

Court, Date, or Wait...

Rules of Engagement for Our Class

- Our Theme: Seeking Truth, Building Convictions
- Participation is Essential
- Questions are Welcome
- Respect is Required
- Preparation Multiplies the Benefit

Underlying Assumptions (for now)...

2 Timothy 3:16–17 - *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”* (from the English Standard Version)

- The Bible is _____ and is our standard of _____
- God _____ what He is talking about
- God’s Word provides wisdom on _____ and how to _____ in this world.

Understanding our Terms

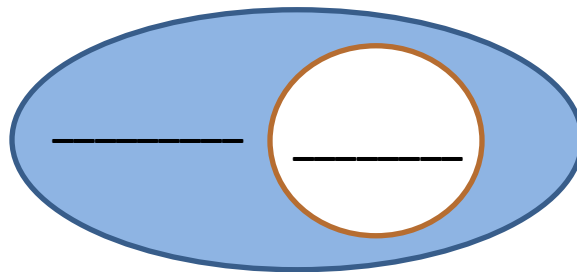
Courting –

Dating –

Q1: What is the difference between courting and dating?

- Courting is

- Dating is



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Courting versus Dating

Q2: Why do some people say that Courting is more Biblical than Dating?

- Song of Solomon 1:5-7

- Recreational Dating –

Q3: Why is Recreational Dating dangerous?

Q4: Should I use the term “Courting” instead of “Dating”?

Q5: Why is it important to have a View towards a Biblical Marriage when Dating or Courting?

Proverbs 3:5–6 - *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”* (ESV)

Assignments

1. Write down at least one question you would like me to address in this study. You do not have to put your name on the card.
2. Review one of the examples of romantic relationships that led to marriage below. What was initial attraction based on? What can we learn about their resulting marriage?
 - Isaac & Rebecca – Genesis 24
 - Jacob & Rachel – Genesis 29
 - Moses & Zipporah – Exodus 2
 - Ruth & Boaz – Ruth
 - Solomon & Shulamite – Song of Solomon
 - Samson & Philistine – Judges 14

Romantic Relationships in the Bible

Q6: What led to some of the marriages we read about in the Bible?

- Isaac & Rebecca :
- Jacob & Rachel :
- Moses & Zipporah:
- Ruth & Boaz:
- Solomon & Shulamite:
- Samson & Philistine:

Q7: What can we learn about their resulting marriage?

- Isaac & Rebecca :
- Jacob & Rachel :
- Moses & Zipporah:
- Ruth & Boaz:
- Solomon & Shulamite:
- Samson & Philistine:

Q8: What can we observe from these examples?

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Applying Biblical Principles to Dating/Courting:

- Who is the intended audience of the Bible? See Matthew 28:18-20 and Revelation 14:6.

- Does the Bible intend to homogenize all cultures (make them all the same)? See Romans 14:1-6, 14:17, Colossians 3:17, and Revelation 7:9.

- What does this have to do with dating/courtship?

Because we are living in America, we must ask and answer the questions in our cultural context:

- _____ should I date/court?
- _____ should I date/court?
- _____ should I date/court?
- _____ should dating/courting _____ _____?

Assignment

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Why Date?

Everything we have studied so far indicates that “dating” (an American creation) can be Biblically-purposed when it is practiced in the context of marriage preparation. As we have discussed, recreational dating (dating for the experience or “fun” of it) is very dangerous. In other words, removing dating from the context of marriage and the seriousness of that commitment removes any good, redeeming Christian purpose, and it becomes an opportunity for Satan to gain a foothold in your life.

The answer to the question, “why date” is easy. Dating (practiced Biblically) may be appropriate if:

The harder question you must answer is this:

In order to answer this question properly, we should review the purposes of marriage.

1. Companionship/Need for a Suitable Helper

Genesis 2:18 - *“Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.””*

Read **Matthew 19:3-12**, focusing on verses 10-12, and answer the following questions.

- Why did Jesus’ disciples remark that it was better not to marry?

- What is a eunuch?

- Why would Jesus speak about eunuchs?

- What are the three types of eunuchs Jesus mentioned?

1.

2.

3.

- What was the point Jesus was making?

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To Have Children and Provide them a Stable Home

Genesis 1:28 – “And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.””

How do Jesus’ comments in Matthew 19:3-12 pertain to becoming a parent?

