

# Dating, Courtship & Engagement: A Journey in Preparing for Marriage

## **Proverbs 30:18-19**

Romance is cool. God designed it.

It is a huge desire of most people's hearts to have a wonderful marriage, but it seems that few attain it. God made male & female, and said it was very good. He designed romantic desires with their fulfillment in marriage.

## **Dating can help prepare you for a successful marriage**

- 1) It can help you learn how to choose the right person to marry.
- 2) It can help you grow in the relationship and communication skills you need in marriage.

## **Review of Topics**

- 1) The benefits of dating, and how dating can help you prepare for marriage.
- 2) When to date. It can be a blessing or cursing.
- 3) Who you should date. Learning to be more discerning.
- 4) How to date so that it can be a growing and learning experience.

In this section we will talk about:

- a) communication
- b) respect
- c) boundaries
- d) self control
- e) pacing
- f) getting physical
- g) the importance of dating in community
- h) the roles and differences of men and women in dating
- i) wisdom in engagement

## **Benefits of dating as preparation for marriage**

Most people dream of having an amazing marriage, but few realize that dream. Clearly, it is not easy. How many people do you know with marriages you would wish for yourself? It's a serious business, yet too few people do much to prepare themselves to have a successful marriage. People typically do all the things that hurt their chances of that happening, i.e., have

sex, rush into things, etc. Dating can help prepare you for marriage and help you get better at choosing someone right for you. It can help you before you're ready to get married in learning to deal responsibly with romantic feelings.

## **Aspects of Marriage**

1. A lifelong commitment to loving one person only.
2. Forsaking all other opportunities for romantic love.
3. Being in a relationship with all the bad, immature, and broken parts of that person.
4. Having your own bad, immature, and broken parts open to the scrutiny of your spouse.
5. Solving conflict in ways that do not involve leaving the relationship.
6. Staying in the relationship even if the other person changes for the worse.
7. Being called to sacrifice many individual preferences for the sake of the relationship.

A big factor in having a successful marriage is choosing the right person. Dating can help you be more discerning in making a good choice of who to marry. That discernment doesn't come automatically. Many people live to regret the choices they made. God can certainly help to resolve marital conflict, but it makes things easier if you choose someone wisely. You can learn to be discerning as to what are the important qualities in a spouse, and how to recognize them. You learn your tastes and values.

Dating helps you develop communication and relationship skills prepare you to be a better spouse. Dating is more heightened than friendship because of the romantic attraction. We are more sensitive to what the other person thinks and behaves. Marriage is similar in this way. When you are married, you are more sensitive to your spouse than you are in a platonic relationship. You get hurt more easily, and it takes more self control in communication. There are more insecurities to deal with than in a same-sex relationship.

Dating vs. Friendship. The terminology can be confusing. There are a lot of variations as to what people call dating and what they call friendship. Because there is so much confusion, it is especially important to be honest about the nature of the relationship, regardless of what you call it. Be careful

about calling something friendship if you have romantic interest or believe the other person does. It is a breeding ground for false hope.

For the purposes of this teaching, we will define dating as going out with someone of the opposite sex when there is mutual romantic interest.

There are many things that can be learned in the process of dating. “Dating is an incubator time of discovering the opposite sex, one’s own sexual feelings, moral limits, relationship skills, and one’s tastes in people.” Dating gives a context to learn sexual self-control and other delaying of gratification.

Why dating rather than friendship? When there are romantic feelings, it is more intense. When people are dating, they often put on a false front, good behavior. You care more about what the other person thinks. You’re more vulnerable; your self worth is more involved.

The problem of not dating: People get to know the opposite sex in the context of “friendship.” Often there are romantic interests, but they are not expressed and this leads to confusion. The feelings are the same, there’s still attraction, but it’s covert, so there can be a lack of honesty. What’s really going on? Be honest about intentions; do not call it friendship so someone could be misled.

Proverbs 27:4-5

Open rebuke is better than hidden love.

If you are saying that you are just friends, but one or both people have romantic interest, it is better to talk about it and clear the air. Be specific. Don’t tell someone, “I don’t want a relationship right now” unless it is true. Ask the person if they are into just being friends.

