

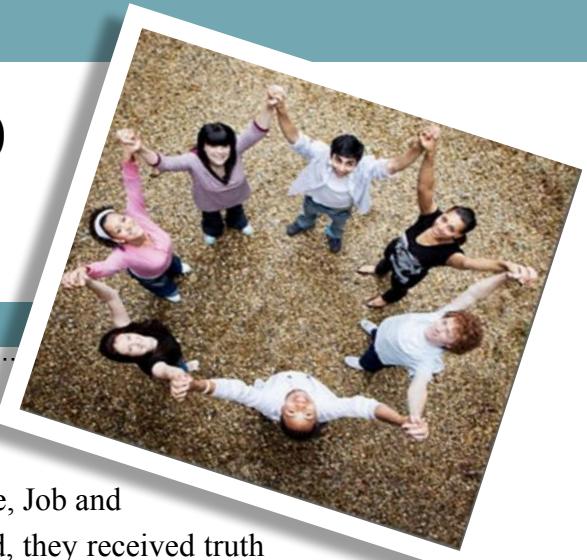
" Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." 2 Tim. 2:22

## Friendship & Dating--The Goals (Part 1)

**Theme: The goals of being friends with the opposite sex**

### Review

The Garr Monster story is true, but those involved had the facts all mixed up, typical of monster stories. The truth was discovered after 51 years, and the terrible Garr Monster was nothing but a deer. In the Bible, Job and Isaiah never did get answers to some of the things they desired. Instead, they received truth and information far superior, information God knew was more important for them. Today, in the Age of Grace, God has fully revealed in the Bible the very things those of the past wished to know, and more. These things apply directly to us and are those God knows we need. These are the eternal, spiritual blessings guaranteed to each believer by God.



### Introduction

Huge differences occur between the early and later teen years. The change in maturity, both physically and mentally, can be incredible. Early teens are more like kids, but a few years later, more like adults. A teen will experience fantastic changes in life. Recognizing that things are changing rapidly, the early and mid-teen years should be a time to get to know members of the opposite sex as friends. This is not the age to be searching for romance or trying to select a future mate. It is recommended that one-on-one dating not be considered until the later teen years (or perhaps after high school, but this may be influenced by many factors not discussed here).

The teen years can be an exciting time in life. Enjoy these years and be content with who you are; do not try to be an adult. Early and mid-teen years are the time for learning about friendship and relationships, not a time for experimenting with romance, sex, or considerations of a future mate. The advice given here follows the Apostle Paul's advice: in love, we are trying to help you by warning you of danger, "**...but as my beloved children I warn you**" (1 Cor. 4:14). The danger is that a teen can do something now, which will hurt his or her future happiness and accomplishments. A mistake in your teen years (by getting all wrapped up in romance) can totally mess up your life and make your future rather dim.

## Teen Success

The teen years have times of fun and happiness, without all the cares and responsibilities of being an adult. You will be able to have more freedom and make more of your own decisions as you mature. However, maturity has nothing to do with how much you look like an adult. It relates directly to how well **you make wise choices, take responsibility for your actions, and exhibit godly behavior.** You exhibit these traits in daily life by the things you say and do. These traits are clear to others when you decide to be "just friends" with members of the opposite sex during the early and mid-teen years, or later.

**Your Thoughts:** Discuss how being "just friends" exhibits the three traits noted.

If you want to be a great craft-person, doctor, artist, teacher, engineer/scientist, writer, musician, missionary/pastor, political leader, and so forth, then you must study and prepare for that career. If you want to make a difference in the world or do something of great importance, it will not be easy; doing so takes a lot of determination. One thing that can prevent you from

achieving your dreams is getting involved romantically at an early age. A wise choice is to hold off on romantic involvement until the later teen years.

This advice on being friends will help you get through high school (and perhaps an advanced education), so that you can have a career. With a career, you can plan for a more stable marriage. Contrary to this, premature marriage will give you a disadvantage in life, with a feeling you just cannot get ahead. It is best to go a bit slowly and let your spiritual growth and mental maturity develop. You have come a long way in a few years, but it takes a lot longer for mental and spiritual maturity to develop than physical maturity. Proceeding in this manner is a sign of maturity, a very responsible action. By following this advice, your life has the potential for more godly behavior than would be the case otherwise.

**Your Thoughts:** Dating often puts pressure on people; many are scared to death, and sometimes a person is put into an "uncomfortable" situation. Discuss how friendship takes away these problems.

## Practical Applications

This lesson promotes being just friends with the opposite sex during the early to mid-teen years, or longer. The goals of being "just friends" are:

1. To have fun and learn about the opposite sex in a non-romantic way,
2. To discover how the opposite sex thinks and behaves, and
3. To see how Christian values influence other people's lives.

