

Jacky Engel asks whether single Christian doctors should embrace twenty-first century dating techniques



Meeting DR. RIGHT

The biggest danger of speed and internet dating is idolising the notion of being in a relationship

'Most of us continue to survive because we're convinced that somewhere along the line, with grit and determination and perseverance, we will end up in some magical union with somebody. It's a fallacy, of course, but it's a form of religion...'¹

I've sometimes wondered how many years you can live through thinking that sooner or later you will meet your life partner. As a youngster you assume 'it' will happen, either at university or somewhere along the way. Then, as you get older, you realise you could easily go another ten years waiting for 'it' to arrive. As a Christian woman, it's tempting to think that being single is caused by the lack of single men in the church and the limited circles from which to choose, compared to our non-Christian girlfriends. But it is a bit more complex than that.

Statistics do indicate that things are hardest for Christian women. At least a quarter of adult church attendees are single women, whilst single men make up only a tenth.² However, it's not just Christian women finding it difficult to meet a partner. The 2001 and 2002 censuses showed that 30 percent and rising of all adults remain single, with up to 51 percent of Londoners going it alone.³ Western society as a whole is experiencing a change in the way our relational futures develop.

So, as a twenty-first century single Christian doctor who wants to meet that someone special, what are your options?

The proactive approach

The number of online dating facilitators available for Christians mirrors the online and speed dating options that have developed for non-Christians over the last

Interview with Dating Agency Friends First

Katharine, why did you set up Friends First?

I heard theologian Elaine Storkey challenge my church to do something for single people. And, I must say, the church in general has been incredibly supportive!

What's the different between Friends First and an online dating agency?

We offer a much more personalised service. Contacting and meeting people you don't know can be nerve-racking. We help, encourage and support people and that leads to a greater success rate than online agencies.

Aren't a lot of your clients sad, lonely and desperate?!

Very few! Most are just lovely people who for some reasons haven't met Mr or Miss Right. We also have lots of older clients, from 40 to 85!

What about doctors and nurses?

Loads of nurses, and a good number of doctors though many get snapped up quickly! See Charles and Andrea's story on our website. If you really are too busy to write any initial emails to the contacts you get from us, we do have a bespoke service as

decade. They can be a positive solution to a very real problem. With internet based dating, a single Christian unable to find love in a church setting can expand his or her pool of Christians with whom to develop friendships. Claire found her husband this way:

First of all I tried speed-dating – but only once! It proved a dismal experience with everyone trying to make an impression, asking bizarre questions and giving ridiculous replies. I really couldn't find out about anyone's personality or interests. Writing a personal advert proved more inspiring. It was a good way to date men from different professions. Of course you only meet one person at a time with adverts, and I stumbled across the perfect compromise solution when I heard about singles dinners. It was much more natural than speed-dating and at the very first dinner I met my husband-to-be. The rest, as they say, is history!

Breeding discontent?

Many Christians agree with Claire: twenty-first dating techniques are perfectly compatible with contemporary Christianity and they can produce lasting relationships for some! But others have strong reservations:

How am I judging the guy sat opposite me for three minutes? Paul tells Timothy that young men must treat young women as they would their sisters, and I'm sure the opposite applies!⁴ The atmosphere of many singles events doesn't help us in this! Furthermore, proactively pursuing a relationship in this way may breed discontentment. I am struck by theologian John Piper's words: 'God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him'.⁵ To me the biggest danger of speed and internet dating is idolising the notion of being in a relationship. (Anonymous junior)

Smug marrieds – happy-ever-after?

Simply being married does not in itself guarantee a happy-ever-after for Christian juniors. Every singleton should ponder the question: 'Apart from sex, what are my motives for dating and wanting to be married?' What are our preconceptions about married life? Do we think, for instance, that our sexual struggles will be over once we're married? Is there one most important factor in a Christian marriage? Anna shares her story:

Sexual purity as a Christian junior is often really tough. The amount of time you spend away from Christian contacts can be a problem. You are forced into close relationships with your medical peers, working, eating and

resting together. Tiredness and the loneliness of shift work can be overwhelming. And it's all too easy to turn admiration for a colleague's clinical skills into romantic attachment. As an SHO I watched two of my Christian house officers drift away from God via such affairs with non-Christian senior colleagues.

There is no question that having a romantic relationship with a fellow believer can help you through the junior doctor years, but that alone is no guarantee of a happy-ever-after...Despite being a smug married myself, I too managed to fall for a non-Christian colleague. In the end, after a really painful time, only the remnants of my underlying faith brought me back to a right relationship with my husband and with God. Looking back, it may not have happened at all had I spent more time reading God's word, praying, and concentrating on my marriage. Instead, I'd let doctoring take first place in my life. So, whatever your marital status, do keep your relationship with God as your number one priority.

Godly guidance

At the end of the day, no matter whether we chose traditional or internet dates, the most important ingredient in all Christian relationships should be God. Medically qualified pastor Jason Roach suggests some helpful principles:

- **Be content in Christ** – it's hard but aim to learn the secret of being content in any and every situation.⁶
- **Look for character** – 'charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.'⁷ Don't value appearances above anything else.
- **Cultivate friendship** – deepen relationships in ways that do not bypass the friendship stage. This honours God and protects us from premature emotional commitment.⁸
- **Stay as two of a crowd** – we need the encouragement and accountability of other Christians. Try not to let a fledgling relationship crowd out others.⁹
- **Seek God's help** – all human relationships have good times and bad ones. Recognising God's sovereignty and blessing in our current situation and praying to him will sustain us.¹⁰

Jacky Engel is CMF Research and Publications Assistant

well to do the initial leg work for you.

Don't people get judged by their looks?

No because we don't post pictures on our site. So, actually, people are judged less quickly by their looks than when meeting in other walks of life.

What do you call a success?

We call success when two people, who wouldn't otherwise have met, become friends. Many people don't tell us when they've made new friends, got engaged or married; but, so far we've had at least

40 couples tie the knot.

And have you met Mr Right via the web?

Indirectly! I met my fiance whilst exhibiting our separate companies. I tried to persuade him to join Friends First but he said he was far more interested in taking the boss out!

And what can you offer CMF members?

A 15 percent discount on our fees until the end of 2006.

Web-based Christian dating sites

- **Big Church**
www.bigchurch.com
- **Christian Café**
www.christiancafe.com
- **Christian Connection**
www.christianconnection.co.uk
- **Christian Cupid**
www.christiancupid.com
- **Christians UK**
www.christiansuk.com
- **Friends First**
www.friends1st.co.uk
- **Fusion 101**
www.fusion101.com
- **Link Christians**
www.linkchristians.co.uk
- **Relationships.com**
www.relationships.com
- **Seeking Christian.com**
www.seekingchristian.com
- **Single Christian Network**
www.singlec.com

Christian social events sites

- **Events for Christians**
www.eventsforchristians.co.uk
- **Foundating**
www.foundating.com
- **Southern Christian Solos**
www.geocities.com/southcs

What do you think to speed and online dating? Join the debate on the online CMF Juniors Forum at www.cmf.org.uk/forum

references

1. Interview with Morrissey, *Times* 2006; 20 May
2. Aune K. *Bridget Jones, Carrie Bradshaw and the Church*. www.damaris.org/content/content.php?type=5&id=62
3. www.statistics.gov.uk
4. 1 Timothy 5:1-2
5. www.desiringgod.org/library/sermons/02/110302.html
6. Philippians 4:12
7. Proverbs 31:30
8. Romans 12:10-11
9. Hebrews 10:25
10. Philippians 4:13