



## My Advice for Students on Dating | by Luke Martin

One of the common conversations I have with high school students is the ‘dating talk’. Usually, it starts with a simple, “What do you think about dating?” During the high school years, adolescents are preparing to make the shift from being learners to explorers. They are in transition from needing teachers in authority structures to needing guides in support structures. That means the dating talk is less a speech and more of a conversation. So, when I have this talk, my goal is to create space for students to verbalize their perspective, consider some questions, and form an opinion. Certainly, parents need to communicate expectations and boundaries and enforce those, but for me, I have the luxury of only needing to offer counsel. I want to practice compassionate curiosity, but when it is my turn to talk, here is some of the wisdom I’ve received from my own mentors and my failings that I share with students about dating.

1. Date someone with whom you can walk the same path.
  - If the person you’re dating or pursuing doesn’t share your beliefs, values, plans, and connection—it won’t go the distance. It’s not just ‘are they a Christian?’ (although that’s crucial), but are we going the same direction at the same pace and in the same way?
2. Date with intentionality and integrity.
  - Your body and your time matter, so be a wise steward of both. Dating with intentionality doesn’t mean forming a five-year plan before going on a first date. It means being self-aware and forthright about your own intentions, expectations, and priorities. Dating with integrity means honoring the body and the emotions. Rather than being a bull in a china shop, be gentle, dignifying, and self-controlled in how you interact with the person you’re in a relationship or on a date with.
3. There is always grace and healing- no matter what.
  - Seriously, no matter what. No abuse, no failing, no crossing a line is irrecoverable and irredeemable. Fear, guilt, and shame do not have the final say, Jesus does.
4. Don't overcommit.
  - Our feelings are intense the younger we are, and they will make us say and do things that may lack wisdom. Use this time now to build a character of self-discipline, embracing limits and boundaries. Those will not go away in marriage. Though sometimes we think marriage is the time for a full release of our stored-up sexual desires—quite the opposite. You will require great restraint to harness sexual and emotional energy and direct it toward good and not selfish ends.
5. Dating should result in an expansion of your circle of community, not a closing or a severing.

- I've never seen an emotionally healthy couple that isolated themselves from friends and caring adults. If your relationship becomes isolating, there is a good chance you're developing an unhealthy need to be needed, a refusal to receive loving correction, or hiding something to avoid correction or disappointment. Be transparent and invite others into your relationship.
6. Find an older couple you trust and get to know them.
    - Watch how they communicate, how they interact with their kids, and ask them lots of questions. Some of Mara and I's closest friends are in their 40's. We've been sharing meals and having conversations and learning from them for years—it's the best way to grow in maturity quickly.
  7. Singleness is a viable option for life.
    - Paul actually wished that most Christians pursued singleness (1 Corinthians 7:25-40). It is a vocation just like marriage, perfectly legit and fully human. It's not God's second best and it's not missing out on intimacy and love. Marriage and singleness are both ascetic, rather than indulgent. Consider what God is calling you to with a trusted community and don't make a final decision now—you've got years to figure this out!
  8. Uproot porn from your life.
    - Trust me on this: it's all fake, it's all addictive, and it's all destructive. If you're struggling with porn, tell someone you trust, and do it now. Accountability and attention to your inner life are essential to overcome the hold porn can take on your life. There is always freedom, hope, and healing—run after it. (I highly recommend *The Gospel and Pornography*—a very short but helpful book—edited by Russell Moore and Andrew T. Walker)
  9. Rule your phone or it will rule you.
    - Your phone can be an incredible gift to help gain knowledge and further connection, or it can distort perceptions, fuel addictions, and obstruct intimacy. Don't have important conversations safely behind a screen, and don't allow phones to give you false courage to say things you wouldn't say face-to-face. Be aware of how screens may be shaping your communication skills, your emotional maturity, your perspective on relationships and yourself, and your presence with others. Invite older adults to help you steward your screens wisely.