

Derek, Jessica & Corinne's Dating Guide

Getting ready – Are you ready to date?

1) Who do you want to marry?

- Have an idea of the kind of person you want to marry before you enter a relationship. Do you share similar values? Not just, “Do you both believe Jesus is important?”
- It's difficult to be objective once you're interested in or dating someone. Do your best to make a list *before* that happens and share it with a mature friend who will give you honest feedback.
- Category suggestions for your “list”
 - Non-negotiables
 - Two important ones:
 - 1) They're a Christian (2 Cor. 7)
 - 2) Compatible spiritual maturity
 - Negotiables
 - Scripture: (Luke 14:28, Prov. 12:4, 18:22)

2) Are you ready for a relationship?

- Consider waiting to be in a relationship if you need to understand and process major issues in your past or family life.
- Consider waiting if a dating relationship could have a negative effect on your grades, current friendships, and ability to serve the Lord.
- Consider waiting if you're not embracing purity.
- *For a more complete list of questions to ask yourself, see the resource titled Should I Start Dating?*

3) Why should I ask these questions?

- A relationship should spur us toward becoming a better disciple of Jesus. It should bring out maturity in both of you.
 - Heb. 10:24.
- Many people think that marriage is the coming together of two “halves.” While that's not entirely inaccurate, in reality it's not addition ($\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2} = 1$), it's multiplication ($\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} = \frac{1}{4}$). It takes two “wholes” to make a whole couple. The importance of a firm sense of your identity in Christ is difficult to overstate.
 - 1 John 3:1
- *For identity in Christ help see Who am I and What is True About Me.*

4) Avoid uncommitted intimate friendships with the opposite gender.

- They may satiate immediate needs, but they lead to frustration, confusion, and heartache.
- By giving him/her so much access to your time, affection and intimacy without requiring any commitment on their part, you're removing all the incentives for him or her to be honest about their intentions, as well as alienating anyone else who may be interested in dating either of you.
- They tend to involve too much of the type of intimacy and companionship meant for dating and marriage.

Starting a relationship

- Consider NOT jumping into dating.

- Strongly consider being “intentional friends” for a season. This means two friends who are intentionally getting to know each other while doing non-romantic things together and *not touching*.
 - The goal: to get to know each other on a (slightly) deeper level than a normal opposite-sex friendship. While this seems counter cultural, it can save a lot of heartache if the relationship doesn't work out.
 - It develops self-control (a fruit of the Spirit).
- What might an intentional friendship look like?

• When it's time, clearly state your intentions.

- Many couples “find” themselves in relationship because there wasn't a *Define the Relationship* moment. Get on the same page with him/her about what your intentions are and how you will define your relationship.
- Start the habit of good, clear, loving communication early. Don't say, “Hey, wanna to hang out?” Say, “Hey, would you like to go on a date with me?”

A Note about Infatuation

- Infatuation – a temporary state of insanity.
 - *“Infatuation is to real love as a hot dog is to a baseball game”* - Brady Bobbink
 - Just because you see a hot dog, doesn't mean a baseball game is occurring.
- Infatuation isn't bad! Repeat: Infatuation is NOT bad. We just need to recognize that it's happening and what it does to us.
 - It causes us to not think straight.
 - It blinds us to reality and who the person really is.
 - God created it and it's a strong motivation to starting a relationship, but it's not completely trustworthy. In the midst of it we need wise counsel from Scripture and mature people.
 - 1 Peter 5:8, SoS 8:4
- Infatuation lasts from 12-18 months! (some studies shows up to 3 years!)

Now that you're Dating

- Grow emotional, spiritual, and physical intimacy in proportion to commitment.
 - Prov. 4:23
 - Many couples reveal too much about themselves too early – secrets, hurts, and desires. Too much too fast gives the illusion of intimacy.
 - Couples may *feel* close when they share deep things with each other, but in reality it's just hormones; While God *did* create emotions, we must remember that emotions are real, but they're not always trustworthy or true.
 - Emotions can blind us to real problems in the relationship, block us from truly getting to know a person, and hinder truly loving them for who they are. *Real* intimacy will require *real* time, both in commitment and trials. There's no substitute for time!
- Do not arouse passions that cannot be righteously fulfilled
 - 1 Cor. 7:1-5, 1 Thess. 4:3-6, 1 Tim. 5:2, Mt. 5:27-28
 - Dating couples have no right to private (or public) physical intimacy with each other. Treat each other as a brother or sister in Christ.

