

Seven Common Mistakes in Relating to the Opposite Sex

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Courtesy of New Life Ministries

CBN.com – Mistake 1: We misinterpret the attentions of the opposite sex.

As an outgrowth of the frustration and desperation sometimes experienced when we want to be married, many singles overreact to any attention from someone of the opposite sex, especially if that someone is attractive to them. If a man looks at us twice, we women can read all kinds of things into it. If a woman happens to sit by a man at a social function, he thinks she's sending him come-ons.

This misinterpretation of attentions is one of the major reasons it's difficult for a single man and woman to have a platonic relationship. Both are on their guard, worried about signals, instead of allowing that two people can actually have a friendly conversation and enjoy each other's company without a romantic attraction.

I also observe too often that many singles – yes, Christian singles – enjoy sending signals and then disowning them. After all, it's an ego trip to think that one or two people are “on your string,” hoping you'll come their way sooner or later, even if you're not attracted to them. They disguise their maneuvers (perhaps even to themselves) by telling everyone, “We're just friends.” They even say that to the other person right up front, laying the groundwork for a quick exit when necessary, and then proceed to give attentions and signals that are truly misleading. Anyone would misinterpret them. And they break not a few hearts in the process of feeding their egos.

Mistake 2: We put up with too much in a relationship and hang on too long.

Do yourself a favor: Admit you have an emotional dependency you're calling “love” – or even admit that you really love the person if you think you do – but acknowledge that it's a wrong relationship and get out.

How do you get out? By taking drastic steps. Jesus said, If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell (Matthew 5:29-30).

If you're in a relationship and you're being treated with disrespect, thoughtlessness, or unkindness, that's a good sign you've hung on too long and put up with too much. If you're hoping he or she will change, you don't know too much about human nature. The one thing that might make a person like this change is having to live with the consequences of his or her behavior – namely, losing the relationship. As long as he or she can get by with treating you shabbily, there's not likely to be much change in behavior.

If you're not happy with the treatment you're receiving from a person before you marry, you can be sure the treatment you would get after marriage would be much more of the same and worse.

Mistake 3: We're not always very good at reading danger signals in a relationship.

I often see single people in relationships that have poor choice written all over them, but somehow they never seem to see the danger signals. The truth is, most of the time they just don't want to see them.

Remember that when our emotions get involved in a situation, it's very easy to lose perspective. Someone once told me, "Emotions and feelings have zero IQ," and I think that's a good thing to remember. You cannot trust your emotions. Those juices get flowing, those romantic notions start whirling around in your head, and you can lose perspective in an instant.

Let's list a few of the danger signals:

Significant age difference. This will vary depending on individuals and depending on the ages involved. I'm not saying that age difference is always a problem, but it certainly is one thing you should consider carefully.

Different family upbringing. It's a fact that no two families are alike, but look at the basics: Were both families Christian? What values were taught by the families? What kind of relationships exist among the family members? Some families are very close and some are not.

Priority of spiritual life. If one person in the relationship puts a higher priority on spiritual life than the other, it's a real danger signal and should not be ignored. Usually when you are involved with someone whose spiritual temperature is below your own, you don't bring them up to your level, you go down to theirs. I've seen it time and again.

Mistake 4: We get physically involved much too soon and go too far.

Here again we Christians have allowed the world system and philosophy to infiltrate our thinking about the physical aspects of a relationship. Romans 12:1-2 says we are not to be conformed to this world, but transformed by a renewed mind. The Phillips translation says, "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold." When we become casual about having sex before marriage, we've been shoved into the world's mold.

If you truly want to remain pure in your sexual life and keep yourself for the one person God has for you, or keep yourself for Christ if you remain single, you most certainly can do that. There is nothing impossible about it.

However, in order to do that, you will need a discipline that I don't see in many singles, a discipline to go the extra mile in keeping the physical contact down to a minimum. You simply cannot trust the chemistry of your body. It is very powerful, and once it gets going, finding the discipline to keep it under control is extremely difficult. So the secret is to keep the electricity down to low levels by controlling the physical contact.

Mistake 5: We think that the only necessary requirement for a date or mate is that he or she is a Christian.

I don't believe that there is only one person in this whole world whom God intends for us to marry, and if we miss that person, we've missed our perfect mate. (Of course, I don't believe that it's necessarily true that each of us is intended by God to be married. But that's another subject!) I think it's possible to find more than one person with whom you can be compatible and have a good lifelong relationship.