**Goal 1: To have fun and learn about the opposite sex in a non-romantic way.**

The step before dating, of being just friends, will help you learn to be comfortable with the opposite sex and learn to interact with them in a non-romantic way. This step of responsibility is for your benefit. This step means doing things together in groups and having fun as friends rather than pairing up, one on one. You can go to social functions, entertainment, church activities, school outings, sporting events, and other activities that help ensure godly behavior. The idea is to learn about the other sex and to interact with them by having fun together. Go slowly, as God guides you, and as godly adults advise (mostly parents). This is a non-threatening

way to get to know others since you are in a group and can act normally as you get to know your peers.

Putting it plain and simple, early dating often results in early marriage, and early marriage has proven be a disaster for most teens. Marriage is great later in life, when you are ready for it. Early marriage often results in having children, which requires holding down a steady job—not only a steady job, but also paying income and property taxes; having a boss tell you what to do; paying car, health, and home insurance; doing the grocery shopping, laundry, and yard work. If you are not ready for all the responsibility of adulthood, you will want to go slowly in dating, since dating can lead to marriage, oftentimes quicker than one expects. Countless adults can tell you of destroyed dreams, loss of an advanced education, lack of a good career, and heartache, all resulting from early romantic relationships.

If you consider all the books written about good relationships with the opposite sex, and understand that half of marriages end in divorce (even among Christians), then you will begin to realize these relationships are a complicated issue, which is more than most adults understand. Being "just friends" in the teen years allows you to be yourself and to have fun with the opposite sex. Being friends takes the pressure off you to be or do what someone else wants. It is a great way to enjoy the wonderful company of other Christian friends and to get to know them in a deeper way

## **Goal 2: To discover how the opposite sex thinks and behaves.**

In the teen years, sex hormones start making really big changes in your life. They turn a girl into a woman and a boy into a man, physically, at least. However, a teen's brain lags behind. Your brain takes time to catch up with the physical changes taking place in your body. While your body may be mature, mental maturity takes much longer. Physical maturity occurs around age twenty, but mental and spiritual maturity takes many more years.

The physical changes make the opposite sex very attractive, and this is by God's design. However, unless you gain an understanding of the opposite sex, you will most likely have problems in your future relationships. You will gain this understanding best by being friends with the opposite sex before starting to date. You may say, "All I want to do is date, not get married." That may be true; however, dating often leads to sexual activity, then marriage. Going through a friendship stage delays dating until such time you gain the needed maturity on such matters.

Both sexes are equal before God: "**...there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus**" (Gal. 3:28). When God tells us there is neither male nor female, He is saying gender makes no difference to Him. He sees both sexes of equal importance and value. However, God created males and females very differently, not only in physical appearance, but also in how they think and what is important to them. Their brains function differently. Female ways of thinking are not right or wrong, male ways of thinking are not right or wrong—they just are different. This difference is by God's design, and it has an important purpose. God wants both types of brains, so that, in marriage, you can complement each other (i.e., help provide what the other lacks, and thus make each other complete).

As you get older, generally no difference in basic intelligence exists between the sexes. However, the sex hormones that are changing your body now were also at work before you were born. Those hormones caused your brains to develop differently, making you either more typically female or male in how you think. You were born to function in a certain way; from the time of birth, females seem more designed for bonding and sensing other people's feelings. Males from birth seem more hardwired for understanding how things work and how to build things. Males tend to be more skilled at the abstract (math, science, etc.) while females tend to excel in language and verbal skills. These are only

generalities; you may be different and that difference is perfectly fine. However, you need to understand these typical thought patterns in order to have better relationships as you grow older.

### **Goal 3: To see how Christian values influence other people's lives.**

The problem with dating too early is that your physical attraction to each other can overpower your common sense; you can find yourself in a bad situation with no way out. Your values of right and wrong can be compromised easily. In the heat of passion, what you believe from the Bible can be overruled. Giving-in to these passions results in shame and a feeling of loss. Once passions are aroused, stopping is hard and that can lead to sin and shame. Sexual sin is not to be taken lightly, and notice the bad friends it has: "...sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, malice, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness..." (Rom. 1:29b). While God does forgive sexual immorality, it does have earthly consequences and causes incredible problems.

Physical attraction to the opposite sex is a minor thing in the long term. When building strong relationships that last, the spiritual and mental aspects of the other person

are the most important. Physical attraction does not hold a relationship together; it takes a lot more. Learning what "a lot more" is about is why we recommend doing things together as friends. Those who rush into dating, or those who are not mature enough, end up with rejection, pain, and hurt. Going into male-female relationships too early can result in heartache, feelings of worthlessness and shame, or pregnancy, suicide, and depression.

