

Christian Dating 101

Are you tired of deadbeat, drama filled relationships that leave you feeling empty? How would you like to meet a great person that you can enjoy life with in a fulfilling relationship that you can be excited about? If meeting people at clubs, bars, or through blind dates simply isn't working for you, I challenge you to try dating God's way.

What Are the Benefits of Christian Dating

Normal dating can result in abuse, unwanted pregnancy, depression, sexually transmitted diseases, heartbreak, trust issues and more. God's word gives us guidance to help safeguard our physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Jesus said "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. (John 10:10). Plus, God can match us up with a great person that we can be excited about for the rest of our life! So, let's get started!

7 Rules for the Game

1. Know that God has Someone for You. You have to know that it is God's will for you to have a happy and healthy relationship that you can be excited about. Stop saying things like "There are no good men left" or "No one will want me" and start trusting God by saying regardless of how hurt you have been in the past, God has someone willing to love you past your mistakes and help you grow into your future. Unless you truly believe this, you won't be able to move forward and will limit your future relationships by your negative experiences in the past. It doesn't matter how old you are, if you have children, if you have emotional scars, if you have a past, God can give you someone designed to love you beyond that. My husband and I both shared our pasts when we were dating and it amazed me that God had specially designed both of us to be able to lovingly accept the other – mistakes and all. If He did it for me, He can do it for you!

2. Make Sure You Are Ready.

Do you just want someone to hang out with and have fun without any commitment? Are you just trying to get with someone since all of your friends are getting married? Or you want someone to make out with? Are you trying to get over a past relationship by finding someone new? If so, seek God for emotional healing. You're not ready.

Being ready means you are stable, or striving to be, in 4 key areas:

- **Spiritual Stability** means you have a consistent prayer life and are constantly growing to be more like Jesus through learning about Him (attending church, Bible Study, etc.) and implementing the things you

learn. Its not measured by ritual (how many services you attend) but by progress (you should have less bad habits than before you were saved).

- **Emotional Stability** – means you are comfortable with who you are. You're not looking for someone to complete you but compliment you. Yet, you are mature enough to not just live selfishly (thinking of what you want all of the time) but ready to think of someone else (plan a future with someone else's needs in mind). How do you know if this is you? If you are willing to listen to someone else's feelings, invest your time to learn their interests, serve and support their dreams, share your resources, and be accountable (take into consideration how your actions will affect someone else), and sacrifice (not always having your way for the greater good). This also means moving on from past relationships (letting go of ex girl/boyfriends) in order to build a new relationship with the one you are with.
- **Financial Stability** – For guys, you should be seriously working toward achieving your goals (e.g., in school, working) saving your money, and striving to be independent from your parents (your own place, car, etc.). You should be disciplined in your spending (living within a budget) to prepare for the financial commitment that comes with a relationship and ultimately being a husband. Ladies, you should also be seriously pursuing your career goals, paying off any debts (credit cards, student loans, etc.) and preparing to be independent from your parents (building a savings account, etc.) Ladies, there is nothing wrong with having your own house before you are married. I did and it just meant my husband and I had a rental property for extra income once we got married and I moved in with him!
 - * This doesn't mean you have to have all of those things in place. You just need to be seriously working toward them! E-mail me if you need tips on accomplishing any of those things.
- **Physical Stability** – Make sure you have had an annual check up (check for STDs, HIV, AIDS). Make sure you are ridding yourself of addictions that could poison a potential relationship (drugs, alcohol abuse, cheating or down low relationships, pornography, gambling, etc.)
 - *If you are still struggling with things, please read the article on getting over addictions.

3. Pray and Let God Choose.

Don't just go out to dinner or movies with people because they have a nice Myspace page or they came highly recommended by a friend. Pray and ask God to lead you. Why? Because our judgment can be misleading. Sometimes the person you are attracted to is not good for you while the one you would never consider based on your external judgment, is the loving person you have waited your entire life for! We miss out on so many great opportunities because we do not let God pick. At one point in my life, I considered dating a very

accomplished, handsome, law student that graduated from my alma mater. However, I prayed about it, and God told me to stay away from this young man. Later, I was talking with one of my friends from college on the phone. We had been friends for many years and over the course of our friendship, he had shared with me that he was interested in pursuing a relationship with me. But, I had never considered it. However, God spoke to me and said "This is your husband." I listened and that "friend" became the man of my dreams and ultimately my husband.