2. To Provide a Visible Picture of the Love between Christ and His Church

Ephesians 5:31–32 – ““Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”

Every marriage is called to become this picture of love between Christ and the church, but as we have seen, not everyone is called to marriage.

3. Pleasure with Purity

Read **1 Corinthians 7:1-9** and answer the following questions.

- What does Paul mean when he says, “I wish that all were as I myself am.”?
- What does Paul acknowledge in verse 6?
- What was Paul’s gift?
- What was Paul’s advice concerning the decision on whether to marry (or in our case, to date at the appropriate time)?

Assignment

Perform a self-evaluation based upon these concepts we have discovered. Recognize that you may not be able to come up with a definitive answer right now, but to the extent you are able, do you believe God has called you to marriage? Why? Answers will not have to be shared with the class.

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Who Should I Date?

Review the book, Shooting for the Mark, by Pastor James Keen.

Q10: Are we supposed to be actively looking for a spouse or wait for God to bring one to us?

It isn't possible to provide a blanket answer to a question like this because the answer will differ from individual to individual. However, here are some pre-questions to consider that will lead you to the right answer.

- What season of life are you in?

- Do you sense that marriage is part of God's calling on your life?

- Why do you want this relationship?
 1. Am I pursuing this relationship for validation?
 2. Am I pursuing this relationship because of expectation or pressure?
 3. Am I seeking to define and develop this relationship in community?
 4. Do I have short-term intentions?
 5. Am I seeking this relationship in submission to God?

- Do you have strong biblical convictions about who you should marry?

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- What is the Biblical model for finding a spouse? Do we actively look or wait for God to bring one to us? Discuss **Genesis 24:1-67**, the account of how a bride was found for Isaac. Answer the questions below based on what we know from our text and surrounding passages.
 - What season of life was he in?

 - Was marriage part of God's calling on his life?

 - Why did Isaac (and his family) want this relationship?
 1. Was he pursuing this relationship for validation?
 2. Was he pursuing this relationship because of expectation or pressure?
 3. Was he seeking to define and develop this relationship in community?
 4. Did he have short-term intentions?
 5. Did he seek this relationship in submission to God?
 - Were there strong convictions about who he should marry?

Was active looking involved in Genesis 24?

Was passive waiting involved in Genesis 24?

What is the answer to our question?

When Should I Date?

We will find that the foundation we have laid in the prior sections will guide us in answering the other questions concerning dating/courting.

Q11: How old is a good dating/courting age?

The question implies that there is a “magic” age when dating is permissible and purposeful. However, the Bible never defines a specific age and customs vary from culture to culture. It is kind of like the “age of accountability” described in the Bible. There is an “age” of innocence when a baby/child/young person is not held eternally accountable to God for their sin (**2 Samuel 12:23**). However, there comes a time when our spiritual eyes are opened to our guilt and need for salvation (**Romans 7:9**). The “age” at which this occurs is never defined. It is different for each person, but it is a time of transition.

Does this mean the Bible gives us nothing to go on? Not at all! However, I want to reframe the question as, “*When am I ready to begin a dating relationship?*” Here are five points to consider in determining your personal “readiness” for dating.

- When your Parents/Authority Figures/Godly Advisors agree that it is time. See **1 Corinthians 7:36-38** as a point of reference.
- When you have found someone to date that is in the “marrying zone”.
- When you have the right perspective on dating/marriage.
- When you are on a solid trajectory for marriage readiness. See **1 Corinthians 13:11**.
- When you have the blessing of the Parents/Authority Figures/Godly Advisors of the person you want to date.

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Our next question is related to the maturity of the individuals who are dating, and is therefore related to the “when” of dating. Part of having the right perspective on dating and being ready to date is having the right perspective on love and being ready to love.

Q12: Can young couples say “I love you” and really mean it and know what it means?

The word “love” in the English language is used to describe at least two words in the Greek New Testament, each with their own undertone:

- Philos – used primarily for the love for a friend
- Agape – used primarily for the love of God, the love of marriage, the love between believers

The meanings of these words and their uses can get muddled at times and it is hard to be definitive about what is intended. Similarly, our use of the word “love” in the English language is pretty muddy too. It is used in lots of contexts, but its meaning can differ from situation to situation.

