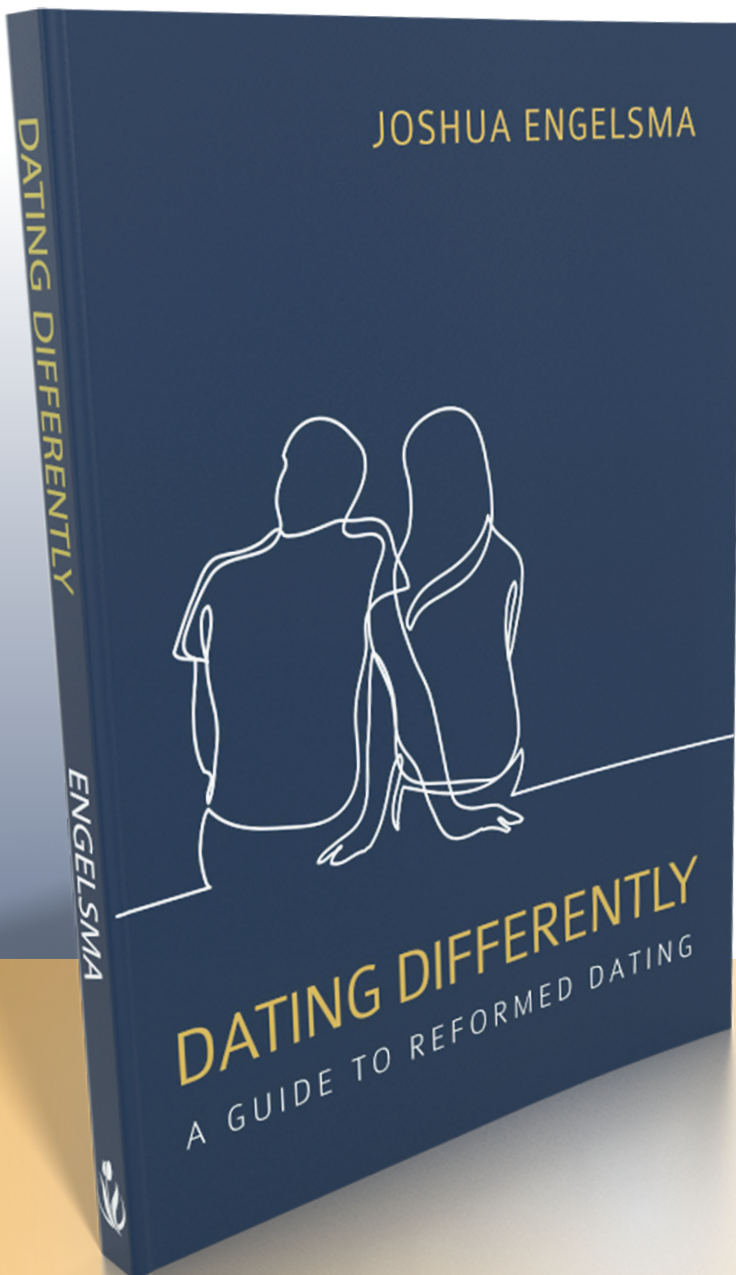




Dating Differently: A Guide to Reformed Dating

Joshua Engelsma. Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2019. Paperback. 160 pages. \$16.95. rfpa.org



Some years ago, in the 1990s, a book appeared entitled *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*. It was part of the so-called purity movement, which advocated that young people remain sexually pure and virgin before marriage. The book was written by a Christian young man, Joshua Harris, who rightly pointed out the many dangers and temptations of dating as practiced today, and the lasting scars it produced in the lives of many persons. So, in his view, it was best not to date at all. The book soon became a best seller. Even the secular world took note of it. As was to be expected, it was strongly criticized. Harris, under pressure, took back many of his good points in the book. Sadder still, after serving as a Christian pastor for some years, he decided last year to divorce his wife, leave his church, and, saddest of all, declare he was no longer a Christian. He forsook the faith and has gone so far as to embrace the anti-Christian agenda of the LGBT movement.

