

## Twelve Mistakes a Catholic Makes in looking for a Mate.

1. We are both devout Catholics; we are in love; it has to work.

Don't assume that because he goes to Mass every Sunday, and prays the rosary every day and wants to have the perfect number of children that he is the perfect match for you. Remember "Grace builds on nature." If you enjoy travel, adventure and meeting people while he loves to sit around at home with the same two friends he has had since kindergarten, all the rosaries in the world are not going to make that conflict go away.

There is no closer bond than a spiritual bond, and hopefully you will share that with your future spouse. But, just like a highly romantic relationship, an intense spiritual experience, or a purely subjective spiritual experience with someone can mask serious psychological problems. You may look up to his great love of Jesus, but that does not mean he has overcome his addictive personality or lack of maturity.

Women, do not think that because of your spiritual love for him that you can fix him. Men do change when they fall in love. If you hold him to a high standard and you have captivated his heart enough, he may even find the will power to change for you. But, if he hasn't started changing in the first few months of his pursuit of you, it is not going to happen. And even then you have to be careful to make sure it is true change and not an act he is just putting on for you.

Men, do not expect that a disordered neediness, vanity or clinging behavior will go away once you have committed to marriage. She may be the most beautiful woman you have ever seen, but the drama gets old very quickly.

You will never find a perfect person but you need to make sure you can live with the flaws that they do have, there is no guarantee they will grow out of them.

John Paul the Great in his book "Love and Responsibility" spells out very accurately the discernment that must happen prior to marriage. You must first assess that your own feelings are they sincerely based on reality. Am I in love with this person as she or he truly is? Or am I in love with a fictional person whom I have constructed in my mind? Secondly, you must assess if that person has done the same for you, and if that person has the moral character to make a true self-gift. Marriage is built on sacrificial love. Of course you will spend the rest of your married lives learning how to do this, but it must have started in a substantial way prior to marriage. If that does not exist, your spiritual love for each other will soon disappear. Or, you may find yourself married to someone who does not have the ability to return your love in any substantial way.

2. Having sexual contact before marriage.

Nothing is more dangerous for the proper assessment of your future spouse than sexual contact; you do not want your hormones making the most important decision of your life. The gratification of the sexual act can be so intense it can easily obscure reason. The surge of pleasure and the feelings of emotional bonding that occur with even minimal

sexual contact can cover up a range of issues that need to be addressed. The mind and the will, under these conditions, look for justifications for sex since sexual gratification has deceptively taken on the guise of an all-satisfying good, masquerading as true love.

Once this emotional bond is formed, it becomes quite difficult to make a mature assessment and decision about the quality of the relationship, and it can prolong a relationship that otherwise would have naturally ended. It can take up to seven years for the emotional bond that simply comes from having intercourse with someone to go away and it is a very frightening revelation when five years into your marriage you find out that your marriage is mostly held together by emotions coming from a physical bond - and that there is not much hope for anything else.

Sex before marriage also corrupts the love of compatible couples that might otherwise have had a very happy and successful marriage. Love is based on friendship, and because of the selfishness that is always a part of sex between people who have not made a permanent bond of commitment, pre-marital sex diminishes the ability of a dating couple to build that friendship. If you are serious about having a relationship built on love rather than on a your own desire for emotional and physical pleasure, you will take seriously the boundaries that need to be put in place. Any physical contact that is meant to inspire sexual passion is harmful to your relationship. It inserts a selfish desire where you should be building a sacrificial love. In a dating relationship you must be careful not to dress or touch someone in a way meant to excite their sexual desires.

Because of the culture we live in you will have to work hard to preserve the purity of your love. As surely as not having sex with someone keeps you from having a baby, never being in a room alone with someone you are dating, or alone for any extended time in a car will keep you from inappropriate sexual contact. Extended periods of time alone fosters a sense of intimacy that can lead to physical intimacy in even the best intentioned people. Your desire to be alone with each other is normal, but even if you *do not* have sexual contact, spending long times alone together can easily degenerate into a selfish desire for emotional pleasure, where you put your own emotional desires above the good of the other person, or your other responsibilities. Perhaps he needs to be with his family that weekend, perhaps you need some serious study time or spend some time with your friends, but now both of you are neglecting real responsibilities just so you can have the emotional gratification of being with each other.

