

"Dating to Engagement"¹

Series Overview:

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| 1. Dating and the Glorious Purpose of Marriage | 2. Dating and Communication | 3. Dating and the Husband's Ministry |
| 4. Dating and the Wife's Ministry | 5. Dating and Sex | 6. Dating and Children |
| 7. Dating and Money | 8. Dating as Courting | 9. Dating Wisdom |
| 10. Dating to Engagement | 11. Dating and Singleness | |

I. Are you both fruit-bearing Christians?

- A.** The Bible is absolutely clear that a Christian is only to marry another Christian (1 Cor. 7:39).
1. In marriage two people become "one flesh" in every single way possible; a non-Christian and a Christian cannot be one spiritually (2 Corinthians 6:14).
 - a. Marriages between a non-believer and a believer are usually unhappy and often end in divorce, if the unbelieving spouse does not become a believer; one should only be in this situation if he or she comes to faith in Christ after marriage.
 - b. **DISCUSSION:** How would you describe the marriages that you have seen where one spouse is a Christian and the other is not?
- B.** It is not enough to simply profess Christ, one must demonstrate by their lifestyle that their profession is genuine (John 8:31-32; 14:15 1 John 2:4).
1. *"Being a Christian is more than a verbal profession of faith in Jesus Christ. It is a way of life. It means in practice that you love and rely on Jesus more than on your spouse."* --- Powlison and Yenchko
 2. Some key things to look for in evaluating the genuineness of a Christian profession: a commitment to the worship and work of a local church (1 Peter 4:10; Hebrews 10:24-25), a commitment to the spiritual disciplines (Col. 4:2; 1 Peter 2:2), an interest in talking about the things of the Lord (Deut. 6:4-7; Psalm 1:2), and the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).
 - a. Through the dating relationship, these "marks" should not be too difficult to determine.

II. Do you have a track record of solving problems biblically?

- A.** Conflict will occur in any sort of committed relationship so one must be able to deal with it in a biblical way.
1. *"There are only two absolutely essential requirements [for choosing a mate]: first, that the other person is a Christian; second, that the two of you not only desire to but growingly give evidence of an ability to face, talk over, and solve problems together from God's Word in God's way."* --- Jay Adams
 2. People who never conflict aren't getting to know each other very well!
- B.** One cannot expect that large issues of disagreement in the dating relationship will go away in the marriage relationship, so they must be worked through before even considering engagement.
1. *"To enjoy the blessings in marriage, you need skills in solving problems and building honesty and trust...Problem patterns don't go away when you get married. Instead, they are aggravated, and the painful consequences multiply."* --- Powlison and Yenchko
 2. **DISCUSSION:** What types of disagreements might a dating couple wrongly think will simply resolve themselves once they are married?
- C.** Your dating partner must demonstrate a willingness to patiently discuss areas of conflict, a humble repentance when approached about their own sin, and the ability to forgive when they are wronged.
1. If any of these three things is sorely lacking in your partner's life, they do not know how to biblically deal with conflict.
 2. To make the point by contrast, the opposite of these three things is avoidance of conflict or anger-filled fighting, offensiveness when approached with their own sin, and lingering bitterness and resentment even when the one who has wronged them has genuinely repented.
 - a. **DISCUSSION:** What other mistakes are often made by dating couples when conflict occurs?
- D.** The modern idea of "compatibility" is unbiblical and harmful.
1. The idea of compatibility says that one should only date or marry those who are very similar to them in their "personality traits" and interests.
 - a. One of the problems with this is that the "personality traits" often reflect our specific sin struggles more than a reflection of an unchangeable, genetic disposition.
 - i. In other words, finding someone compatible to you may be simply finding someone who struggles with the exact same sins that you do!
 - b. **DISCUSSION:** In discussions about compatibility, what are the issues emphasized?

¹ This lesson is heavily dependent on a little booklet that I highly recommend: *Pre-Engagement: Five Questions to Ask Yourself* by David Powlison and John Yenchko.

