

Dating from a Biblical Perspective

By Bill Scheidler

Introduction

Satan is doing everything that he can to destroy this generation because he knows that there will be a generation that will tread on him (Rom. 16:20). He uses the drug culture, music, entertainment (movies, TV, video games), toys, pornography, the Internet and many other avenues with the view of derailing this generation.

One major way he seeks to destroy young people and change the course of their lives is by promoting sexual promiscuity. Sexual promiscuity leads to damaged self-image, unplanned pregnancies, abortions, broken relationships and poorly founded marriages, which can lead to divorce. All of these things can destroy the potential of young people and hinder their ability to be a generation of spiritual warriors.

Sexual promiscuity is fanned by our western view of dating and relationships. If we are going to confront our culture, we have got to deal with the dating issue.

Things that complicate dating in our day

A. Dating is not specifically discussed in the Bible.

1. In Bible times children had very little to do with the choice of whom they married. Most marriages were arranged by the parents and often times those arrangements took place when the children were quite young.
2. In such cases the parties involved in the arranged marriage learned to love their betrothed during the espousal period, which was a period of a year prior to the marriage. This love relationship in such a marriage was based far more on the commitment to love than on an emotional or romantic feeling of love.
3. In such a culture there was no place for experimental dating, as we know it today. As a result, there was less temptation to cross over the line into immorality, especially when the penalty for such activity was death.

B. In today's world children see a totally wrong view of sex and male/female relationships on TV, in the movies and among schoolmates.

1. Dating almost always involves or leads to kissing, inappropriate touching, petting and eventually intercourse. While previous generations may have struggled with the notion of "kissing on the first date", today's generation fully expects to "have sex" or some sexual encounter on the first date. It is the price of a date in many girls' mind.
2. Dating is a status thing among young people. Your status is determined by whom you date or if you have a boyfriend or girlfriend. This puts tremendous peer pressure upon young people to "get with it" in the world of dating. If you are 15 or 16 years old you are expected to have a boyfriend or girlfriend.

- C. Parents themselves have had no teaching on biblical principles that might apply to the dating scene.
1. They themselves possibly did it wrong. Parents who did it wrong (and may think they did it right) are ill equipped to teach their children the right way.
 2. They may feel powerless with their children because they do not know what the Bible says about the whole concept of dating.
 3. As a result they have no ammunition to use to establish a line or a standard with their young people.
- D. Some parents think that matchmaking and early dating is cute and they foster it or promote it early in their child's life.

This is very sad. When parents start pairing up their six year olds for school activities, dressing their young children in provocative ways and applying adult make up, they are making a huge mistake. They think it is cute, but what it is doing is arousing desires that should not be aroused at such an early age. As a result, these children become vulnerable to sexual activity, sexual predators, exploitation and experimentation in their pre-teen years.

- E. Parents find it difficult to resist the persuasions of their own teenagers.
1. Their children accuse them of being old fashioned. With the constant barrage from the media, parents may even begin to believe that the children are right and that they need to be more understanding.
 2. In addition, very few (if any) of the parents of your children's peers have strong standards regarding dating and your children use that against you. Parents find it hard to hold the line when "all the other kids are doing it" or "so-and-so's parents let them do it."
 3. Often even pastors and youth groups do not have clear standards. Just because someone's standards are weaker than the standards taught in the Bible does not justify our lowering our standards no matter who that "someone" may be.
 4. Many parents do not have the "backbone" to stand up to their teenagers. If the teenager exerts enough pressure on the parent, the parent often "caves in."

All these things can lay a very poor foundation for dating and set young people up for serious failure.

If we are going to find success in this area, we must be willing to submit this area of our lives to the principles of God's word as it addresses all relationships outside of marriage.

Biblical concepts that apply to this area of dating and relationships

- A. God wants us to be free from any premarital sexual encounters and promiscuity (I Th. 4:3-8, NIV).

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, 5 not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; 6 and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. 7 For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. 8 Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.

This includes:

1. Idolatry, which is exalting someone else above God (Col 3:5-6, NIV).

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

2. Licentiousness sometimes translated “lewdness”, which is the stirring up of sensual desires. This includes kissing, petting, inappropriate touching, indecent bodily movements, even homosexual acts (I Pet. 4:1-6; II Pet. 2:7; Eph. 4:17-20).