4. Get To Know Them As Friends First.

What is the difference between friendship and dating? Intimacy. However, premature intimacy clouds judgment. It keeps you from seeing the full picture since your emotions are so involved. Lasting relationships require a commitment (doing the right thing even when you do not feel like it). Commitment only comes from valuing more than just physical aspects of a person. Friendship allows you to ask questions and see the full picture, as opposed to being clouded by how good they kiss or how they make you feel. My husband and I were friends for 5 years (college and beyond) before we started dating. It was great because we had gotten to know each other as individuals. We knew each other's values, goals, family and dreams and were able to see those things clearly. And remember, if someone is not willing to start slow and get to know you as a friend, they might not be willing to hang in there with you for the long haul (marriage and beyond).

5. Keep the Relationship Pure.

Once you have become friends and decide that you would like to begin dating with the intention of marriage, fight to keep things pure. This means doing your best to not have sex before you get married. Yes, it is possible! Why is this important? Not because God wants to deprive you. But because God realizes that a relationship/marriage will require a level of self-control. If you are not able to not be governed by your emotions while you're dating, there will be nothing to stop you from letting your emotions control you once you're married (e.g., cheating when you're upset, having an attitude when things don't go your way, or getting a divorce just because things get tough). It will bring the two of you closer by having to work together to meet a difficult goal and hold each other accountable. Plus, you will enjoy and appreciate sex more while married due to the wait. My husband and I worked hard to make it to the altar. I'm not saying it's easy, but it's possible and it was well worth it. Here were some things that helped us:

- **Appreciate your sex drive** – don't ask God to take it away. It will come in handy later. He just wants you to discipline it so you are not ruled by it. It's like money. It's a good thing, but it can be destructive when we don't

have the discipline to not let it control us (e.g., spending our mortgage/rent money on a new outfit)

- **Both of You Must Agree** – you must both discuss and commit to waiting. That way, when one is weak, you can hold the other accountable.
- **Discuss & Set Boundaries** – talk about the things that tempt you (without tempting each other during the conversation) and set guidelines to hold each other accountable. Some sample guidelines include: not sleeping in each other's bed, giving yourself a curfew, not talking on the phone past a certain time, and if things begin to get intense, double dating. For my husband and I, we decided we would go out together in public places and would not leave ourselves alone in dark, private places. We censored the movies we watched and music we listened to. I monitored how I dressed (cute but not provocative) and we gave ourselves a curfew for getting home from dates and times for getting off of the phone. We also chose to occasional do double dates. Guys, take the lead in guarding the purity of the relationship. Women will naturally be inclined to want to please their man, so set the standard by enforcing the rules even when it is hard. Remember, even once you're married, there will be times when you do not have physical access to your spouse (e.g., if they are sick, out of town, etc.) If you don't develop the discipline to control your body while you are single, you won't be able to discipline yourself while married and will find yourself cheating and potentially destroying your relationship.

6. **Expect Opposition.** Anytime you are in God's will, expect to be challenged. Every relationship will be tested. If you're in an abusive situation, I'm not advocating that you stay and try to work that out. However, if you are with the person God has told you to be with, be willing to work things out and fight for the relationship. As we learned more about each other, my husband and I encountered many attacks while dating. He lost his job, I encountered opposition in law school, some family members opposed our relationship, and more. However, we prayed together and did not give up. Be careful who you seek guidance from because many unhappy people will happily volunteer their advice to lead you astray. Seek God first before consulting anyone else!
7. **Have Fun!** You're making memories so be creative and have a blast. While dating, we went to great restaurants, movies, concerts, banquets, and celebrated accomplishments...all on a budget! Take pictures and always remember that you are living your own love story and God wants you to enjoy it!