

Courtship and Medical Careers

Introduction:

Most medical students are in that time of life where many people get married. It's hard enough seeing all your friends get married off when you are not a medical doctor. Try adding the stresses of having no time and no outside life. Plus fatigue. And knowing that it only gets worse before it gets better (i.e., no one really wants to face internship alone, so it's easy to get desperate).

Scriptural principles:

God wants us to love Him first and foremost (*Matt 22:36-8*)

God wants us to find our satisfaction in Him.

God made us with needs for fellowship and love. But He wants us to look to Him first for those needs to be filled, and to submit our desires to Him.

Lust (unrestrained desire) has harmful consequences.

God places restrictions on our sexual drives in part to protect us from those harmful consequences.

Recognize that marriage to an unbeliever leads you into a relationship that certainly falls under being "yoked together with unbelievers" (*2 Corinthians 6*). Intimate association with unbelievers as in the case of marriage is unwise, if not forbidden—almost always it is the believer who ends up compromising their faith convictions (*1 Kings 11:1-3*—If Solomon could fall, so can you.)

Adultery is outside of God's will for His people (*Exodus 20:14*).

Sex outside of marriage is outside of God's will for His people.

The right thing at the wrong time is wrong. You probably know a lot of this already but people do a lot of weird things when entangled in wrong relationships.

Common pitfalls for any believer in this time of life include but are not limited to:

1. falling in love with and marrying a person who does not share your beliefs and/or goals in life (i.e. a person interested in missions marrying someone who would rather die than go to the mission field)
2. premature or just plainly irrational sexual involvement (lets not kid ourselves—there are lots of people out there in the church who have gotten into sexual immorality)
3. dating or marrying someone who is just not compatible
4. shopping around and getting entangled with multiple wrong people before they find the right one.

Why are medical people at risk for bad dating lives?

Little exposure to other Christians due to overexposure to work.

Fatigue clouds one's judgment and weakens one's self control.

Little accountability due to inconsistent involvement with the rest of the Body.

Especially male doctors meet too many women who are doctor chasers (\$\$\$\$).

We have little time to research the fine art of courtship.

We've devoted so much time to learning medicine, that now we suddenly feel behind...

It follows that to prevent bad dating lives one should:

Remain accountable.

Seek Christian fellowship—of both sexes.

Learn about how to do dating well from a Christian standpoint.

Stay away from temptation—meaning don't be alone with someone who is of the opposite sex, or if you are forced to do so, be social, but not intimate in your conversation, **always ask your date if he/she is married** (some people don't wear rings because they catch on gloves), guard yourself where you are weak, do not assume that a person who is Christian is immune from committing sin up to and including sexual immorality and assault (there are many wolves in sheep's clothing—keep yourself safe).

BE PATIENT—the fact is that while we are single, God gives us the gift of singleness. Shopping around doesn't do anything but set you up for bad habits when you meet the right person (see chart from Choosing God's Best).

Singleness has a lot of advantages, which should be enjoyed and exploited even while we have it: being more able to travel, keep odd hours, live frugally, live spontaneously...

How to have a good dating life:

THIS IS NOT ABOUT HOW TO GET LOTS OF DATES.

Resolve to treat others with respect and not to use people for your own selfish emotional gratification. No one likes to be used. Everyone likes to be respected. Courtship is a fuzzy term. Basically the idea in most modern Christian circles is that you pursue the relationship with the idea that you are exploring the idea of getting married, not just enjoying one another for the sake of trying each other out or getting temporary needs met. However, you should always be clear what kind of commitment you are making/getting before you accept it.

Be accountable to family (cultivate those people who are like spiritual parents to you) and to other brothers and sisters.

Be ready for marriage before you start to pursue it. (Do you really know what marriage entails? How much have you read about marriage? What does the Bible say about it? Are you going to take time out to do this well now? Are you ready emotionally, spiritually, physically, financially, educationally, etc.?)

Check your motives? Why do you want to be married? Is it for selfish reasons (to fill that loneliness void, to have someone help you out during internship and residency, to appease your parents, to appease your biological clock) or are you really ready to serve and give yourself to another person without necessarily receiving anything in return?

OK, so you're ready for courtship.

How do you make it work when your life is crazy?

Get support: parents, friends, people at church (in general, people like to be involved in something like advising someone else in a relationship that might end up in marriage)—this is for accountability, but also for godly advice.

Read books and learn from the experience of others: Passion and Purity, I Kissed Dating Goodbye, Choosing God's Best, Boy Meets Girl...

Take call on the same nights: You won't be able to spend time together on call or post call, but at least that one off call day, you'll both be awake.

Come in and have dinner together on call—include others for accountability and to take off the pressure.

Set specific appointments for when you are going to be sure to be available and awake for feedback and to deal with issues related to the relationship if you are in a situation where you are not often available to your significant other. Having an issue explode when you are exhausted is a recipe for arguing, or making bad decisions due to poor judgment. You have to be responsible for making sure your significant other has enough time from you. Don't go hiding behind the cloak of work responsibilities if the real issue is that you don't want to deal with some unpleasant relationship issue.