



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

NAVIGATING TEEN ROMANCE

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While navigating teen romance has never been easy, things have only gotten more complicated in recent years. Research from the Survey Center of American Life found that 44% of Gen Z males have never been in a relationship, and other studies show that teens are dating less than previous generations. A number of factors have contributed to these trends, and Christian parents and leaders need wisdom to help our kids see God's design for love and marriage.



WORLD

What is Happening?

- **Delayed Social Development:** For a variety of reasons, teens today tend to be more risk averse, socially awkward, and unsure of themselves, all of which make them more hesitant to start dating.
- **Modern Dating is Hard:** So called “third places”—social spaces outside the home or work/school, like bowling alleys, cafes, and community hangouts—are disappearing, making it difficult to meet other people in real life. Dating among young adults therefore relies heavily on apps, which often make interactions feel transactional and competitive.
- **Changes in Technology & Culture:** Teens spend a lot of time interacting online, but that's a poor replacement for in-person hangouts. The allure of online pornography and AI relationships is causing some kids to ditch the dating scene altogether. The rise of incels (“involuntary celibates”) has drawn recent attention, reflecting further shifts in teen and young adult culture.
- **Effects of Social Media:** Social media warps young people's perception of romance. On the one hand, the endless shareable content of picture-perfect dates, glamorous relationships, tips from romance gurus, and fairy tale weddings set unrealistic expectations. On the other hand, social media also provides an outlet for disaffected voices to air their frustrations and stoke the fears of others with stories of dates gone wrong, lists of “toxic traits” in a partner, and all around bad advice.
- **Battle of the Sexes:** Gen Z men lean conservative while Gen Z women tend to be more liberal, and the value gap between them is growing. Differing beliefs on politics, religion, and family dynamics make finding a good match difficult.





WORD

What Does God's Word Say?

While the Bible doesn't specifically address the issue of dating, it does have a lot to say about the way we treat one another. Each one of us is valuable, not because of our physical appearance or charisma, but because we have been made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27). As believers, teens should view each other as brothers and sisters in Christ (Gal 3:26). This spiritual identity reshapes how relationships are approached. It means that others are never to be used for personal gratification, status, or self-fulfillment. Further, it means treating each other with decency, respect, and modesty, doing all things in love (1 Cor 10:24; 16:14). Married or not, all believers are called to put others first (Php 2:3-4). In a culture divided by gender, Christians must learn to forgive and live with one another in an understanding way (Eph 4:32; Col 3:12-14).

In a Christian framework, the goal of dating is to find a godly spouse.

Marriage is a picture of the gospel meant to display Christ's love for the church (Eph 5:25-32) and is therefore to be held in esteem by all (Heb 13:4). "He who finds a wife finds a good thing" (Prov 18:22), and marriage is one of God's blessings that we should cherish. The deepest compatibility in a marriage is not emotional, but spiritual, and therefore believers are cautioned not to be "unequally yoked" with an unbeliever (2 Cor 6:14). Godliness matters far more than worldly status or beauty. Various passages of Scripture provide helpful criteria by which teens can evaluate their relationships, including the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23), Christ-like humility (Php 2:1-11), purity (1 Thess 4:3-7), and love (1 Cor 13:4-7).

While marriage is a good thing, it's not an ultimate thing. While we should rightly uphold marriage, we should also be careful not to project it as an ideal for everybody. Not everyone is or should get married. Paul actually says in 1 Corinthians 7 that singleness is an advantage because then one is able to focus fully on the kingdom. The Bible teaches that our ultimate purpose is found in a relationship with God. Teens should not go looking to find in a boyfriend or girlfriend what can only be found in Christ.





WALK

FURTHER READING:

Abbott, Shelby. *I Am a Tool (To Help With Your Dating Life)*. Cru Press, 2014.

Cox, Daniel A, et al. "Generation Z and the Transformation of American Adolescence: How Gen Z's Formative Experiences Shape Its Politics, Priorities, and Future." *The Survey Center on American Life*, 9 Nov. 2023, www.americansurveycenter.org/research/generation-z-and-the-transformation-of-american-adolescence-how-gen-zs-formative-experiences-shape-its-politics-priorities-and-future/.

Conversation Starters and Questions:

Teens need to see healthy, God-honoring romance modeled for them by spiritually mature adults, both in the home and the church. They need to witness marriages that display the gospel, marked by real affection and joy. They need parents who genuinely love one another and aren't afraid to show it in appropriate, everyday ways. Parents and adult leaders should coach teens on how to treat the opposite sex: how to respectfully communicate, act with integrity, establish healthy boundaries, handle rejection graciously, and treat others as fellow image-bearers of God.

Paradoxically, our culture denigrates marriage but idolizes romance. Dating relationships are wrongly upheld as sources of validation and self-worth. Many teens feel the need to conform, to go further than they're ready, or to even compromise their values in order to belong or be accepted. Combined with the hormonal and emotional changes that come with puberty, this leaves teens confused about what healthy relationships are supposed to look like. In response, Christians can hold to a biblically high view of marriage while taking some of the pressure off dating by keeping the two distinct. Dating is not marriage, and not every relationship is expected to end at the altar. Dating should be fun! It should involve friendship, conversation, shared experiences, and learning how to relate to others. While marriage is the ultimate goal of a romantic relationship, dating should not carry the emotional weight of a lifelong commitment from the very beginning.

When teens understand this distinction, they are better equipped to approach relationships with wisdom rather than fear or desperation. In doing so, they honor God by treating others with respect and can prayerfully search out His will for the future of their relationships. Romance has always been one of life's great mysteries and adventures, and dating is a time for teens to grow deeper in their relationship with the God who is love (1 Jn 4:16).

Questions for discussion:

- Have you ever thought about getting married? What do you want your future relationship to look like?
- Are any of your friends dating? What positives do you see in their relationships? What negatives?
- What are some ways you can get to know members of the opposite sex?

"Let all that you do be done in love."

(1 Corinthians 16:14)



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