It's very smart to put yourself through intensive soul-searching when you consider marrying someone. Keeping in mind that your emotions are involved and therefore your perspective may be off center, ask for advice from trusted people. Get them to play devil's advocate and throw every question they can at you. Take every compatibility test you can find. Do all you can do to know what you're getting into before you jump. You'll never be totally prepared for marriage, but it's a good idea to try to find out before you walk down the aisle whether this match is likely to work well.

Mistake 6: We carry our list of requirements for a relationship with us and judge others too quickly and selfishly.

I used to have a list of the things I wanted in a man. The list was divided into "Essential" and "Nonessential." Now, that's not an altogether bad idea.

My "Essential" list now has one thing on it: "Must be someone who would enhance my walk with God and allow us to have a more effective ministry together than we have separately."

Isn't it great that our God is big enough to deal with all our differences and idiosyncrasies? He isn't looking for cookie-cutter Christians, all of us looking and acting just alike in every way. We certainly all have the same biblical principles to apply to our lives, but within those principles, there's much room for individuality and personality. Amen to that!

Many singles, however, seem to have a long list of requirements for their potential date or mate, and they've gotten a bit carried away with it, probably as a reaction to the many failed marriages around us. It's as though they're checking you out, making sure you meet their needs. They approach this area of their lives as they might approach buying a car: What features do you have and what are the benefits of those features to me?

Having certain important guidelines in mind as we meet and date people is helpful in keeping us from making totally emotional decisions. But checking people out for selfish reasons is going too far.

Mistake 7: We think that anything is better than being alone.

While it's true that we have basic needs for companionship, it's not true that aloneness is the worst condition in the whole world. Note that I said aloneness, not loneliness. There's a big difference, you know.

Most people fear aloneness because to them it represents loneliness. They haven't learned to fill their time so that aloneness is valuable and refreshing for them. I have learned to love my aloneness, but it has not always been that way. It has come as I've learned to enjoy the presence of God and stopped equating aloneness with loneliness.

Loneliness is a feeling, an attitude. We don't get through this life without experiencing it to some degree. But to settle for anything as a substitute for loneliness is a big mistake. There are worse things than loneliness, and by God's grace we do not have to be overcome and defeated by loneliness. He can take our aloneness and turn it into beautiful, fruitful, productive time with Him.

Recognize that being alone doesn't mean you're a social misfit. Don't buy into the lies of our enemy, who wants you to feel desperate. When we feel desperate, we act in irrational and unprincipled ways. When we feel an overpowering need to have someone near, we'll settle for anything.

Also recognize your need for social interaction and plan good things. But you don't have to have a date to have company; reach out to others and share your time. Not with the idea that it's second best – you'd rather have a date but since you can't you'll be with friends – enjoy those people for who they are, and you'll discover that the loneliness goes away.

Biblical Dating

If you're reading this, you're interested in dating. You've done it, you're doing it, you'd like to do it, or you need to teach somebody else how to do it. Don't worry. You're not alone. In our society, dating has become something of an obsession. It is expected to be a universal phenomenon. It's just something you do if you're single and of age (and that age is quickly dropping) in America. It is considered the natural precursor to marriage, and is generally considered something to be desired, whatever form it might take.

It's also big business. If you were to Google the word "matchmaker," you would receive something in the neighborhood of 12,100,000 responses — with a few of these outfits claiming to be Christian, but most making no such claim. "Dating" will get you 462,000,000 hits.

As evangelical Christians, we're called to be distinct in the ways we think and act about all issues that confront us and those around us. This topic is no exception. So, is there such a thing as *biblical* dating? If so, what is it? How can Christians think differently about this pervasive issue in media and culture? How are we doing so far?

The answer to that last question is "not well." Surveys consistently indicate that professing Christians behave almost exactly like non-Christians in terms of sexual involvement outside of marriage (in both percentage of people involved and how deeply involved they are — how far they're going), living together before marriage, and infidelity and divorce after marriage. In fact, depending on which statistics one believes, the divorce rate for professing Christians may actually be *higher* than for Americans as a whole. Granted, not all of these people are evangelicals, but we're not doing so well either. Indeed, the central issue we need to confront — and the reason I write and speak on this topic — is that when it comes to dating and relationships, perhaps more than in any other area of the everyday Christian life, the church is largely indistinguishable from the world. That truth has brought immeasurable emotional pain and other consequences to many Christians. Worse, it has brought great dishonor to the name of Christ and to the witness of individuals and the church.

