

Christian Dating: How Far Is Too Far?

The worlds of dating and Christianity can be two difficult worlds to merge. Find out where the lines are drawn.



Even couples who take responsibility for their actions and trust God to help them stay pure want to know when they're crossing the line. To offer them help with this vaguely marked boundary, Jason Illian, author of *Undressed: The Naked Truth About Love, Sex, and Dating* first reminds singles of a simple biblical principle stated in 1 Corinthians 6:12: "'Everything is permissible for me'—but not everything is beneficial" (NIV).

Illian then illustrates that statement with a helpful set of guidelines while comparing physical actions with rungs of a ladder.

"Every rung represents a new physical act you share in a relationship. ... The higher you climb, the more physically satisfying and intimate the experience will become. However, with each step of the ladder, it becomes increasingly more dangerous."

Rungs 1-4, Illian explains, represent activities that are permissible and can be beneficial—holding hands, hugging and cuddling, kissing, French kissing.

Rungs 5-6 are choices that are permissible but not necessarily beneficial—touching and caressing with clothes on.

Rungs 7-9, the top of the ladder, are neither permissible nor beneficial—petting and groping (under the clothes or without clothes), oral sex and intercourse.

Illian encourages couples to “draw a line and take a step back”—meaning, they ought to prayerfully consider the rung they feel comfortable climbing to “and then choose the rung right underneath it.”

For couples in the process of deciding on their physical boundaries, Mindy Meier, writing in *Sex and Dating* offers this cautionary observation: “A number of engaged people have shared with me that they wish they had done less sexually—sometimes with a high school girlfriend or boyfriend, sometimes with the one they are about to marry. But no one has ever said they wish they had done more.”

To set boundaries is one thing. However, to keep the standards that are set is a whole different challenge. But there are ways couples can help themselves stick to their rules.

Meier recommends having accountability partners: “Find someone of the same sex who you can be totally honest with, someone who will give you grace when you fail but not let you get by with disobedience to the Lord.”

She also suggests that couples meet in public places, where some privacy is afforded but where they can’t give in to temptation for intimacy.

Author Gary Chapman gives nonsexual examples of ways to show affection, such as words of affirmation, gifts and acts of service. To these, Meier adds “food.”

“Cooking a special meal for the person you’re dating or showing up with a well-loved snack,” she says, “are wonderful ways to say I love you.”

Most important is that a couple talk and pray about the sexual purity aspect of their relationship. God will honor the ones who pursue His standard of holiness and rely on Him for guidance and strength.

As a single person, you can “wait in the right way” by being content in God and pursuing His will while actively looking for a spouse. God created you for relationship and understands the desire you have to find a mate. Involve Him in your search, follow your passions, pursue maturity, be deliberate and don’t stop asking Him for the desires of your heart.

And keep dreaming.

In her book *You Matter More Than You Think*, Leslie Parrott, co-founder of the Center for Relationship Development, states, “The eventual pain that results from not dreaming—for the fear of being disappointed by an unrealized dream—will always eclipse the pain of a dream that never comes true.”

Leigh DeVore is the assistant editor of *Charisma* magazine.