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Friendship & Dating—Rights & Responsibilities (Part 2)

Theme: Knowing the expectations and responsibilities of relationships.

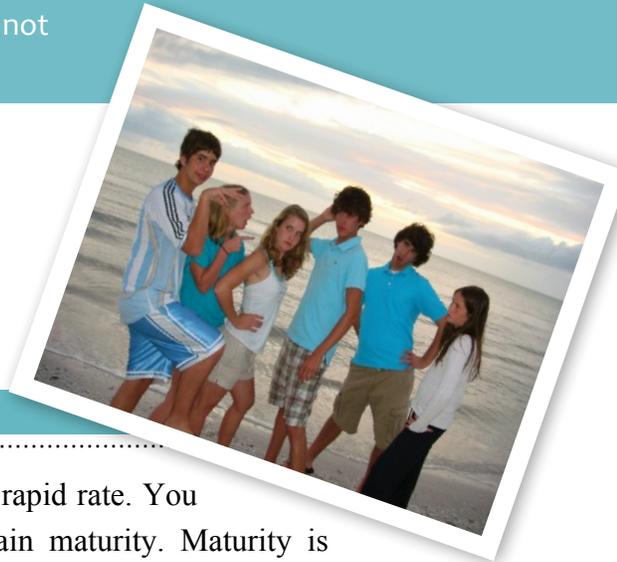
Review

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 to you 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, it is best to be just friends with the opposite sex (maybe until out of high school). 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 the best way to proceed is by going slowly and not taking actions that could cause big problems for the rest of your life.

Introduction

Friendship, dating, and courtship are three methods of beginning a relationship with the opposite sex (the final relationships are engagement and marriage). Friendship is the preferred starting point for teens. The friendship period is the time to find out if another person is truly a Christian. Dating is the next step and it can be set up in a way that maintains the friendship goals, at least until both people are ready to commit to each another as potential marriage partners. Courtship is not a third step but an option to friendship/dating; it takes the position that two people have no physical contact at all (no touching, no holding hands, no kissing) until marriage.

The idea of being just friends is not to get involved romantically or to be committed to just one person. Group settings are important, not being alone one-on-one. During the group activities, observe others: how do they think, act, and interact with others? Do all boys act goofy and talk nonstop about sports and games? Why do girls spend so much time discussing makeup/clothes and other people? These are not dates, but group activities at church, adult-supervised outings, or parent-approved functions. These are not times to "pair up" with someone or for romance, but to spend time having fun and enjoying others.



As you develop friendships, consider the fruit of Galatians 5:22 (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness...). Who exhibits them? Sure, we are all sinners and do not exhibit these qualities all the time, but neither can sincere Christians hide them. If people do not exhibit at least some of these fruits, they may not be saved, or they are not living for the Lord. If they do, they are developing spiritually, as God would desire.

Do not concern yourself with finding someone to date or someone to fall in love with and marry. Those relationships all can occur in future years. For the next few years, be content with where you are in life, and learn the lessons God has in store for you. As with all things, commit the issue of being friends with the opposite sex to the Lord in prayer (Phil. 4:6). If you concentrate on being the right kind of person, He will lead you to the right person.

Bible Truth

Resolve in Your Heart

It is important that you make up your mind now about what you will and will not do in the future. In the Old Testament, a teen named Daniel, "...**purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself...**" (Dan. 1:8). Immoral people surrounded Daniel, yet he made up his mind that he would not be like them. He was blessed because he set himself apart from the crowd and because of his choices. You can have that same resolve to lead a pure life.

One of the ways we can achieve that resolve is to choose good friends because they have a huge influence in our lives. I Cor. 15:33 tells us, "**Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits.'**" Resolve in your heart to not be corrupted by the wrong kind of friends, at whatever age you are. Last week we learned about Solomon, who was corrupted by his foreign wives; they were not believers. He was slowly but surely led downward, and ended life in despair. Daniel was not corrupted, and he was blessed. Choose friends who have good values and morals and who follow the Lord, then work together to support one another in your daily life.

In your teenage years, be aware of situations that would make it easy for you to lose your resolve. Going places with groups of friends instead of being alone with a date is a good practice to follow. Make sure that your parents

(or another adult) will be there before you invite anyone into your home. Do not go to your opposite-sex friend's house if a responsible adult is not there. Keep all your relationships pure and open.