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. 2 As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. 3 For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do--living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. 4 They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. 5 But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. I Peter 4:1-5, NIV

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Ephesians 4:17-20, NIV

3. Passion of lust (Col. 3:5-6; I Th. 4:5).
4. Evil Desires (Col. 3:5-6; Rom. 7:8)
5. Fornication, which is any form of sexual activity outside of the context of marriage (I Cor. 6:18-20; Gal. 5:19). This word translated “fornication” comes from the Greek word from which we get the word “pornography.”

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are

not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.
I Corinthians 6:18-20, NIV

B. God does want us to get married, but somehow He wants us to do so without sinning in the process.

1. The example of Mary and Joseph (Mt. 1:18). They were betrothed or engaged to be married, but they did not come together in a sexual way until after they were married.

The birth of Jesus took place like this. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. Before they came to the marriage bed, Joseph discovered she was pregnant. –Message

2. When we take advantage of another person sexually outside of marriage, the Bible speaks of this as “defrauding” them (I Th. 4:6). Defrauding is “using” “taking advantage of” or “injuring” someone else for your own gratification. It involves taking something that does not belong to you. A woman does not belong to a man until after they are married and vice versa (I Cor. 7:4-5).

C. The romantic desires that we have within us are given to us by God and are meant to push us toward marriage, which is vital to the fulfillment of God’s eternal purpose.

1. These desires must be brought under the control of the Holy Spirit (I Tim. 5:1-2; I Th. 4:3-8).

It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable.
I Thessalonians 4:3-4, NIV

2. These desires can only be righteously fulfilled in marriage (Pro. 5:15-20, NLT).

Drink water from your own well--share your love only with your wife. 16 Why spill the water of your springs in public, having sex with just anyone? 17 You should reserve it for yourselves. Don’t share it with strangers. 18 Let your wife be a fountain of blessing for you. Rejoice in the wife of your youth. 19 She is a loving doe, a graceful deer. Let her breasts satisfy you always. May you always be captivated by her love. 20 Why be captivated, my son, with an immoral woman, or embrace the breasts of an adulterous woman?

God’s Pattern Vs. Satan’s Pattern

God’s pattern for developing relationships is the exact opposite of Satan’s pattern.

A. Man’s Nature—A Triune Being

Man is a three part being consisting of spirit, soul and body (I Th. 5:23). The spirit is the God-conscious part of man, the soul is the self-conscious part of man and the body is the sense or world-conscious part of man.

B. Satan's Pattern—Body, Soul and Spirit

When Satan establishes relationship with man he starts from the body or sense realm, moves to the soul realm so that he can possess the spirit of man. He did this with Adam and Eve when he tempted them in the Garden. He started from the lusts of the flesh or the body realm (the fruit was good for food); he moved to the lust of the eyes or the soul realm (it will make one wise) and went to the pride of life or the spirit realm (you will be like God). Satan's whole intent was to possess the spirit of man.

C. God's Pattern—Spirit, Soul and Body

God's pattern is exactly the opposite. He begins relating to man by possessing his spirit in the new birth; He moves from there to the soul (mind, will, emotions) in sanctification and, finally, His redemption affects the physical body of man at the return of Christ.

God's pattern should serve as the pattern for dating relationships

A. Satan's has a dating plan which leads to death.

1. Satan's method of relationship starts in the physical realm (physical attraction, physical activities, surface communication only for the purpose of getting what you want).
2. Hopefully, the relationship moves to the soul realm, however, it often never does. There are people who have been married for years and still only have a relationship in the physical realm. Women generally want more than a physical relationship. They want a deep friendship that includes high levels of communication.
3. In Satan's approach, the relationship is based on the physical.
 - a. This is why physical beauty and the retention of it is so important to people. People spend millions of dollars each year trying to maintain a physical attractiveness fearing that they will lose their relationship with the opposite sex if they no longer look "sexy."
 - b. This is why sexual experimentation is seen to be necessary to "keep the marriage alive." Keeping the marriage alive is dependent on our being able to have fresh and new experiences in the physical realm.
 - c. This is why people say that it is important to experiment before marriage to find out if they are compatible sexually. When people come together God's way, the sexual part of marriage will never be an issue. This is the natural part of a deep relationship that does not need "testing" before marriage.