When someone in a dating relationship says, “I love you,” what is usually meant?

In the context of the prior question, how can someone fall “out of love”?

What is the basis of the use of “love” in these contexts?

Read **1 Corinthians 13:1-8** and **John 3:16**. How is biblical love defined in this passage?

Does love grow and mature? Consider **John 21:15-18**, **Ephesians 5:25**, and **Titus 2:3-4**.

What does the potential for love to grow and mature mean about the nature of true love?

Can a young person say “I love you” and really mean it and know what it means?

How to Date

As we have seen in the Bible, marriage relationships initiated and progressed in different ways. There is not a “one-size-fits-all” model. Does that mean that there are no biblical guidelines for initiating and pursuing a dating relationship? No! There are definitely principles that can inform and guide you down a successful path for pursuing marriage. We will discuss some common questions addressing the process from the beginning of a relationship to marriage itself.

Q13: Who should initiate a dating relationship?

The biblical model for the home is male-headship (**Ephesians 5:23**). The roles in the home are patterned after the love of Christ for His church. In that relationship, Christ is the initiator, leader, provider, and protector. We also see several examples of men being initiators in scriptures, such as Jacob (**Genesis 29:18**), Othniel (**Judges 1:13-14**), and David (**1 Samuel 25:40**).

Ruth’s experience seems to depart from this model, however. Read **Ruth 3:1-18**. How do we reconcile Ruth’s actions with the other examples?

There are a few takeaways from these passages:

- Men should be leaders in initiating a dating relationship.
- Women should let the men be leaders in initiating a dating relationship.
- Women can send clear signals of interest and availability if there is a man that is both suitable and of interest to you.

Q14: When should parents/guardians become involved?

Your relationship with your parents will probably heavily influence how this will happen. Some young people will be talking to a parent or mentor from the first sparks of interest. Others may not involve them until a bit later in the process.

My recommendation is that when the relationship starts to turn from friendship/acquaintance to romance, parents or guardians should get involved. It is my conviction that a young man should pursue the blessing of both his parents and the girl’s parents before “dating.” This doesn’t mean that he can’t secure the girl’s interest before talking to them (think of Ruth and Boaz); it means that he shouldn’t go further than that without their blessing.

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Q15: What should dates look like?

Dates should be designed to support the purpose of dating: getting to know the other person and learning whether they are someone you are called to marry. Overall, I see two stages of the dating relationship, with some overlap between the stages:

1. Investigation/Testing (typically pre-engagement):
2. Preparation (typically post-engagement): Moving towards oneness.

In a practical way, this means that the courting/dating period should include:

1. Communication
2. Activities
3. Family Life
4. Spiritual Life
5. Appropriate Oversight

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Q16: What are the benefits of praying together while dating?

The benefits can be abundant:

- Building a good habit – see **1 Corinthians 7:5**
- Vulnerability and honesty (if you pray properly).
- The spiritual transformation can impact you both.
- Placing your relationship before God.

There are some dangers:

- Sharing what should not yet be shared.
- A temptation to take God's place for your spouse.

Q17: What is the proper level of emotional involvement in dating?

Emotions are powerful things and as we have already discussed, emotion is mistaken as being the pinnacle of love in our culture (i.e. falling in love) and also an unstoppable force (i.e. the heart loves who it loves). **If these cultural premises are true; then the Bible is a lie.**

Regarding love, the Bible teaches:

- The Pinnacle of Love is Self-Sacrifice. See **John 15:13**.
- Every thought (and feeling) can be brought into submission to Christ. See **Romans 12:2-3** and **2 Corinthians 10:5**.

The reason that this is an important question is that unchecked emotions can easily override our reason, justifying all sorts of poor choices. Uncontrolled emotions are at the root of countless bad marriages and marital problems. The truth is that our feelings do not have to control us and they are not beyond control. Our feelings are simply a reflection of our heart. It is important to recognize that while feelings can form very quickly, it typically takes them longer to change. Fortunately, we serve a God who is able to change, cleanse, purify, and refresh our hearts. We also play a cooperative role in heart change (see **Joel 2:13**).

What is the Biblical model for the emotional involvement between a husband and a wife? See **Ephesians 5:28-31**.

Does the Bible provide an example of emotional involvement between a courting couple? See **Song of Solomon 3:1-5**.

