

## **My Thoughts on Dating**

I call these my thoughts because I have no evidence to indicate the absoluteness of my ideas. If I've left something out, it's possible that I've never thought about it, and wouldn't mind being enlightened. To start off, I'll define a date from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "an appointment to meet at a specified time; *especially* : a social engagement between two persons that often has a romantic character." Often when we mention dating, I think we refer to the ongoing process of many date events culminating in a deeper relationship whose end is hopefully marriage.

My conclusions on dating stem from my own short dating experience and my interaction with others around me. Dating is very similar to what one would do if they had a best friend. Nourishing a best friend relationship properly is also an interest I have, so my ideas about these tend to be similar.

A friend, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, is "one attached to another by affection or esteem." A best friend would be someone who is never failing (long term) in this respect as a friend. As Christians, we understand friends to be those who demonstrate love towards one another. A best friend would be someone who we look out for their best interests and they likewise look out for our best interests; not as a response to each other's care, but out of a desire that is blind to debt. As Christians, this is how we must respond to God's gifts because we cannot repay him. If we saw how indebted we are and expect to repay it in full, we'd realize its futility. We must give graciously, like God who gave even though we cannot repay. We do what God desires, because we love Him, not because of our debt (unless we are weak, and need only temporary motivation). (If we find ourselves knowingly do something sinful, it brings our love into question.)

My first (and only) dating session lasted about 2.5 months. It was with a non-Christian (I didn't know what she was one when I first started the relationship), and I ended it because over those 2.5 months God challenged my heart about the incompatibility between Christians and non-Christians. She had all of the surface characteristics of a friendly person, beautiful, and caring, but I discovered that neither of our hearts were in the right place. I filled a vacuum in her life because I showed care and devotion towards her, and her response was to be a girlfriend, reflecting with gifts of gratitude. She filled a vacuum in my life because of the pressures at home (my mom) and at church about the topic of marriage. (Both mom and church probably expecting to lead properly, but instead led astray.)

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Certainly God used this experience to bring me closer to Him, but it's like a black spot in my life because I previously didn't want any more than one dating relationship. I wanted the first one to be the only *one*. If I had been closer to God, and knew His teachings better, with wisdom instead of just knowledge, I know I would have at least avoided this particular situation.

*Fear* is what one should not have in a dating relationship. I had fear, which caused me to wait several weeks before I asked whether she was a Christian or not. This type of fear is irrational because if you expect to form a best friend from the relationship, there cannot be fear of revelation. If there is no hope to resolve<sup>1</sup> all differences in opinions, actions, and beliefs, the friendship is already limited by fear. This realization is what slowly encouraged me to ask the one I was dating challenging questions. This is also an important part of our relationship with God.

*Understanding* is what we should seek in a dating relationship. The priorities when we date someone need to be correct. We date to form a better understanding of each other. In my dating relationship, my priorities were not as secure as they should have been, and the lady's priorities were heavily emotional and physical (hugging and kissing). I do not wish to downplay *all* emotional and physical interaction in a dating relationship, however if the motives are wrong I believe they should be avoided. My experience and responses to questions I asked the lady seemed to show that what guided most of her emotional and physical actions were shallow. She was doing what *others* did, and as time progressed, I noticed it paralleled many of the TV/movie love relationships. Beyond this, I began to have the feeling that her desires were primarily to satisfy her own felt needs, without the consideration of my own best interest. (Her reactions to several events and questions back this up.) When the motives are self-seeking, understanding is hard to come by because the focus is on what one can get out of the other. The motives must be seeking the other, and their best interests. This forces us not only to examine the other, but ourselves in respect to the other.

For those with difficulty in discerning how their motives lie, I recommend "hands-off" dating. Friendships aren't based solely around touching, but by actions, words, and deeds. Although the TV and movies typically show that love doesn't come without a physical hug or kiss, I don't believe this is so, and think

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<sup>1</sup> By resolve, I mean to "become at relative peace with". Since we are all human and fallible, it would be unrealistic to assume we could agree on everything. However, conflict will always create stress and tension, and that's not what's best in a best friend relationship.

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love is far more pronounced in other aspects of our lives. If the relationship becomes too focused on the physical aspects, like all things, they need to be tempered. If this means fasting from them for a period of time, it must be done to keep the relationship from revolving around them, and they becoming a roadblock to a deeper relationship.