2. Compatibility is simply not an accurate way of really assessing what another person is like; this really will only be known in the marriage context.
 - a. If you ask most married couples who have been married for some time how much they really knew about their spouse before they got married, most will tell you that they really knew very little.
 - b. *"We are sorry if this is shocking, but compatibility had better not be the key to marriage, or else our happiness depends on a shot in the dark."* --- Richard and Sharon Phillips
3. Compatibility focuses too much on how the other person can serve me instead of how I can serve that person.
 - a. *"[The idea of compatibility] reflects the consumer model of our secular culture more than the sacrificial model found in Scripture."* --- Richard and Sharon Phillips.
 - b. *"The issue is not whether you can find someone worthy of your love, but whether you are ready to give a love that is worthy of marriage."* --- Richard and Sharon Phillips
 - c. **DISCUSSION:** How much do you think the idea of compatibility affects dating today?
4. An emphasis on compatibility is basically a desire to avoid sanctification.
 - a. *"To most of us, finding a compatible mate means having a marriage that requires minimal change from us. We are selfish and lazy, especially when it comes to character change, so we want someone who will fit nicely just as we are."* --- Richard and Sharon Phillips
 - b. *"The Biblical fact is that no two persons are compatible, regardless of whether their backgrounds are similar or not. We are all born sinners, and that means that we are by nature incompatible people...People are not born compatible; they only become compatible by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in their lives."* --- Jay Adams
 - c. **DISCUSSION:** As Christians, why should we not want to avoid sanctification?

III. Are you heading in the same direction in life?

- A. The Bible teaches that a man and a woman leave their parents (or single life) behind in order to cleave to one another (Genesis 2:24).
 1. The partners must be willing to change the way they relate to their parents and friends.
 - a. The marriage partner will be their number one friendship and the number one person that they must look to for emotional support and such.
 - i. Sometimes a son or daughter will have a hard time making this transition from their mom or dad to their spouse.
- B. The married couple is called to be one in the way they serve the Lord in their marriage.
 1. The couple must make sure that they both are in fairly close agreement to what the Scripture teaches concerning the distinctive ministry of the husband and the wife, the importance of rearing godly children, the commitment to a local church, the stewardship of their financial resources, etc.
 2. The wife will be called to be the helper to her husband so she must be willing to support and encourage the man in the vocation to which God is calling him.
 - a. For example, if God is calling the man to serve overseas as a missionary and the woman is repulsed at the idea of ever living more than a couple of hours from her parents, they should not get married!
 3. **DISCUSSION:** What are some of the other areas of direction that you think should be considered?

IV. What do those who know you well think of your relationship?

- A. Ideally, accountability and counsel from others will have already been a part of your dating relationship.
 1. We need the help of others to make sure that we do not give in to the deceitfulness of sin as we spend time with a person of the opposite sex in the dating relationship (Hebrews 3:12-13).
- B. Godly people who know you well should be consulted about what they think about how well you two could serve the Lord together in the marriage relationship (Proverbs 14:12; 12:15).
 1. We are sometimes blinded to serious character and calling issues with the person we are dating, so those with a more objective perspective can provide much help.
 2. **DISCUSSION:** To be more specific, what kind of godly people would be able to give you the best counsel?

V. Do you want to marry this person with a willingness to accept them just as they are?

- A. First, one should make sure that they really want to marry this person and not just because they are pressured by others.
 1. The Scripture emphasizes that we have the choice to marry or not marry; it is not a choice others can make for us (1 Cor. 7:25-40).
- B. The gospel helps us to realize that the one we will marry is still a sinner in PROCESS of transformation.
 1. God loves and accepts us and our fellow Christians on the basis of Christ's person and work and not any merit in ourselves (Romans 15:7-9), so we too must love and accept our Christian brother or sister with their own specific sin struggles.
 2. Ultimately, God is sovereign over the level of practical holiness that your potential spouse will grow into over the course of life on earth, so we cannot expect that they will necessarily completely overcome certain sins.