

Isaiah 62:5 For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

10 Things We Need in Dates

1. Men asking women out on dates - a tragic loss in our culture
2. Women say yes once or twice, then you can say no
3. Friendship – dates are about friendship
4. Honesty – be honest
5. Community – group dates, but also being known
6. Respect, chivalry – open doors, be polite
7. Honor each other – you are both people
8. Fun and talking – do something fun and talk to each other
9. Not gossip or overthinking it – let people go on dates
10. Keep things where they are – it’s just a date

10 Things We Need in Marriage

1. Honesty – without honesty there is not real relationship
2. Fidelity – you have promised to be true to each other
3. The Gospel – without the gospel I will ruin my marriage
4. Love and respect – Ephesians 5
5. Church and Community – the context of grace
6. Repentance and forgiveness – Will you please forgive me?
7. Porn blockers – this problem doesn’t go away in marriage
8. No divorce – don’t even say the word, it’s not an option
9. Work or kids or status not idols in your life
10. A mission – what is your marriage for?

!!The Gospel!!!

What is the chief end of man? Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

What is the chief end of dating? Dating’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

10 Things We Need in Dating

1. Ask her to be your girlfriend and say what that means
2. Be honest in answering – say no if you don’t want to
3. Community
4. Counseling – talk to people along the way a lot
5. Chastity – don’t do things you wouldn’t do on the S Oval
6. Repentance – say, “Will you please forgive me?”
7. Friendship – remember dating is about friendship
8. Porn blockers – must have. Break up if he/she won’t install.
9. Intentionality, a plan – where is this going?
10. Lead/follow practice – are *practicing* the roles

10 Things That Will Ruin It

1. Dishonesty
2. Sex outside of marriage – of any kind, porn
3. Selfishness
4. Idolizing the relationship
5. Lack of trust, lack of forgiveness
6. No plan or commitment
7. Anger, fear and insecurity
8. Forgetting the gospel, forgetting community
9. Not talking, not believing God, not walking with Jesus
10. Ownership of the other person

This is the very end of a paper by Rev. Les Newsom, RUF campus minister at Ole Miss. Read the rest here: <http://www.olemiss.ruf.org/resources> It's on the bottom of the page.

Tom and Sarah: A Case Study

So what does this all look like in practice? Hopefully, it will not be too hard to imagine Tom and Sarah who met when they first came to college through freshman orientation. After a year and a half or so of just getting settled on all the many questions that have to be faced early on in college (what's my major, what's my crowd, what's my schedule, etc.) the two of them began to spend time in very similar circles. Somewhere before the end of their sophomore year, Tom got up the courage to ask Sarah to out to dinner together where they both had a great time.

The two exchanged phone numbers and began to call each other on a semi-regular basis, sometimes just to talk, and sometimes to talk about going out again. Which they did. However, the summer break interrupted their relationship before either of them could be certain as to what was really "going on" between them. They made a decision, therefore, to avoid stressing one another out over the break by trying to see each other. Sarah was studying abroad for the summer and Tom was interning at his father's accounting firm. The two emailed probably once a week during the summer just to keep in touch and engage in some low-grade flirtatiousness (as flirtatious as email can be...ahem).

When their junior year approached, neither of the two had lost any interest in each other. Both had many friends in common who were asking all kinds of questions about what was going to happen to them this semester. Tom continued to call Sarah the first week of school and the two went out after that. When Sarah got home that night, she sat down with her roommates for the evening "grilling." "What did he say?" "Does he like you?" "Are you going to start dating him?" were just a few of the questions she fielded. Sarah, though vaguely uncomfortable with the pressure she felt from the questions decided that she needed to know what to think of what was happening.

It must be said at this point, that Sarah's mild frustration is entirely normal. At this stage, she has no grid through which to view Tom's actions. What does his calling, and their flirting, and their going out MEAN? What she craves in her frustration is what every person craves when they start to date...a definition through which she can understand and interpret Tom's advances.

The next night on the phone, Sarah was visibly distant and not very interested in talking too long. Tom picked up on the vibe right away and gracefully allowed her out of the conversation. Tom hung up the phone and knew that he and Sarah were having much too good a time together for her to suddenly change her mind. She was not the sort to be that fickle. So he decided to ask her about it the next day.

Tom text messaged Sarah and asked her if she wouldn't mind meeting him for coffee the next afternoon. The two met in a quiet coffee shop to talk. Tom opened up the conversation by saying that he had noticed that Sarah was really distracted on the phone the other night, and that it had occurred to him, on the advice of his father, that he needed to tell Sarah what he was thinking about the two of them. Tom grinned like a kid as he talked about how much fun he was having with Sarah and that he wanted very much to keep seeing her. He also added that he because of some mistakes that he had made in high school (and seen his fraternity brothers make), he was vaguely nervous about entering to an overly-committed intense relationship with anybody. But that he wanted only to have the enjoyment of being able to talk and do things with Sarah.

