

## **Christian Dating: Putting your Brave Pants on!**

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### **Our Topic:**

Dating is risky business (especially in Christian circles) – should you, could you, and how do you get into committed and godly relationship.

### **For:**

Unmarried Men or Women – in or hoping for a relationship

### **Aim:**

To consider the *roles* and *responsibilities* of a Christian Boy or Girl in a godly relationship.

Specifically:

- How much of what the Bible says about marriage should be put into action?
  - How can we better show care to each other?
  - Discuss what should or could be done to get into a committed godly relationship.
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### **Outline**

Introduction

Why 'go out' with someone?

A Biblical View of Relationships

The Nature of Marriage

The Purpose of Marriage

Christian Marriage

Who to go out with?

Why don't we get into Relationship?

How to act towards the opposite sex?

How to get into a Relationship?

Holy Dating

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### **Equipment**

- Butchers Paper and Markers
  - Books
  - Lectern
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Welcome and thanks for registering for this seminar.

For some, to come to a seminar like this in the first place would have been a demonstration of putting your brave pants on – thank you. Let's make our time worthwhile.

A little about me, so you know where I am coming from:

- KDN

Who are you?

➤ Go around the room – name, church.

➤ Pray

### **Introduction**

- We have a tricky and personal subject before us – Christian Dating.
- This is not that easy to talk about especially when I don't particularly know you or you me!
- It is tricky because it is an emotionally charged topic.
- It is tricky because it is personal
- It is tricky because across this group we are probably in different circumstances
  - single and unsure about whether you want to be in a relationship,
  - single and interested,
  - just going out,
  - long term going out,
  - engaged?

I take it that you are all Christian

I know that you (as I am) are sinful.

And I assume that we each come with different degrees of baggage when it comes to current or past relationships.

- That said, not knowing you also has its advantages because it means I can say things which the Bible says about our topic and you can know that I am not saying it to address something personally at you – given I don't (necessarily) know your situation.

### **Why 'go out' with someone?**

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- There are many good reasons why a person should go out with another?
  - [Butchers paper] – In groups, what are some of the reasons people yearn to go out with others?

*[Get the group to put the write them on butchers paper – then debrief, but acknowledging the strength of emotions that could lie behind these reasons]*

### **A Biblical View of Relationships**

- The place to start whenever you want to know anything about what God thinks of course is the Bible.
- Exercise: What passages in the Bible (that you can think of) say anything about Christian Dating?

*[In threes – give some time, then debrief]*

For Christians, when thinking about developing a relationship with the opposite sex, or when in a relationship - we are really talking (or should be) about the relationship of (eventual) marriage.

So the place to start is theologically – briefly, what is marriage really about?

#### **The Nature of Marriage**

- The nature of marriage has been under attack since the Fall (Gen 3) – but particularly in the last 100 years as culture norms have challenged Biblical patterns for marriage.
- Western society used to think biblical marriage was a good idea, and that divorce, adultery, pre-marital sex, cohabitation; serial monogamy and same sex marriage were bad ideas.
- Now, by and large, we don't question that they are sometimes necessary evils, or even that some of them are moral imperatives.
- The Bible says that marriage between a man and woman is a gift from God.
- Genesis 2 - Marriage is where man is created as male and female, and marriage is ordained with the words... (Gen. 2:24) *Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*

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- The nature of marriage the way God created it is demonstrated every time a man and woman leave their families of origin and join together as one new family.

#### **The Purpose of Marriage**

- To help us think about dating – let's think about the purpose of marriage? Why does it exist? Three things to consider.

#### **Togetherness – by God**

- Genesis 2:18:

The Lord said, *'It is not good for a man to be alone'; I will make a helper fit for him'*

- The common reading of this verse implies that it is not good for a man to be lonely – as if Adam in the garden was bored!
- Verses 19-23 suggests a little more.
- (2:20) Every beast of the field, every bird of the heavens were brought to Adam – but from all, none was found suitable as a *'helper fit for him'*
- So the Lord created woman from the rib of Adam and when she was brought to him he responds with joy (2:23) *'At last...bone of my bones...flesh of my flesh...she shall be called Woman'*
- Adam's response in 2:23 without our fallen sex-saturated culture to ruin it for us is saying that this union is sexual, relational and made for one another – this is the way things should be.
- Given that God created, then he also sets the purpose.
- With God we do not have the opportunity to argue about the purpose of marriage. If he says marriage is for something, then that is what it is for. And of course there are a range of competing possibilities when we ask the question of what marriage is for.
  - Marriage is for the expression of romantic feelings.
  - Marriage is for physical satisfaction of sexual urges.
  - Marriage is for the stability of society.
  - Marriage is for the bringing up of children in a safe and stable environment.
  - Marriage is for producing Godly offspring (Mal 2:15)
  - Marriage is because it is not good for the man to be alone.
- There may be many biblical purposes for marriage, but to start with, to be founded on – we have to recognize that God's purpose for marriage is at least to bring a Man and a Woman together for each other.

