

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. 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

1. Dating is not specifically discussed in the Bible.

In Bible times children had very little to do with the choice of whom they married. They learned to love their betrothed during the espousal period, which was a period of a year prior to the marriage. There was no experimental dating, as we know it today.

2. Children are exposed to all the wrong examples.

Children see a totally wrong view of sex and male/female relationships on TV, in the movies and among schoolmates. In the world of movies, dating almost always involves or leads to kissing, touching and eventually intercourse.

In addition, dating is a status thing among young people. Your status is determined by who you date or if you have a boyfriend or girlfriend.

3. Parents do not know how to guide their children.

- They themselves possibly did it wrong.
- They do not know what the Bible says.
- They have had no teaching on biblical principles that may apply to dating.
- They have no ammunition to use to establish a line with their young people.

4. Some parents think that matchmaking and early dating is a game.

They think it is cute and so they foster it or promote it early in their child's life not realizing they are lighting a fire that can lead to injury.

5. Parents find it difficult to resist the persuasions of their own teenagers.

More and more society teaches people how to stand up against their parents.

- Their children accuse them of being old fashioned.
- Few other parents have strong standards and your children use that against you.
- Often even pastors and youth groups do not have clear standards.

All these things complications 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

Since "dating" is not specifically discussed in the Bible it has to be approached on the basis of what the Bible does discuss.

The following are some things that we know from the Bible:

1. God wants us to be free from any premarital sexual encounters and promiscuity.

I Thessalonians 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:

- Idolatry

Which is exalting someone else above God (Col 3:5-6).

- Licentiousness

Which is the stirring up of sensual desires (e.g. kissing, petting, inappropriate touching, indecent bodily movements, even homosexual acts I Pet. 4:1-6; II Pet. 2:7; Eph. 4:19).

- Passion of lust (Col. 3:5-6; I Th. 4:5).
- Evil Desires (Col. 3:5-6; Rom. 7:8)

- Fornication

Which is any form of sexual activity outside of the context of marriage (I Cor. 6:18-20; Gal. 5:19). This is the Greek word from which we get the word “pornography.”

2. God wants men and women to get married.

God’s purpose includes marrying, but somehow He wants us to be able to do so without sinning in the process.

Mary and Joseph serve as an example (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.

When we take advantage of another person sexually outside of marriage, the Bible speaks of this as defrauding them. Defrauding is “using” or “injuring” someone else for your own gratification. It involves taking something that does not belong to you.

3. The sexual desires that we have within us are given to us by God.

God gives us these desires to push us toward marriage, which is vital to the fulfillment of God’s eternal purpose.

- These desires must be brought under the control of the Holy Spirit (I Tim. 5:1-2; I Th. 4:7-8).
- These desires can only be righteously fulfilled in marriage (Pro. 5:15-20).

God has a pattern for the development of relationships

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

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.

1. Satan’s Pattern—Body, Soul and Spirit

When Satan establishes relationship with man he starts from the body or sense realm (good for food), moves to the soul realm (desire to make one wise) so that he can possess the spirit of man.

2. God’s Pattern—Spirit, Soul and Body

God’s pattern is exactly the opposite. He begins relating to man by possessing his spirit, moving from there to the soul and finally touching the physical body of man.

God’s pattern for relationships should serve as the pattern for dating relationships.

1. Satan's Dating Plan leads to death.

- The relationship starts in the physical realm.

This includes physical attraction, physical activities, surface communication only for the purpose of getting what you want.

- The relationship might move to the soul realm.

However, it often never does. More often than not the relationship remains based on the physical. This is why physical beauty and the retention of it is so important to people. This is why sexual experimentation is seen to be necessary to “keep the marriage alive.”

2. God's Dating Plan leads to life.

- The relationship starts by being one in the spirit.

Because of this one could ever marry someone that is not a Christian (no unity of spirit). If you cannot marry an unbeliever, you must not date an unbeliever.

We are brothers and sisters in Christ. All of the admonitions concerning how to treat a brother or sister apply to this relationship (love, honor, seek best interest, be considerate, etc.).

Activities that promote a unity of the spirit include church services, youth group, Bible studies, group fellowship, and Christian service projects.

- The relationship moves to becoming one in the soul realm.

This involves becoming one in our mind, will and emotions. This could be described as cultivating deepening levels of friendship. The levels of relationship include:

- Acquaintances
- Casual Friends
- Close Friends

It is when the relationship reaches the “close friend” level that you are in a position to begin exploring the idea of marriage.

Activities in this period should be limited to non-romantic type activities that still involve others, family members and friends (sports, hobbies, family outings, and group activities).

- The relationship moves to the coming together in the physical realm (reserved for marriage).

God's pattern for relationships is based on completely different elements.

	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 inclusive of the Body of Christ	Relationship 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

12 Principles that should govern the dating process

1. Submission to God

This means we must yield all of our desires, values, actions and decisions to God. His will must be sought.

2. Covering

This means 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.

3. Responsibility

This means we must recognize that God holds us accountable for how we relate to others.

4. Commitment

This means 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.

5. Sensitivity

This means we must at all times be considerate of the needs, opinions and values of the other person putting their wellbeing ahead of one's own.

6. Expectations

This means 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.

7. Control

This means we must monitor the emotional level of the relationship by limiting the factors that accelerate the relationship—time, words and actions.

8. Timing

This means we must be willing to pace the relationship to allow it to grow naturally over a longer period of time.

9. Mutuality

This means 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.

10. Love

This means 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.

11. Assumptions

This means we must avoid making assumptions in the relationship based on feelings, body language and what others say and commit to open sharing to clarify perceptions.

12. Communication

This means we must promote interpersonal understanding and commitment by an honest and meaningful exchange on a wide range of areas.

The relationship and involvement of parents in the dating process

Parents are responsible before God to remain in the driver's seat in relation to the dating process of their children. Parents are the child's direct covering until the child gets married. Therefore they should be actively involved in the process.

1. Parents should be careful to show godly affection to all of their children as they grow through the stages of their life (dating your daughters?)
2. Parents should instill certain things in their children early on about friendship. It is usually from their pool of friends that dating relationships arise.

- How to choose friends

Choosing friends with a commitment to God, a positive attitude toward authority, truthful and self-controlled

- How to make friends.
- How to treat friends.

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

- How to treat members of the opposite sex with respect?
- What things are inappropriate in relating to the opposite sex?
- The importance of modesty in dress.
- The dangers and consequences of improper sexual activity.
- How to deal with hormones (sex education)?
- What is their personal philosophy and timeline for one-on-one dating?
- What the Bible teaches about sexual activity outside of marriage?

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

- Providing a safe haven for their friends.
- Planning gender-neutral activities for their friends.
- Encouraging participation in wholesome group activities.

5. Parents should give their children specific guidelines for their social activities.

- When should they be home (curfew)?
- With whom are they going?
- Where are they going?
- What will they be doing?
- Who is responsible? Who is chaperoning?
- Who is driving or providing transportation?

6. Parents should guide their children through the dating process when the time is appropriate for such a relationship.

- Both parents should grant permission for a dating relationship to start.
 - Parents should regulate time and relationship factors (phone calls, frequency, duration, etc.).
 - Parents should monitor the dating process with accountability questions.
 - Parents should give positive feedback for wise decisions.
7. Parents must be willing to step into relationships that are developing in an improper way.
 8. Parents must avoid trying to relive their lives through their young people.

Note: More on this subject can be found in the School of Ministry course Social Roles and Relationships.