It doesn't have to be this way. For Christians, the Lord has given us his Word, and the Holy Spirit helps us to understand it. We have brothers and sisters in Christ to hold us accountable and to help us apply the Word to our lives. If you're a Christian, that's the biblical life you're called to.

That's what I hope this column will be about — applying God's Word to the topic of dating, finding a spouse, and getting married. I also hope that many of you will set the agenda. Well, except for this column. Just this once, I'm going to set out a basic framework for biblical dating so we all know what we're talking about — or at least so you know where *I'm* coming from. After this column, you have my word that I'll spend the next several months answering *your* questions (that is, when I have answers). So hang with me this time, then you're on.

Scripture Rules

I have to start by explaining the theological doctrine that drives the approach I want to outline (and advocate). That doctrine is called the *sufficiency of Scripture*. Almost all professing evangelical Christians are familiar with and vigorously defend the doctrine of the *inerrancy* of Scripture (which states that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God, it's true, and it contains no falsity or error). I certainly agree with the inerrancy of Scripture, but that's not what I'm talking about here. The doctrine of the *sufficiency* of Scripture assumes inerrancy but then goes a step further. This doctrine simply holds that the Bible is sufficient to guide and instruct us authoritatively in all areas of our faith and life, and that there is no area of life about which the Bible has no guidance for us. The sufficiency of Scripture is taught explicitly and implicitly in many passages, but perhaps the most obvious is [2 Tim. 3:16-17](#):

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

So, how does the sufficiency of Scripture apply to our coming discussions? Well, many evangelicals who otherwise believe in the inerrancy of the Bible and who might generally agree with the sufficiency of Scripture have nonetheless embraced the *world's* ideas about dating. In doing so, some make the argument that Scripture doesn't speak to this topic. I believe it does. The Bible speaks to *every* area of our faith and life at some level. Some things it talks about explicitly, like salvation, or sanctification, or marriage, or elders. The Bible guides us in some areas by broader, more general principles and ideas we can build on as we strive to live the Christian life in practical ways. In either case, no area of life falls totally outside of the guidance and authority of God's Word.

My point is that we cannot simply state that the Bible "doesn't mention dating or courtship," and then think we're off the hook to pursue this area of our lives either on the world's terms or however seems best to us without diligent, submissive reference to God's Word. If the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture is true, then God's Word does have authoritative guidance for us about how we might best glorify God in this area of our lives. That means our conversation has to be a *biblical* conversation. I mention the sufficiency of Scripture as part of the groundwork for this column because it's one of those doctrines that touches every area of our lives, and it is at the heart of the approach to dating (and life) that we'll talk about here. No matter how practical or specific your questions or my answers get in the coming months, I will strive to have biblical support at some level for everything I say.

Biblical Dating

OK. Let's take care of some basic definitions. We may define *biblical dating* as a method of introduction and carrying out of a pre-marital relationship between a single man and a single woman:

1. That begins (maybe) with the man approaching and going through the woman's father or family;
2. that is conducted under the authority of the woman's father or family or church; and
3. that always has marriage (or at least a determination regarding marriage to a specific person) as its direct goal.

The Scriptural support for the idea of biblical dating is largely by example and implication. We will look at a number of passages over the course of our discussions that support various aspects of biblical dating, but for the moment, let me just give you some references to study:

- [1 Corinthians 6:9-7:19](#) (command to be pure, seriousness of sexual sin and instructions regarding marriage)
- [1 Thessalonians 4:1-8](#) (do not wrong or *defraud* one another in relationships — by implying a relationship or commitment by your words or conduct that does not actually exist)
- [Song of Solomon 2:7](#) ("do not awaken love before it pleases" — i.e. before the proper time, meaning marriage)
- [Proverbs 6:20-7:27](#) (warning to avoid sexual sin and foolish relationships)
- [James 1:13-15](#) (temptation is to be taken very seriously)

- [Romans 13:8-14](#) (love others, work for their soul's good; don't look to please self)
- [Romans 14:1-15:7](#) (favor others, not self ... value what's good to their souls)
- [I Timothy 5:1-2](#) (treat single women as sisters in Christ, with *absolute purity*)
- [Titus 2:1-8](#) (young men and women should focus on self-control/godliness)
- [John 14:15](#) (if you love Christ, you will obey His commands — read: above your own desires — and live biblically)

Again, we'll talk more about these and other passages as we deal with specific questions.