Personally, I believe that any relationship that cannot survive without hugs and kisses will have a hard time surviving with them (in the long term). I therefore support the absence of those elements until the relationship is deep enough that the relationship does not form around them.<sup>2</sup> *Theology* (worldview), *character*, and *priority* compatibility will mean the most in the end, and these should be the foundations of a best friend relationship.

*Commitment* is a requirement in a dating relationship. Just like we make commitments as Christians to know and follow the Lord, Jesus Christ, commitments must be made in a dating relationship. Saint Paul even mentions this in 1 Corinthians 7:32-35 (although as a warning about becoming so committed to a spouse that God is given less priority). The lack of commitment indicates the lack of a relationship. I see commitment as not only setting time aside during good times, but also setting aside time to persevere in bad times. Even when things turn sour, there must be some effort in reconciliation. Living with the burden of increasing tensions and lack of peace is not what a best friend does. If something cannot be resolved peacefully, it becomes a roadblock to a deeper friend relationship. Especially in marriage, there must be a sense of commitment on both sides to deal with problems peacefully and justly. (Due to the differing beliefs between Christians and non-Christians, this commitment can become problematic because there can be no real peace between the two. That's why Saint Paul warns about being unequally yoked in 2 Corinthians 6:14).

I've thought of a way to get to know people better, and build stronger friendships (I'm by no means perfect though). It is key to continuously challenge the friendship. You must not hold back, but say what you believe. This is both in telling about yourself, and responding to what your friends tell you. Ignorance does not make a very strong relationship. Although timing may be appropriate, anything left unsaid is a weakness. If they cease being friends, I personally doubt

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<sup>2</sup> I've been called on the strong term *absence*. Unfortunately in my own life most friendly hugs and kisses have come only from family members, so I'm uncomfortable having them in any other contexts. However, I now think they are extremely valuable within friendships as well, but care needs to be taken. I wouldn't do anything I wouldn't already do with just a friend. Dating is to learn about more about each other, it's not the same as marriage. :)

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the strength and validity of the friendship. That's not to say there may not be bad days and disputes, but in the long term there must be reasonable effort to resolve conflicts. A friend who refuses to discuss an issue, period, is not a friend of mine.<sup>3</sup> There may be other ways to discuss the problem, or face it, but ignorance or living with it in the long term tends to be detrimental to the friendship.

When telling about yourself, don't aim to please, instead aim to challenge.<sup>4</sup> In this way, especially in dating, understanding can come early,<sup>5</sup> and so can disagreements, allowing those involved to learn how each one handles challenging topics or arguments.

Physical contact should be limited to what you would do if you were not dating. Consider if you were to stop dating, how would you treat them physically? Never exceed that. My fear is that anything beyond such contact may inhibit a deeper relationship, whether it becomes a dominant feature, or because it is built on unfounded hopes of the future, which may be blinding to the truth when those hopes begin to disintegrate.

Determine what in your life sucks up valuable time, whether it is the TV, work, computer games, and/or books and evaluate their importance in respect to the one you are dating. We should already be having such thoughts in respect to God, so this should be somewhat natural. If something is more important than the one you are dating, ask yourself why, and consider how valuable that makes the relationship to you. If you can do something together, and both enjoy it together, that is preferred to neglecting the more valuable for something of lesser value.

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<sup>3</sup> When I say *period*, I mean no good reasons are provided for not discussing an issue. I knew someone who was simply ignoring a problem that was growing between us, and when I mentioned it to him and wanted to talk about it, he blew up. He told me everything was fine before I'd mentioned it (it wasn't for me), but now I'd opened a can of worms. I would have gladly postponed talking about it, but he wasn't interested in that. He didn't really show any care in what I thought and resolving the rift I felt was breaking our friendship. It's extremely hard to see someone like that as a friend. I certainly didn't think he was being very friendly, and now when we talk, I fear bringing up any issues with him. I'd rather avoid conflict in order to salvage whatever friendship is left, if there is any.

<sup>4</sup> What I mean by "don't aim to *please*, but to *challenge*" is to be yourself, and show yourself. If you are doing something that is unpleasant to the other person, change yourself, don't create a facade. Also, sometimes people become comfortable in a relationship and it remains shallow. In this case, how can you expect to deepen the relationship if you don't take advantage of opportunities to take small risks outside of your comfort zone?

<sup>5</sup> Early, as in before engagement or marriage.