

10 Rules of Christian Dating

These 10 dating rules could change your future for the better. Trust me.

It is time for Christians to start talking about dating. The trajectory of lives and eternities are in the balance.

“Careful, there, cowboy. You startin’ kinda strong!”

Yes, I am. Church, this issue shapes our young people, friends and family more than we could ever imagine. And we have been passive too long. “Let’s just sit back and see what happens” might work in certain scenarios, but Christian dating isn’t one of them.

Establishing principles for Christian dating could set men and women on a course toward Christ-centered marriages. Laying out guidelines for dating as followers of Jesus could alter the lives of men and women by keeping them out of toxic and unhealthy relationships (and ultimately marriages).

Most importantly, guidelines and principles for dating could transform lives and shape eternities.

So, this is incredibly important. And we have a responsibility as men and women of God to be pro-active. But we can’t be pro-active unless principles are established. So I am starting the conversation.

I hope and pray the words from this post will spark further conversations in your ministries, relationships and homes. Here are 10 really important principles for Christian dating.

1. Stop Looking for “the One”

“Frank, how will I know when I find ‘the one’?”

You won’t. Mostly because “the one” doesn’t exist. The truth

is you could spend your life with more than one person. If you need to take a minute to let that sink in, I will be here when you get back.

Alright, glad you returned. Here's the deal: God doesn't set up marriage as a divine lottery where every person has one winning ticket. That would make God a gambler, and the Bible clearly says gambling is from the devil (only joking). But "the one" very much paints God this way.

Look, marriage isn't as much about finding someone totally compatible as it is about committing to someone despite difficulties and differences.

"The one" says you need to find the perfect person. And discovering one flaw means it's time to move on.

But the beauty of marriage is God sustains you despite your flaws. The brokenness you see in yourself and the brokenness you experience from your spouse point both of you to the only perfect one, God.

2. Date with a Trajectory Toward Marriage

This quote sums it up:

"Dating without the intent of getting married is like going to the grocery store with no money. You either leave unsatisfied or you take something that isn't yours."—Jefferson Bethke

That'll preach right there. If you are a Christian, there is no reason to date without a trajectory towards marriage. Now, I want to clarify what I mean.

Dating with a trajectory toward marriage means dating with a purpose. It means dating with an understanding of the gospel. It means dating someone who meets the values and goals you have for a future spouse (more on that later).

Casual or purposeless dating has no benefit for Christians. We are intentional beings. We are designed to know why we do stuff and where we are going. Dating is no different.

Now, please, please, please don't be a freakish weirdo. Dating with a trajectory towards marriage doesn't mean you only date one person ever. That would be awesome, but it's not always realistic.

You might get into a relationship with someone who loves Jesus, meets the values you have in a future spouse and is compatible with you. But once you get into the relationship, you realize things aren't as they seemed. Maybe they like to cuddle with cats or something. That's always a deal breaker.

Just end the relationship and continue to seek the Lord.

Disclaimer: A date is not dating. Again, please don't be a freakish weirdo and give Christians a negative label. Having coffee or going to eat dinner with the opposite sex is not dating. That's a date. Dating is more intimate. Dating involves . talks. It involves sharing personal struggles and vulnerability.

So if you choose not to get coffee or watch a movie with the opposite sex, then whatever. But don't place that expectation on others.

3. Don't Date Non-Christians

The ultimate purpose of marriage is sanctification (becoming like God). So, my question is, "How does dating a non-Christian aid you in this?"

If you are a Christian, God isn't a piece of your pie. He is the pie. Why date someone who doesn't even have God as a piece of the pie?

My wife loves the Lord, and I can say with all certainty I wouldn't be following Jesus without her. There will be days

when life is crashing down, your faith is wavering, and the only thing left will be your spouse. This is the beauty of a sanctifying marriage. In this scenario, your spouse is there to pray for you, put his or her arm around you and walk with you.

Without a Christian spouse, one of two things will happen: You will drift away from God or your spouse will become a functional god (more on this later). Both of these are bad.

There is another dangerous mentality in Christian circles I want to address ... “flirting to convert.”

Look, Christians are called to be missionaries. The dating world, however, is not the place to be a missionary. Don't allow pride to deceive you. You can't change someone. That's God job.

So date Christians. Marry someone who loves Jesus. And spread the gospel as missionaries together.

4. Have a List of Values and Don't Compromise Them

If you have no idea what values are important to you in a future spouse, exit the road to marriage at the next off-ramp. Pull over at the closest gas station and decide what you want in a future spouse. It's dangerous riding on the road to marriage without an idea of where you are going.

Now, when you form this list, don't be legalistic. Don't sit someone down on the first date and interview them to make sure they meet all of the qualities. That's freakish, weirdo stuff. Again, don't give the rest of us a bad name. Your list is designed to give you a framework for dating, not be a checklist for it.