Modern Dating

We may basically define *modern dating* as a method of introduction and carrying out of a pre-marital relationship between a single man and a single woman:

1. that begins with either the man or the woman initiating with the other;
2. that is conducted outside the formal oversight or authority of either person's family or church; and
3. that may or may not have marriage as its goal and is often purely "recreational" or "educational."

Now, the biblical support for the modern approach to dating ... (insert crickets, tumbleweeds, person whistling here)... That was it. There isn't any. The very idea of extended romantic or sexual involvement outside of marriage doesn't even appear in Scripture unless it is described as illicit (sinful). Furthermore, it doesn't even appear in any society, western or otherwise, in any systematic way until the 20th century! While the principles supporting biblical dating have their beginnings with the very structure of the family, modern dating has its origins with the sexual revolution of the 1960s. It is brand new, and yet, seemingly, it is all we know.

Differences Between Modern Dating and Biblical Dating

So what's the real difference? Here are some fundamentals:

Modern dating philosophy assumes that there will be several intimate romantic relationships in a person's life before marriage. In fact, it advocates "playing the field" in order to determine "what one wants" in a mate. Biblical dating has as its goal to be emotionally and physically intimate with only one member of the opposite sex ... your spouse.

Modern dating tends to be egalitarian (no differences between men and women in spiritual or emotional "wiring" or God-given roles). Biblical dating tends to be complimentary (God has created men and women differently and has ordained each of these *spiritual equals* to play different and valuable roles in the church and in the family).

Modern dating tends to assume that you will spend a great deal of time together (most of it alone). Biblical dating tends to encourage time spent in group activities or with other people the couple knows well.

Modern dating tends to assume that you need to get to know a person more deeply than anyone else in the world to figure out whether you should be with him or her. The biblical approach suggests that real commitment to the other person should precede such a high level of intimacy.

Modern dating tends to assume that a good relationship will "meet all *my* needs and desires," and a bad one won't — it's essentially a self-centered approach. Biblical dating approaches relationships from a completely different perspective — one of ministry and service and bringing glory to God.

Modern dating tends to assume that there will be a high level of emotional involvement in a dating relationship, and some level of physical involvement as well. Biblical dating assumes NO physical intimacy, and more limited emotional intimacy outside of marriage.

Modern Dating assumes that what I do and who I date as an adult is entirely up to me and is private (my family or the church has no formal or practical authority). Biblical dating assumes a context of spiritual accountability, *as is true in every other area of the Christian life*.

Basically, we can make three general statements about modern dating vs. biblical dating in terms of their respective philosophies:

1. Modern dating seems to be about "*finding*" the right person *for me* (as my friend Michael Lawrence has written on this site); biblical dating is more about "*being*" the right person to serve my future spouse's needs and be a God-glorifying husband or wife.
2. In modern dating, intimacy precedes commitment. In biblical dating, commitment precedes intimacy.
3. The modern dating approach tells us that the way to figure out whether I want to marry someone is to act like we *are* married. If we like it, we make it official. If we don't, then we go through something emotionally — and probably physically — like a divorce. In biblical dating, Scripture guides us as to how to find a mate and marry, and the Bible teaches, among other things, that we should act in such a way so as *not* to imply a marriage-level commitment until that commitment exists before the Lord.

I'm supremely confident that as we go back and forth in the coming months, some — perhaps many — of you will disagree (if you don't already) or be initially annoyed at some of my statements. Ask yourself why. What are you trying to hold onto that you think this approach will take from you (privacy, autonomy, a secular idea of freedom or of your own rights)?

I have a particular challenge for those of you whose main objection is that the practical details we'll talk about here "are not explicitly biblical": think about the details of how you conduct (or would like to conduct) your dating life. Can you find explicit support for the modern approach in Scripture? Are there even *broad principles* in Scripture that justify the modern vision of dating (or yours, whatever it may be)? The Bible simply doesn't give us explicit instructions on some of what we'll discuss. Fair enough. In such a situation, we should ask what gets us *closest* to clear biblical teaching. In other words, within the many gray areas here, what conduct in our dating lives will help us to best care for our brothers and sisters in Christ and bring honor to His name?

That's it. That's a basic framework for biblical dating as best I can discern it from the principles of God's Word. Now, you're on. No question is too broad or too specific, too theoretical, too theological, or too practical. Agree with what I've said, or challenge it. This is how iron sharpens iron.