## **What the Bible Says About Dating**

It would be really easy if we could just do a word study on dating and find all the answers. Problem: dating didn’t happen in biblical times. But does that mean that we can’t learn about dating in the Bible? No.

2 Peter 1:3

Colossians 2:20

We shouldn't add rules to God's Word, such as: no movies, card playing, make-up etc. We have to be careful about what we can and cannot substantiate in Scripture. No specific rules are given for dating, so how do we govern our behavior? In this tape we will go through Scripture that will help you to make clear, godly choices in the situations you will encounter in the context of dating courtship and engagement.

Some people shouldn't date. It's not good to be too dependent. You need to first be at peace being alone. Get close to God; have healthy friends, so that you make choices out of strength, not weakness. Learning how to be a good friend. Pursue wholeness. It doesn't work if you're too needy. Growth attracts growth, so be growing yourself. You should become a person worth marrying.

Get input from those you trust about whether you are ready.

Consider how dating the person affects your walk with God.

Matthew 7:3-5

You cannot ask others to change without you changing. Be the best you can be. Be honorable.

You may want to wait because you're focused on other goals, not really interested, etc.

Two types of dating: when you're ready for marriage and when you're not. Are there any benefits to dating when you're not ready to get married? Same benefits but you need to handle things differently, because there's a different end in view.

## **Who We Should Date**

Make a list of non-negotiable character traits. Get your priorities straight—not too picky on insignificant things. It's a good time to get clear about personal tastes and preferences. If the person matches your tastes, but not the character traits, he/she should be a non-contender. It takes discipline to focus on the important qualities so you don't compromise. Don't magnify taste

issues (he likes music, he's got great abs, good sense of humor, she's tall) at the expense of character issues.

Very important is whether or not they take ownership, and how they repent and change (not just say they're sorry). Look for someone who is open to self-examination & growth.

There's a difference between imperfections (sloppiness) and character flaws (dishonesty). Have a zero tolerance policy to deception.

## **Dating Believers vs. Unbelievers**

Be not unequally yoked. Don't get serious about someone who is new to the faith. Look at the strength of their walk with God, and at how dependent they are on you. This can be misleading. More often than not, a couple gets swept up in the romance, and the weaker person acts more committed to God than they would if they weren't in the relationship. Are they really walking with the Lord or just quoting Scripture?

Be realistic about what doctrinal differences you could live with—baptism, Trinity, manifestations. If you get married without coming to an agreement, those things can be a big deal.

As the relationship progresses, take a look at preferences such as wanting to have children. You need to get that out in the open if are thinking of marriage.

Look for a reciprocal relationship.

Don't ignore red flags.

They need to respect your physical boundaries.

Look at how they are in other relationships. Are they always blaming others? What are their friends like? Do they have lasting friendships? How do they treat others? What is their reputation?

Don't over spiritualize when making choices. "Revelation" is suspect. There is a real lack of objectivity in romance. It is possible God could tell you this is the one, but get input from your close friends (safety in a multitude of counselors). Karen Anne Graeser's Jan. 2002 Tape/CD of the Month, *Four*

*Keys to Evaluating Prophetic Guidance*, applies here. If there is no reason behind your choice, it could be it's not God telling you this is the one.

Take responsibility for yourself, and for your choices. If things don't work out, don't lay all the blame on the person being the wrong person.

Why are you attracted to the wrong kind of person? It's your responsibility to be discerning.

You must be willing to cut loose people who are wrong for you. Have faith & patience that God will bring you the right one. Don't compromise. People often rush to get married because they are afraid they will be alone, and too often they marry someone with a lot of problems. God loves you and wants to bless you with someone if it's on your heart to marry. Sometimes you may have to do some personal growing before you are ready. Ask people who you love & will be honest with you if there are some areas you need to grow or get healing in before you would be ready.

### **False Hope (Romans 5:5 and Proverbs 13:12)**

Genuine change is demonstrated by different behavior for a period of time; one must seek change by taking concrete steps.

### **Face Reality**

Don't be so attached to the fantasy of romance that you don't want to let go.