B. God's has a dating plan, which leads to life.

1. God's method of forming a relationship starts by a couple being one in the spirit.

- a. With God's approach no Christian could ever consider marrying someone who was not a Christian. A true Christian's spirit is one with the Spirit of God. A Christian can only be in unity in the spirit with those who share the same experience (I Cor. 6:15-20; II Cor. 6:14).

Don't you realize that your bodies are actually parts of Christ? Should a man take his body, which belongs to Christ, and join it to a prostitute? Never! 16 And don't you know that if a man joins himself to a prostitute, he becomes one body with her? For the Scriptures say, "The two are united into one." 17 But the person who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. 18 Run away from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. 19 Or don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, 20 for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.
I Corinthians 6:15-20

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?
II Corinthians 6:14

- b. If you cannot marry an unbeliever, you must not date an unbeliever. You must never date someone that you know you cannot marry. One on one dating only has one purpose and that is to explore potential marriage partners. Those who do not abide by this allow themselves to become emotionally involved with the person and will not be able to make a proper decision.
 - c. God's method starts from the premise that we are brothers and sisters in Christ. Therefore, all of the admonitions concerning how to treat a brother or sister apply to the dating relationship. That means that we are to love the person we are dating with Christ-like love. We are to honor them, seek their best interest, be considerate of them and serve them. Whatever we do to them we do to Christ who lives within them.
 - d. When we enter into a relationship according to God's method we must begin our relationship with a focus our dating activities on things that promote a unity of the spirit. Some of these things would include attending church services, youth group, Bible studies and group fellowships or cell groups. It also includes being involved together in ministries in the local church and other Christian service projects.
2. The second level of God's method of developing relationship is being one in the soul realm.
- a. Becoming one in the soul realm involves becoming one in our mind, will and emotions. Are we compatible in our philosophy of life? Do we have the same goals and dreams? Is the call of God on our lives compatible? Do we have the same value system?
 - b. Becoming one in the soul realm could be described as cultivating deepening levels of friendship. It takes time as well as a great deal of communication to move

through these levels. This is why courtship should last over significant period of time. The levels of relationship include:

- Acquaintances
- Casual Friends
- Close Friends

- c. It is when the relationship reaches the “close friend” level that you are in a position to begin exploring the idea of marriage. However, it must be remembered that all of these levels are completely free from any physical touching, kissing and other intimate behavior. Once the physical aspect of the relationship is introduced, it is difficult to stay on God’s track.
- d. Activities in this period should be limited to non-romantic type activities that still involve others, family members and friends. This includes sports, hobbies, family outings, and other group activities.

3. The third level involves the coming together in the physical realm (reserved for marriage).

	God’s Dating Plan	Satan’s Dating Plan
Basis	God centered relationships based on wholesome attraction, common commitment to God, and Christian friendship	Self-centered relationships based on natural attraction, feelings and sensual desires
Foundation	Moral absolutes found in the Bible—Principles	Situational ethics and a lack of absolutes—Feelings
Goals	Mutual Edification—Giving	Mutual Gratification—Receiving
Focus	Focus on becoming one in spirit and soul	Focus on physical activity and experimentation
Pacing	Relationship takes time to grow through the stages, getting to know one another	Relationship moves quickly, bypassing levels to take advantage of the other
Relationship to Others	Relationship is inclusive of the Body of Christ	Relationship is exclusive of the Body of Christ
Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger relationship to Lord • Stronger relationship to others • Healthy self-image • Character development for the better • Good example to others • Peace • Joy • Strong foundation for marriage • Abundant Life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weakened relationship to God • Weakened relationship to others • Unhealthy self-image • Character change for the worse • Influence others to sin • Confusion, strife, pain • Sorrow and regret • Bad foundation for marriage. • Death

“Run from anything that stimulates youthful lust, follow anything that makes you want to do right.” II Timothy 2:22, NLT

