

“Teens and Dating”

In most American household the issue of dating comes up during the teen years. Over my years as a pastor I have been asked this question by concerned parents and teens very frequently.

Most parents never even question the idea of dating. It is just considered the “normal thing to do”. The only question might be what is the right age and what are some boundaries? After all most people reason if you don’t date how would you ever meet the “Right One”? First let me say that God has given your children to you to watch and guard over their lives. Second, please consider the divorce rate and realize that “dating” is not working. Even above and beyond the divorce rate look at the huge number of people struggling with “romantic relationship” heartbreak, intimacy, trust issues and the like. As a parent you are the authority in your child’s life and what you say goes. I offer these suggestions for your prayerful consideration as you approach this subject with your teens.

First of all dating as practiced in America is not in the Bible. I know that driving cars is not in the Bible either – but various modes of transportation are in the Bible. Family – Marriage – Parents and children – those are in the Bible. The idea of romantically seeing one person after another and then breaking up is NOT in the Bible anywhere.

The concept of trying out people to see if you like them and then breaking up to find “other fish in the sea” is not biblical. I know – I know you think but my kids will protest if I won’t let them date. You may also look at your own life and think but I dated and it all eventually worked out. Perhaps it did all “work out” – for lots of people it does all “work out” but let’s be honest there was probably a lot of tears, heartbreak, severe cases of unrequited “love” and a host of all kinds of other stuff you really didn’t need to go through.

So back to dating. God’s idea is for men and women is marriage for a lifetime. Let’s face it who in high school is really ready for marriage and lifetime companionship? Nobody. With that being said dating in high school is just not a good idea for so many reasons. It doesn’t really matter that it’s the “norm” and what everybody (including Christian do). We are called according to Romans 12:1-2 to renew our minds and not to conform to this world.

Romans 12: 1-2 NIV

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

The first pre-requisite for marriage is a strong personal relationship with Christ. We all know marriage works so much better if both people know the Lord and are mature in Christ. Quite honestly, teens don't fit this bill – nor should they be expected to – nor should they be in situations that require more adult mature thinking that they can handle in their teen years.

Luke 10:27 (a)

He answered: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind...."and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.

A second pre-requisite for marriage is personal responsibility. How can a teen who is still learning how to do homework, and how to do laundry going to handle a mature, responsible relationship with a member of the opposite sex? Personal responsibility is learned through a relationship with Christ and parents, extended family members, spiritual leaders, and pastors. Your teen needs to completely understand that it is sin to exploit other people. It is sin to “break other people's hearts” or to treat people poorly. Again this kind of knowledge and responsibility is above what most teens in America can honestly handle.

Luke 10:27 (b)

and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Make it easier on them (and you) by just not allowing them to date. Express to them that you want their relationships to be mature and successful. Right now growing close the Lord – seeking His will for their life and career must come first. Spending time with their family (immediate and extended) is the best experience for the success of future relationships. Yes, your teen does need some good solid friendships too. Hopefully, those are the children of grown ups that you trust and spend time with also. Even youth group participation should be monitored and approved on an event by event basis. Don't just “throw your kids out there” because you think it's church and everything will be “safe”.

There will come a time when your child (not when they are a child though) is ready to pursue a relationship with the opposite sex. You will know when the time is right (again I don't think teen dating is wisdom). This is only after the following areas of their lives are in order:

A strong personal relationship with Christ.

A sense of keen personal responsibility.

A time in which their motives have been proven pure (they want to honor God in their relationships and are seriously ready for the responsibility spiritually, emotionally, and financially). Yes, I said financially. That's a part of personal responsibility.

Finally, even if they are already 18 years of age or older there should be some immediate and extended family member involvement (whenever possible).

None of us are islands unto ourselves. We need the involvement of our immediate and extended family in our lives. I am not talking about smothering your young adults here. I am talking about helping them launch successfully into life. This means you must meet whoever they are talking to – this will help you pray for them and guide them through the courting process.

Even after I turned 18 years of age my parents insisted that they meet anyone I went out with. Yes, people thought that was strange but it did two things:

- 1) It showed people that my parents cared – that I wasn't just "anyone" and I wasn't allowed to do just "anything". Just this parental expectation set me apart from others and it kept those with impure motives away from me.
- 2) It protected me from 'giving my heart away" too quickly and unwisely.

I am grateful for both of these things today. When it comes to dating remember God does not have you in your teenagers life to be their friend. They have enough friends already. They need parent/s that love them enough to watch over them and protect them.

For more information and helpful resources check out the following:

Books

"I Kissed Dating Goodbye" by Josh Harris

www.joshharris.com

"The Illusion of Dating – Pretending to be Married – Practicing for Divorce" by Daryl Fitzgerald

<http://darylfitz.com>

<http://www.gotquestions.org/dating-courting.html>

<http://www.gotquestions.org/difference-dating-courting.html>