



A weekly resource to spark biblically-centered conversations with your kids about the issues they face in today's youth culture.

## DATING

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*Dating can be a difficult subject for parents to navigate with their teens, especially amidst our shifting culture. But this is one subject that parents must not just choose to avoid. Although the concept of dating is foreign to the Scriptures, what guidance does God's Word provide for this specific area of parenting?*

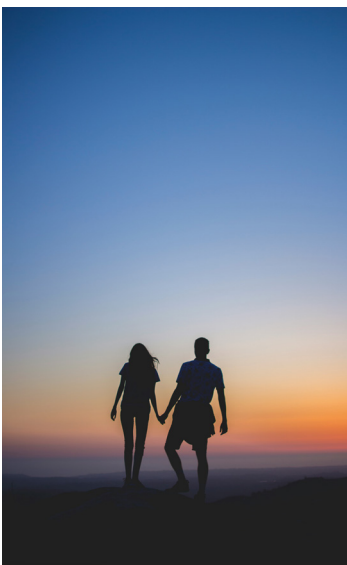
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### What is Happening?

- Dating relationships tend to increase throughout the teen years with 36% of 13-year olds and 70% of 18-year olds reporting a romantic relationship within the past 18 months.
- However, according to the US Health and Human Services, Adolescents date less now than they did in the past. According to their latest studies, nearly two-thirds of 13- to 17-year-olds have never been in a dating or romantic relationship.
- With the rise in social media use among teens, many have assumed that dating has increasingly moved toward an online context. However, the number of teens who meet dating partners online remains virtually low. Many speculate, though, that the rise of social media is a central factor in the trend of fewer teens who are dating.
- According to Lumen Learning, unhealthy relationships can start early and last a lifetime, and approximately 29 percent of adolescents reported being verbally or psychologically abused within the previous year. They state that, "holding idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships can lead to disillusionment and ineffective coping mechanisms when conflict emerges. It also seems reasonable to expect that physical aggression may be more common when adolescents have not fully developed their capacity for intimacy, including their ability to communicate."
- Another trend that has been attributed to the rise of social media, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, has to do with the percentage of US high school students who have ever had sex, with that number decreasing from 54 percent in 1992 to 40 percent in 2017.



WORLD





## WORD

### What Does God’s Word Say?

**Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:7-8.** Marriage is a sacred union created and instituted by God as a beautiful aspect of his good creation and creative purposes. The marriage covenant provides the exclusive blessed context for the expression of eros love, or love expressed between lovers that includes sexual attraction, between one man and one woman for God’s glory in fulfilling his purposes.

**Ephesians 5:22-33.** In the most comprehensive treatment of marriage in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul highlights specific Spirit-enabled character traits that are necessary for husbands and wives to embody in order to fulfill their uniquely defined God-given roles. This passage also reveals that marriage is ultimately to be a picture of the gospel, reflecting Jesus and his love for his bride, the church.

**1 John 4:7-12.** Although the context for this passage speaks of believers loving one another, the idea that God’s love can only be revealed to others as his love is perfected in those who abide in him certainly speaks to the way we love in every way and in every context. Simply stated, we will love others well—in every way—only when we supremely love Jesus and as his love is cultivated and perfected in us.

**Song of Solomon 2:7; 3:5; 8:4.** A refrain throughout the Songs declares, “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem ... that you not stir up or awaken love until in pleases,” or before its time.

**1 Corinthians 7:32-38.** While Paul affirms the goodness of marriage for those who enter into it, he also affirms singleness as even an advantage in being whole-heartedly devoted to the Lord in service to him. Either way, “undivided devotion to the Lord” is to be the primary pursuit of every believer, regardless of marital or relationship status.

**1 Thessalonians 4:1-8.** God’s will for each of his redeemed people centers upon sanctification, or growth in spiritual maturity and holiness. A key aspect to this work includes every believer knowing “how to control his [or her] body in holiness and honor, as “God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.”





WALK

*“You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”*

*I Corinthians  
6:19-20*

### Conversation Starters and Questions:

Dating is one of those topics about which different families will have differing convictions and philosophies. As a student ministry leader, instead of simply trying to steer parents toward adopting my own convictions and philosophy, I want to encourage parents toward *intentionality*. The worst posture that Christian parents can have towards dating is passivity. If asked about their particular stance and approach, all Christian parents ought to have a goal of being able to share about how the Scriptures inform their convictions and guide how they seek to shepherd their teenage child’s heart in this area. Here are some questions parents can use for reflection as they begin to develop such a biblical dating philosophy for their own household, incorporating the biblical passages mentioned in the Word section above:

- **Why?** This should always be the first question! Why should my/our teenager date? What is the objective? What is the motivation? If God’s objective for this type of relationship is marriage, that ought to have a major effect on our *why* for dating. Ultimately, our kids don’t need to date in order to gain experience, but healthy dating can certainly cultivate certain characteristics that are foundational to a healthy marriage.
- **How does our primary calling as parents shape our philosophy of dating?** As parents, we need to be reminded often that our primary calling is not the happiness of our children or making sure they keep up with the natural flow of culture. Our primary task is leading our children to know and treasure Jesus as lifelong disciples.
- **In what ways might dating “stir up or awaken love before its time?”** When this sort of love is stirred up and awakened in the lives of young people and able to be explored before they have a measure of emotional and spiritual maturity to handle it, dating can produce unhealthy patterns and yield lasting detrimental emotional baggage.
- **How can we evaluate when our teenager (\*each one\* uniquely) is emotionally prepared for dating?** What are some baseline marks of maturity that we ought to be able to consistently see in their lives that would help us to be comfortable with them dating?
- **While my/our teenager is dating, how can we (and others) continue to help them in cultivating an “undivided devotion to the Lord?”** How might dating become another incubator for such development if handled in a mature and healthy way?