing so prematurely usually results in much heartache.

For Discussion

What are some other ways in which couples fail to guard their emotions by prematurely expressing their feelings for one another? Pressing for a relationship; offering an expensive gift; class ring; varsity jacket; promise ring

---

2 “I’ve come to realize that I have no business asking for a girl’s heart and affections if I’m not ready to back up my request with a lifelong commitment” (Harris, p. 23). “My father counseled his four sons never to say, I love you’ to a woman until they were ready to follow immediately with Will you marry me?” (Elliot, Passion and Purity, p. 93). This is exactly what Jim Elliot did (Elliot, Quest for Love, p. 226). “No plans till the ring is on the finger” (Elliot, Quest for Love).
Don’t be possessive.

We’ve all seen it. Perhaps we’ve experienced it ourselves. For some reason, we’ve gotten the idea that those whom we date belong to us and us alone. As Clark states: “Most young couples assume . . . that the partner is now the personal property of the other—that is, if you’re going out or dating, you’d better be together constantly or have a doggone good reason why you aren’t. A few mature and courageous couples buck this unspoken rule; but most abide by it faithfully” (pp. 56–57).

Until engagement, you have no claim to the one you are dating. In our culture, engagement is the means whereby two individuals commit themselves to one another exclusively for life. Until that time, you should refrain from “smothering” the one you are dating by being overly-possessive.

The custom of “going steady” is another form that impatience takes. The couple are not ready for marriage or even for the public commitment that engagement ought to entail, but neither are they ready to leave each other in God’s hands (Elliot, Passion and Purity, p. 152).

I believe that until we’re ready to commit our lives in marriage, we have no right to treat anyone as if he or she belongs to us (Harris, p. 48).

Unless a man is prepared to ask a woman to be his wife, what right has he to claim her exclusive attention? Unless she has been asked to marry him, why would a sensible woman promise any man her exclusive attention? If, when the time has come for a commitment, he is not man enough to ask her to marry him, she should give him no reason to presume that she belongs to him (Elliot, Passion and Purity, p. 153).

Breaking Up

Unfortunately, some of us will one day experience the pain of breaking up with someone. Though breaking up is difficult, there are some things which can be done to lessen the pain. Here are some do’s and don’t’s when it comes to breaking up:

The Do’s and Don’t’s of Dating 43
Lesson 8
Some don’t’s

_Don’t play mind games._

When it becomes clear that it’s time to end a dating relationship, be upfront about it. Don’t drop hints. Don’t have others do it for you. Don’t do it impersonally (such as with a “Dear John” letter).

_Don’t drag it out._

It is best for both of you to make a clean break when breaking up. This does not mean that you can no longer be friends. It does mean, however, that you immediately cease from engaging in any expressions of intimacy toward one another. Doing so only prolongs the pain.

_Don’t jump into a new relationship right away._

“Beware of getting involved in a new serious relationship. A common response when we are hurt is to immediately seek a new relationship in order to reassure ourselves that we are still attractive to the opposite sex” (Kirby, p. 120). Take time to reflect upon the previous relationship. Allow God to teach you how to be a better date in the future. Avoid “rebound.”

Some do’s

_Do be loving._

Depending upon the circumstances leading up to a break up, it is often quite tempting to “blast” or “lash out at” your “ex.” As Christians, however, we are to break up with style. This means breaking up as lovingly and gently as possible.

_Do be honest._

Let the other person know the real reason(s) why you are breaking up with him or her. Ephesians 4:15 commands us to “speak the truth in love.” Don’t beat around the bush. Your date deserves a clear and direct explanation as to why you are terminating the relationship.
Conclusion

In this lesson, we have learned several important dating tips. Among these are the need to seek your parent’s approval, waiting to date until you are ready, going slow, and breaking up with style.
Whether, When, and Who to Marry

Whether to Marry

So, you’ve found that special someone, and your relationship has become “serious.” The more you date, the more you realize that you just might like to spend the rest of your life with this person. Marriage sounds like a great idea. In the midst of your excitement, however, several questions begin to trouble you: How do I know if she’s “the one”? If she is the one, how do I know when to “pop the question”? Besides, how do I know if I should even get married in the first place?