The two of you need to get to know each other, but you learn nothing of real importance about a person by making out or studying together in a room by yourselves. You get to know someone by doing things together. Make him plan the date, and a movie alone on a couch is not a very creative date. If he cannot figure out creative things for the two of you to do while you are dating, imagine how less interesting he is going to be after you are married. And if she is no fun to do things with now, imagine what married life will be with her.

You will learn about each other best by being together around other people. In this way you can more easily observe someone's true actions and come to know and love them as they truly are. You can always go to a restaurant or take a walk in a park for more private conversations.

3. Becoming emotionally involved with someone of the opposite sex that you have no intention of marrying.

In this type of a relationship you have a friend who you have lunch with, do things with - he fixes your flat or she helps you decorate for Christmas - but you have no real intention to move toward marriage. The difficulty here is that you have another person's heart held captive who may be actually interested in you for marriage and at the same time you have lost a major motivating force in forming possible marital relationships, i.e. the need for opposite sex attention and comfort. These relationships should always be broken off for the benefit of both parties. It is fine to have acquaintances of the opposite sex, but real friends are best kept within the same sex. They keep you honest, and they don't have to end when you get married.

Another problem that frequently occurs are those who marry someone just because they have hung around together for a few years. Marriage should be more of a positive choice than a default fall back option.

4. Allowing your relationship to exclude other people.

So, you finally meet the right girl, she seems everything you want in a woman. As Bruce Springsteen once said, "You like the same music, you like the same bands, you like the same clothes." Why not hang out with her every moment of the week? She makes your heart sing and besides, she needs help with her homework.

No one likes to be married to someone who has an emotional co-dependency, and if they do, there are serious control or jealousy issues. Furthermore, you do not want to marry someone who can only be happy when you are around because eventually a time will come when your presence fails to make him or her happy. Marriage is more like two figure skaters than two people clinging to each other in the middle of the ice rink. You want to marry someone who can stand on his or her own two feet.

Furthermore, we all need same sex friendships in order to mature and develop. Be very careful about dating someone who does not seem to have a social circle outside you or makes unreasonable demands to limit your own time with family and friends. Friends and family are a normal part of a functioning human person, is it right to expect your girl friend or boy friend to drop all bonds of friendship simply to be with you? If he calls you Thursday night for something on Friday, it would be irresponsible to drop all your other engagements just for him. Tell him that you appreciate the offer, but you're busy.

There is also the danger of a real unhealthy emotional addiction and an unreasonable expectation of what marriage will be. Married people do not normally spend a lot of time during the day alone in each other's company. They have jobs and children to take care of. Dating should be just that, going out on dates - not living in each other's arms.

An even worse scenario is treating your boy friend or girl friend as your exclusive property, demanding that they give their affection only to you. Just because you have had a number of dates with a girl or boy does not mean that he or she can't go out with someone else. Going steady is a modern phenomenon that, while perhaps unavoidable, is really a hybrid between dating and engagement. In a perfect world only an engagement

would limit someone from dating someone else. But even after you have reached a point of “going steady” (which is in effect a quasi engagement) a person should feel free to be with his friends and family as he or she desires. If he gets jealous because you are having fun outside his company, or even with another man, simply point to your hand and tell him, “I see no ring on my finger.”

5. Setting the wrong bar too high and the right bar too low.

What are you looking for in a spouse? We usually set the bar very high in things like looks, charisma, charm, intelligence, and set the bar too low on character. A girl who finds herself with a handsome exciting boy will put up with a lot of disrespect while a boy with an attractive girl will easily overlook large character flaws. Do not be afraid to date someone a little less exciting or attractive if you can see in them an easy going nature, integrity, a sensitive heart, and a strong work ethic. After a few years of marriage it is the deeper moral character of a person that you will fall most in love with.

Think of the perfect person for you, not their hair color and music tastes, but their character, their personality. Now, try to be the person that person would be interested in. Happily growing your own virtue is the best way to attract a person of caliber. If you study well, work hard, take time to pray, have control of your passions, are loyal to your friends, are fun loving and light hearted, chances are very good that you will attract someone with those qualities.

