

Protect Your Teen From These Unequally Yoked Relationships

Outside of the decision to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior and live a surrendered life to Him, the next most important decision made will be who one chooses to marry and share their life with. In 22 years of full time pastoring, I've seen too many Christian young people derailed from their destiny by marrying someone who did not share an equal commitment to Jesus. The Apostle Paul gave the directive to not be unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14).

Yet, I believe there is another form of being unequally yoked. That is with believers who do not share the same level of passion or pursuit of the heart of God, or who may not share a common vision or goals for life. How can we as parents help guide our children into making the best decision for a life partner?

Hopefully, as Christian parents, we are training our children in the value of living our lives with a biblical worldview. This includes prioritizing the Great Commandment of radical love for the Lord above all else (Matt. 22:37-39), obedience to Him that leads to fruitfulness (John 15:10), living a Sermon on the Mount lifestyle (Matt. 5-7) and a biblical view of relationships.

Two Views of Courtship

The biblical view of dating or courtship is very different than that of our modern cultural norms. In the biblical model, an interested young man would request permission from a girl's father to pursue the possibility of a relationship with the intention of a life-long commitment to her. Any pre-marriage relationship was under the oversight of the father, family or even the church (synagogue).

Courtship was about enjoying one another's company, often with family, friends or in groups, with a goal of determining if it was God's will for the other person to be one's future husband or wife. Commitment happened before intimacy.

By contrast, today's form of dating has little or no oversight by families and is more about "playing the field" with multiple partners with little or no intention or commitment to pursue marriage. Dating relationships are common (even expected) in ages as young as 11 or 12.

Since the oversight of a modern dating relationship is generally left to the couple, there are more opportunities to fall into temptation and not walk in purity. There tends to be much time spent alone. Emotional and physical involvement is expected. Intimacy happens before commitment. Having multiple dating relationships is like having multiple mini-divorces which can shatter hearts, shake confidence, plunge one into depression and awaken love before its time.

We have instructed our children in the biblical view of dating or courtship. We have asked them not to engage in the modern process of dating. We are happy for our kids to hang out in groups with friends, go to coffee shops for conversations that build friendships or help them get to know someone.

However, if a man pursues one of our daughters romantically with a more serious intention of dating, we have asked our daughters to have him request permission of my husband, John, and I to court or biblically date our daughter. Our permission would only be granted if this is one John and I would consider someone our daughter could marry.

Similarly, for our son (we have one son and five daughters), we asked him to speak to us first before pursuing a girl so we could share a unity that the girl is indeed "marriage material," and we all have a witness from the Lord to proceed.

Besides the obvious issue of no physical intimacy until

marriage, we have asked our children not to kiss until engagement. But simply put, do not kiss before getting a ring, and do not take your clothing off until after the wedding. The question should never be, "How far can I go in physical touch and actions before it is too far before marriage?" The question should be, "How can I honor God and His person in my actions, maintaining utmost purity?"

I have appreciated the teachings of Lou Engle in his booklet *Nazirite DNA*. Basically, a Nazirite call (see Num. 6) has to do with setting aside time in one's life to seek the Lord, be consecrated to Him and not be distracted by things like dating. Our three oldest children took a Nazirite vow for periods of their lives to focus on the Lord and not pursue relationships. For example, our son did this for the duration of his high school years. Parents can encourage their children to not be caught up in culture's push for premature dating but save themselves for God's best.

What If It Seems Too Late?

What about parents of children already dating or those who have already 'gone too far' or for those who messed up themselves in dating relationships before they became parents? Well, I know firsthand what that is like since I had multiple unhealthy dating relationships before I met and married my husband.

The prayers of my mother proved very fruitful to help guide me. Upon seeing the error of my ways, the Lord purified me, cleansed me and forgave me of my premarital wrongs. While engaged, the Lord spoke to my husband, who was a virgin when he married me and was struggling with my previous dating past, saying, "Do not call unholy what I have made clean." We have now shared 27 years of a healthy, happy, glorious marriage.

The worst parenting regarding dating is no boundaries—little input or leaving it up to the child to flounder through those

years. Stay strong your boundaries, have a consistent prayer life for your child to marry God's choice for them and give honest, loving input. Keep communication lines flowing as much as you can. Encourage your child that the Lord will repeatedly confirm a romantic relationship that is of Him. Perhaps they could speak to other spiritual leaders to seek advice or even listen to godly friends.

While speaking at a conference internationally, I was billeted in the home of leaders of the church. I was appalled to find out these leaders allowed their son to sleep with his girlfriend in his room in their home. They didn't want to confront him because they were afraid he would leave. I felt the spiritual oppression in that home due to the parents' unwise choice to let "anything go" in their home. I would rather have a child move out and face the consequences outside of my oversight than tolerate willful sin in the home that I have authority over.

Single parents such as single moms trying to help a son navigate dating years could reach out to mature men in their church family to help provide male spiritual leadership and friendship to their son. Parents with children who have already gone too far can teach and model the value of forgiveness through the blood of Jesus—starting over and not accepting any lies that now they are "dirty" or "trash." There is forgiveness, freedom and healing in Jesus.

Parental Blessing

In the blessing ceremony we have held for each of our children at age 13, among other things, they signed a covenantal commitment to sexual purity including abstinence until marriage. The ceremony is similar to a Jewish *bar mitzvah*, but in the Christian form is a *bar* (for a boy) or *bat* (for a girl) *barakah*, which means "son of the blessing" or "daughter of the blessing."

When in a courtship relationship, which we are all agreed on as Christian parents with our children, we also ask for a written and signed dating commitment. It includes activates to pursue (such as encouraging one another's spiritual vision, being actively involved in ministry, going to prayer meetings together and reading the Word together) as well as activities to avoid (such as kissing before engagement, being in compromising situations, watching movies that stir up desires that cannot be righteously fulfilled, drinking alcohol together, being alone in a home). In order to be accountable to uphold these standards, the couple should submit the written and signed commitments to parents and those they view as mentors.

Very importantly, and before all of the above, the prayers of a parent for the guidance of God to bring their child into the marriage relationship He has for them is of utmost importance. We began these prayers regularly after their birth.

Of our six children, three are married, and three are still teenagers. I'm delighted to report that of our three married, our daughter-in-law and two sons-in-law are outstanding, godly young adults. They were our children's first dating relationship, first kiss on engagement and first sexual encounter at marriage. They have complementary passion for Jesus, live with common vision for the future in walking in destiny and are abundantly happy in marriage.

In regards to dating—there is a higher way. Let's choose God's way.

This summer teens are invited to "Awaken to Christ. Run with Others." at Awakening Teen Camps. Join hundreds of teens for times of corporate worship and biblically-sound teachings in a safe and fun environment at Awakening Teen Camps.

*Reprinted with permission from the International House of Prayer in Kansas City. **Patricia Bootsma**, with her husband,*

John, gives pastoral leadership to Catch the Fire Toronto Airport Church. She is the director of the Catch the Fire Toronto House of Prayer and represents the province of Ontario to the Canadian Prophetic Counsel. Patricia travels both in North America and internationally, ministering prophetically and helping believers to walk in passion for Jesus and live out the fullness of their destiny. Patricia and John are the parents of six amazing children.