

To My Daughters

The distillation of a lifetime's wisdom on living and loving

My lovely girls! In no time at all, it seems, you have grown into young women. It brings me so much joy to know that you have welcomed Jesus into your life; that you love Him and want to live in obedience to Him.

As Christians we are marked by the way we love and care for one another: it is the same way Jesus loved us. This way of living is distinctly different from the rest of the world. In all our relationships His Spirit works in us to help us be obedient to God and to minister to one another, building each other up in our walk with Christ. This other-centredness is the starting point for what I want to say to you about dating.

Dating is wonderful. It's exciting and special to be spending time with someone you are attracted to, getting to know them better and falling in love. God made men and women to live in relationship with Him and also with each other, and marriage is part of His plan for the lives of most of His people. In our culture dating is seen as anything from a casual fling to the search for Mr Right, but I'm convinced that Christians ought to regard it as part of the journey to marriage. What the Bible says about marriage, then, will help you understand what God expects of you in a dating relationship.

First, as a Christian woman, you should date a Christian man: a man who trusts and follows Jesus, who is prayerful and is developing a sound knowledge of the Bible, and who regularly serves others in his church. Look for a man who shares your heart *for* God, because one day he might share your heart *with* God.

When you begin regularly spending time with him you can discover more about his character. Galatians 5:16-26 is the finest list of character traits I know against which to compare the man who might become your husband. Ask yourself what sort of fruit he bears — the fruit of a sinful nature, or the fruit of the Spirit — and let that help you decide whether you should continue dating him.

Some people talk about the importance of "compatibility" in dating and marriage, and how they think it's essential to find someone who likes the same things as you. Remember that what really matters is a shared faith in Jesus, a desire to obey God, and a willingness to help each other grow as Christians. After that, it's a matter of wisdom as to whether you enjoy the same sport or movies or music. It might be that the likes and dislikes become quite unimportant in your relationship!

My advice is that you don't begin a dating relationship unless you are interested in it leading to marriage. Of course, not every relationship will lead to marriage. But you should expect that it might, as you grow closer in your commitment to each other and as your lives become more entwined. So wait until you are, in age and character, mature enough to marry before you start dating. And when you have reached that point in your life, remember that to begin a relationship with no real intention of growing in commitment — what we call, "playing the field" — is heartless and doesn't demonstrate the love that God wants you to show toward a Christian brother (for that is what he is until he becomes your husband).

For now, God has placed you in the care of your father. When you marry, that responsibility will be passed to your husband. You can show your respect of this by seeking your father's consent and blessing before you begin dating, and allowing him to meet the man and get to know him.

Once you are dating and growing in commitment to this man, remember the Bible is very clear on the place of physical intimacy between men and women: it belongs in a marriage relationship. This is so out-of-step with the way the world views physical relationships between men and women; in our society, not only is sex outside of marriage permitted, it is often encouraged. You know this from what you see in the media every day. It will be difficult to resist the pressure of our culture in this area of your life. This is another reason why you should date a Christian man — he will have a shared understanding of God's purpose for marriage, and the blessing of physical intimacy within it, and you will be able to help each other act in a godly way.

Steer clear of tempting situations when you are with a man, whether you are in a relationship or not. The obvious thing here is to avoid being alone together in secluded places, but also be aware of how the hormonal changes in your body each month affect the way you respond to a man's touch. Find a trusted, Christian, female confidante to whom you can be accountable about the level of physical contact you have with your boyfriend.

Dress and speak and act modestly. Think about who will be attracted by the clothes you wear and the way you behave — and make sure it's the right sort of man! This is important both when you are dating and when you are not, and particularly if you are out on your own, or at night, or somewhere unfamiliar. If you are dating, take care not to tempt your Christian brother to sin because of the way you dress or act. And, by the way, expect him to show the same respect and concern for you.

Finally, show how beautiful you are by your speech and behaviour. Mirror the love of God to all those around you, building them up in the Lord. Trust in Him to work out his good purposes for your life in *all* things. I know He will!

Sheryl Sarkoezy

©2017
www.christianstudylibrary.org