- If someone else was dating your future spouse, what would you want/not-want them to do with him/her?
- See Sex in Marriage resource
- Emphasize the friendship aspect of dating life.
 - Couples have courted for millennia without the benefit of a pre-marital physical relationship. Physical intimacy can blind us to real problems in the relationship and from actually getting to know a person.
 - It *can* be quite selfish. When couples touch (especially when they have sex), there are hormones that bond them together. If the relationship doesn't work out, tearing apart the bond is devastating. Remember this when you decide what boundaries are appropriate.
 - Ask yourself: what physical boundaries would be most loving towards the other person, yourself, and your future spouse?
- Be outwardly minded
 - Learn to love and serve others as a couple. Your relationship (and potential marriage) is intended to be a blessing to the world.
 - Proverbs 11:25-26
 - Please avoid the third wheel syndrome when others are around. It's unloving and selfish.
 - When you are together, avoid spending all your time alone – try to spend at least half your time in groups.
- Date, don't virtually co-habitate.
 - You should know when the date ends, and return to your own homes, routines, and the focus to which God has called you. Having it as a default that you will be together unless something else is planned is virtual co-habitation, regardless of where you spend the night. Time apart brings balance to the Force; it helps you process the relationship.
- The 11pm principle.
 - Avoid being alone and/or having important conversations late at night. The later it gets the more compromises you'll make in your physicality and communication.
- Don't jump ahead
 - When it comes to relationships, friends should not act like dating couples, dating couples should not act like engaged couples, engaged couples should not act like married couples. (Some dating couples see each other more than Derek and Jessica see each other!)

Seek guidance and accountability in everything

- Make a covenant that includes:
 - 1) Physical boundaries that keep you pure and above reproach.
 - 2) Time boundaries that help maintain your calling in Jesus and vocation.
 - 3) Emotional boundaries to help keep intimacy in check.
 - 4) Spiritual boundaries to make sure you're growing in Jesus and outward-focused.
 - Write them down – otherwise they can, and likely will, morph over time. Give these boundaries to a mature Christ-following friend or mentor couple. Give them permission to ask any question at any time about your relationship.

- Seek input!
 - Ask others what they think about your (potential?) relationship.
 - Prov. 15:22
 - 1) Leaders of your Biblical community; they know you and God's purposes.
 - 2) Parents: they know you.
 - 3) Mature Christ-following friends; they watch your relationship.
 - *If you're afraid to ask for advice, ask yourself "why?"*
- Grace
 - Everyone messes up, recognize that you are not perfect and that the person you want to date is not perfect.
 - Ask Jesus and others to help you have grace through the process.

Breaking Up:

- Time and space are the ONLY way to break up effectively. It's very difficult to "just be friends" afterwards. It's often helpful to have a set amount of time where you have limited contact after breaking up. Otherwise it's easy to slip back into the habit of acting a like a dating couple.

Headed towards engagement and/or marriage

- Consider... Get pre-engagement or pre-marital counseling!
 - First, what's the difference?
 - Very little, except one important detail: Pre-E happens before engagement.
 - What's the advantage?
 - Once a couple is engaged the "marriage machine" kicks in: there's a wedding to plan! Your thoughts start to go "places," and the relationship often slows in development.
 - Pre-E makes it easier to think through your relationship objectively. If for some reason your mentor couple thinks you need more time or if they think getting married is an unwise idea, then there's no ring that needs to be taken back, no venue that needs to be canceled, no invitations that need canceling, etc.
 - There's less pressure to "make it work" when it's unwise.
- Are people who do Pre-M bad or are they sinning?
 - No, definitely not. Our heart is to set you up for the best marriage possible; one that will serve yourselves, others, and the Kingdom of God well.
- Many (wise) mentor couples will not do Pre-E or Pre-M with a mentee couple unless the couple has been exclusively dating for at least a year. Why? For many reasons, but mostly 1) it's hard to go through the material if it's been less than that and 2) *see infatuation above*
- Bottom line: there are things about marriage that you don't know that you don't know. Get some Pre-E or Pre-M. Why wouldn't you want to give your marriage the best shot possible?

Strongly Recommended Resources

The Sacred Search – Gary Thomas
Tools for Mentoring – Joy Schroeder
Your Chi Alpha pastors
Your Biblical community