

Christ-Centered Dating

Dating is a topic that can take up a lot of space in our minds, especially in a period of our lives like college, when we really begin to think about what lies ahead. Thoughts about our future career, lifestyle, and of course, spouse begin to drive the decisions we make during this pivotal moment of our lives. This desire to find someone who we can grow to love and spend the rest of our lives here on earth with is natural. Just as God saw that, “it is not good that man should be alone,” (Gen. 2:18) and created Eve as a helper to Adam, so too He, in His kindness, allows us to form a relationship with another in perfect love through the sacrament of Holy Matrimony, that we might learn to love Him in that same perfect love. Dating serves as a means of beginning this relationship, and this is our topic of discussion today. How do we keep Christ at the center of this process, and take the steps necessary to allow God to work in our hearts? While I can’t promise that you’ll walk away from this article with a clear answer to the question, I know that the Church, in Its wisdom, has provided many of the tools necessary to succeed.

The first step in the process of dating is deciding when the right time to start is, and I believe there are a few objective criteria that must be met before moving on. As we mentioned before, God gave us the sacrament of Holy Matrimony as a way to build a relationship of unconditional, selfless love, with Christ at the center of it, and so it must start with the full consent and support of your Father of Confession and spiritual guides. Without a green light from those who (should) know the most about your spiritual life, you’ve set a weak foundation to the relationship; “for no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor. 3:11)

Now, we’ve gotten the okay from the spiritual figures in life, so we’re good right? Not exactly. The story of Moses and Joshua fighting the Amalekites (Exodus 17) provides us with the framework to taking the next step towards dating—prayer. Just as the Israelites were only able to succeed when Moses kept his arms raised towards God, so too we must keep our arms raised in prayer if we hope for a successful relationship. A rigorous prayer life is essential to ensure that God can work through us and help us make the right decisions throughout the process of dating. Before you begin to “talk” to someone, pray. When you start to “talk” to someone, pray. Before you go on a date, pray. When you leave the date, pray. As St. Paul tells us, “pray without ceasing” (1Thess. 5:17). One short prayer that comforted me throughout the process of dating is, “Thy will be done.” I often prayed that if the relationship I was in was not in line with God’s ultimate Will, He would separate us. In all things, we must learn to “trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.” (Prov. 3:5) Relationships are no exception to this rule; as we begin to pursue relationships with the intent of finding a future spouse, we must not forget that God’s wisdom far exceeds our own, and so we must allow Him to work, even if His work isn’t what we willed for.

For the rest of this article, I want to provide some practical tips that you may or may not find helpful. I’ve tried to make these as general as possible, to cater to anyone that is considering dating, is currently dating, or has dated in the past.

- Some of the priests in our local churches have come up with a few tips about when the right time to start dating is:

- “When you are two years away from being at the stage in your life when you are ready to get engaged, then you can start to date.”
- “First year [of college], don’t think about it. Second year, pray about it. Third year, start to think about it. Fourth year, do something about it.”
- As an underclassman in college, focus on yourself. Before God created Eve, He gave Adam the responsibility of naming each of the animals. In the same way, God expects us to fulfill our responsibilities before we can care for another; these responsibilities include our spirituality, family, education, and friends, among others.
- Open communication is critical; you are laying down building blocks for the relationship between you and your future spouse. Learning how to effectively communicate your thoughts and emotions in a clear manner will go a long way towards a successful marriage. Learn what their “love languages” are, what methods of communication work best with them, what kind of support they look for when they’re facing a difficult time, etc.
- Practice selfless love whenever you can, so that you can build the foundation for a selfless marriage, one in which you hope to be the best husband/wife for your spouse. Think about what you can do for your significant other, not what they can do for you.
- When first getting to know someone, don’t allow emotions to control the relationship. Dating is all about being practical, as its purpose is to find someone that is compatible with you. Love “covers a multitude of sins,” (1 Peter 4:8) and can often times cloud our judgement of a person’s character, in a time when we should be most critical of who they are.
- In the early stages of a relationship, be wise in who you choose to tell about it. Keep the people who matter most (your Father of Confession, spiritual guide, parents) in the loop at all times.
- As the relationship progresses, ensure that you avoid situations of physical temptation. Simple steps like taking separate cars on the way to your date, or going to places like the movies in groups rather than just the two of you will help remove any of the triggers that may lead to sinful actions.
- Give yourself, and others, time to emotionally recover from a break-up. His Grace Bishop Youssef mentions in his book, “Choose Your Spouse” that it can take up to a year and a half for someone to move on from a previous relationship. **I highly recommend giving this short book a read before you think about dating.**

“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion.” Ecclesiastes 4:9-10