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- Any further purposes that may be determined for marriage should not contradict or undermine that very core purpose.

#### **Rule – by God**

- Back to our verse in Genesis - *It is not good that man should be alone. I will make a helper fit for him.* (Gen 2:18)
- The context in Genesis 1 reminds us that male and female are made in the image of God. What does this mean for our dating relationships?
- Look at 1:26 – ‘*God said let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in his own image in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them*’ (1:26-27)
- In God’s creation of Man he very clearly gives a mandate to rule (to have dominion over).
- It is both for the man and the woman as the second half of verse 27 mentions both male and female - Humans are given the responsibility together to rule the earth for God. (see also 1:29 ‘*fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion [over it]*’)
- This should help us understand the idea of stewardship as man and woman are divinely appointed caretakers of the earth.
- Significantly it is not man alone – but man and woman who share this joint stewardship
  - together they are to exercise this rule according to the will of God.
  - together they are to multiply and be stewards of the children given to them by God.
  - together they are to subdue the earth by division of labour
  - No it is not good for a man to be alone – because God’s purpose in marriage is that his ‘helper’, his wife will share the joint responsibility of ruling for God.

#### **Relate sexually – by God**

- Let’s push further...
- – the purpose of marriage is more than God bringing a man and a woman together to rule – the purpose of marriage is to bring a man and a woman together to relate sexually.
- The woman being taken from the flesh of the man (2:21), to become flesh of his flesh (2:23) and to then join together as one flesh (2:24), naked and not ashamed (2:25) - is sexual and deeply relational.

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- The sexual nature of marriage is a theme that runs through the Bible.
- You see it is with Isaac and Rebekah in little verses like Genesis 24:67 which talks about how Isaac loved Rebekah and so is *comforted* after the death of his mother.
- You see it in the patient love story of Jacob and Rachel in Genesis 29.
- You see it reflected in the story of Ruth and Boaz (in the book of Ruth)
- You find a sense of it in verses like Proverbs 30:18-19

*Three things are too wonderful for me;*

*four I do not understand:*

*the way of an eagle in the sky,*

*the way of a serpent on a rock,*

*the way of a ship on the high seas,*

*and the way of a man with a virgin.* (Prov 30:18-19)

- And then of course there is Song of Songs – full of sexual ideas and imagery.
- That said, sex although important in marriage, is not all consuming in the Bible.
- The whole question of sex (or even romantic love) seems to be so much more important to our world than it is to the Bible.
- If this idea of sex is so important - wouldn't you expect to read far more about it than we in fact do?

Yet you can read huge slabs of Old Testament, and the Gospels and Acts, and almost all of Romans, and more, without finding reference to the idea of romantic love, sex, and intimacy in the context of the marriage relationship.

- If marriage is at the heart of being in the image of God, why isn't there more?
- Not to mention what we do with things like the singleness of the Lord Jesus, and the likely singleness of Paul and in fact the whole category of singleness.
- Can I suggest, the Bible doesn't spend more time on sex because sex is not the be-all-and-end-all of marriage. It is certainly a fantastic and fundamentally important part of marriage but sex has a purpose and it is more about precreation.
- God's command (1:28) is to *be fruitful and multiply and fill all the earth*

PAUSE

### **Christian Marriage**

- Let me quickly turn to the idea of Christian Marriage – then I'll draw this together so we can think about Christian dating.
- To be a Christian is to be someone who recognizes, more sharply and clearly than our world, that the creation story is not the end.
- As early as Genesis 4 we are introduced to Lamech who took more than one wife, even the great Abraham had more than one wife and also had concubines.

