

The Dangers of Dating

I do not believe that dating is sinful but it is broken and needs to be fixed. Dating is similar to eating at a fast-food restaurant—it's not wrong to eat there, but there is something far better available. There is a better way of romance, a way that might spare many heartaches and regrets.

Most kids grow up thinking that dating is an essential part of being a teenager. To them, life is a series of one-girlfriend (or boyfriend)-after-another, which really amounts to one heartache after another. They understand that the dating relationship does not involve any permanent commitment and that either party is free to break up the romance at any time, for any reason. In most cases, even Christian young people proceed through a number of serial romances before marriage. In breaking up, these two hearts that have begun bonding are ripped apart. They each leave the relationship with some degree of heartbreak. They might either display varying degrees of emotional devastation or simply toughen their feelings. Either way they leave the relationship emotionally wounded or scarred. The pain of breaking up eventually subsides as they develop a new romance with a different partner. In time, however, this relationship results in another heartbreak and more emotional wounds that leave scars. Some of the romances are serious and others admittedly so casual that breaking up is hardly painful at all. Yet the cumulative effect is that the person's heart becomes increasingly calloused. Some respond to this sequence by developing strategies to play the game in such a way to always be the heartbreaker rather than the heart-broken. Finally, the young person finds the one that they will eventually marry but the memories of past romances, the insecurity of being dropped again, the pattern of jilting partners when the other person loses their initial, intense appeal, and the callouses cultivated to protect from further pain all become barriers to emotional and physical unity. Yet we still insist that dating is somehow healthy preparation for marriage. Isn't such *emotional promiscuity* more likely a training ground for divorce than marriage?

There must be a better way to interact with members of the opposite sex; a less hurtful means to find a suitable life partner. Perhaps the solution can be found in "*smart love*". Smart love begins with the desire for God's best and requires a knowledge of and willingness to obey God's rules. "*Dumb love*" is interested in what I can get such as the popularity a girlfriend can give or the comfort and pleasure I can gain physically or emotionally from a relationship. Dumb love is choosing what feels good for me instead of what is good for others and what pleases God. Does love motivate the guy who has sex with his girlfriend when it will scar her emotionally and damage her relationship with God? Does love motivate the girl who leads a guy along then breaks up with him when she finds someone better? The answers are obvious. Smart love is sincere, God-focused love that is concerned for others. Dumb love is self-centered and flirtatious.

The Seven Habits of Highly Defective Dating:

1. It leads to intimacy but not necessarily to commitment.

- 2. It tends to skip the “friendship” stage of a relationship.**
- 3. It often mistakes a physical relationship for love.**
- 4. It often isolates a couple from other vital relationships.**
- 5. It distracts young adults from their primary responsibility of preparing for the future.**
- 6. It can cause discontentment with God’s gift of singleness.**
- 7. It creates an artificial environment for evaluating another person’s character.**

So how do we avoid defective dating? How can couples meet, romance one another and nurture a relationship that might someday bloom into marriage? To begin with, we must stop abusing the word love. Our meaning is far below God’s. Man’s view of love contains several notions that are contrary to God’s and should therefore be contrary to the way we pursue love, especially love in the deepest and most intimate of human relationships. We must reject the philosophy that reduces love to a mere feeling, and believes that it is beyond control. According to God’s Word love seeks first the good of others, is not measured by feelings, and is capable of being controlled responsibly. The style of dating in Western culture is little more than a series of short-term relationships that lack personal responsibility, sincerity and love.

The substance of romance-as-it-ought-to-be must include, among other qualities, patience, purity, and grace. Sometimes what is wrong with a romantic relationship is simply timing. If a young man (or lady) is not prepared to seriously consider a lifelong commitment, he is better off to avoid monopolizing another person’s affections and isolating himself from other valuable friendships. Why not rather enjoy the season of singleness as a gift from God?

When the possibility of romance does enter one’s life, what a blessing it would be to have developed a lifestyle of purity. Physical interaction encourages us to begin something we are not supposed to finish, awakening desires we are not allowed to consummate, turning on passions we have to turn off. Patience is tough; purity is a struggle. But God’s grace is available.

The journey toward marriage cannot be reduced to a formula, nor should it be. Relationships are as unique and varied as the people who are involved in them. God is creative in building lives and even more so in bringing two together as one. While there is no formula, there are principles to help navigate a relationship through the major stages of romance: casual friendship, deeper friendship, purposeful intimacy with integrity, and engagement. (These principles include determining if the relationship should be moved along, how to move it along, and how to get help in the process.)

Finding the right partner is a matter of working to become the right life partner and trusting God to cover the ‘who’ and ‘when’ issues. We must purpose to remain pure and build wholesome relationships that cause us to treat younger men as brothers and younger women as sisters.

