

Dear Friend,

So, you're dating. I heard he's a pretty cool guy, and easy on the eyes too. Oh, and he's on the soccer team, and he gets good grades, huh? I bet you love hanging out with him. Those dating years are so much fun. So, are you going to marry him?

Say what?! Yeah, I know. You're only 16 (or maybe 18 or 21). Way too young to think about getting married, right? Wrong. You may not be old enough or mature enough actually to *get* married yet, but you're old enough to *think* about getting married. If you're old enough to date, then you're old enough to think about marriage. Because after all, why are you dating? It's so easy to date just for fun...because let's be honest, having a boyfriend can be a lot of fun. But you should be dating in order to get to know him better. Because it's only after you know him well that can you decide if this is someone you could (or should) marry someday.

So think about your boyfriend. If you married him, would you be marrying in the Lord?

“Marrying in the Lord.” That's a phrase that you've probably heard quite a bit. Of course, it means that you marry a fellow believer. Someone who worships the same God and Lord as you do. 2 Corinthians 6:14 reminds us to be “...not unequally yoked together with unbelievers...” But what exactly does that mean? I'm going to tell you right now that marrying in the Lord doesn't just mean that you marry someone that belongs to a denomination with the right initials. Or that you marry someone who is willing to join your denomination. It goes much deeper than that.

You should be dating someone who can and will become a godly husband and father. He will need to step up to the plate as the spiritual leader in your home someday, as we read in 1 Corinthians 3:11: “...the head of the woman is the man...” You and your children will need to rely on him for spiritual guidance and support. I don't mean that he needs to have the maturity and wisdom of a 40-year-old father right now, today. But you should see signs that he could someday fill that position, and he should be showing a desire and willingness to grow into that role.

So how in the world do you know if your boyfriend can be all that if you would marry him? Of course, none of us can predict the future. And maybe it's even a little bit scary to think that far ahead. But there are almost always signs, whether positive or negative, that will become clear if you ask yourself (and maybe your boyfriend) some questions. These aren't necessarily first-date questions. These are questions that you can and should be asking as your relationship progresses. Some of the “right” answers will depend on your (and his) situation. But if you don't like most of the answers, then you should probably ask yourself one more question: Why am I dating this person?

How was he raised? For what did he get disciplined? What was let go? Would he raise his children the same way, or would he do things slightly different than his parents did? Did his parents obey the command in Ephesians 6:4b to “bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”?

What is his dad like? How does he lead family devotions? How does his dad treat his mom? What kinds of things do he and his dad do together? Do they watch and play sports together? If so, that's fine. But do they discuss sermons too? If his dad is not a positive role model, does your boyfriend see and understand this?

What kind of relationship do his parents have? Remember, this is the marriage model he has observed for much of his life and may try to imitate.

How does he treat his siblings? Does he get along with them? If he has older siblings, are they a positive or negative influence on his thoughts and decisions? Do you like his siblings? If you get married, they will be part of your family for the rest of your life.

How does his family observe the Sabbath? Does he faithfully attend both services? What about between services...is the TV on? Or is the *Beacon Lights* open?

Is he someone you can respect? Can you see yourself submitting willingly to his leadership? Ephesians 5:22 doesn't say “sometimes” or “most of the time” when it instructs us to “...submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.”

How does he react when you bring up spiritual matters? Does it make him uncomfortable to talk about the sermon? Or can he discuss preservation of the saints just as willingly as he analyzes his most recent soccer game?

How does he handle disagreements? Does he argue loudly and get upset, or does he discuss things calmly?

Is he active in church life? Does he attend Bible Study and/or Young People's Society? This is important for his spiritual development, especially since he will someday be head of his home.

Is he good-looking? Oh, wait, that doesn't really matter. If you're attracted to his personality, then his outward appearance automatically becomes attractive to you as well, doesn't it?

Does he listen to and willingly take advice from those older and wiser than he? Or does he always have all the

answers? Proverbs 1:7 reminds us that “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

What kind of work ethic does he have? How does he speak about his employer? Laziness is not cool, and someday it will mean that you might not be able to afford groceries or pay the tuition bill. 1 Timothy 5:8: “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” As well, is he a good steward of his money, or does he spend it on frivolous things? Does he give to the church? Is he willing to support you so that you can someday stay home with your children?

Does he listen to what you have to say? Or does he brush it off as unimportant? Does he treat you the same when you're alone together as he does in front of his friends, or does he act “too cool” and put you down when his guy friends are around?

Does he make you want to be a better person? Does he encourage you to grow in your relationship with Jesus Christ?

Do you like him for who he is right now? Of course, we all grow, learn, and change as we mature. But if you think you can change someone's personality after you get married, you're dreaming.

