

What Parents Need To Know About Dating

by Joe McGee

The Great Deception

The dating process is a great deception. It's a myth kept alive by countless romantic novels and sentimental movies that promise thrilling love scenes, tender music, and romantic fulfillment.

Romance is fun! Romance is exciting! It's also temporary! Infatuation and sexual attraction make us feel good but have nothing to do with true love. True love is much more than a feeling. Relationships take hard work and time to develop and maintain. True love can only be developed between two people who are committed to putting God first in their lives and are committed to one another.

The History Of Courtship

Dating is an invention of the 20th century, making it a relatively new concept. Some 200 years ago, women held the power of courtship. It was the mother of a home who decided which man could call on her daughter. A male suitor would first be invited to the home of the woman he sought as his wife. He would sit in a parlor, visit, and listen to her play the piano or sing—all under the watchful eye of her parents. After many weeks of courtship, the suitor could finally ask the father for her daughter's hand in marriage. Courtship had one goal—marriage.

During the 18th century, marriage was encouraged. Bachelors were sometimes harassed, fined, or even run out of town. Singleness was seen as a sign of laziness. The ability to financially support a wife and family was the single most important prerequisite for marriage. Social standing and family reputation were also critical. Love was something that developed after the wedding day, not before.

But by 1920, dating was the centerpiece of courtship in America. Boys and girls engaged in unchaperoned, informal relationships with no clear rules or goals. The invention of motion pictures and the automobile meant less control of young couples. Instead of spending time at home, dating was "going out," and "going out" meant spending money. This shifted the balance of power in courtship to the man. Dating was based more on competition than on love. The more money a man had, the better chance he had of getting a "good date."

Dating and courtship began to have different objectives. Dating focused on increasing one's popularity, while courtship focused on finding a mate. Junior high kids began dating, and going steady became popular in high school. Dating allowed couples a great deal of privacy and intimacy, causing the practice of "petting" to spread rampantly.

Relationships Have To Be Controlled

Uncontrolled relationships move too fast, because romance is addictive. Being together is so much fun that most couples just naturally want to spend more and more time together. Couples quickly become inseparable.

But just as quickly, the newness of romance begins to wane. Just being together isn't as exciting as it used to be. Social togetherness moves on to sexual togetherness in an effort to recapture the excitement. Many couples find that they have suddenly jumped from being mere acquaintances to being sexually active without ever making a serious commitment to their relationship.

As Christians we are expected to have high moral standards. When we break God's laws, our witness is damaged. To prevent this, the first steps in controlling our relationships are to:

- Choose carefully how time together will be spent. A whole Saturday spent cleaning out a garage is better than several hours spent kissing in a dark room listening to music.
- Limit the amount of time spent alone together. It's easy to move from a once-a-week date to an every-evening and all-weekend relationship.
- Remember other things require our attention. We still need time with God, time with family and friends, and time to keep up with the tasks of daily life.

A close relationship with someone of the opposite sex is one of the greatest joys in life. Everyone needs to love and be loved. But too many hours alone together can weaken resistance to sexual temptation. Rather than playing the Russian Roulette game of dating and suffering the pain from a relationship broken off after emotional intimacy has been established, God has a better way to find a mate.

The Partner Selection Process

We need to teach our children the partner selection process. Without it, our kids are left to the cultural norm of using their eyes, hormones, and emotions to find a spouse, rather than using godly wisdom. As parents we should:

1. Teach the process of decision-making. (Move from car buying to college selection, to choosing a suitable spouse, etc.)
2. Ask the question, "If you were describing the perfect spouse, what would be most important to you?"
3. Write a list of the desired qualities and repeatedly discuss them over the next several years. (The list can be amended and adjusted over time.)
4. Give kids the freedom to work on their own lists.
5. Establish at what age our children can date.
6. Establish whom can they date (i.e., only Christians, 2 Corinthians 6:14-16).

7. Establish what constitutes a date (social events, parties, shopping, etc.).
8. Establish parental involvement on the first several dates. (I meet the prospective date alone before any dates with my daughter can be scheduled. Once approved, the next five dates are dates with our family.)
9. Establish curfews.
10. Establish where dates can take place. (Places not pre-approved are off limits.)
11. Establish when they can date one on one. (i.e., after high school graduation).
12. Have date “wrap-ups.” Re-connect with our child by talking about the date when they return home. (Eat a late snack and talk, Proverbs 27:19.)
13. “Date” our own children occasionally to show them how to treat someone and how they should expect to be treated.
14. Understand that our own marriage is the most significant example of marriage that our children will ever see.
15. Know that we are teaching our children conflict resolution and problem solving.
16. Understand that we demonstrate the priority that should be placed on marriage by the time we schedule for it.
17. Realize that sibling rivalry is great practice for marriage.
18. Limit phone and Internet use. Moderation is the key.
19. Tell our girls what to expect of boys and our boys what to expect of girls.
20. Understand that Jesus wants to be Lord over our child’s social life.

He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think according to the power that works in us. Ephesians 3:20