Sarah was more than happy to oblige Tom's request to keep seeing her. She too had been burned before on relationships that had gotten too intense too fast. So the two of them agreed that though they were clearly interested, they would "take it slow."

From that point on, they did nothing of a sort. It was really hard to maintain other interests that Fall. The two of them saw each other almost every day and certainly talked or emailed or text-ed every day. By the time Thanksgiving came around, Tom and Sarah were clearly a couple, at least in the eyes of their friends. And their friends genuinely enjoyed being around them. The two of them rarely sat together when others were around. And they avoided the temptation to engage in "public displays of affection" when others were around because of the tendency to put those around them off.

One night that December, in a lighthearted moment, Tom and Sarah were joking about the kinds of names that they did or didn't like. At one moment, Tom said, "Well, we'll just have to name our kids something normal, right?" Sarah laughed and let it go, but the truth was that she was completely freaked out by the comment. She was having a great time, sure. But marriage was such a big commitment and there was SO MUCH she felt she didn't know about Tom that she just couldn't stand the pressure she felt trying to think about it.

This is a myth, by the way, of college relationships. The amount of information that you need to know about the person you are dating is FAR less than what most think it is. This is evidenced by the relative speed with which folks get engaged AFTER they graduate from college. They find it simply doesn't take near as long after they are out of the realm of college. But the truth is: the time it takes to find out what one "needs to know" in order to know if they are a potential partner is not near what college students think it is.

Sarah got very distant at this point. Tom was great, sure, and she could see herself marrying him...maybe, but she was nowhere near wanting to think about those kinds of questions. Not only that, but she had recently been introduced to the brother of one her roommates who had come into town just the week before and had stayed up to talk with his sister and her roommates. Sarah found herself completely charmed by the guy and even made some flirtatious advances that few in the room noticed except herself.

But when she climbed into bed that night she wondered, "What did that mean?" Now, two weeks later and Tom was putting on the "hard sell" trying to bring up the topic of them getting married (which, of course, he never even thought of mentioning...it was nothing more than an innocent joke). Sarah spent the next two weeks in a fog and was beginning to get annoyed with the slightest things that Tom did wrong.

Tom, meanwhile, was largely oblivious to the whole affair and didn't think much of Sarah's distance lately, but merely chalked it up to end of the semester stress with exams. It took him totally by surprise when, after exams were over, and school was closing up for the winter holidays that Sarah called wanting to talk to him.

She explained that she felt like things were running too fast. She said that their promise to take it slow at the beginning of the semester had been completely disregarded by both of them and that she was feeling the pressure to think about things that she didn't want to think about. Tom was very much on his heels and put up a small fight wondering from where she was feeling the pressure. She then asked him what he meant when he was talking a few weeks ago about "our children." Tom laughed out loud and said that he had meant it only as a joke. Sarah explained that it didn't matter; she just wanted to back off some and rethink what they were doing together.

The ride home for Tom was miserable. The truth was that he had indeed been thinking that Sarah could be "The One" and that he would start in a few months thinking about how to bring that up with her. But at the same time, he was deeply annoyed, because, by Sarah's own admission, it was nothing that he was doing that was making her feel this way, besides a thoughtless remark about a yet non-existent future. It didn't seem fair to him to have the relationship end over something that he didn't even do.

In his grief over the next few days, Tom grew more and more irritated at Sarah's reaction and determined to set it straight. Tom called Sarah and told her that he absolutely had to speak to her as soon as possible. Sarah reluctantly agreed, thinking that it was going to take it a while to get through to this guy that she was ready to move on...or so she thought.

Tom drove the next day the hour and a half to Sarah's family home and the two went out to eat a local fast food restaurant. Tom began by asking for a favor of Sarah. He asked if they could determine from then on to only judge where their relationship was going on the basis of what THEY heard from each other, NOT on what they THOUGHT they heard from each other. Communication was worth the try, he argued, and it would be tragic if the two of them missed a chance to enjoy more time together over a stupid misunderstanding.

Second, Tom told Sarah that he had no intention of even thinking of talking about marriage with Sarah. They were simply doing exactly what he said he was doing from the very beginning of their relationship: spending time with one another and having fun. Tom went on to say that he knew he had no rights to force Sarah to think about anything she wasn't ready to talk about. And as if to punctuate the point, he told her that he didn't even have the right to ask her not to go out with anyone else, that she was free at all times to do whatever she wanted to do with him, either say 'yes' when he calls to ask her out on a date, or say 'no.' It was her choice, but it would be a deep, wide tragedy for the two of them to end their time together over Sarah thinking that Tom was getting pushy.