Your Thoughts: Discuss what it means to be the right kind of person; does it have anything to do with athletic ability, brains, or looks?

Looking Ahead

The most important relationship you will ever have is the one you have with Jesus Christ. Your desire should be to honor Him, and to stay away from any activity that is not glorifying and honoring to Him. "**Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God**" (1 Cor. 10:31). He will guide you and teach you important lessons. Use your relationship with Him as a guide on how to act with others.

This lesson applies to friendship and dating (courtship, if you so decide). In both the friendship and dating stages of life, you have certain rights and certain responsibilities, as shown below. Your level of maturity is very much related to accepting your responsibilities. Your well-being is very much related to realizing your rights. Your rights and responsibilities are given to you by God, they are recognized by human governments, and they are promoted by those involved in building strong

relationships. You can expect (even demand) these rights from others, but make sure you are also giving the same respect to them. In essence, no other teen has the right to make you do something you do not want, and you have the right to break off a relationship if you think it is best to do so. What you resolve in your heart, and the honor you give God (as mentioned above), are very much part of your rights and responsibilities.

A Bible verse is not given for each item below since many items are based upon godly wisdom gathered from the entire Bible, though not stated in one particular verse. Some of the Bible verses given as references discuss how you are to treat others, but that also means others are to treat you the same way. An example is Philippians 2:3.

You Have the Right to Expect

1. To always be treated with respect (Phil. 2:3)
2. To have control over your own body, thoughts, and opinions (Phil. 2:4)
3. To leave a relationship and to say no
4. To choose your own friends (no other teen should control this)
5. To not be abused—physically, emotionally, or sexually
6. To be an equal in all things (Gal. 3:2)
7. To live without fear of a friend's anger
8. To change your mind or express disagreement with others

Responsibilities for Yourself

1. To do no harm to yourself or others if things go wrong (Rom. 12:17-19; 1Thes. 5:15)
2. To support others emotionally, not to tear them down behind their backs (Rom. 12:9)
3. To engage in communication, but not to manipulate others (Tit. 2:8)
4. To not humiliate, embarrass, or make others jealous (Phil. 4:8, Prov. 27:4)
5. To refuse to abuse in any manner—always respect others (Rom. 12:10)
6. To honor your parents/guardians in your activities
7. To honor the Lord in all you do

Your Thoughts: Why would anyone want to harm himself or herself? (Ideas: to get attention, to manipulate someone, to show inner pain, or to die because he or she is immature and cannot handle sorrow or rejection....)

You may want to put the items above on sheet of paper and put it on a bulletin board or some place in your bedroom as a reminder. The fifteen things listed above are summarized briefly below:

- **respect** (for yourself and others)
- **no fear** (in you or caused by you)
- **no harm** (to yourself or others)
- **honor** (your Lord and parents)

Life Applications

Respect

Please resolve in your heart right now to follow the Lord in all aspects of your life. The Lord expects abstinence (no sexual activity) until marriage. The teaching given here is designed to help you achieve the Lord's expectations. Because dating relationships can easily get out of control and lead to sexual activity, friendship is recommended for early to mid-teen years (or even older) and then dating/courtship. Please remember to learn the

basic concepts of the "You Have the Right to Expect" and "Responsibilities for Yourself" shown above.

You are a unique individual whom God created. He loves you and sent His Son to die for your sins, so that you can have a relationship with Him. That relationship is the most important one you will ever have. When you trust in Him, you become part of His body of believers and a special "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). If you believe

these facts from God's Word, then you must have respect for yourself. This is not a prideful thing, but recognition that you are His special person.

Your desire should be to do only the things that please and honor Him. There will be friends, even Christian friends, who will not have the proper respect for you; you may have to limit your association with them. As a new creation in Christ, you will have respect for your friends, **"Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another"** (Rom. 12:10). If you truly respect someone, you will not view him or her as an object of desire, but as a brother or sister in Christ. You will want to honor such persons and not want to take advantage of them for your own personal satisfaction. You should never ask them to do something that would compromise their testimony for the Lord, or vice versa. The verse above gives you more clues as to what to look for in friends, that is, showing kind affection, demonstrating brotherly love, giving honor, and putting others first.