### **Manifest the Love of God**

Put the needs of others above yourself. Look to preserve the long-term relationship.

1 Timothy 5:1-3—Treat younger women as sisters.

Romans 10:10-2—Honor one another above yourselves.

Matthew 7:12—Do unto others as you would have them do to you.

Philippians 2:1-6—Do nothing out of selfish ambition.

You want a relationship in which both parties are open to confronting and comfort.

### **Self Control**

Control your tongue; set boundaries; slow things down.

Self-control builds trustworthiness for marriage, where it is most needed.

## **Give & Expect Respect**

Respect: your opinion is heard and valued; your differences and disagreeing are validated; your choices are esteemed, even the wrong ones.

Your feelings are regarded. When you are wrong, you're confronted respectfully, not talked down to or babied.

### **How disrespect is manifest:**

1. Dominating
2. Withdrawing
3. Manipulating
4. Direct violation—the same hurtful action after being asked not to
5. Minimizing—saying the hurt person is overreacting
6. Blaming
7. Rationalizing

### **Solutions**

Don't wait to deal with it. Say no as soon as you recognize the problem.

Address the disrespect as a problem. Clarify what bothers you, your feelings, how you like to be treated, what you will do if things do not change.

Bring others in. Own your own part of the problem.

### **What won't work:**

1. Ending the relationship immediately
2. Compliance
3. Retaliation
4. Complaining without consequences

## **Boundaries**

Take appropriate responsibility—not too much blame too much responsibility.

Blame is truth without love. It always focuses on another's fault, with you as the victim. It makes us think our biggest problem is the sins of another, which leads us to try to protect ourselves. We need to separate blame from responsibility. Just because someone is upset doesn't mean you're at fault. Be willing to risk the relationship to do what ever is right. Be willing to get rejected. Don't be more concerned about being good than honest.

## **How to Cure Blaming Others**

1. Become more self-scrutinizing
2. Relate to both the good and bad of the other person
3. Set boundaries instead of blaming
4. Forgive
5. Grieve
6. Learn to humbly listen to correction and restrain the urge to react and blame
7. Use blame as a signal to see if you are afraid, feel judged, or are sad about a fault
8. Take a strong stance of being more concerned about your own soul's state than that of the other person
9. Accept what is negative about the other person and work with the realities instead of staying locked in protest, argument, and blame
10. Ask those you trust to let you know when you play the blame game
11. Be a forgiver, and make mutual forgiveness part of the culture of your relationship

## **Honesty**

Ephesians 4:15 (speaking the truth in love)

Ephesians 4:25 (put off lying)

Be clear about the status of your relationship. Be honest about signals you're giving & receiving. Get in the habit of saying what you want. Do not play a guessing game. Don't expect the other person to be a mind reader.

Be who you are, honest about your likes and dislikes. Don't hide your differences or preferences. Don't adapt to someone to get him or her to like you ("I'll be whatever you want"). It's important to accept that some people won't like you. Have faith that God will bring you who you need.

Talk about values. Don't hide your hurts or conflicts. You shouldn't avoid conflict. Differences are OK. Welcome them. It's not about winning. Seek first to understand, because that helps tear down walls.

Be honest and make choices based on where the relationship is heading. Keep looking down the road. That governs whether your actions are loving. Handle things differently according to whether things are serious or not. Consider how it would be for you and the person to be ministering together.

## **Jealousy**

Make agreements about what kind of behavior each of you is comfortable with when the other is around the opposite sex.

## **Pacing: Should You Be Exclusive?**

Be cautious about how you proceed. Slow emotions down. Talk to yourself. How well do you really know this person? Look at the future of the relationship. Are you ready for marriage? Is this someone you enjoy Christian fellowship with? If so, you may need to be even more careful.

Ask why you're moving too fast. Take time, get counseling, exercise self-control. Use caution, go slowly, analyze. What have you got to lose? It's serious business.

## **How Physical to Get**

1 Corinthians 7:1-9 (not touch [*aptomai*] a women/ not marry euphemism)

1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 (control your body)

Ephesians 5:1-4 (not a hint of sexual immorality)

To kiss or not to kiss—that's a personal choice. Talk to others, see how they were affected, and then choose. You have to think about what you can live with, and what is the best way to love the other person. Be careful about kissing someone if it will get them more serious about the relationship than you are willing to get. Be honest with yourself. A big key is communication. Be deliberate. Don't get swept away in a weak moment without thinking about how it affects you and the other.