Sarah had never had any guy talk to her this way. Usually, when some of her other relationships had gotten to this point, the guy tightened up and tried to oblige himself to her even more. But Tom had ended the conversation by saying that he still would love to keep seeing her on those terms, if she was willing. Still a little stunned and wondering if Tom was just up to something, Sarah agreed that he could call her if he wanted to...but that she might not be available if he did.

Tom rode the way home dejected and depressed. He had said what he wanted to say and walked away with what he thought was his dignity, but he still despaired for their future. That night, Tom got home and emailed Sarah some of the same things he had said to her in their meeting and as Sarah read the note, she was glad to hear that she had been wrong about feeling the pressure, but she still was very unsure about jumping back into things too quickly. Besides, she thought, her roommate had already set her up with her cute brother when she found out that she had told Tom to slow down.

Just as he promised, Tom called three or four days later just to check and see how Sarah was doing. Sarah was actually glad to hear from him and had to admit to herself that she had missed their conversations. Tom decided to take the dive and ask Sarah out to dinner for the next weekend. It was a long drive but there was a great restaurant he wanted her to go to very near where she lived.

Sarah froze on the phone realizing that Tom had asked her out for the very night she was set up to go on a date with her roommate's brother. Sarah took a deep breath and decided it was best to be honest and just came right out with the fact that she had a date with her roommate's brother.

It's important to notice that at this very point, Tom stands at a crossroads. And it matters not ONE bit what his motives or 'true' feelings are. He KNOWS what he ought to do, but he also knows what he wants to do. Is Tom being disingenuous with his feelings if he says what he knows he NEEDS to say rather than what he wants to say? Rather than being an example of dishonesty, this is actually an example of loving a person the way they ought to be loved...that is, with what is right rather than with what you feel.

Tom took a deep breath and said the opposite of what he wanted to say. He said that he had heard of this guy and very brightly said that he and Sarah would have a great time together. He added that he knew Sarah and her roommate were very close and that it would be fun to double date with a crowd like that. Tom worked with all his might to not let slip even the slightest hint of disappointment in his voice. He was totally positive without being gushing and supportive without sounding suspicious. Tom told Sarah that he'd try again "next time." The two made some more small talk and hung up the phone.

While Tom was again trying to convince himself that at least he had not made a fool of himself, Sarah was baffled. For the strangest reason, she had wished that Tom hadn't wanted to get off the phone. She even began to wonder why she was doing this at all. Why had she called things off with Tom? Why had she gotten so bent out of shape over the whole thing?

Next weekend, Tom was sitting on his couch watching late night TV when the phone rang...it was Sarah. When she asked what he was doing, Tom answered shortly but immediately asked where she was. She said she had gotten home from her date a little after 10 o'clock and just wondered what he was up to. And Tom knew he had done the right thing. They talked until 2am.

Needless to say, Tom and Sarah were "back on" for the next Spring. But Tom had learned a valuable lesson. The more freedom and space he gave Sarah, the closer she wanted to be to him. Tom determined that he would assume NOTHING in his relationship with Sarah, and committed himself to keeping their relationship open at all times. Sarah would periodically struggle with her feelings for Tom, but Tom would always meet her with the

same refrain about her having complete freedom to date whomever she wanted to and be with whomever she wanted. That Spring, Sarah had to break one of their dates because she had been invited on a girls weekend outing to a large nearby city. Tom actually was able to be excited for her, telling her that she'd have a great time. Sarah found it hard all weekend to enjoy it since Tom wasn't there.

Tom and Sarah also found that the climate that had been created for their relationship helped tremendously with their struggle to maintain some sanity in their sexual lives. With the two of them growing so close, it was only natural that there were regular intense evenings when the two of them did FAR more than they ever intended to do before marriage. However, what always struck Sarah after these mistakes happened was the fact that Tom was always talking about her having the freedom to date whomever she pleased. It didn't take her long to realize that Tom assumed that HE had the very same freedom. The thought of Tom being with someone else just galled her and helped her tremendously in maintaining a sense of self-control when the evening was clearly over. It was a bit easier for the two of them to keep to their original agreement to limit their physical contact with each other to innocent kisses.

By the time the next Fall came around, Sarah and Tom were openly talking about getting married. That Thanksgiving, Tom gave her a ring and she said 'yes.' They would be married next summer. But throughout the whole engagement, Tom found that his commitment to respect Sarah's time and freedom paid the richest dividends. Tom found it unnatural to assume that any of the wedding preparations were "her job." Sarah found that she needed to re-think everything when she was with Tom and not just assume that the way she grew up doing certain tasks was the right way. The two agreed that the greatest thing that had ever happened to them was stumbling across this great fact: that relationships grow the best when they remain the most free.