The case for singleness

Strange as it may sound, the Bible teaches that it is not God’s will for everyone to be married. There
really is a “bachelor till the Rapture” club. In fact, Paul taught that it is good not to be married.

I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. - 1 Corinthians 7:7–8

God has given some individuals what has been called the gift of singleness—the God-given ability to be content being single. This is one gift that many would rather not receive. If you are of such an opinion, it’s pretty certain you don’t have the gift. The point is: It’s OK not to get married. In fact, as Paul points out, there is spiritual benefit in remaining single.

I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs—how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord. - 1 Corinthians 7:32–35 (See also Matthew 19:12.)

In other words, one who is single has an easier time being devoted to the Lord, all things being equal. His or her loyalties are not divided between the Lord’s work and his or her family.

“Let not our longing slay the appetite of our living” - Jim Elliot to his future bride, Elisabeth

The case for marriage

In spite of the benefits of staying single, most people choose to get married. Like singleness, marriage is also a good thing.

The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” - Genesis 2:18
So, it’s OK to stay single or to get married. The question is: Which one is best for me? In other words, how do I know whether or not I should stay single or get married? Here are some guidelines:

Can you remain abstinent?

Notice the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:

Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. - 1 Corinthians 7:8–9

Most people cannot withstand the natural desire to have sex indefinitely. The solution to this dilemma is marriage, not fornication. This does not mean, however, that one should get married solely for this reason. God’s grace is sufficient to enable anyone to abstain from sexual relations until he or she is ready for marriage.

What are your career goals?

The decision to get married is a decision to commit oneself to meeting the physical and emotional needs of another. One cannot adequately do so, however, if he or she is not around. Certain careers are not conducive to a stable marriage. Therefore, you should determine whether or not your career plans will allow you to have a successful marriage. If not, then you should remain single. As Coleman states: “If you’re planning to fly a one-seater airplane your whole life, you have no business asking someone to be your co-pilot” (p. 64).

When to Marry

Assuming you’ve decided that marriage is for you, the next question you need to answer is when to get married. How does one know when it’s time? Here are some guidelines:
You are ready to get married when you have found someone who is worth getting married to.

This may sound like a “no brainer,” but for some it’s not. Too many young people make the mistake of rushing into marriage with someone who is not right for them. We’ve already discussed who such people are in Lessons Four through Six. Wait upon the Lord. Don’t panic. If God wants you to get married, He will send the right one your way at the appropriate time.

You are ready to get married when you are mature enough to handle the responsibilities of married life.

Make no mistake about it, marriage is a major decision. Once married, you are no longer responsible for just yourself. Besides being obligated to meet the needs of your spouse, you are also obligated to meet the needs of any children the Lord may give you. You are no longer your own. You belong to your spouse and your children. “Married people have no right to do whatever they want whenever they want. That’s called being single” (Coleman, p. 44). Are you mature enough to handle the responsibility of a family? If not, don’t get married.

You are ready to get married when you are willing to remain committed to one and only one man or woman for the rest of your life.

Marriage is all about commitment. You have no business getting married unless you are committed to reserving yourself exclusively for your spouse. All “old flames” must be extinguished.

You are ready to get married when you are in good financial standing.

Benjamin Franklin once gave this piece of wise advice: “First thrive, then wive.” In other words, it’s wise to hold off on marriage until you are in a position financially to meet the material needs
(food, shelter, clothing, medical care, etc.) of a family. Admittedly, it’s not easy to determine at what point this may be. Perhaps it would be wise to wait on marriage until all the debts of both partners are paid and until at least one of you has a steady source of income.

Who to Marry

Perhaps the biggest question one must answer when it comes to marriage is who to marry. Is it God’s will for me to marry so-and-so? According to the traditional view, there is one and only one person you can marry. To marry someone else is to marry outside the will of God. Admittedly, this is a scary prospect. There is one major problem with this view, however: Can one know God’s “specific” will when it comes to marriage? The answer is no. Why? Because God’s specific will is unrevealed. Only God knows for certain who you should marry. The best you can do is make a biblically-informed decision. Before you go throwing your hands up in despair, however, realize this: God has not left us “clueless” when it comes to knowing His will concerning whom we should marry. The Bible reveals to us God’s “moral” will concerning everything, including marriage. The Bible tells us many things that will help us make a wise decision in this area. For example:

It is God’s will that you marry a believer who is living obediently.

