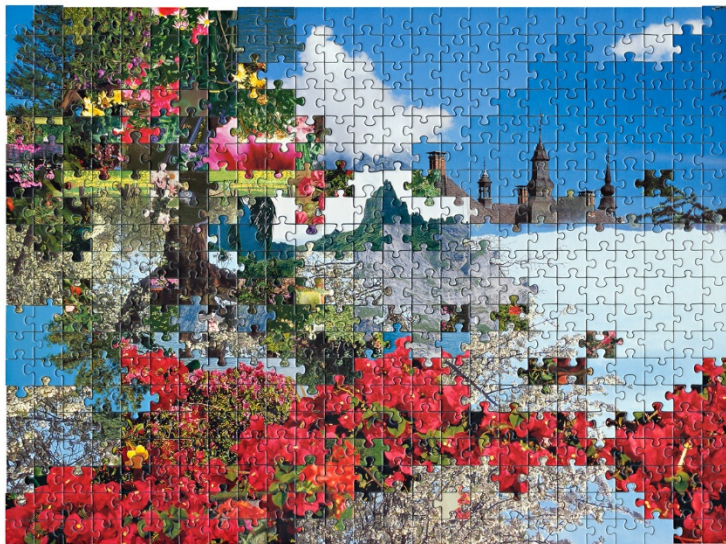


Sex During Dating – Be Careful What You Glue Together

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Dating has to be one of the most interesting yet difficult processes we go through in life. Finding a compatible mate and going through the process of understanding, aligning, compromising, satisfying, and being satisfied can be arduous. People are so complex and different. What one person considers true and acceptable the other might think is false and unacceptable. Perhaps nowhere is this more apparent than when two people navigate intimacy before marriage and try to reach mutual agreement on what is acceptable for them. And when both are Christians, to know what is okay from God's perspective.

Dating for permanence is about finding a lifelong friend, lover, companion, and partner. In contrast, dating for sex is for a very different purpose. It is

for satisfying physical desires which is pursuing lust, not love. Different still is looking for a friendly platonic relationship. Making friends is about enjoying time with people, not having sex or finding a lifetime partner. These are very different dating objectives of which dating with the intent to secure a lifelong partnership being the focus here.

How big a deal is sex during the dating process? It depends on the individuals, but can be the most significant issue a couple faces. Sex is powerful – mentally, emotionally, and physically. Like owning a gun, driving a car, or being in a position of authority, sex can be used for good or bad. It can get people in a lot of trouble—physically, legally, and emotionally—and therefore should be taken very seriously.

Our physical, mental, and emotional being is God given. This includes our sex drive as well as other innate desires such as loving, eating, drinking, playing, and sleeping. Sex being defined as any form of physical intimacy from kissing to intercourse and everything in between. But there are many problems with merely following our God-given physical, emotional, and mental desires. Hence the need for self-control. Left unabated, our God-given desires would make us obese, drunk, pregnant, addicted, sick, and slothful. We would become spiritually, mentally, emotionally, physically, socially, and financially depraved. Our unmanaged desires would leave us dissatisfied with ourselves, broke, ill, destitute, sad, mad, hurt, dependent, and apart from God—all outcomes that God knows are bad for us both on this earth and for eternity.

God gives us instructions in His Word on how to behave, but we still have to interpret his instructions. This is especially true in our effort to understand and apply self-control. We have to understand and apply being pure of heart, not defiling our bodies, and denying ourselves. We get to figure out what to deny in our pursuit of maintaining our health and relationship with our Lord. For example, we know to deny that which is evil and immoral. We know not to do things with our minds or bodies that are against God's design for us. But what about maintaining control in areas such as social media, movies, eating, and drinking? Or being intimate with someone we love? When do these cross the line from enjoying God's provisions to sinning? When does too much time on social media or playing become irresponsible? When does eating or drinking become damaging to our body—the holy temple of God's spirit within us? What level of intimacy becomes impure or type of sex becomes immoral?

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God's Word is clear on sexual immorality. Homosexuality, prostitution, adultery, orgies, having sex with next-of-kin, and coveting another's spouse are immoral. God didn't mention pornography specifically, but most certainly that belongs on the list of sexual immorality as well. Pornography leads to immoral activities as well as objectifies people which lead to ungodly and adverse outcomes. Pornography and other immoral activities are not part of God's design. They are not good for us in many ways. God knows what He is doing when giving us instructions.

In terms of dating, where does that leave kissing? Making out in the car? Touching? Reaching orgasm without intercourse? Fornication? Masturbating? At what point does sexual activity become sin? The first date? The tenth date? Anytime outside of marriage?