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- The Old Testament reports polygamy but never holds it up as an example to be imitated.
- By the end of Genesis we've seen adultery, incest, rape, homosexual rape, and prostitution - quite a bit more than we really were bargaining on.
- Blame it on the Fall!
- The fall has damaged all of our relationships, especially and profoundly the marriage relationship.
- The fall is the reason why it is so tempting to have sex before marriage.
- The fall is the reason why marriage when it does happen is often hard work.
- The fall has meant for some that command (in marriage) to be fruitful and multiply seems like a distant promise – because falling pregnant just doesn't seem to happen.
- But God's purposes for marriage—for man and women to be together, to rule, to relate sexually and to multiply and fill the earth under God — his purposes for marriage (despite the fall) are in no way changed.
- When Jesus comes he doesn't undercut the truth and reality of marriage – he reaffirms it as God's plan.
- When he's asked about divorce in Matthew 19, the very first thing he does is to remind his hearers of Genesis 2, and God's plan that marriage be permanent.
- Paul in speaking of marriage in Ephesians 5 suggests that Christian marriage should be a demonstration of the gospel as everything should be 'out of reverence to Christ' (5:21).
- It is with Jesus and because of our sin that we *move away from the sphere of creation* and we *move towards the sphere of redemption*.
- Our (future) marriage should demonstrate our permanent redemption in Christ – as Ephesians 5 points out.
- We should recognize the marriage relationship as a wonderful gift of God our creator, there to be enjoyed in its fullness, but not as an introspective end in itself, but as a way of reaching the world with the news that Jesus is Lord.
- But just in case we fall into the trap of thinking that marriage is all important, it is worth noting that in heaven, there is no marriage (Matt 22:30) which suggests that pursuit to get married off (instead of remaining single) should not be overstated.
- For Christians – the job is to serve God with all that he has given us. Which means:
  - while single, we serve God in our singleness.

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- while going out, serve God as an exclusive couple but with the intention of glorifying God in all you do.
  - When engaged, serve God by being pure and blameless.
  - When married (if God so intends that gift for you), serve God as husband and wife recognizing that your marriage, like everything else, should be to glorify God.
- Our job as Christians is to set an example of godly and faithful living both while single, while we date, and then if married.
- In thinking rightly about Christian dating, we have to think about it in the context of Christian marriage.

If interested there are several passages in the Bible that may be worth further reflection:

- Matthew 19:11-12 – Remain unmarried? - single by birth or event or single by choice.
- Matthew 22:29-30 – At the (final) resurrection there is no marriage
- Revelation 19:6-8 – The wedding of the Lamb – when all will rejoice and give him glory.
- 1 John 4:10-11 – Love: that God loved us and sent his son.
- Ephesians 5:21-27 – Love and Submission in marriage out of reverence for Christ.
- 1 Peter 1:14-16 – Be holy, because I am holy
- 1 Corinthians 7:1-39 – Matters to do with singleness, marriage and relationships
- Matthew 5:27-30 – Adultery
- 1 Thessalonians 4:2-8 – Sexual Purity
  
- Note – these verses are about proactively being holy and blameless.
- Being in a relationship, being married, is not the fix if you are ‘unholy’.
  
- *QUESTIONS/COMMENTS??*

### **Who to go out with?**

Guys – let me talk first to you...

Proverbs 31 draws a picture of a godly woman and excellent wife. The qualities that are written of this woman are a great guide to who you should go out with especially if you are seeking to be ministry-minded (and married). Of course the picture is of a married woman, so what you are looking for is evidence that she would aspire to these qualities – the greatest and most important being a fear of the Lord.



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- 10 *An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.*
- 11 *The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.*
- 12 *She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.*
- 13 *She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands.*
- 14 *She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar.*
- 15 *She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens.*
- 16 *She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.*
- 17 *She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong.*
- 18 *She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night.*
- 19 *She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle.*
- 20 *She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy.* 21 *She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet.*
- 22 *She makes bed coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple.*
- 23 *Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.*
- 24 *She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchant.*
- 25 *Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.*
- 26 *She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.*
- 27 *She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.*
- 28 *Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:*
- 29 *"Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all."*
- 30 *Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but **a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.***
- 31 *Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.*

This woman, works for the sake of those she is caring for (husband and children and poor and needy). She is a woman of strength, dignity, wisdom, kindness. Note this is not a physical description (must be thin, large, tall, short, pretty, blonde, etc.)

Seek these fundamental aspects about the person you may be interested in.

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Ladies – let me talk to you now...