See Lesson Four.

It is God’s will that you marry one whom your parents approve of.

See Lesson Eight.

We can determine with absolute certainty that it is God’s will for us not to marry certain individuals. However, we cannot determine with absolute
certainty that it is God’s will for us to marry a certain individual. There are several who might fit the bill. The best we can do is to make as wise a decision as possible in light of the teaching of Scripture (See chapter eighteen of Friesen’s book for a more thorough treatment of this concept.).

Conclusion

In this lesson, we have learned that it’s OK to remain single or to get married. We’ve also learned that there are several guidelines one can use to determine when he is ready for marriage. Among these are availability, maturity, commitment, and financial stability. Finally, we’ve learned that one cannot determine with absolute certainty the one person whom he should marry. Rather, he can use the teaching of Scripture to guide him in making as wise a choice as possible.
OUR JOURNEY through the dating maze is almost complete. In this tenth and final lesson, we will discuss the two most important steps in a dating relationship: engagement and marriage.

Engagement

In spite of the fact that there was no such thing as dating in Bible times, couples usually had time to get to know one another prior to marriage during the period of time known as betrothal. In our culture, we practice something quite similar. It’s called engagement. Engagement is that period of time leading up to marriage during which couples further prepare themselves for married life, focusing
particularly on the wedding ceremony itself. Here are some important points regarding engagement:

**Take it seriously.**

Engagement has fallen on hard times these days. One author claims that 40–50% of all engagements are broken (Kirby, p. 4). This is pathetic. Engagement is a vow. Notice what Scripture has to say about vows:

“Let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.” - Matthew 5:37

It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. - Ecclesiastes 5:5

Engagement is a promise to your partner that you will marry him or her unless providentially hindered. Holzmann puts it quite bluntly: “At [engagement] a couple is not yet married, but they are on their way toward marriage and they should exert every effort to ensure that they get there, unless God intervenes and allows one of them to die” (p. 233). Take engagement seriously. Don’t get engaged unless you are willing to marry your partner right then and there.

**Don’t make it too short or too long.**

How long should the engagement period last? Though there is no one right answer to this question, two extremes should be avoided: very brief engagements and very lengthy ones. The engagement period should be long enough to allow the couple to adequately prepare for the marriage ceremony and the early days of married life, but not so long that the couple begins finding it too difficult to deal with their mounting sexual desires. For most couples, an engagement period anywhere from six months to a year is sufficient.

**Use the time wisely.**

As mentioned above, the purpose for the engagement period is two-fold: 1) to prepare for
the wedding ceremony and 2) to further prepare for married life. Though important, preparing for the ceremony should be secondary. Use the engagement period to intensify your preparation for marriage. A significant part of this involves learning all that you can about married life through such things as Bible study, book reading, and pre-marital counseling. Furthermore, discuss with your fiancee such issues as finances, birth control, and parenting.

Marriage

In the very first lesson of this series, we learned that the purpose of dating is marriage. Thus, no series on dating would be complete without some instruction regarding marriage itself. Here are some important points regarding marriage:

Marriage is for life.

Like engagement, marriage has also fallen on hard times. Whereas some forgo marriage altogether by opting to live together, others opt out of marriage by filing for divorce. Both options are sin. Scripture teaches that marriage is a life-long commitment. It is until “death do us part.” Speaking of marriage, Christ said in Matthew 19:6: “Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.” Don’t marry someone unless you are willing to spend the rest of your life with him or her.

Does the Bible Permit Divorce?

Theologians have debated for centuries as to whether or not the Bible permits divorce. While some believe that divorce is always wrong, others believe that it is permissible under certain circumstances. Though God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16), He does seem to allow for such in two instances: adultery (Matthew 19:9) and desertion by an unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7:15). This does not mean, however, that a divorce should be sought in such cases. God’s desire is that
repentance and reconciliation take place. Divorce should be a last resort.

Get married for the right reasons.