Just remember one thing: we're in this together — for *His* Glory.

Biblical Dating: Just Friends by [Scott Croft](#)

Before continuing with this column, please review the preamble included at the beginning of Scott's first article in this series, "[Biblical Dating: An Introduction](#)."

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One of the big questions hovering around the topic of courtship and dating is the role of friendship. How intimate of a friendship with someone of the opposite sex is OK? How do I move from friendship to dating? Won't the friendship be ruined if one of us expresses romantic interest and the other doesn't respond favorably?

Basically, the question seems to be how exactly single Christians should relate to members of the opposite sex in that large and awkward zone between "we've never met" and a deliberate dating or courting relationship.

Much of this is a fairly new problem. I won't repeat the full history lesson here, as several *Boundless* authors have already discussed it (John Thomas most recently, in his excellent piece "[Stuck in the Just-Friends Zone](#)"). Essentially, the historical reality is that until 30 or 40 years ago, long, intimate friendships between men and women in which each served as the other's emotional confidante, relationship adviser, and "[best buddy](#)" were far less common than they are today.

So, is the trend toward intimate friendships between single men and women a good thing? In my view, not so much. If you haven't read my previous columns on biblical dating, you'll be helped in thinking through this issue by reading "[Biblical Dating: An Introduction](#)," and perhaps "[To Kiss or not to Kiss](#)" as well. Based on some of the principles found there, let me offer a couple of practical reasons why I believe such friendships to be generally unwise, and then I'll suggest a positive role for friendship among singles in the Christian community. Then, as always, it's over to you to hash it out on [the blog](#).

Friendship That Invites Confusion and Frustration

In this column, we've raised several biblical principles regarding the way we should treat our brothers and sisters in Christ. [1 Thess. 4:1-8](#) admonishes us not to wrong or "defraud" our brother or sister by implying a marital level of commitment (through sexual involvement) when it does not exist. As I've discussed before, a broad (but sound) implication of this passage is that "defrauding" could include inappropriate emotional — as well as physical — intimacy. Romans 13:8-14 calls us to love others, to work for their souls' good rather than looking to please

ourselves. More specifically, verse 10 reminds us that "[l]ove does no harm to its neighbor." [Romans 14:1-15:7](#) offers a discourse on favoring weaker brothers and sisters above ourselves, valuing and encouraging that which is good in the souls of others.

Bottom line: I believe it is *extremely* difficult and rare — as a practical matter — to honor these principles in the context of a close, intimate friendship between two single Christians of the opposite sex. (For the verbally precise among you, I think such friendships between non-single Christians are also a bad idea, but that's not what we're talking about here.)

Intimate friendships between men and women almost always produce confusion and frustration for at least one of the parties involved. Close friendships by their very nature tend to involve extensive time talking and hanging out one-on-one. They tend to involve a deep knowledge of the other person's hopes, desires and personality. They tend to involve the sharing of many aspects of each other's daily lives and routines. In other words, they tend to involve much of the type of intimacy and companionship involved in — and meant for — marriage.

And yet, even with all this deep communication going on, at least one aspect of these friendships inherently involves a mixed message. No matter how clearly one or both of you have defined what's happening as "just friends," your *actions* are constantly saying "I enjoy being with you and interacting with you in a way that suggests marriage (or at least romantic attraction)."

The simple reality (of which most people are aware, whether they admit it or not) is that in the vast majority of these types of relationships, one of the parties involved either began the "friendship" with romantic feelings for the other person or develops them along the way. Either way, that person is now hanging on to the "friendship" in the hope of getting something more despite the "clear words" from the other person that he or she wants nothing beyond friendship.

To the extent that one person's romantic feelings have been clearly articulated to the other (and were met with an unfavorable response), to continue in some no-man's land of "good friends," is arguably to take selfish advantage of the vulnerable party. Yes, I know, the other person is an adult who is free and responsible to walk away if he or she is so unsatisfied, but like it or not, it tends not to work that way. Hope springs eternal, whether it should or not.

And that's the "clear" scenario. What if one person develops romantic feelings in a friendship in which no "clear words" have been spoken, such that the desires of the other person are a mystery? Especially if it's the woman in this position (as seems to be the case more often than not), she will likely feel that if she pushes for something more than friendship, she may lose the interaction and companionship she currently has. Still, given her desire for a husband — and perhaps to have *this* man as her husband — the status quo of "just really good friends but nothing more for some odd reason" will leave her unsatisfied, frustrated, and confused. I have seen and heard and read of such frustration and hurt playing out many times over.

