

Dating: Practical Principles for Managing Intimacy

grace church articles

In dating, men and women both have a responsibility to live out their masculinity and femininity in ways that are thoughtful, compelling, and honoring to God. Yet even as we begin to view dating through the lens of biblical principles, the question remains: **What does it actually look like for men and women to relate to one another in dating?** Here are a few ideas to help singles catch a vision for living out a healthy, thoughtful expression of the road between singleness and marriage as they work towards life together.

MEN

Pursue

Plan and create various environments (e.g., with family, serving together, peer group activities) where you can learn about each other in more true-to-life relational contexts.

Clearly communicate intentions for the relationship: what you're doing and why you're doing it (i.e., to make an informed and wise decision about marriage). Demonstrate that you want to study her likes, dislikes, and opinions (within appropriate bounds).

Protect

Be intentional and strategic about managing physical and emotional intimacy ("Do not awaken love before its time"). You are responsible for protecting not only your heart but hers also. Establish physical boundaries; make them available to friends and family for accountability.

Seek wise counsel (i.e., from family, pastors, leaders, and mentors) on the appropriateness and timing of certain discussion topics given the season of your relationship. Refrain from divulging more emotional expression than the maturity of your relationship can shoulder.

Provide

Be able and willing to give physical and spiritual direction. Demonstrate to her and her family that you can make a living and work hard. Demonstrate through a life of discipleship that you are being equipped to lead her spiritually (e.g., Bible, prayer, service, leadership).

WOMEN

Invite

Be persuadable and winnable to a godly man, inviting him to a certain level of appropriate connection. (i.e., not rigid nor ruled by unrealistic expectations, not self-protective or withdrawn, doesn't hold him accountable for past relational wounds).

Nurture

Nurture the relationship but don't coddle the man. Be a student of his strengths and weaknesses and how God has wired him, in order to help him become more of who God created him to be (rather than who you want him to be).

Remind him that he has a contribution to make in every situation. Foster and encourage opportunities for his growth and development in a way that make him less needy of you.

Foster healthy independence in the relationship rather than an unhealthy emotional dependence on one another. Encourage activities and friendships apart from one another.

Partner

Find a man whose vision you like and assist him with making it a reality. Own his mission for your relationship and assist him in moving the relationship in the direction he intends. Unless it transgresses your conscience, respect and hold to whatever boundaries or direction he gives the relationship. Don't try to get him to compromise his resolutions just because you don't understand them.

Continue to develop yourself (in the dating and/or engaged phase) so that you may bring all your strengths and gifting alongside him once you get married.

View conflict as an opportunity for your differences to complement each other rather than divide you or threaten your relationship. He needs and values your perspective. Grow in your ability to disagree with poise and patience, not living in fear that disagreement will lead to breaking the relationship.