

HELP!

I'M CONFUSED ABOUT DATING



Joel James

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INTRODUCTION

My dating experiences before I met and married my wife were not exactly the highlights of my youth. Take my first date, for example. Everything that could have gone wrong did.

I asked a lovely Christian girl named Julie to accompany me to a Christian concert, and she was kind enough to accept. When the afternoon of the concert came, Julie called to say that she was feeling ill, but that she still wanted to come. In fact, when she arrived at my dorm just before it was time to leave, she looked awful. Drawn, pale—she was clearly not in top form. I told her she didn't have to come, but she obviously felt that she had given her word and wanted to keep it. I'm sure she felt a lot better when we bumped into her former boyfriend on our way out of the building. I hate it when that happens.

Ready to depart, we got into my friend's car. I didn't own a car and thought a 120-mile ride on the back of my bicycle might be a bit uncomfortable for her, so the five of us squeezed into my friend's vehicle: three guys, me, and Julie. Nice. Romantic. Immediately

after we had loaded into the car, I unloaded. I had forgotten our tickets and had to go back to my dorm room to get them. Organized, that's me.

The concert was in another city about an hour away, and just before we arrived at the concert hall, my friend's car started to smoke slightly. We didn't think much of it; we were too eager to see the show.

Julie had tried her best to make small talk on the way, but she was clearly paddling upstream against a strong current. You can imagine how much better three hours of loud music made her feel. After the concert we piled back into my friend's car and started home. On the outskirts of the city where the concert was, the car blew up. The dashboard lights went berserk, smoke started rolling in through all the vents, and we had to pull over and stop.

While my friends went for help, I spent the next three-and-a-half hours watching Julie slowly freeze as the temperature plummeted. My only hope was that, if she got cold enough, she might forget how sick she was. In the end, it was after two in the morning by the time we got home.

Needless to say, we didn't go out again. In fact, Julie got married a short time later. One date with me was enough to convince her that she needed to take herself out of the field, and quickly.

Dating is crazy sometimes, isn't it? But, to be honest, car fires in the middle of the night are the least of it. The real reason dating is crazy is mainly because Christian young people and parents have never consciously shaped their understanding of dating by the Bible. In fact, dating is one of the most obvious areas where Christians have blindly followed the path beaten by the world. Paul told the church in Rome,

Do not be conformed to this world.

(Romans 12:2)

If ever there was an area where we need to resist being pressed into the world's mold, dating is it.

However, the Bible seems to have lost its voice when it comes to dating. Dating, as we practice it, simply isn't found in Scripture. The approach of God's people was very different. How different? When forty-year-old Isaac wanted to get married, he didn't borrow Dad's camel and take a girl to the movies. Instead his dad, Abraham, sent one of his trusted servants about five hundred miles away to Mesopotamia to pick a girl for Isaac, and she assented to the marriage without even meeting him (Genesis 24). That's different!

As a parent myself now, I'm beginning to think Abraham's approach wasn't such a bad idea. However, while the parental-appointment method is *described* in the Bible, it is never *prescribed* or commanded. Therefore, it is impossible to say that arranged marriages are the biblical method. If nothing else, the interaction between Ruth and Boaz in the book of Ruth shows that there was freedom in this area.

While we don't have the luxury of turning to *the* biblical passage on dating and reading God's final word on the subject, we do know that God's Word is sufficient for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Therefore, the guidance we need regarding dating is there; we just need to find it.

1

Dating Don'ts

One way of learning how to do something is by watching someone else do it poorly. When I swam in triathlons, I had a friend who worked out in the same pool. In his freestyle stroke, he had a habit of putting his hand in the water too far toward the centerline of his body, turning his body slightly sideways. Therefore, instead of gliding through the water, he snow-plowed the water in front of him. I learned a lot by watching him: I learned how *not* to swim. His mistake helped me correct a similar error in my own stroke.