Does he respect your body and your desire to remain pure? Or does he push to make your relationship more physical than you want it to be?

For that matter, are you concerned about remaining pure? The temptations are ever-present and very real, aren't they? 1 Corinthians 6:18 says to “Flee fornication.” That doesn't just mean walk around it, but run away from it. So many things could be said here, but the best advice I can give you is to use common sense. Don't hang out in your bedroom with the door closed. Go on dates in public places. Don't send texts with double meanings. Go on double-dates with your friends, or hang out in group settings. Keep your jokes clean. Don't wear shirts that give your boyfriend an eyeful. Don't sit in a car in the corner of a dark parking lot to “talk”. Pray regularly with your boyfriend. Before, during, or after your date...or all three would be fine too! It makes it a whole lot more difficult to “go too far” if you know you're going to pray together at the end of the night.

So, back to all these questions you're asking yourself. The point of these questions is to encourage you to look beyond how much fun you've been having with your boyfriend on the weekends. There's nothing wrong with having fun together. In fact, if you don't have fun together, then you should seriously consider breaking up with him. But think about what kind of man he will mature into. Think about building a life, a home, a family together. A marriage is much more than a series of Friday nights. If you cannot imagine spending a lifetime

together, or you do not think your boyfriend will ever grow to be a spiritual leader, then by all means end your relationship now. The longer you wait, the harder it will be to have that conversation.

If you like the answers to a lot of those questions, and all signs point to your boyfriend's growing into a godly father and husband, then we have a few more things to talk about. I was in your shoes not all that long ago, so hopefully you don't mind if I pass along a few words of advice. Not because I know it all, but because I care about you and your relationship.

Be yourself. Don't hide your true personality. Not only is this living a lie, but it's not fair to your boyfriend. Be honest and open. If he doesn't like you for who you are, then he's not someone you'd want to marry anyway.

Laugh together. Enjoy your time together! But ask the hard questions and have the serious talks too. This is your opportunity to get to know each other. Take advantage of it.

Be realistic in your expectations. Romance doesn't have to be expensive, and guys don't always remember important dates. Extend grace, offer to plan the outing once in awhile, and remind your boyfriend that a five dollar pizza eaten at the beach together is wonderful!

Don't ditch your girlfriends. Yes, it's important to spend time with your boyfriend, getting to know each other. But time apart is healthy too. As well, ask your girlfriends their opinion about your boyfriend. I don't mean you should "kiss and tell" or gossip, but you can ask your friends for their honest opinion about your relationship. Good, true friends usually have solid insight and advice.

If texting, Instagramming, tweeting, and posting Facebook statuses are the primary ways you communicate with each other, then you need to schedule a real date that doesn't involve any sort of screen. Face-to-face communication is vital to any relationship. Marriage means you'll spend a lot of time together, and hiding behind your keyboard is no way to prepare for that. Fifty or sixty years is a long time to live with someone whom you can't look in the eye.

Pray. Pray with your boyfriend, and pray for your boyfriend. Pray for guidance in your relationship. Ask God to help you remain chaste. Pray that God will form and shape each of you into a godly spouse.

Enjoy this time in your life. Marriage is a good and beautiful thing, but don't wish away these months or years of dating. Almost every girl daydreams about getting swept off her feet, but the reality is that it takes time to get to know someone.

Talk to your parents. And to his parents. Tell them where you went on your date and what you did. Or go out for dinner as a couple, but then have dessert and play cards with Dad and Mom. Ask your mom how she knew that your dad was “the one”. Make sure your boyfriend can look your dad in the eye. Don't forget that Dad and Mom dated too. Your parents faced the same issues, temptations, and questions that you are facing right now, so believe it or not, they really do “get it.”

Don't expect perfection. I gave you a list of questions as a starting point. But those questions are not designed to help you find a perfect guy. They're supposed to help you decide if the guy you're with is the perfect guy *for you*. If you dump your knight the first time you see a crack in his armor, you'll probably find something wrong with the next guy too. And the next one.

Be careful about dropping the L word. Just because he says it doesn't mean you have to say it back if you're not ready. True love is not that warm fuzzy feeling you get when you hold hands for the first time. Nor is true love portrayed by anything that comes out of Hollywood or Nashville. Love is a choice and a commitment.

Remember that your identity is found in Christ. Your worth does not depend on your boyfriend's remembering to text you, and your value does not rest on how many dates it took to get your first kiss. You are a sinner saved by grace, fearfully and wonderfully made in his image...and as such, are a beloved child of God.

I sincerely hope that he's “the one”, and I'm praying that God will guide your relationship.

Your friend,

Lisa