

DATING FOR CHRISTIANS PART 1

By Penny Rose/Misty Foster



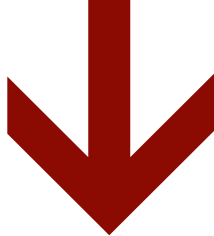
If you are single, you know that the dating game can have some tricky rules—especially for a Christian. A variety of believers have differing dating standards. Most believe dating should have the intent of marriage. Some believe in courtship: a parentally supervised period of time for the couple to decide on marriage. Some decide to casually date as a way to evaluate potential mates. Others believe God will providentially bring the person you should marry. Whatever your view on dating and courtship, the goal is to keep your relationship Christ-centered by following some godly guidelines:

- **Pick wisely.** Set your standards high by dating a believer. You will likely discover that you have the same morals, worldview, and priorities when you date within the faith. Do not date an unbeliever hoping you will be the one to convert them. Salvation is the Lord's work—no “missionary dating.”
- **Pray continually.** Seek God's will and pray before you agree to date. If dating, pray for one another daily. Practice praying as a couple. Spending time in prayer together reveals a great deal about your relationship with God.



- **Talk openly.** Get to know each other's background, family traditions, and plans for the future. Before you decide to marry someone, you want to learn their philosophy on child-rearing, what they expect of you, how they intend to spend the holidays, how they view financial planning, etc. Communication in a relationship is important and not something you want to try to establish after you say, "I do."
- **Date cautiously.** Agree to ground rules on physical affection. Covenant that any sexual contact will occur only *after* marriage. Make sure all you do honors the Lord. Group dating allows you to get to know each other in a wholesome environment and reveals how your date responds in social situations. Don't allow yourself to get into situations that might tempt you to let your guard down (like a romantic candlelight dinner for two in your date's apartment). Review the ground rules regularly.
- **Seek accountability.** Ask a godly couple to act as supervisors. Another couple can guide you and keep you accountable in purity before the Lord. You might want to double date with this couple, do a Bible study together, and ask them to pray over your relationship and its future. Your pastor can also provide the insight and wisdom you need as you date.

Dating can be a dangerous gambit if you follow the world's ways. But it can be a delightful time so long as you "delight yourself in the LORD" (Isaiah 58:14). If you are dating, put God at the center of your relationship and trust Him to guide your steps...and lead you to your spouse.



DATING FOR CHRISTIANS PART 2

ONLINE DATING

By Paul & Mary Bishop



In the 1840s, poets Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett courted over two years by exchanging 573 love letters. By the time they married they knew each other deeply, and had a very happy marriage.

Times have changed—long distance love letters don't always fit today's hectic pace. What about using on-line dating to find your perfect match? While the Bible speaks clearly on issues such as abstaining from pre-marital sex and dating within the faith, it doesn't provide instruction on *how* couples should meet. The internet may be an option, but it is a prime arena for deception. Pray for God's guidance and practice the following tips to navigate the murky waters of online dating.

- **Be honest.** An online profile is like a resumé; make it short and sincere. Don't exaggerate successes or diminish less attractive qualities. Be clear about your goal: friendship, occasional dating, or marriage. Include a brief description of your faith, interests, hobbies, and life goals.
- **Be picture perfect.** Be true in your visual statement. Don't post a photo taken five years or twenty pounds ago. That way, when (or if) you meet, your photo won't establish any distrust.



- **Be true to you.** Neal Clark Warren, founder of eHarmony.com, says the most stable marriages are between people with many similarities. An athlete who runs every day, kayaks dangerous rivers, and needs four hours of sleep is probably not a good match for a quiet, cerebral bookworm. Present who you really are.
- **Be discerning.** Don't assume that because someone says he/she is a Christian, single, or financially independent that it's so. Ask direct questions that clarify the person's status and beliefs. And don't ignore red flags! It's better to discover deceptions or incompatibilities early than have heartbreak later.
- **Be patient.** Take time to let the friendship develop before meeting face to face. Several months of correspondence is a good way to avoid a premature physical or emotional attachment.
- **Be accountable.** Practice godliness in your speech, deeds, and keyboarding. Internet dating is still dating. Online conversations should be as holy and respectful as a conversation with Jesus.
- **Be Cautious.** Be aware of potential dangers. Pay for a background check and/or get references before meeting. Meet in a public place with plenty of witnesses the first several dates. Then, introduce him/her to your friends and get their feedback.

Whether meeting online, at church, or through a friend, make Christ the starting line and bottom line in any relationship. Honor Him by seeking His will and blessing, and He will honor how you welcome His rule and reign in your life—online and offline.