Principles that should govern the dating process

- A. Submission to God – We must yield all of our desires, values, actions and decisions to God. His will must be sought.
- B. Covering – We must seek the counsel and confirmation of those over us as a practical way of measuring our responsiveness to authority. It also protects us from unwise decisions.
- C. Responsibility – We must recognize that God holds us accountable for how we relate to others.
- D. Commitment – We must maintain a loyalty to God, to both sets of parents and to the other person as a brother or sister in Christ whether or not the relationship leads to marriage.
- E. Sensitivity – We must at all times be considerate of the needs, opinions and values of the other person putting their wellbeing ahead of our own.
- F. Expectations – We must yield our expectations of the other person to God. Unrealistic expectations are caused by seeking to receive, desiring others to meet your needs and focusing on how someone else can please you.
- G. Control – We must monitor the emotional level of the relationship by limiting the factors that accelerate the relationship—time, words and actions.
- H. Timing – We must be willing to pace the relationship to allow it to grow naturally over a longer period of time.
- I. Mutuality – We must communicate openly about the relationship to ensure that both parties involved are on the same level in terms of commitment, direction and goals.
- J. Love – We must at all times follow the dictates of true “agape” love as described in I Corinthians 13 and keep the other person’s best interests in mind.
- K. Assumptions – We must avoid making assumptions in the relationship based on feelings, body language and what others say and commit ourselves to open sharing to clarify perceptions.
- L. Communication – We must promote interpersonal understanding and commitment by an honest and meaningful exchange on a wide range of areas.

Parent’s relationship and involvement in the dating process.

- A. Parents are a child’s direct covering until the child gets married. Therefore they should be actively involved in the process.

B. Parents should be careful to show godly affection to all of their children as they grow through the stages of their life. Young people often seek from others what they were lacking from their parents. This is why fathers need to give honorable affection to their daughters and mothers need to give honorable attention to their sons.

C. Parents should instill certain things in their children early on about friendship. It is usually from their pool of friends that dating relationships arise.

1. How to choose friends.

Young people should be choosing friends based on their commitment to God, their positive attitude toward authority and their character qualities especially in the areas of truthfulness and self-control.

2. How to make friends.

3. How to treat friends.

D. Parents should give their children specific guidelines for relating to the opposite sex before problems arise.

1. How to treat members of the opposite sex with respect

2. What things are inappropriate in relating to the opposite sex?

3. The importance of modesty in dress

4. The dangers and consequences of improper sexual activity

5. How to deal with hormones (sex education)

6. What is their personal philosophy and timeline for one-on-one dating?

7. What the Bible teaches about sexual activity outside of marriage

E. Parents should encourage their young people to develop a wide range of wholesome relationships.

They do this by:

1. Providing a safe haven for their friends. Make sure your home is a place where your children can gather with their friends. You will have much more to say about the atmosphere and activities.

2. Planning gender-neutral activities for their friends. Too many parties for young people are designed with a “bring-a-date” mentality. Let your activities be for groups of young people where it is clearly not date related.

3. Encouraging participation in wholesome group activities. When you become aware of wholesome activities that youth would enjoy, encourage and facilitate their attendance. This would especially apply to church sponsored activities.

F. Parents should know what their children are doing and they should give their children specific guidelines for their social activities.

1. When should they be home (curfew)?

2. With whom are they going?
 3. Where are they going?
 4. What will they be doing?
 5. Who is the responsible party? Who is chaperoning?
 6. Who is driving or providing transportation?
- G. Parents should guide their children through the dating process when the time is appropriate for such a relationship.
1. Both parents (parents of the boy and parents of the girl) should grant permission for a dating relationship to start.
 2. Parents should regulate time, pace and relationship factors (phone calls, frequency, duration, etc.).
 3. Parents should monitor the dating process with accountability questions.
 4. Parents should give positive feedback so that their children can make wise decisions.
- H. Parents must be willing to step into relationships that are developing in an improper way.
- I. Parents must avoid trying to relive their lives through their young people.

Note: All of these guidelines apply to adults who date as well. While they may not have as much parental input, all of the other biblical factors apply to every Christian and the relationships that they cultivate with the opposite sex.

Note: Some of the above material was extracted from a book no longer in print titled *Principles of Family Life*, which was published by City Bible Publishing and was authored by a team of writers including but not limited to the author of this teaching.