

What Are Your Standards for Dating?

The do's and don'ts of going out with the opposite sex.

by Samuel Rainey

Editor's Note: In this excerpt from the book, So You're About to Be a Teenager?, Samuel Rainey challenges teens to think about some standards for interacting with the opposite sex.

Let me turn back the clock for a moment to seventh grade when I was head over heels for this girl I'll call Ginger (not her real name). Well, I heard through the grapevine that she was interested in me. Being the savvy, confident seventh grader that I was, I decided to see if she'd want to "go with me." I remember giving her a note asking her to be my girlfriend. And she said YES!

Well, we "went together" for about four months. During that time I had tons of pressure to kiss her. I didn't want to do so because kissing wasn't that big of a deal to me. Well, it ended up that she broke up with me, mostly because I wouldn't kiss her.

This was my first and last girlfriend before I met Stephanie, who is now my wife. You know what, about eleven years went by where I didn't have a girlfriend—*eleven years!* That is a long time, but it in no way affected God's providing me a wife. Stephanie was the only girl I ever wanted to date; I wanted to marry her. Dating in seventh grade seemed like the thing to do, but it really didn't accomplish much.

As fun as it is to think about spending some time with a special person, dating can be a real trap for us when we are young. We all need to have limits in each area of our lives that will protect us emotionally and physically—and dating is no exception.

A plan for great dating

Because our family has six children, over the years my parents have come up with some really good ideas on dating—even though at the time my brother and sisters were not always too crazy about them. At any rate, here are some of the "Rainey Dating Dos and Don'ts" that I think will help you and your parents come up with a great dating plan.

Do take your time. There's no need to be in a big hurry to have a boyfriend or girlfriend. By boyfriend or girlfriend, I mean having a one-on-one, exclusive dating relationship. Regardless of what you call it—"going out" or "going steady"—exclusive dating ought to be for a time when you are older and more mature. Most young men and women start looking for love before they can handle it. It just is not good to awaken your love before it is ready for the real deal. Dating is a fun but serious activity.

Don't be selfish. Many friends I knew who started dating kind of early before they were really mature seemed to focus way too much on their own needs. Two people can end up using one another just to satisfy selfish desires. A guy may want a cute girl on his arm to make him look cool or so that he can brag about her to the guys in the locker room. A girl may want a guy's attention so she will have a boyfriend just like all of her friends do. Going out with a certain guy may make her feel wanted or part of a popular clique.

Do serve others. I think a more mature way to learn how to know others and get along with them is to serve them. That is the way Jesus Christ has called us to live. Here's what Philippians 2:3-4 says on this topic: "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."

Instead of always thinking about how we can get that *special someone* to like us, why not just try to be a good friend to a lot of people—and let God in His time set us up with someone to love? If you can begin to learn how to be selfless in your friendships and other relationships, you will be way ahead of just about everyone else later on when you get married.

Do watch your heart. Proverbs 4:23 says, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life." One of the ways to apply that verse is to guard your heart from romantic love until you are ready to marry. If you will let them, your parents can help you guard your heart. The media constantly

bombards you with the message that *you need to be in love*. Advertising, magazines, movies, the Internet, music, and television will all encourage you to establish a romantic relationship with a guy or girl. But don't listen to these messages; instead listen to your parents and guard your heart.

Don't missionary date. Sometimes a young guy or girl will really like someone who turns out not to be a Christian. Rather than just say, "I better not date that person," they get the idea in their head that they can rescue their friend who is headed down a wrong path. That's called missionary dating, and it's a very bad idea because it usually doesn't work. Let someone of the same sex redirect the path of someone who does not know Jesus. You pray for the person and encourage him or her. But don't date. This is trouble. I want to encourage you to pray for your friend who needs help. But don't think that by dating this person you can straighten him out. You are asking for trouble.

Do have many guy and girl friends. One of the problems with exclusive dating is that except for marriage there isn't a lot of good that can come out of it. Let's say some good guy-girl friends start going out and then begin dating each other exclusively. That's about all they do—just hang out with one another. The guy loses all his friends who are guys and the girl begins to neglect her friends who are girls. Before long all they have is one another. That really isn't healthy in junior high or even high school. Who wants to have just one good friend?

Don't touch. Stay away from physical stuff in dating. I want to really lay it on the line here: Reserve for later in marriage all the touching that leads to stirring of sexual feelings in a relationship. I've seen so many of my friends start out with a good relationship, but then the hugging and kissing and touchy-touchy started. They fell right into the trap. Some of my friends messed up and made some mistakes that they really regret now that they are married. I promise—you will never be sorry if you save your sexual intimacy for marriage. It pays to wait.

Do talk. About the most important thing you can learn now is how to talk to a boy or girl. It's fun to learn more about another person—what the other person thinks, makes her laugh, makes him happy, makes her mad. Talking is very important in relationships and especially marriage. You can start practicing now—it's cool.

Do group date. That means you hang out with a lot of different people. It's fun and safe. You get to know people, you develop lots of different kinds of relationships, you learn how to relate to each other and what you like and dislike in other people. A group situation takes away a lot of the risks, like being alone with the opposite sex and having to share too many personal things about yourself with someone who has no long-term commitment to you. Besides, when I was young, I was not ready for a heavy commitment to a girl. I needed to grow up first.

Do enjoy your teen years. As you move into the teenage years, you are going to be amazed at how many of your friends seem desperate to have a boyfriend or a girlfriend. It's the "thing to do" because without one, you are not a total person or something. That's ridiculous! Have fun while you can. There are a lot bigger choices and opportunities ahead of you than finding a boyfriend or girlfriend right now.

No doubt I could list many more dating dos and don'ts that have been tried out in our family. But this list is plenty to get you started. I'm sure your parents will have a few more to add anyway!

Let me encourage you not to let your perspective of dating get blown all out of proportion. After that early experience in junior high, I waited a lot of years to have a girlfriend! Not everyone will do that—certainly not everyone in my family has. I think you probably will agree with me, though, when I say that dating is *not* the most important thing in life during your teenage years. If you will decide now on what your dating values will be in the future, you will save yourself and others much heartache.

Invite your parents to talk about this topic with you. Ask them what they learned about dating. Their ideas will be very beneficial. Let them help you clarify the right path for you to walk when it comes to dating. Ask them to help you stay out of the traps by pointing out where they are. And honor their wishes and defer to their authority over you. This is how God planned it so that your life will be a success.

Hold on to your standards and your convictions—don't let anyone convince you to drop them even for a moment. You will never regret giving Jesus Christ first place in everything.