GIBC
GRACE IMMANUEL BIBLE CHURCH

17475 Jonathan Drive
Jupiter, FL 33477
561.746.4617
www.gibcjupiter.org

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Ungodly Dating Relationships

How to Avoid Getting Stung

Jerry R. Wragg



...discipline your life for the purpose of godliness

(1 Timothy 4:7)

How to Avoid Getting Stung by an Ungodly Dating Relationship

Dating. The very word can evoke strong feelings, both good and bad. Many books in recent years have tried to clear up some of the confusion, but they've often raised additional questions that further cloud the issue. The principles outlined in this brief essay are not designed to critique the various views on dating. In fact, it's not really a discussion of dating at all. Rather, the purpose here is to get very specific about how relationships quickly get into trouble, and to articulate principles that help the people of God avoid the perils of an ungodly relationship.

Is emotional attachment simply spending too much time together?

Not at all. In fact, spending an increasing amount of time together is a normal part of even a God-honoring relationship. However, time can be an enemy if two immature people spend it selfishly using and consuming the relationship rather than serving it.

What are some warnings signs to watch for?

Most young people begin a relationship quite normally. They are initially attracted to each other (God has designed this as a good thing), and they desire to "get to know" one another. Here's where the problem begins. Typically, they become instantly focused on all the following superficial dynamics of the initial attraction:

1. They want the constant pleasure of looking at the attractiveness of the other, so being together for hours and hours "seems" good.

14. Avoid feeding emotional desires with flattering conversation.
15. Trust only the Lord to knit your heart together with another person. If He's in it, you'll have the complete affirmation of godly parents and trusted friends around you.

6. Don't pursue the relationship without affirmation from those who know you best, and *never* excuse a violation of the clear principles of Scripture under the guise of "true love and affection".
7. If the Lord affirms your readiness, pursue the person with clearly stated intentions and integrity.
8. Always protect their reputation and the name of Christ.
9. Never allow time together to cause confusion or questions about motives. What you do and when you do it should never create doubts about each other's integrity, singular devotion to Christ, or sincerest care for one another's reputation and purity.
10. Never neglect other spiritual responsibilities within the family or body of Christ in order to "spend time" with the person.
11. Stay away from tempting environments—late nights alone, idle and unproductive "hanging out," being in one another's personal space (bedrooms, dorms, etc), unhelpful entertainment (movies with romantic themes, love songs, etc), staying in contact through computer and phones all hours of the day and night.
12. Avoid physical expressions of affection until a time when future commitments have been seriously contemplated, and never do anything that you wouldn't openly do in front of godly parents or the body of Christ. Ask parents and mentors how to "discipline your life for the purpose of godliness" (1 Tim 4:7).
13. Resist the superficial "counsel" and "encouragement" from friends who offer opinions rather than biblical support. Sentimental prodding from relationship-novices is never helpful. Listen carefully to those who know what it takes to build a lifetime of blessing and fulfillment in marriage.

2. They like being noticed by others when they're with this new friend because it makes them look good to be with someone so attractive and well-liked.
3. They feed the shallow infatuation by saying things to each other that will invoke more fleshly desire (i.e. "I miss being with you", "I've never been with anyone like you", "Do you miss me?", etc.).
4. They experiment with physical touching of various kinds (holding hands, lingering embraces, kissing)—not because the relationship has enough depth of commitment to have earned such displays of affection—but because their hearts are filled with lusts to "feel" the rewards of marital romance before vows are exchanged. Stated more bluntly, young people want *now* what God has designed for marriage alone. Even "good Christian kids", who manage to avoid blatant sexual activity, will often engage in lesser forms of the same lust of the heart, which always brings immediate trouble into the relationship.
5. Continuing to build on the above superficial habits, they constantly rationalize more and more time together at the expense of all other important relationships (family, friends, church mentors, ministry needs, etc.). In other words, all important ministry time normally devoted to family and the body of Christ gets swallowed up by hours of idle "hanging out" with this new interest. If the student is in high school or college (though Jr. High students are not immune), these spans of time together begin to invade each individual's "personal" time and space. Long hours late into the evening, either at each other's home or simply through electronic media. This is a subtle form of "playing house," as though they have the privileges of 24/7 companionship without having to earn it by proven character and marital commitment.

6. Lastly, they begin to use phrases like "I love you" and "You mean so much to me" because they have deceived themselves into thinking the relationship is healthy, normal, and potentially ready for the next step toward marriage. This is a huge miscalculation! Especially during the high school years but quite often in college as well, young people overestimate their spiritual maturity and resist the godly counsel of more mature believers (parents, older godly couples, youth pastors, et.al.). No relationship is truly mature without each individual having first extensively proven a level of spiritual depth and maturity in their own walk with Christ. I'm not talking about consistent quiet times (even pre-teens can be disciplined here) or involvement in the church youth group. I'm talking about a well-known, proven moral godliness, the fruits of which are humility, sacrifice, purity, submission to authority, self-control, and separation from worldliness ("lust of the flesh…lust of the eyes…pride of life"). Most early relationships don't even think about these virtues, let alone look for a measure of consistency in them. Consequently, when two young people spend time together they do not have the proven maturity to build a strong foundation for long-term godliness in one another.

At this point, the relationship is nothing more than two people, selfishly feeding personal desires for companionship and romance, and focusing exclusively on elements of a relationship that, while a normal part of God's design, *cannot* provide any substantial foundation for building a truly committed union that honors Christ. There's nothing sinful about being attracted to someone and feeling all the initial excitement and anticipation such infatuation brings. But if—very shortly after these initial interests—the two young people neglect the discipline and self-

control required to strengthen and deepen the relationship, the result will be a superficial emotional attachment that is rooted in lust and selfishness. It may "feel" great…it may seem harmless because of the good intentions of two Christian students…it may start out with involvement in Bible studies, prayer, and church attendance, but without a growing Christ like character the relationship will quickly deteriorate.

How can young people avoid these ungodly habits?

1. Let parents and mentors know early on of your interest in someone, and ask them to help evaluate the potential.
2. Watch the person's life from a distance for about two to three months before going any further. This will help you remain objective and avoid being blinded by emotional infatuation. It will be especially challenging at this stage to "hold off" making your interests known to the person for fear of missing the opportunity. Trust the Lord! If He is leading you, you'll never miss out on anything that will bless your life.
3. Know the biblical character qualities to look for and be honest about any glaring weaknesses observed.
4. Listen carefully to the wisdom and experience of those whom God has placed over you. You may think your happiness depends on being with the one you like, but those who know what it takes to enjoy a godly relationship are your best protection against such immature thinking.
5. Acknowledge ungodly tendencies and areas of vulnerability. If you struggle with being flirtatious and shallow, wanting to be liked more than desiring holiness, or resisting authority (particularly Scripture), openly confess these weaknesses to those who care about you and strive to build new habits and biblical thinking.