In Lessons 30 and 31 the issues of true love and the values of the inner person are discussed in more detail (in contrast to the outward appearance). For now, it is important to understand that lasting relationships depend upon Christians exhibiting inner qualities that reflect the love of God in them. Those who have the love of God in them, and who are following Him, will exhibit a life of godly behavior. It takes time for you (or anyone) to understand these qualities and to see their impact on a person's life.

**Your Thoughts:** Why is it a good idea to learn to be friends with the opposite sex as a teen? (Tips: to learn how members of the other sex think, act, and relate to each other and you; to see where they place God in their lives; to discover their true values and beliefs.)

### **Bible Truth**

Solomon lived around 1000 BC and was the richest, wisest, most politically powerful man in history. He had it all, and he walked with the Lord while he was young. He ruled over Israel for 40 years and wrote a considerable amount of Scripture. On top of his great wisdom, wealth, and power, he had 700 wives and many "girlfriends": oops, what is this about (1 Kings 11:3-8)? Was this adult topic hidden from you when you were younger?

Solomon started life well, but ended up a failure; some think he was not a believer when he died. What caused

this tremendous downfall? Foreign wives. The term "foreign wives" means wives who worshipped other gods; they were strangers from the Lord and His people. These foreign wives eventually led Solomon away from the Lord. Maybe, just maybe, 700 wives were 699 too many. It took many years for his disobedience to catch up with him, but it surely did, as it will for all of us.

Solomon did not flee youthful lusts, even as an adult. The consequences are why we plead with each teen to follow the Word, the advice of your parents, and this lesson. Solomon ended his life as a defeated man full of

regrets and bitterness, wondering why he had not obeyed the Lord. That uncertainty is what this verse is trying to prevent in our lives: "**Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart**" (2 Tim. 2:22). Notice these points:

- You are to flee (run as fast as you can) from something.
- Run quickly from youthful lusts (desiring what is not yours). But wait, this was written to Timothy and he was in his 30s, so he was not a teen. We will see that adults also have these lusts. If these lusts get hold of your mind when you are young, they will tend to control it your entire life, so flee them while you can.
- Instead of lusting, you are to follow godly values of righteousness, faith, love, and peace. If you do, these good things will control your heart and mind all your life.

- Your primary fellowship should be with them who call upon the Lord: Christians.

The things of this world will not capture your mind, and your relationships will not bring you to ruin (like Solomon) if you follow the Word. Being friends with the opposite sex during the early to mid-teen years can prove very rewarding. It gradually eases, and slowly introduces, young people into more complicated relationships, so they learn much more about godly behavior and human nature. Being friends in the teen years prepares you for deeper and more lasting future relationships, including marriage.

**Your Thoughts:** Explain some of your thoughts about Solomon and how such a wise man was brought so low in his final days. What do you learn from this?

## Take 2 Heart

### Summary

Teen years can be fun, and changes are taking place in your life at a rapid rate. You may be seeking more freedom; it will be given as you gain maturity. Maturity is demonstrated by making wise decisions, taking responsibility for your actions, and exhibiting godly behavior. Physical maturity develops rapidly, but mental maturity takes much longer. Part of your mental maturation should be to learn, in general, about the opposite sex. The learning process includes observing their true inner values and relationship with God. Thus, in the early and mid-teen years, being just friends with the opposite sex (maybe until out of high school) is best. The goals of being "just friends" are to have fun and learn about the opposite sex in a non-romantic way, to discover how they think and behave, and to see how Christian values influence their lives. Realizing that male-female relationships are hard to understand is important, so go slowly and do not do something that could cause big problems for the rest of your life.

### Gospel

The most responsible and mature decision you will ever make relates to allowing the Lord Jesus Christ to be your Savior. Believing in Jesus Christ's death for you, to pay for your sins, results in your salvation. "**For by grace you have been saved through faith ... it is the gift of God**" (Eph. 2:8). It is never too late to trust in Christ. You have committed no sin that He will not gladly forgive; you only have to believe. You cannot be good enough to get to Heaven on your own, and you cannot be so bad that God will not save you. He delights in saving sinners.

### Encouragement

Please consider that the first step in the early to mid-teen years (perhaps even older) is to be just friends with the opposite sex. If you have already started dating, it is not too late; you can still apply the principles of being friends. Get to know others for who they are on the inside, learn how the two sexes think, and become

comfortable being with each other in a group setting. Early dating tends to defeat the goal of learning about the opposite sex because biologic urges cause us to see only the outer person. The inner beauty of a person will lead to a lasting relationship, regardless of how beautiful (or not) the person may be on the outside. May the Lord guide you in all the important decisions of your life. It is wonderful to know there are teens that honor the Lord.