Colossians 3:1-17 is worth considering [*READ IT*].

This passage is not written specifically about men – but ladies, if you are looking for a man, then it is a great start! Note the things he should put off (put to death – vv 5-11) and then note the things he should put on (vv 12-17) – and all because of Christ (vv 1-4).

I am sure you know this, but for the Christian seeking to get into a relationship the **Biblical imperatives** are (four things):

- a. The opposite sex (Gen 2:18, 22-24)
- b. Not related to you (Lev 20:10-12, 17-21; 1 Cor 5:1)
- c. Available (not married, engaged or going out) (Rom 7:2, Tit 1:6)
- d. Christian

The Bible says that you should marry a Christian (1 Cor 7:39).

Dating someone who is not a Christian is both

- a) dishonest and misleading because you shouldn't marry them and
- b) very foolish because you will constantly have to compromise.

A Christian is a new creation (2 Cor 5:17) and a non-Christian is in rebellion with God. What do you fundamentally have in common? How will you both encourage one another to be holy? How will you help each other serve God? How will you read the Bible or pray together? How will you be encouraged to sincerely go to church for your benefit? How can you expect to remain holy when the other person does not have the Spirit of God nor the desire to be holy?

If it is of lasting substance it will be Christian (2 Cor 6:14-7:1).

**Wisdom** would also say (three further things):

- e. Ministry minded (1 Tim 3:2; Tit 2:1-5)
- f. Growing as a Christian
- g. And you like them

Go out with someone with both eyes open, if you get married close one eye!

- **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS??**

### **Why don't we get into Relationship?**

There are as many reasons under the sun why many will find it difficult to get into relationships. Here are some common ones.

- God does not want you to be in a boyfriend/girlfriend relationship – right now.
- You may not be someone who should get married.
- Because you are more worried about what others think (or might think) than you are worried about what God thinks.
- You are scared
  - of getting hurt
  - of being embarrassed
  - of being vulnerable
  - of it not working out.
- You are self-absorbed
- You don't make yourself available (e.g. the ladies standing in a huddle at church talking about why there are no godly men around! Or the guys being so adverse to hanging and chatting that they go home instead of going out)
- For guys – don't want to hurt a friendship.
- For girls – waiting for the guy to take the lead!
- You have baggage that you don't want to let it go (yet).
- You do nothing about getting into a relationship.

### **How to act towards the opposite sex?<sup>1</sup>**

It is totally appropriate to be friends with Christians of the opposite sex. It is not appropriate to lead someone on as if you are interested in a relationship when you are not.

At the risk of type casting – let me say some things to the guys only, then something to the girls only!

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<sup>1</sup> This section has been written by Naomi Noakes

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### **Guys**

Men in leadership are often attractive to women. If you happen to have a half-decent personality as well then even more so! Men, if you want a relationship, it is your job to lead and make something happen!

Beware. Women will want your attention and will read attraction into your attention. So...

- Relate to women with absolute purity. Keep your eyes off what you shouldn't. Develop the skill of bouncing eyes!
- Avoid touch and repeated eye contact.
- Do not show repeated interest or engage in repeated interactions with a sister if you have no intention of building the relationship. Before you have coffee twice, she will have planned your wedding!
- Do not flirt. Flirting aims to get a reaction from the person you are flirting with for your own self-gratification.
- Do not confide. Avoid being a confidant.
- Be especially aware of the potential feelings of the women you do ministry with. Share experiences create relationship, which is appropriate. Without care you can easily lead a sister to read far more into the relationship than you may have intended.
- Be aware of 'needy' women or women who flatter you.

But men, when you are interested, then do something about it (see below).

### **Ladies**

Ladies you can steal a man's heart intentionally and unintentionally! Where you may see a man from the inside out – men will see you from the outside in. Beware.

Men can promise quickly but often selfishly, they will commit slowly. Men can give you attention and be blind to their own intentions. So...

- Relate to men with absolute purity. Be the Proverbs 31 woman (even though Proverbs 31 is a picture of a married woman).

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- Do not flirt. Flirting aims to get a reaction from the person you are flirting with for your own self-gratification.
- Be careful what you wear. If you aim to attract guys by how you look, then you will find they value you first for your external appearance and be blind to what should be more beautiful – your godly character.
- Don't rush. Guys get with the program quickly sexually, but not relationally!!
- Do not confide. Avoid being a confidant – until you are in the relationship.
- Do not lose yourself – don't listen more to your dream than the reality.
- Be especially aware of the potential feelings of the men you do ministry with. Share experiences create relationship, which is appropriate.