I am glad that another Joshua has come forward to offer a better approach to dating in a wonderful new book on the subject. Rev. Joshua Engelsma, a young pastor in the Protestant Reformed churches, has written a small paperback book entitled *Dating Differently*. Its subtitle is *A Guide to Reformed Dating*. I wonder if that could have been better stated as "A Guide to Biblical Dating," or perhaps "A Guide to Christian Dating." For, though it is written from a Reformed point

of view, what the book sets forth would certainly also be most fitting for Baptists or Lutherans—yes, Christians of all stripes—to heed. Even non-Christians would benefit from it. That said, this is indeed a very good book, and I highly recommend it for the following reasons (not listed in the order of their importance):

It is a needed book. Our youth and singles live in a secular and sex-crazed culture, in which they cannot avoid hearing and seeing the ungodly lifestyles and conduct of the vast majority of persons their age—also as it pertains to relationships between the sexes. Christian youth contemplating dating should know clearly how it should be done in a manner pleasing to their Lord.

It is a succinct and readable book. It is not a long, detailed, or academic work—which young persons would quickly look at and put aside. A young person could read a chapter a day and benefit from it. Or it could be used as a discussion guide for a young people's or young adult group. The author probably thought of that possibility, because he has discussion questions at the end of each chapter.

It is a practical book. Yes, it does contain theology. But every chapter is brought down to earth, and its ideas are set forth clearly. The chapter headings reveal its practicality, with the questions they cover, such as "When Should I Start?"; "Who's the One?"; "What's There to Do on Dates?"; "What's the Place of My Parents and Others?"; "What About Sex?"; "What If I Am Single All My Life?"; "When Do I Get Married?" As the author deals with these issues, he feels free at times to relate his own experience as a young man, including some of his misjudgments. He relates to youth in their struggles and temptations.

It is a well-organized book.

The author begins with the challenge and purpose of dating—which is to find a suitable marriage partner, not just to have fun. He lays an important foundation by explaining the institution of marriage as God ordained it. And in all of his chapters, he divides his subject with key subpoints. For example, in his chapter "Who's the One?," dealing with whom a person should choose to date, he lays out three principles. It should be a person of the opposite sex (obvious to us, but necessary to say these days); a true believer or child of God; and a spiritually mature person—which he explains both as to the male and female persons involved.

It emphasizes truths important especially for our times. These include the permanence of marriage over against the prevalent and casual acceptance of divorce; the need for purity in dating and avoidance of sex before marriage; the importance of roles—the man to be a good leader, the woman to be a good supporter; the need to include parents in a young person's dating and engagement decisions. All these matters are well explained. No doubt they will also incur some negative reaction. But they need to be considered and understood.

It is a thoroughly biblical book. This is, of course, the most important quality of the book, as it is for any book. The author seeks to ground his ideas in Scripture—which he refers to throughout. He wisely makes clear what Scripture makes clear, even as he offers suggestions which derive from godly experience. For instance, in his chapter "What's There to Do on Dates?," he cites many activities couples can do which offer a variety of wholesome enjoyment, and do not turn dates into unwholesome sexual escapades.

The Bible is not a handbook on dating. Yet it gives God's children principles to guide them in their sexual relationships. And by giving us wise and godly parents, friends, and teachers, God also provides good counsel for younger persons in all the areas of their lives, including dating.

It is a book for youth first, but not only for them. Yes, its focus is on dating, which is generally a practice of younger persons. But parents and singles of all ages will find a lot of good material in this book. The fact that the author decided to include a chapter on singleness—"What If I'm Single All My Life?"—was a good choice, as this is often a difficult and sensitive matter which some of God's children must deal with.

In conclusion, I wish to thank Rev. Engelsma for a fine book. I would encourage all parents and youth to get this book, including those who may not fully agree with everything it says. Even if you are a grandparent, as I am, you could do much spiritual good by obtaining this paperback for your grandchildren of dating age (or for their parents to pass on to their children). For what is more important than Christian marriages for God's covenant children for their own happiness, but even more that will "serve their ultimate purpose: the glory of our God in the demonstration of the unity of the Bridegroom and his Bride." (p. 147 of book).

This book can be purchased at rfpa.org, or by calling Reformed Free Publishing Association at (616) 457-5970.

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