No Fear

There should be no fear in any relationship, or with ending a relationship. Sometimes, friends think you have to do certain things, think a certain way, wear certain cloths, and so forth. Friendship or dating should not be based upon these external things. Even worse, sometimes a member of the opposite sex will act as if he or she owns you. You should not act in ways to make others jealous, but no other teen can tell you whom you can see or tell you what to do. A Christian may be humble and willing to serve others, but you are not a doormat on which others can wipe their feet. If anyone causes you fear, threatens you, or bullies you, please tell your parents or a trusted adult.

No person has the right to create fear in you or control you. As Christians, we speak of fearing God, but that fear means to have a deep respect and awe, not the fear He is going to hurt you. God is our comfort and peace.

In addition, we do not have to fear His wrath; the same should be true of other humans. **"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and of a sound mind"** (2 Tim. 1:7). **"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love"** (1 Jn. 4:18).

No Harm

Some relationships will go badly. It happens to everyone. Sometimes a person can be so "in love" with another that if something goes wrong, he or she gets very depressed, even suicidal. During such a time, thoughts of doing harm to oneself or to someone else may occur. Sometimes people threaten to do harm to themselves in order to get another person to do what they want. Any thoughts of doing harm to yourself or another should be immediately brought to the Lord in prayer. God wants you to tell Him what is causing you pain and heartache because He cares. **"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus"** (Phil. 4:6-7). As you bring such matters to the Lord, He will provide you peace, which is exactly what you need during such a hard time in life. That peace is beyond our understanding; it is wonderful beyond our imagination. For anyone with a broken heart, wishing to die, please take this matter to the Lord. You will experience a peace that is beyond your understanding.

Your Thoughts: Philippians 4:6-7 has more to offer than anything else in this world. How would you explain this verse to someone who is hurting?

The Bible does not promise to remove your problems or make things like they were, but it does say He will enable you to get through the hard times and be a better person for it. Please read Psalm 34:17-22; 2 Corinthians

1:3, 7:16; and Ephesians 6:22, 4:13 to gain an understanding that God wants to comfort you and provide peace in your life. It is always good to go to a trusted adult (parent, relative, youth leader, pastor, Sunday school teacher) and see if they can help. During times like these, your friends should be able to support and encourage you. You must do the same when your friends are going through hard times.

Honor

"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and

ever. Amen" (1 Tim. 1:17). Honor refers to regarding others with great respect and esteem. Of primary importance, remember to honor the Lord in all things, for He is worthy. As you honor Him, you will also see the importance of honoring your parents/guardians, others, and yourself (Eph. 6:2; Rom. 12:10; 2 Tim. 2:21). To honor yourself does not mean to think you are really great or better than others, but to remember you are God's child and others have no right to dishonor you. So, whatever you do, wherever you go, when things are good, or when things are bad, remember the importance of honoring.

Take 2 Heart

Summary

The early to mid-teen years are not the time to "pair up" with the opposite sex for romance, but a time to spend having fun and enjoying others. As you develop friendships (and when dating) consider the fruit of Galatians 5:22 (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness...); who exhibits them? Sure, we are all sinners and do not exhibit these qualities all the time, but neither can a sincere Christian hide them. Your friendship outings should be primarily with those friends who honor God in all things and who help build you up in your Christian life. Remember, Solomon had wives who were unbelievers and they brought him down, while Daniel resolved in his heart to honor God and he was blessed. Fifteen rights and responsibilities were given for you to know and follow; these are primarily biblical in origin and worthy of your attention. The fifteen can be summarized this way: respect, no fear, no harm, and honor. If you concentrate on these items, that is, on being the right kind of person, He will lead you to the right person.

Gospel

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans

6:23). Salvation is the gift of God, and it delivers a person from damnation. Salvation is available to you upon faith in Jesus Christ's death for your sins. God's plan of salvation was thousands of years in the making and of great price to Him. He offers it to each of us freely; that is grace. Believing in Him is the wisest choice you can ever make.

Encouragement

Thank you for making the commitment to follow Him regardless of what others think. As a teen you will have many temptations and opportunities to go the wrong way. It is sometimes hard to know what is best, and at other times, you know what is best, but the urge is very strong to go the other way. If you have already done many things you know are wrong, please know it is never too late to start following the Lord. The Lord will never give up on you, do not give up on yourself. If you mess up, just admit it; that is part of taking responsibility for your actions. Then ask the Lord to help you. Part of being a teen is doing crazy things and making mistakes, but learn from them so you can show adults you are maturing. Your resolve to honor Him can be a beautiful thing. May the Lord greatly bless you.