And ladies, if you are interested in a Christian guy, show interest in him directly. Don't assume he knows what you are thinking! Don't show interest through others. Don't expect the guy to break into your huddle of female friends – it will probably not happen!

### **How to get into a Relationship?**

So what do you do when you do want to make something happen? Here are some suggestions:

- Pray
- Put your brave pants on! Step out of your comfort zone.  
Yes there is a risk. You could get hurt. Pray that it is worth the risk.
- Time is a friend – don't rush. Build a friendship.
- Be intentional
- Be honest about your intentions – with them (rather than everyone else).
- Look them in the eye – often. Look them in the eye from across the room.
- Be interested in them – who they are, what they think, what they like. Listen.
- Show repeated interest.

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- Guys - be a gentleman – protect women (e.g. open doors for them, walk them to their car, wait for them to get in the door, stand between them and odd characters)
- Girls – be a lady – allow the guy to be a gentleman. Show respect (rather than embarrassment) when he does.
- Chase them – write them a note, give them a gift, send them flowers, invite them out.
- Allow others to set you up (but don't rely on this).

Recognize this Christian paradox:

Christian women want the men to show leadership and get frustrated when they do not.

Christian men don't want to hurt the friendship and so will often hold back (unlike the Non-Christian guys).

Girls – make yourself available – if interested.

Guys – man up. Ask her out.

- And if you enter into a relationship – Give thanks to God.
- *Have a discussion about the value of Christian Dating Websites.*
- *Caution*
  - *Puts God on the agenda up front*
  - *Helpful in expanding, then narrowing down the field (and location)*
  - *Difficult for women more so than men (because of the emotional energy required to set up the 'dates')*

*TIP: Encourage them to meet you the first time at Church! Your friends know you well and it is a safe place for both of you. It tests their 'Christian' claim.*

## **Holy Dating (Tips for How to conduct yourself when Dating)**

1. **Set boundaries.** Be specific and intentional about how you want to protect your relationship. Write them down.
2. **Read the Bible and Pray together.** It is difficult (not impossible) to be sexually impure when you have the Bible passages ringing in your ears. Read it lots. Be aware however that this closeness can be dangerous – It can be a turn-on to

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spend one-on-one time reading the Bible and praying with your girlfriend/boyfriend. So follow the next few suggestions. This should not be stopped by long-distance separation.

3. **Get someone to hold you accountable.** Choose a Christian friend of the same sex who you can be honest and open with. Give them the questions to ask you. Both you and your girlfriend/boyfriend should have someone to be accountable to. Friends can be a gift from God in this area. What should you ask? Try these: *Has your physical relationship progressed further than last time you met? If so, do you think that where it has progressed would please God as much as you?* These types of questions mean that you don't have to tell your accountability partner all the gory details, but you know someone is also going to hold you to account if you are continually progressing physically and beyond what is good for the relationship.
4. **Spend time with groups of people.** Where does it say that dating is about being alone with someone – the movies! Wrong. If you want to get to know someone then see how they relate to others. See how they relate to your family and friends (after all, other than God, who knows you best?).
5. **Be alone in public places.** When you do want alone time, be alone in public – go for a walk, a picnic, coffee shop, movies, zoo, ferry etc.
6. **Don't be alone together where things could happen.** Never in closed door rooms, avoid your bedroom, use the car to travel and don't park (at least in secluded spots).
7. **Be honest with yourself about what arouses you** – avoid it. Stop early.
8. **Work hard on communication.** Be intentional, regular, planned and committed in the times you set to talk (and find different ways – Skype, letter, email, delivered gifts, text messages, phone calls).
9. **Have Fun – to the glory of God.**

➤ *QUESTION /COMMENT*

I hope this has been helpful. Put your brave pants on and have some fun!!!

➤ *Finish in prayer*

### **References (for further reading)**

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Jensen, P. D., *Love, Sex and Marriage* (Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2003). 4 Talks. (<http://www.matthiasmedia.com.au/love-sex-and-marriage>)

This seminar appreciates earlier work done by Peter and Lyndy Berthon in *Marriage, Love and Sex – enjoying God's good creation in the light of Christ's work*. (Unpublished paper)