There are many reasons why people choose to get married. Some of these reasons are noble, while others are not.

Bad reasons to get married

Loneliness
Many people get married solely for companionship. This is a very selfish reason for getting married. Loneliness is not a sin. It is better to be lonely than to marry the wrong person.

Sex
Some (especially some men) get married solely for sex. The problem with such thinking is that marriage involves much more than this. As Coleman states: “This may be difficult for young people to believe, but sexual desire doesn’t rage all the time. Other characteristics, therefore, are necessary to keep a relationship from becoming stagnant while the waters are calm” (p. 81).

Peer pressure
Others get married because it’s the thing to do.

After all, all their friends are doing it. Why be left out? Don’t succumb to such pressure. The stakes are too high.

Escape
Still others get married in order to escape a bad home life. This, too, is a dangerous reason for marriage.

Good reasons to get married

Love
In Lesson Three, we learned that true love involves doing what is best for someone else. Your partner has certain needs that can only be met by a spouse.
Love is that which motivates you to commit yourself to meet such needs by marrying him or her.

Children
Another noble reason for getting married is to have children. Children are a reward from God (Psalm 127:3). Blessed is the man who has many of them (Psalm 127:5). The desire to have children is a perfectly legitimate one. However, it is only through marriage that children should be conceived.

Sex
As mentioned in Lesson Nine, Paul taught that it is better to marry than to burn with sexual passion indefinitely. Thus, getting married for sex is OK provided you don’t make this your sole reason for getting married.

Leave and cleave.
When God brought the first husband and wife together, He gave this important instruction:

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. - Genesis 2:24

God’s design for marriage is that each partner “cut the apron strings,” i.e., leave his or her previous family (both physically and emotionally), and unite (“cleave,” KJV) to his or her spouse to form a new family.

Conclusion
In this lesson, we have learned a few things about engagement and marriage. Engagement should be taken seriously; it should be a reasonable length of time (not too short or too long); and it should be time used wisely (to prepare for married life, not just the wedding ceremony). Marriage is for life; it should be entered into for the right reasons; and it involves leaving one’s previous family to form a new one.
1. Of the three Greek words used for love, agape love most clearly describes what “true” love is all about. True

2. A Christian should not date someone who is not a Christian. True

3. When the Bible speaks of sexual immorality (whether fornication or adultery), it is only talking about sexual intercourse in its technical sense, not the behavior which leads up to such. False

4. It is a sin to disregard the wishes of your parents regarding your dating life. True

5. It is good not to get married. True

6. One can know with absolute certainty the specific individual God wants him to marry. False
7. The primary purpose of the engagement period should be to prepare for the wedding ceremony itself. **False**

**Fill in the Blank**

1. The purpose of dating is **marriage**.
2. The primary role of the man is **leadership**, while the primary role of the woman is **submission**.

**Short Answer**

1. In Lesson One, we discussed five improper purposes for dating. Give three.
   1) to have a good time
   2) to overcome loneliness
   3) to make oneself look good
   Also: to have sex and to satisfy one’s parents and/or peers

2. In Lesson Two, we learned that relating to the opposite sex properly is foundational to a successful dating relationship. Give two of the three ways in which you should treat members of the opposite sex.
   You should treat members of the opposite sex like brothers and sisters and like friends.
   Also: like ladies and gentlemen

3. Define love.
   **choosing to do what is best for someone else**

4. Give two of the three characteristics of “Mr. Right” taught in Lesson Five. Mr. Right is . . .
   1) a man of character
   2) a leader
5. Give one of the two characteristics of “Mrs. Right” taught in Lesson Six.

Mrs. Right is a woman of character.

Also: industrious

6. In Lesson Seven, we gave three ways in which God judges those who engage in physical intimacy outside the bounds of marriage. Give two.

1) physical

2) emotional

Also: spiritual

7. In Lesson Ten, we gave four bad reasons for getting married. Give two.

1) loneliness

2) peer pressure

Also: sex and escape

8. Also in Lesson Ten, we gave three good reasons for getting married. Give two.

1) Love

2) Children

Also: sex
The following is a list of resources consulted by the author in preparation for this series. An asterisk (*) indicates those volumes which are particularly recommended.