Read that passage again in **Song of Solomon 3:1-5**. What is the warning in verse 5, also found in **2:7**? What does it mean?

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What does it have to do with the quest to determine the proper level of emotional involvement?

Q18: What is the right balance of leadership and submission in a dating relationship? Should it mirror marriage?

The Bible definitely describes roles for each spouse within marriage. Read **Ephesians 5:22-33**.

- The role of the wife is _____ to the leadership of her husband.
- The role of the husband is _____ (_____) leadership of his wife for her good.

The question seeks to uncover how the ultimate roles within marriage should inform and guide the dating relationship. Here are some points to consider:

1. Understand what the marital roles mean.
 - Recognize the distinction between roles and _____
 - See **1 Peter 3:1**
2. Understand what the marital roles do not mean.
 - See **1 Corinthians 7:12-17**
 - See **Matthew 19:9**
3. Consider the fitness of your girlfriend/boyfriend for the biblical wife/husband role.
 - Observe their _____
 - Encourage _____ into the roles to which God has called them.
4. Consider your fitness and willingness to assume your role.
 - Whatever that role is, are you willing to “ _____ ” to it?

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5. Understand where you are right now. See **Ephesians 5:31**.
 - Unless you are an independent adult, you are under the _____ of another.
 - Even as an _____, it is the marital covenant bond (becoming one) that places us within our roles in marriage.

Q19: How far is too far with physical intimacy?

The non-negotiable undeniably clear teaching from the Bible about sex is that:

1. Sex is good and proper and intended to be enjoyed in the right context. See **1 Timothy 4:3**, **Proverbs 5:19**, **1 Corinthians 7:3**.
2. The (only) right context for sex is within the covenant commitment of marriage between a man and a woman. See **1 Corinthians 6:18** and **Matthew 5:27-28**.
 - There is a distinction between sexual immorality (*porneia*) and adultery (*moicheuo*) in the Greek language. Though they are the same physical act, both are recognized as sinful.
 - Sex is intended to be the capstone on a covenantal commitment of spiritual & emotional oneness.
 - Misuse of the gift of sex is a particularly dangerous sin that will be judged by God. See **Hebrews 12:16**.

Why is sexual immorality a big deal? American culture is HIGHLY sexualized. Sexually provocative images are nearly inescapable. “Casual” sex is common and even expected among teens and adults. However, there is nothing casual about sex. Paul told the Ephesian church that sexual immorality shouldn’t even be joked about among saints (see **Ephesians 5:3**).

There are many reasons why sexual immorality is wrong. Providing an exhaustive list of reasons is beyond the scope of this lesson. Let me provide one thought. Sexual intimacy is physically, emotionally, and spiritually powerful and leaves a lasting imprint. It is not something that can be “shaken off.” See **1 Corinthians 6:18**. It is intended to be a sort of “super glue” to the formation of a good and enduring relationship in the bonds of marriage. It is even the God-ordained doorway to the creation of new life made in the image of God, a sacred blessing given to mankind.

When this glue is poured over relationships that are not ready or meant to endure (or even exist), it can only result in the improper joining of the pieces or even worse, result in a great mess when the pieces are broken apart. See **2 Samuel 13:1-19**. Consider the direct and collateral damage resulting from Amnon’s sin.

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It is completely inconsistent that American culture recognizes the danger and damage of sex without the consent of both parties (i.e. rape), but will not recognize the danger of sex outside of marriage, even if both parties consent. The fact is that sexual intimacy is powerful and beautiful within marriage but it is spiritually damaging outside of that union.

Let's consider what God's Word has to say about how to navigate this challenging temptation outside of the bounds of marriage.

1. Protect your personal purity. See **Job 31:1** and **Matthew 5:27-30**.

2. Sexual touching is meant to take you all the way (called foreplay for a reason). See **Song of Solomon 2:7, 2:15, 3:5, and 4:12**.
 - By sexual touching, I mean:
 - touching, caressing, pressing against, stimulating, etc... the "bad touch" areas of our body that are intended to be covered for the sake of modesty.
 - Other intentionally sexually awakening/arousing touching or kissing.
 - Don't put yourself in that situation until you can go all the way.

3. In a mature dating relationship, you should set clear boundaries and don't play "near the fence."
 - Men

 - Women

 - Boundaries should include:

 - Prevent temptation.