On the other hand, don't compromise. Your heart and the holiness of marriage are too important to flippantly give away because you are frustrated, impatient or settling.

One more thing: have primary and secondary values. And filter appropriately.

Let's practice. If you believe God is preparing you for foreign missions, is it important the person you marry shares this passion? Yes ... this is a primary value. If you love the Cowboys and your future spouse loves the Packers, is it important to work through this before marriage? No ... this is a secondary value.

Primary values are probably deal breakers. Secondary values are probably not.

5. Don't "Shotgun" Date

Ever handled a shotgun? If not, let me fill you in. The shells of a shotgun are stuffed with tiny round balls. When you pull the trigger, these balls spread over a large range, increasing the chance you hit the target. It's great for hunting ... it's terrible for dating.

"Let's see. I am going to ask 20 people on a date. Five of those should be keepers. Hopefully one will end up as my spouse."

Not a good idea. I fear this mentality in the dating culture is actually promoting divorce. Let me explain.

The culture says, "Date around. It's OK. Get to know yourself." And as soon as the person you are dating smacks his or her gum the wrong way, you are out. So the default for years is to leave as soon as a flaw arises. Suddenly, when marriage begins, you are asked to flip a switch.

You are asked to go from a mentality that says "End a relationship as soon as difficulty arises," to one that says, "Don't end the relationship regardless of the difficulty that arises."

That's a tough switch to flip. Date with a trajectory towards marriage. Date intentionally.

6. It's OK to Want to Get Married

You desire marriage. Praise God. He gives you the desire. Let me prove it.

The first instance in the Bible where God is not pleased comes when God sees Adam living in the Garden of Eden alone (Gen. 2:18). God knows it is not good for man to be by himself. Enter Eve, pro-creation and marriage (not necessarily in that order).

People are created to be in community. And the most intimate community on earth is the relationship you will have with your spouse. So pray for God to send you a spouse. But don't allow the desire to consume your life.

Be patient. Wait on the Lord. If you are confident God called you to marry, He will deliver.

7. It's OK NOT to Get Married

While marriage is a huge sanctifier, it is not something God says is mandatory. If you aren't ready for marriage, or if you do not want to get married, you are not sinning.

I am fearful the Christian community has irresponsibly coerced men and women into marriage through cultural pressure. There must be a secret bylaw passed down from the early church fathers, but once you reach the age of 25 you will be asked the question almost weekly ... "When are you getting married?"

Can you imagine how constantly hearing this question from friends, family and unsuspecting old ladies at church can make some people believe they have a problem?

If you aren't ready to date, don't allow the cultural pressure to override God's plan.

Disclaimer: If you are single, understand it is your responsibility to steward your time well. Singleness is a gift from God, but singleness is not an excuse to be lazy. It is an opportunity to serve the Lord.

8. Have a community of Christians Around You. And Listen to Them

Don't date alone. This sounds lame. But so is marrying a sleaze ball.

When you date, allow the community of people around to speak into your relationship. Your feelings can deceive you. Your friends are able to see inconsistencies and problems you can't because they are outside the storm.

I know too many men and women who refused to listen to people around them, and their prideful arrogance resulted in a failed marriage. Don't fall into this category. Find men and women you trust, and allow them to speak into your relationship.

9. Pursue a Pure Mind

"Sex before marriage is bad." This was the extent of my understanding of Christian dating as a teenager and young adult.

And to my church's credit, they drilled this one point home constantly. Like that annoying kid at church camp that wouldn't leave you alone.

I heard don't have sex before marriage so much I actually believed getting to marriage a virgin was the only important thing. The problem? In the process, I filled my heart and mind with lust, and I secretly struggled with pornography. Big uh-oh.

What the church needs to teach is the importance of a pure mind. This requires discipline, restraint and abstinence from activities that don't promote holiness. But the sacrifice is

worth the prize.

A pure mind might be the greatest gift you can give your future spouse. It allows you to jump into marriage with a clear conscience. No baggage. No comparisons. No regret. Just you, your spouse and God.

A pure mind might be the greatest gift you can give your future spouse.

Don't ever date someone who won't honor purity with you. Ever.

Remember. If you are dating, you have not entered into the sacred bond of marriage. You have not made covenant vows to one another. So the person you are dating is not yours.

Practice purity. But understand purity begins with the mind and heart.

10. Don't Date If You Are Dependent on Someone for Things Only God Can Provide

If I could get on my knees and beg you to follow one of these principles, it would be this one. Dating and marriage are not for those who rely on another person for joy, peace and purpose.

Co-dependent dating leads to co-dependent marriages. And co-dependent marriages will eventually crumble because the weight placed on them is too heavy.

God must be at the center of your life before you consider dating. If not, purity will take a back seat. Dating toward marriage will take a back seat. In fact, every principle discussed in this article is null and void without God at the center.

Don't start dating without an assurance of God's love for you and a solid understanding of the gospel. {eoa}

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