Certainly, a man can find himself in a similar position with a woman he's attracted to, but given his obligation to be clear and intentional with the woman and to initiate the type of relationship he truly desires, he arguably has placed — or at least kept — *himself* in such a position. He simply is not "between a rock and a hard place" in the same way a woman is.

Finally, there's one more type of confusion to consider. How do *others* view your "friendship"? Ladies, might there be men who would have initiated with you but for their uncertainty about or discomfort with your intimate friendship with another man? Guys, has a woman perhaps turned you down over questions about a woman friend you spend lots of time with? Would *you* want to date someone knowing that he or she had a significant, pre-existing, and ongoing emotional bond with another single member of the opposite sex? If I were a single person desiring marriage, the answers to these questions would matter to me.

I admit we're not talking absolutes here, but almost. In my experience counseling and writing on this topic, everybody thinks (or at least *claims*) that his or her intimate friendship is the exception. "No *way* we'll end up in one of the situations you just talked about. Unlike most other people of our age and experience, we are (insert favorite answer here) (a) really astute students of our own and each other's hearts, (b) *super*-clear and talented communicators, (c) always honest with each other, even when such honesty entails huge vulnerability for whoever is speaking, (d) all of the above."

Maybe. But here I would pose the question that is relevant to so many aspects of the courtship and dating topic. Why risk harm to your own heart or to that of a brother or sister in order to have a type of companionship that, outside of marriage, is arguably questionable anyway? This brings me to my second argument against intimate one-on-one friendships between brothers and sisters in Christ....

Enjoying the Convenient, Delaying the Good

Let's assume for the sake of argument that your intimate friendship is one of those rare jewels that is devoid of the potential for hurt or confusion. There's another drawback to such friendships. They discourage marriage.

Men and women who are not called to long-term singleness and celibacy have a strong desire for companionship with a member of the opposite sex. This is good and right. As I've discussed before, Scripture seems to consider marriage (and children) to be a normal part of the progression toward biblical manhood and womanhood (see, among others, [Gen. 1:27-28](#); [2:23-24](#); [Mat. 24:38-41](#); [Luke 20:34-36](#)).

In the past, when both sexual immorality and intimate male-female friendships were much less accepted and less common in society, men and women moved more deliberately toward marriage earlier in life. By offering a taste of the companionship and interactions that make marriage so satisfying, with none of the accompanying commitments or responsibilities entailed in marriage, intimate friendships discourage the pursuit of the grown-up, God-intended outlet for marital desires — marriage. This is especially so in a culture — and a church — that struggles with the widespread sociological trend in its young adults known as "perpetual adolescence." [Albert Mohler](#), [Alex and Brett Harris](#), [Candice Watters](#) and other *Boundless* authors have written about this trend at length. In fact, the failure of many Christian men to pursue marriage well into their 20s and 30s may be one of the most disturbing results of this trend, but that's another topic for another day.

As you probably know, I believe Scripture to teach that engaging in the types of emotional intimacy and companionship involved in close male-female friendships — outside of marriage and for their own sake — is wrong (see *everything* else I've ever written for *Boundless*). But even if you don't accept that premise, such intimacy is still inadvisable in the sense that it delays and discourages marriage, which Scripture unambiguously calls good and right.

I would especially encourage women who desire marriage to give this argument some thought. If you are one of the *many* women to write me or Boundless Answers or another *Boundless* author to complain with great frustration that "Christian men don't initiate," consider this: Are you and your sisters satisfying the intermediate needs of your guy friends such that they feel no particular compulsion to pursue marriage?

Friendship Within A Context of Community

So am I saying that I'm against the idea of relationships growing out of Christian friendship? Am I saying that friendship among single brothers and sisters has no place? Am I saying that single men and women need to shun one another, speaking only to utter the words "will you date me," followed by "yes" or "no"? Absolutely not. In fact, I would argue that dating or courting relationships *ideally* grow out of friendship among co-laborers in the gospel. The question is what those friendships look like practically.

