**Intentional Relationships: Online Dating**

**QUESTION:**

*I am 59, a widow of 5 years, married for 23. A few weeks ago, I signed up on a Christian online dating site in hopes of starting to date again and getting married one day. I have had a few men locally interested, but they weren't suitable for me.  I am not feeling comfortable with what I am doing. I am having a hard time discerning what a red flag might be. I think my lack of experience has gotten my focus off the real issues, but what is the real issue other than a man who loves Jesus with all his heart. For instance, I have one interested gentleman who seems too focused on what he calls "chemistry." I am confused, to say the least.  And what about talking to several men at once.  Does that make me deceitful?  I feel like I'm cheating. Maybe I was supposed only to get to know one man at a time, make a decision and move on to the next? Please help!*

Thanks for your honesty, including fears and apprehensions regarding online dating. Many feel the same. Please know that we can meet someone special anywhere and at any time. It's never where we meet someone but our motives behind meeting them. While I see you have pure motives for wanting to date a Christian guy in the hopes of getting married again, you are correct in your concerns with the process.

Online dating sites can be difficult. If you've done it, then you already know. There are horror stories of creeps, weirdos, and people who lie about their age, body description, or what they do for a living. Then some say they are Christian, but their belief stops at their bio. There are also the no-shows, no-responses, ghosters, or those desperate to marry you after a five-minute phone call. We can't forget those who cry on the first date, gush about their thirty cats, or tell you everything they have ever done. Should we go on?

On a more positive note, online dating has come a long way and appears to work for many. And there are some circumstances where it might be the only option, especially when you don't live in a major city with large churches and Christian singles ministries. So, if you want to date online, we suggest you first build an Intentional Friendship™, where you take the extra time to build a deep friendship before you get romantically involved. Be sure to get a copy of our study, Intentional Relationships for Singles, to read more, including 650 questions to help you get to know someone better.

**• Do your homework on these dating sites.** Anyone can say they are Christian. Take the extra time to pray and be sure this is what God is telling you to do. Make sure when they state they are "Christian," they are one in the spiritual sense and not just some cultural definition. You will want to be equally yoked. We talk more about this in Chapter 11.

**• Present yourself truthfully.** Write the truth in your bio and use current pictures of yourself. It's OK to put your best foot forward, but using the social media filters should not make you look like someone else. Don't you want people you are meeting, to be honest with you? Trust God for the right connection.

**• Be aware of spammers and those trying to get money from you.** People will say anything when you appear needy. They will say or text all the right things you want to hear and begin asking more and more of you. They are usually characterized by drama and stories of heartbreak only you can rescue them from.

**• Have an online coaching team.** These people you trust and bring into your dating life to give you their opinions and watch out for you. Our judgment can be off when we have that "in love" feeling. Our friends are not affected similarly and can be much more objective. However, this requires total transparency. When we are not honest with others, we will not get helpful feedback from them.

**• Check and see if there is some kind of identity verification.** We live in a world where married people and deceptive people are on dating sites. It's good to do your Google searches, view their social media pages, and do background checks to help you better understand before starting that friendship.

**• Go slow to build trust and a foundation.** Remember, even though you are using a dating site, the goal is to build an Intentional Friendship first. You are the one in charge of how fast you go. If this is going to be the person you may want to spend the rest of your life with, you will not regret taking the time to get to know them.

**• Start with text or phone.** Put in some boundaries. Don't text or phone daily, but try to get as much information as possible before meeting them. Go ahead and ask some questions, starting on page 155 of our study, before you meet in person. You might even suggest they read this chapter with you, asking you the questions too. You can decide what questions are important to you before you meet.

Note: We have a new stand-alone book on "Intentional Friendship," including the 650 questions.

**• Meet in a public place.** It's best to drive yourself to the public place you are meeting. This may be called "online dating" by our culture, but for a Christian, it should be about building a friendship first with no dating in mind. If you go to the most expensive restaurant in town, you may be communicating something about the seriousness of your friendship. Linen tablecloths, candlelight, and roses do not communicate "Let's be friends first."

**• Consider bringing a friend along or doing a group activity with them.** This is a personal choice, but involving others when you first meet someone is not a bad idea. You might even have your first meeting at church or an event with friends. It's important to involve those we trust for accountability and support.

**• Ladies, ensure someone knows where you are and whom you are meeting.** It's sad that you would need to do this, but there are situations where women's security has been compromised by men who were not safe. Have a plan to call someone during your time together. You might even have a code word you can tell your friend in case you feel there is a security issue.

**• Connect with those who are local whenever possible.** It helps you see their life in person, rather than having it communicated to you over the phone, text, or video chat. You can visit their church, come along on group activities, see them at work, meet their friends and family, and find out about them through their life. If they are not local, be sure you have taken plenty of time to get to know them and have started an Intentional Friendship. When and if you have to travel to see them, stay at a hotel.

Note: If the thought of telling someone how you met bothers you, then perhaps that is God telling you the way you're connecting is not right for you.

"*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight*." Proverbs 3:5-6

To learn more about Intentional Friendship™ and dating, order your copy of Intentional Relationships for Singles 12-week Bible study. This study covers topics on why our relationships fail, identity, gender differences, boundaries, conflict, blind spots, friendship (in all our relationships—family, work, church, neighbors, friends) but also intentional friendship, including red, yellow, and green flags, intentional dating, and engagement.