Perhaps we can use that same approach as we consider how Samson went about finding a wife. I once heard a dating talk entitled “The Dos and Don'ts of Dating.” Unfortunately, in chapters 14–16 of the book of Judges, we find only the *don'ts* of dating. There are no *dos* in Samson's story. He

did everything wrongly.

Then Samson went down to Timnah and saw a woman in Timnah, one of the daughters of the Philistines. So he came back and told his father and mother, "I saw a woman in Timnah, one of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife."

(Judges 14:1-2)

Samson had seen girls before, but this one was a real knockout. So much so, he immediately decided he wanted to marry her. What's wrong with that? Boy meets girl. Boy flips his lid. Boy asks girl to marry him. Love at first sight ... how romantic!

What was wrong with Samson's approach to dating? Everything. Specifically, he made three disastrous mistakes.

Don't #1

Samson was visiting Timnah and saw "one of the daughters of the Philistines." What was the problem with that? Just this: Israel had been commanded by God not to marry the daughters of the idolatrous,

demon-worshipping peoples around them (Deuteronomy 7:3-4). It was a wise command. God didn't want his people being led astray by the idol worship and occult practices of the Canaanites, the Philistines, and others.

In other words, Samson had no business going to Timnah with a roving eye. Every girl there was off-limits. Unfortunately, Samson never learned his lesson. If it wasn't a sweetheart in Timnah, it was a prostitute in Gaza (Judges 16:1), and when he grew tired of her, he pursued yet another Philistine lover, the delectable Delilah (16:4). The land of the Philistines was the home of a wicked and immoral people, and every time Samson went there, his lust pulled him into another disastrous relationship.

Ignoring God's commands, Samson told his father, "Get her for me, for she looks good to me" (Judges 14:3). The original language actually says "She is *righteous* or *upright* to me." According to Samson, Miss Timnah met the accepted standard. Unfortunately, as a worshipper of the gods of the Philistines, she definitely did not meet God's standards. But Samson was adamant: "She meets the standard." When the girl Samson wanted didn't measure up, he changed the rules. Not even God's commands stopped him from pursuing the girl he desired.

Don't #2

Besides looking for love in all the wrong places, Samson had another major problem in his approach to dating. How did Samson determine that a girl would be a good partner? “I saw a woman in Timnah” (Judges 14:2, emphasis added). Samson’s measure of a woman was her profile. Always the human hormone, Samson thought only of sex appeal when he searched for a wife. Her faith and her character were inconsequential. If the curve of her face and the cut of her hair were right, then it was full steam ahead.

Don't #3

Then his father and his mother said to him, “Is there no woman among the daughters of your relatives, or among all our people, that you go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?” But Samson said to his father, “Get her for me, for she looks good to me.”

(Judges 14:3)

Proverbs says,

Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child.

(Proverbs 22:15)

Certainly that was true of Samson. His parents tried to warn him. They strongly encouraged him to reconsider his course of action. Samson's response? "Dad, Mom, you're idiots. I know better than you do." Blinded by infatuation, Samson rejected his parents' counsel. In so doing, he steamrolled right over one of God's most important lines of defense protecting us against foolish decisions.

Pride Goes before Destruction

You probably know the rest of the story. Before the wedding feast was over, Samson's beautiful bride had manipulated and betrayed him. She nagged and whined out of him the answer to the riddle he had invented to stump her wedding guests (Judges 14:16-17). Samson left the wedding in a fury and stormed out of town. Eventually, after several bouts of revenge and counter-revenge between Samson and his wife's friends, Judges 15:8 tells us that

Samson ended up living in a cave like an outlaw. His self-styled approach to dating didn't bring him the happiness and pleasure he thought it would. It brought only manipulation, distrust, faithlessness, in-law squabbles, anger, vengeance, and loneliness.

Samson was forever putting himself in situations where he could become emotionally and physically involved with an unbeliever. And, inevitably, he did. He also measured a prospective companion only by her physical attractiveness rather than by her love for God. And when his parents tried to shine the light of wisdom on his bad decision, he turned a blind eye to their counsel. Those are three classic blunders, and Samson made them all.