I Timothy 5 describes a relationship among Christian men and women not married to one another as that of brothers and sisters. The Lord has mercifully called us not to live the Christian life alone but as part of a community of believers. Single men and women can and should serve in ministry together, study the word together, and hang out together socially. They should go out together, gather around meals, watch movies. In my view, however, these activities should be done, for the most part, in groups rather than one-on-one. Men can initiate group get-togethers, and so can women. In fact, single brothers and sisters in Christ, like the rest of Christ's body, are positively called to care for one another. Men can (and should) give women rides home rather than have them walk alone at night. Men can come over and move couches. Women can cook a meal for a group of guys in danger of developing scurvy from a near total lack of vegetables. Knock yourselves out.

Friendships grow out of the body of Christ functioning and, in turn, result in interests beyond friendship. To be sure, the friendships that develop in this context are not the same friendships with the same level of intimacy that would develop from spending consistent time alone with someone, but they provide a context from which initiations and relationships can bloom. Remember, the world has *falsely* told us that a high level of intimacy with another person needs to precede any sort of commitment to another person.

Is there a precise formula for whether a friendship or series of interactions is too intimate? If there is, I don't know it. Hang out in groups; serve together. By all means, chat and be friendly with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Should a friend make the assumption that you're ready to marry him or her if you initiate a one-on-one conversation at church or at a group dinner? No. Have you blown two tires and gone screaming off into the trees if you ask someone to lunch or coffee once or twice? Maybe not. Depends on what happens from there.

Just be aware that "friendship" is no more a forum to play married than a dating relationship is. If you find that you are consistently showing one of your opposite-sex Christian friends more one-on-one attention than all the others, whether in conversation or through invitations out, it's probably time for (1) some clarification of intentions and (most likely) a change in the status of the relationship to something more overtly committed, or (2) a change in the way you interact with that person.

Beyond that, godly single adults will have to work this out on a case-by-case basis. As always, I welcome your comments. See you on [the blog](#).

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#630. Awkward opposite sex friendships.

Oct 1st by admin

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A few weeks ago I spoke at a conference that required me to fly. In arranging rides to and from the airport with the conference staff, I realized they had me scheduled to be driven back to the airport for my flight home by a lady.

I know what you're thinking, "Hey, you've got a book coming out, don't you have an entourage with one really big guy who everyone calls 'Tiny' and another guy who can always talk his way out of a jam and possibly a really tall guy who can reach things on shelves that you can't? Aren't you rich?" Yes, I mean globally speaking I am rich in that when I went to pick out shoes to wear today it was a multiple choice test. But I don't have an entourage, which is a request that Zondervan continues to ignore. When I travel it's just me and my backpack. No luggage, no baggage, just a seemingly bottomless LL Bean backpack which makes me feel a bit like Dora the Explorer.

So without an entourage, I decided to request that a guy drive me to the airport. I just wasn't comfortable with the idea of spending an hour in LA traffic alone with a girl. That just didn't seem smart to me and the conference was completely cool with that request. They found a guy, everything was good.

That felt like a no brainer to me. But what about other less obvious situations? When you get married, you're suddenly thrown into all these awkward opposite sex friendship moments.

What about having a one on one meeting with a woman? Is it enough to just leave the door open? Or do you have to have three people present at all times? I know churches who use both approaches. My boss at work is a woman. When we talk about my salary and the exorbitant raise she's not aware yet she's giving me at the end of the year but will know about soon because people at my IT job have started to read this blog, do I have to invite someone else to the conversation? What if I forget to? Can I grab the janitor on the way to the meeting and just tell him to maybe vacuum in the room we're in if he feels weird and wants to multitask?

What about a lunch meeting? A married friend recently told me that if he couldn't go out to lunch with females he couldn't do his job. Is lunch with a lady a date? What if it's a business lunch? The CEO of Zondervan is a lady, what if she calls me and says, "Jon, we'd like to give you a 37 book deal and your own Honda Ruckus Scooter for a cross country tour called 'Ruckus by Ruckus,' can we go out to lunch to discuss the details?" Do I have to invite someone along with me? What if my wife is not available that day?

And when you get married, at what point do you have to officially retire the silly sentence, "I've just always gotten along better with the opposite sex, that's how I'm wired?"

I don't know. I don't have the answer on this one. Just the idea that things get a little awkward when you get married and have to figure out friendships with the opposite sex. But of the two camps, "Jeez you're such a Puritan, loosen up" and "Better safe than sorry, can a dude drive me to the airport," I know which one I want to fall into. Because no one ever wakes up and says, "Today I'm having an affair." Affairs are slow burn decisions, with a wick a mile long made of little steps and little compromises.