Kissing can be a sin if it doesn't take into account how it affects another. There are times when you can kiss in dating and have it not be sin. Petting is another category. It is not something done in public, and is more specifically sexual behavior. You must get really honest about your choices and whether you are being loving and honest. Talk about how it's going to effect things. Don't put your self in tempting situations.

## **Date in Context of Community**

Be honest about the fact that we all have tendencies to lack objectivity in romantic situations. Support and feedback becomes more necessary.

Proverbs 11:14; 24:6 (a multitude of counselors)

Ask honest friends for feedback. Be honest with your friends about the relationship.

## **The Differences Between Men & Women in Dating**

There are differences in the roles of husband & wife. As the “head,” the husband goes first into battle (*The Role of Women in the Church*, Mar/Apr 96 and *Role of Women in the Church 2*, May/Jun 01—teaching tapes available from CES).

“Wild at Heart.” Boys want a beauty to rescue. Girls want to know you will fight for them.

“Mars & Venus on a Date.” Men need to pursue, women need to applaud the pursuit. Men don’t value women if they are not pursuing.

For women: It’s better to wait for someone who will fight for you, who will win you. Men will pursue if it’s the right woman.

How do men pursue? They can make the phone calls, arrange the date. What if they can’t afford it? Go on a picnic with baloney sandwiches. Doesn’t have to cost anything.

### **Evaluate Your Dating**

1. Are you growing in your dating?
2. Are you getting better at choosing?
3. Are you becoming a better person to be in a relationship with?
4. Learn from the past and from mistakes.
5. Take time to grow in honesty and boundaries.

You won’t get it perfect. You will act selfishly at times. The idea is to get honest about when you are being selfish, and minimize those times. Move toward making our actions more Christ-like.

It’s possible to date and contribute to one another’s lives so that both people benefit.

## **Use Wisdom During Engagement**

Engagement shouldn’t mean: “We’re getting married no matter what. We’re too attached to seeing a fantasy come true, we aren’t going to listen to anyone.” You should still stay open to evaluating whether it is the right decision.

It is wise to prepare well before you get married. It makes the marriage much easier. When you are engaged, take time, use self-control. It's wise to get good and plenty of counseling. Take time for scrutiny. Look for potential problems. Be open to hear other people's concerns. Don't barrel your way to the altar. Listen to what others say about how much time to take and what people think of your choice of person.

## **Review**

Dating can help you prepare for marriage if it's done well. It can help you prepare for choosing a spouse as well as enhance your relationship skills. Take time to make a list of what are your non-negotiable qualities. Let truth and love guide your choices in how you behave in dating. Get rid of false hope; don't go too fast. Be careful not to get too physical. Invite people you trust to give you feedback; you need community. Men & women are different. Get counsel in engagement.

For a list of further study materials please see the back page.

**Recommended books and teaching tapes/CDs available from:**

Christian Educational Services  
2144 E 52<sup>nd</sup> St  
Indianapolis, IN 46205  
888-255-6189, M-F 8:30 to 5  
CES@CESonline.org  
www.CESonline.org

Books:

Sex & Scripture: A Biblical Study of Proper Sexual Behavior by John W. Schoenheit

Tapes/CDs:

Role of Women in the Church (Mar/Apr 96)  
Role of Women in the Church 2 (May/Jun 01)  
Establishing Healthy Boundaries (Jul/Aug 01)  
The Joy & Rewards of Sexual Purity (May 02)  
Healthily Processing Anger (Mar 03)  
Growth Begins in Truthfulness (Jun 03)  
Deliverance From People Pleasing (Jul 03)  
Healthy Submission (Feb 04)

**Recommended Books by Others**

Boundaries in Dating by Henry Cloud & John Townsend  
Finding the Love of Your Life by Neil Clark Warren  
Wild at Heart by John Eldredge  
Mars & Venus on a Date by John Gray