

What Does Dating Have to Do with Marriage?

Ricardo Campos, Teaching Elder Grace Chapel, Orange, CA July 10, 2011

I. Introduction

How should one date? What are the ground rules? Are you allowed to engage in deep personal conversation on the first date or should you wait until the third or fourth date? What about loneliness and being single, how is one supposed to handle that? What about sex, how far can we go without sinning? And what does dating have to do with marriage anyway?

II. How Does the World View Dating?

The advice you'll get from the world about dating is varied. Though people are looking for true love, the way they go about it leads to frustration, undefined relationships, and broken hearts. They share too much personal information (often on the first date) before there's a clear understanding of what the relationship is. Regarding sex, sometimes people treat it special, other times they treat it as casual as a handshake. They engage in it with more than one person without thinking of the consequences to themselves or others. All this leaves people frustrated and unsure about the relationship they're in. For example, after nine months of "serious" dating, you think that you have a committed relationship until someone asks your mate, "Are you two serious?" and he replies, "Kind of."

III. How Does God View Dating?

What is the purpose of dating? The foundation of marriage is oneness, Genesis 2:24. This oneness is not just physical. It is mind, body, and soul; it is two people of the opposite sex sharing their intimacy. Since this is what happens on a date, though to a lesser extent, marriage will define what dating is and should be. That is, if you understand what marriage is, then you will know how to date because ultimately, dating is supposed to lead to marriage. Why can't we just date to have fun? You can, but to date someone without clarifying the relationship from the beginning is to toy with their intimacy. You can go out and have fun, but be clear of your intentions and what the relationship is.

Loneliness/Singleness, it will likely take some time to find a husband/wife. In the mean time you may have to deal with loneliness/singleness. First, everyone deals with loneliness, even those who are married, so it's not unique to single people. Second, you should surround yourself with enough friends and family to minimize your loneliness—your church family can and should play a role here. Third, God did not intend for you to be single forever, Genesis 2:18, unless He gave you the gift of celibacy, 1 Corinthians 7:7–9. Thus, God will provide you someone, but this requires your obedience and action. If you make sinful decisions, especially regarding the opposite sex, then you may prolong your singleness.

What kind of person should I date? Frist, 2 Corinthians 6:14 informs us not to be unequally yoked. Therefore, the person you date should not be an unbeliever. Make unbelievers your mission field, but not in your dating life. Second, see if the person you're dating fulfills the central command of marriage: sacrificial love, Ephesians 5:22f. Are they selfless with their friends and family? Are they more concerned about you than themselves? Do they exhibit selfless behavior in all they do, including ministry? Along with this, is their life Christ-centered, i.e., do they view their life through the lens of Scripture and seek to emulate Christ?

At what age should young people marry? Two commands are relevant: the newlyweds should be financially independent, Genesis 2:25, and they should not wait too long to marry otherwise they will 'burn' sexually and fall into sin, 1 Corinthians 7:2, 7-9. We must strive to obey both commands not just the first one. Though, parents urge their children to be financially stable before marriage, they often ignore the second command. This leads to premarital sex among Christians because although they're trying to establish a career, they're burning sexually. You cannot disobey God and expect things to go well, Galatians 6:7.

Their parents' fear is that if they marry young, then they won't finish college or establish their career. What if parents raised their kids differently and taught them to be financial independent while young? Parents would urge their kids to learn a trade as soon as possible so that they could sustain themselves financially. That way, if they decided to marry young, they could provide for themselves while they pursued their plans for a career. Thus, people should contemplate marriage with both commands in mind.

Sex: how far can we go before marriage? It's never a good idea to start by asking, "How far can I go without sinning?" God wants us to enjoy sex thoroughly, Song of Solomon. But He also ordained that it be enjoyed within marriage between a husband and wife and nowhere else. Therefore, to engage in any activity (kissing, touching, etc.) that would tempt you to sin is foolish. God does not want you to burn sexually; He wants you to enjoy it, but not outside of marriage. The question is, "Will you put the other person's interest above your own physical pleasure?" Thus, sex of any kind is out of the question (phone sex, sexting, etc.). Neither can you engage in sex if you're engaged and your wedding is next Saturday. Sex is for marriage and marriage alone.

IV. Guidelines to Follow When Dating

There is a helpful book titled “*We’re Just Friends” and Other Dating Lies* by Mr. Chuck Milian. He suggests following these Five Dating Levels:

1. *Dating for Something to Do*: these are ‘getting to know you’ dates, preferably group events but there are one-on-one dates. There is no obligation to go on another date. Attraction is not required, only a desire to have fun. You can date many people at one time. Conversations must not be too personal; seek a basic understanding of the person. No late night phone conversations. No physical contact at all (kissing, holding hands, etc.). Frequency: one call/date once or twice a month.
2. *Dating Because it’s You*: you must acknowledge your interest/attraction. These are mostly group events but there are one-on-one dates. This is not an exclusive relationship.¹ You pay for each other’s dates (Mr. Milian suggestion: whoever invites pays). There should be a spiritual dimension to the relationship. You can pray together, but prayers must not be too personal. Conversations are more private and personal. Holding hands and arm around shoulder and waist is OK, but no kissing. Frequency: weekly date and 1–2 contacts each week. Mr. Milian suggests staying at this Level 3–6 months.
3. *Dating with the Future in View*: this is an exclusive relationship. There’s an equal division between group events and one-on-one dates. The focus is on clarifying life goals and true compatibility. Conversations get more personal. You discuss things you need to know before marriage, e.g., attitude towards children, value systems, and personal goals. You also spend time with each other’s families. You want to experience each other in multiple environments, social, church, family, work, etc. Hand-to-head contact and hand-to-body begins, e.g., neck rubs. Kissing is OK but not if it leads to more physical intimacy. There is no late night conversations, couch cuddling, back rubs, sleeping over on the couch, or saying “I love you.” Frequency: 1–2 dates per week and multiple contacts per week.
4. *Dating and Engaged to You*: the focus is on clarifying roles, family boundaries, premarital counseling, and life planning. Kissing is OK, but not if leads to more physical intimacy.
5. *Dating after Saying I Do*: weekly dates are critical to keep romance alive, maintain open communication, and mature the relationship in preparation for children and eventual ‘empty nest syndrome.’

Mr. Milian also suggests dating for one year prior to getting engaged. The whole point is not to share intimacy until a commitment level is understood by both parties.

¹ This is one area where I disagree with Mr. Milian. Because of the level of intimacy shared at Level 2 (e.g., you can put your arm around their shoulder/waist, have more personal conversations, and pray together), I think this should be an exclusive relationship.