



**Educate  
+ Engage**



SERIOUS  
RELATIONSHIPS:



In a  
Relationship

### OVERVIEW

Multitudes of Apostolics have started an incredible journey with their future spouse through a time of God-honoring dating. But others have taken major relationship detours that ended with damage and destruction.

#### **Scripture Passage**

Proverbs 3:5–6

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."

To acknowledge means to "give consideration." Sadly many Apostolics fail to consider God's direction in matters of dating.

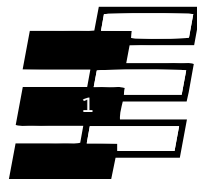
### EDUCATE

*Discussion Questions: Does it matter to God who you date? Why? In what ways can someone acknowledge (consider) God in their season of dating?*

#### A Quick History Lesson

Before dating culture was even a thing, "courting" existed. In yesteryear, young men and women spent their first dates at home. The boy would meet the girl's parents, they would all sit in the living room and visit, followed by dinner with the entire family. Later in the evening the couple may sit on the front porch swing for a few minutes alone. After several meetings, the parents may grant permission for an unchaperoned walk through the town.

Do you know what shattered those courting traditions? The emergence of the automobile. That's right! The single greatest factor that led to recreational dating was the car. Young people were now able to look beyond their own small towns at an enlarged dating pool. Courtship was removed from the watchful eyes of anxious parents. Teens enjoyed a freedom from parental supervision unknown to previous generations. The courtship process rapidly devolved into dating. Experimentation with sexual behaviors before marriage became increasingly common.



### Three Types of Daters

#### *Recreational Daters*

Recreational daters date primarily for fun. Some trademarks of recreational daters are:

- They tend to skip the friendship stage of a relationship.
- They place an unhealthy focus on attraction and romantic connection.
- They are often isolated from other important relationships because their time is monopolized by dating. They're too busy for lifelong friends, youth pastors, and parents because they're obsessed with their new boyfriend or girlfriend.
- They sometimes mistake a physical relationship for love.
- Moral purity is often a problem.

Recreational daters generally don't know that infatuation can happen with a person who is totally wrong for them. They don't have critical conversations with their spiritual authority about who, how, and when they should date. They rarely work out personal dating standards before they date or understand that dating should be seriously related to marriage.

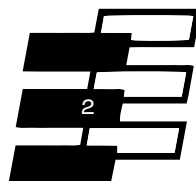
People who recreationally date are often less emotionally healthy than people who don't date at all. They deal with depression and stress due to breakups and conflict in their relationships. Sadly, recreational daters frequently experience a great deal of avoidable pain.

#### *Serial Daters*

Serial daters are in a constant cycle of romance and breakup. They believe that infatuation is "falling in love," which is why they are addicted to the euphoric feeling of infatuation. Serial daters are not in love with people; they are in love with the high of infatuation (in love with love).

They usually have codependent personalities, feeling they need to be in a relationship to be fulfilled. Tragically they often struggle with sexual integrity and ultimately carry wounds into marriage. Serial daters "fall in love" by emotions, and when those emotions stop, they "fall out of love," making serial daters prone to divorce once the romantic feelings wane. We all need to understand that love is not a feeling; love is a decision.

**Marriage is an unconditional commitment to an imperfect person.**



Even great marriages aren't exempt from frustration and pain. Marriage is fueled by forgiveness and mercy. If someone's operational definition of love is based on feelings, he or she is in trouble. The person right for you is not perfect, but the grace of God will enable you to make an unconditional, loving commitment to that imperfect person.

### *Intentional Daters*

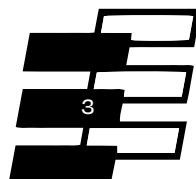
Intentional daters have standards that go beyond mere attraction and romantic connection. When people feel attraction and romantic connection with someone, they can see that as a green light for a dating relationship. However, these two components are not the difference makers for a healthy relationship. Successful and failed relationships have both started with attraction and romantic connection.

Pulses of attraction and romantic connection bring powerful and almost intoxicating feelings of infatuation. Intentional daters are not blown off their foundations by infatuation because they are anchored by greater considerations. They know that the person who has captured their interest might be totally wrong for them.

For some singles, the only criterion of whether to date someone is if the other person attends church. This condition alone doesn't make someone "legal." Just because she's wearing a skirt doesn't mean she's legal. Just because he was raised in church doesn't mean he's legal. Considerations such as aligned goals, aligned consecration, aligned values, and aligned callings should be major considerations in a relationship decision.

Intentional daters won't lower their standards because they have a non-negotiables list detailing the type of person they want to marry. That list makes clear the characteristics they have identified as their standard for who is and who isn't marriage material. And if someone isn't marriage material, why date them?

A person's non-negotiables list should include spiritual qualities like consecration, a prayer life, emotional maturity, and submission to authority. The list could also include mutual expectations for family dynamics and a commitment to stewardship. An intentional dater talks to elders and friends about their list. They get input about the kind of personality and giftings they should look for.



Sometimes people who go through the trouble of making a list throw it away when they experience physical attraction and romantic connection. Intentional daters recognize that it's possible to have chemistry and attraction with someone who doesn't check the boxes on their list. Therefore, they won't lower their standards or abandon their prayerfully composed list, even if their resolve means losing a date.

### **Intentional daters surrender to God and their spiritual authority the right to date.**

Intentional daters know that God cares about whom they choose to date. When friendship ignites into romantic connection, intentional daters talk with God, their pastor, their parents, and their mentors before taking their relationship to the next level. Proverbs 11:14 wisely teaches: "Where there is no counsel, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors there is safety."

*Discussion Question: Are you radically submitted enough to walk away from a relationship that feels right to you, but your parents, pastor, and Holy Ghost are telling you isn't right?*

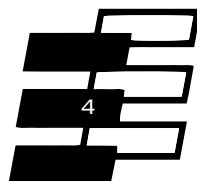
Intentional daters are in a life season that's ready for marriage. Intentional daters don't date if they aren't in a season where they can pursue lifelong commitment. It's not a serious relationship if you are dating but can't—or don't want to—move forward; it's seriously dangerous.

Now this criterion doesn't mean you shouldn't date someone until you know 100 percent for sure that you are going to marry them, but it does mean you know enough about the person to know if he or she is marriage material. A healthy season of growing the relationship should occur before committing to marriage. You need enough time to see each other frustrated and to have a couple of healthy disagreements. You must vet each other's authenticity and real-world compatibility.

Some might argue that many people date recreationally, even if they are not ready for marriage, without any trouble. But dating without being close to the season of marriage creates challenges. Long-term dating competes with foundational preparation for life (such as calling, college, career) and it becomes increasingly difficult to stay morally pure the longer you date.

### **Closing**

Intentionality in dating blesses your future and helps avoid much of the drama and trauma that recreational and serial daters typically experience. In Genesis 24 Abraham sent a servant back to his homeland to find a wife for his son Isaac. Upon arriving at his destination, the servant





prayed for God to lead him to the right woman. God divinely led the servant to Isaac's future wife, Rebekah. She was by a well watering the camels in the servant's caravan without being asked. Based on this story, do the following:

- Pray about your future spouse and God will direct you.
- Look for a future spouse who lives by, and draws from, the wells of salvation.
- Look for someone who doesn't have a selfish nature, but a serving nature.

## ENGAGE

If God intends for you to marry, your spouse is alive and breathing right now. It makes sense for you to pray for him or her. Ask God to guide your steps and theirs. Be intentional, even if you have not yet met your future mate, so you will be ready for the seasons ahead.