God's Word is clear on having intercourse outside of marriage. Intercourse is sin until after marriage at which point it becomes a God-given blessing. But then some ask what is a God-ordained marriage? God's Word is clear here too that marriage is a covenant between a man and woman, but does marriage require a secular piece of paper? For most, a marriage commitment does require a mankind-ordained document. For others, though, it doesn't. Even mankind's law says that after a period of time when two people have lived together, they are considered married. So maybe a piece of paper isn't required, but like any contract, a certificate of marriage makes formal that which might otherwise be overlooked or abused. Therefore, becoming officially married is the conscionable way to go.

Regardless of mankind's view, God is clear that marriage according to Him is a very serious and life-long commitment that includes Him at its center. And because it includes Him and done in His name, it includes self-control, obedience, patience, kindness, humility, trust, protection, generosity, gratefulness, and respect.

God also says that His people's bodies are jointly their own and His until marriage. After marriage, two then become one and the married couple become co-owners of their bodies. So, there is a difference in how people should view their bodies before and after marriage.

With intercourse being God's design for marriage, where does this leave other forms of sex outside of marriage? What constitutes sin? What violates God's desire for His children to remain pure in heart? Should people masturbate to alleviate their physical desires? Is masturbation acceptable outside of marriage? Or even inside of marriage? God is silent on this and so it seems to be acceptable as long as it doesn't violate God's other commands or intentions. But clearly if done without self-control or in the context of immoral sexual activity, it is not part of God's design. Or if it harms others in some way, it isn't acceptable. Under these circumstances masturbation falls outside of God's intent. Additionally, it can become an addiction as well as cause damage to a couple's sexual performance during intercourse. Therefore, masturbation should be treated with caution.

Where does that leave making out, touching, and oral sex? These are not technically intercourse, but can clearly lead to intercourse. For that reason alone, there is sufficient justification to avoid them. But even more dangerous is that they lead to an emotional, mental, and physical bond to someone that isn't based on God's design. Even though not intercourse, these sexual activities create a degree of dependence, indebtedness, and commitment that may not be based on mutual and genuine love. They create a connection that leads to bad decisions such as trying to make a relationship work that wouldn't otherwise work. Physical intimacy creates strong bonds that create relationships, including marriages, that are destined to failure.

Making out or performing any sexual activity without first loving a person for who they truly are is foolish. It is based on lust, not love. It is based on contemporary social norms, not God's norms. If you don't truly love someone for who they are as a person (i.e. their inner beauty) and there isn't a high likelihood of the two of you becoming one in marriage, making out is unwise. It leads to touching and oral sex which further intensify emotions, thoughts, and physical desires which ultimately overrule logic. Sexual feelings are so powerful that they override what we know to be right versus wrong. They cause us to make bad decisions. They create life-long consequences we can't undo. They wreck the design God has for us which by the way if we just follow does fulfill all of our desires. His plan provides a

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level of joy and happiness that only come from a God-centered two-become-one unified relationship. His plan is for sex to be the glue that holds all of the more-important elements of a relationship together.

Having sex before choosing a person to be your life-long partner is like putting glue on a jigsaw puzzle without having all the pieces in the right place. It potentially leads to a very ugly puzzle that once glued together is very hard to undo. It also has the potential to create regrets. It has the potential to make the other person feel disrespected if not unsafe and taken advantage of. In contrast, assembling a puzzle with all the right pieces in place before gluing it together makes for a beautiful and permanent puzzle.

For those who don't want to make a potentially very bad decision based on the glue of sex, having intercourse should wait until marriage. But for those who know each other well, have fallen in love with each other based on who each other is without the attachment of sexual intimacy, and intend to marry, making out may be acceptable. It needs to be done with respect and control, but can fulfill emotional and physical desires until marriage. It also strengthens a couple's mental and emotional connection allowing them to continue to deepen their relationship.

Where does this leave sleeping in the same bed, spending weekends together, and traveling together? Or living together? Should these be left for marriage as with intercourse? Should living after marriage be very different than living before marriage? For sure living together before marriage creates many problems. It lessens the need to make a formal commitment. It sets a bad example for others to follow. Like sex, living together creates strong bonds that overrule logic and inhibit objective decision making. It makes dissolving a bad relationship very difficult which leads to maintaining a relationship that otherwise wouldn't and shouldn't be maintained. Moving in and living together therefore can lead to bad outcomes.

But what about occupying the same bed, traveling together, and spending multiple days together? These clearly advance the process of getting to know each other. They build confidence in the decision to get married as opposed to making a marriage commitment without really knowing someone. They provide opportunities to understand how each other behaves and thinks in different circumstances. They help make a marriage commitment based on experience rather than promises. So being together overnight and for periods of time can be helpful, but requires self-control. If either person can't inhibit their desires past what has been agreed on, it isn't a good idea.

In summary, exercise self-control over your mind and body when dating. Be careful about becoming intimate with someone at any level before knowing in your mind and heart they are the one with whom you want to spend the rest of your life. Then discuss and agree on what level of intimacy you both believe to be acceptable. Enjoy that without guilt until marriage when you can then cross the line into completely sharing in God's design for a mutually satisfying sexual relationship.

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