6. Not talking about how to raise children.

This is crucial if you are marrying a non-Catholic. Women especially need to be careful as men can suddenly find a piety they never had and insist that the children be raised in their own religion. It can be uncomfortable talking about religion, and especially how to raise the children – still it is a big mistake to think that bridge can be crossed at the baptism of your first child. To be married in the Catholic Church you promise to raise the children Catholic. This must be very clear at the beginning of the relationship.

7. Overlooking the other’s family of origin and neglecting your own family.

Be careful with anyone who has an unusual relationship with their parents. Daughters who are angry and blame their father and men who cannot disengage from their mother make very difficult marriage partners. People can be different than their parents, but you will want to take a close look at any unsettling character flaw that you see in someone’s parents to make sure it is not in them.

You also want to trust the opinion of your own family. Normally your family consists of the people who know you and love you the most. Why not solicit their opinion early in the process?

8. Thinking that you need to be married in order to be happy.

There is nothing wrong with wishing to be married, and longing for the day when you will meet the right person. However, it shows a lack of maturity to have your life centered on finding a steady boy or girl friend and not trusting in God. You need to be happy with your own life as it is if you are going to be able to make someone else happy. Furthermore, most people can instinctively sense someone who is choosing them more for the desire they have to be married than out of love for them - which explains why, contrary to their best efforts, people in this mode sometimes take a long time to get married.

9. Dating indiscriminately.

You date in order to find a mate. No matter how attractive they may be or how many shivers they send up your spine, do not waste your time dating someone who you know will not be a good mother or father for your children—in other words, someone that you cannot see yourself married to. To date someone just for his or her company, to keep you from being alone, or worse yet to provide for some physical pleasure, is to use someone. Avoid dating non-Catholics, but, it is more important to marry someone of good moral character and who has a positive view of the Catholic faith than a Catholic who dismisses his or own faith.

10. Expecting too much out of a relationship.

You are not going to find that perfect someone who fulfills every one of your needs, only God can give you all the happiness that you need. As St. Augustine said, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in thee." If you think you have found that perfect person, there is something seriously wrong with either your heart or your brain, for you either have a very small heart, or you are delusional and not living in the reality of who you are dating.

11. Poor timing.

Like all organic things in life a dating relationship has a certain time line. A good rule of thumb is that it should take no more than one year to decide if a person is right for you followed by a six month to one year engagement. (And you can usually tell if someone is *wrong* for you much quicker.) But that timing is not for every one. The important thing is that you do not push things and that when the time comes you do not drag your feet.

Along these lines is dating before you are ready to marry. You do not want to be in a tight relationship with someone who is five years away from a possible marriage. What happens if after four years of exclusive dating he or she suddenly decides you are the wrong person? It is quite selfish to put someone on hold and expect them to wait for you, and you are taking a big risk waiting for someone to come around. True love means I prefer you to any limited personal goal that I might have. If he is not ready to give you his heart to you in an engagement, it means that no matter how fond he is of you, he still prefers his own individual life to one shared with you. On the other side of the coin, if you

do not see yourself able to be engaged within a year it is irresponsible of you to capture someone's heart and exclusive affection. If you are not ready to settle down, then don't settle into someone else's heart.

## 12. Not guarding your heart.

You do not want to use emotional criteria as the only method in choosing someone to date. It is not that hard to be emotionally attracted to a person, "to be in love." So, while it is easy to "be in love" with a person, that does not necessarily mean they have the required moral character for you to marry, even if you like their personality. While you are getting to know the person you have to answer serious questions. Does this person take their faith seriously? Is he moral? Is he struggling to live chastely? If he is not Catholic, does he respect my religion? Do I agree with the main points of his perspective on life? These questions cannot be put off but must be answered very early, before you begin to let your heart go. Once you give your heart away it will be difficult to look past the future union that you desire and you may easily lose the ability to honestly answer these questions.

Just because you have gone on a few dates does not mean that you should unload your whole heart. Your feelings are important, and sharing feelings is a necessity in any friendship. But emotional intimacy is not to be given indiscriminately to everyone. Your deepest darkest secrets should be just that, deep secrets. Share them only when you expect the relationship to last forever.

On the other hand, before you get too serious with someone, you owe him or her the broad strokes of your sexual history or any serious current or past flaws in your character. It can be a simple conversation and start with a "just so you know. . ." and finish in a few sentences. If he or she wants more details, they will ask, and then you can feel free to give what little or more information you wish. You should then expect the same from him or her.

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