

BEFORE YOU SAY YES

*A Christian Dating Guide to Red Flags, Green Flags,
Discernment, Boundaries
and Choosing Wisely*



PASTOR RICHMOND KOBE

Faithful Path

Before You Say Yes

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Pastor Richmond Kobe

A Faithful Path publication

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Also by Pastor Richmond Kobe

- *Talk Before You Marry: A Christian Premarital Counselling Workbook*
- *Lead Before You're Ready: A Guide for New Church Leaders*
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Before You Begin

If You Are Not Sure You Belong to Christ

This book assumes that its reader is a Christian — someone who has trusted Christ and wants to date, and one day marry, in a way that honours him. But books do not check credentials at the door, and some readers will have picked this up because they are dating a Christian, or were raised in church, or are simply curious. Others have been Christians for years and are, if they are honest, not sure what that has ever meant.

If that is you, I want to say something before we go any further, because the rest of the book will not make full sense without it.

Christianity is not a set of relationship rules. It is not a moral standard for dating, or a way of ensuring a good marriage. It is the news that God, who made you, has come to you in Jesus Christ — that Jesus lived the life you have not lived, died the death your sin deserved, and rose from the dead so that everyone who trusts him is forgiven, made new, and brought into God's family forever. That is the foundation. Everything this book says about wisdom, boundaries, character and discernment stands on it, and nothing this book says can replace it.

Belonging to Christ is not the same as attending church, being raised by Christian parents, holding Christian values, or having a Christian partner. It is a matter of trust: turning from the life you have been running on your own terms, and resting your whole weight on Jesus — his death for your sins and his life for your righteousness. The Bible calls this repentance and faith, and it says that everyone who comes to Christ this way is received; nobody is received because they performed repentance perfectly (John 6:37; Romans 10:9–13).

If you are not sure whether you belong to Christ, do not pretend certainty merely to move past this page. You may continue reading, but understand that the book's vision of dating grows out of following Jesus, not merely adopting Christian relationship rules. Begin with one of the Gospels — Mark gives a concise account, while John gives sustained attention to who Jesus is. Speak with a trustworthy pastor or mature Christian and ask your questions plainly. And pray, in your own words, something like this: *God, I do not know if I belong to you. I want to. Show me who Jesus is, and help me trust him.* The prayer itself is not a formula that saves you; Christ does. Use it as an honest beginning, then keep looking to Jesus in Scripture, and speak with someone who can help you understand repentance and faith.

How to Use This Book

This is a workbook, not a lecture. Each chapter ends with a tool — a reflection, checklist or worksheet — and the tools are the point. Read a chapter, then do the tool, then move on. If you read the whole book in a weekend and do none of the tools, you will have some ideas. If you complete the tools honestly, you should have a clearer account of the evidence, the unanswered questions, and the decision now before you. The tools cannot guarantee an immediate decision — a legitimate answer is sometimes “not yet” — but they can make clear what you know, what you do not know, and what needs to happen next.

If you have an immediate concern about fear, coercion, sexual pressure, violence, stalking or family pressure, read *A Note on Safety* below and go directly to the relevant safety sections before beginning at Chapter 1.

Otherwise, read it in order the first time. The chapters build. Part One asks who you are before you date anyone; Part Two is about choosing; Part Three about dating with your eyes open; Part Four about discernment; Part Five about what to do once you have seen. Later chapters refer back to earlier tools constantly, and Part Five draws heavily on the observations and distinctions developed in Parts One to Four, so most readers will use it better after completing the earlier material.

Then use it out of order. Once you have read it through, the book is designed to be returned to. Someone deciding whether to end a relationship needs Chapters 16 to 19, not Chapter 1. Someone newly dating needs Chapters 4 to 7. Someone who has just been told no needs Chapters 16 and 20. The contents page and the cross-references inside each chapter will get you where you need to go.

The tools are reflections, not tests. None of them produces a score. None of them tells you whether your relationship passes. They are designed to help you see clearly — what you want, what you have observed, what you are afraid of, what you have not yet asked — so that you, with counsel and before God, can decide. Where a tool offers a set of options at the end, it is showing you the paths, not choosing one for you.

Most tools are done alone first. Several can then be compared with the person you are dating, and the instructions say which. Do not skip the “alone” step. Writing alone first makes it easier to notice your own response before it is shaped by the other person’s expectations. What you write is evidence of your present perception, not an infallible verdict; examine it alongside observed facts, Scripture and wise counsel. And completing a tool alone does not mean every answer must later be shown to the person you are dating. Follow the instructions attached to each tool, preserve appropriate privacy, and never share a worksheet with someone who may use it to pressure, punish or monitor you.

Write in the book, or copy the tools. The copyright page sets out what may be photocopied and for whom. If you are working through the book with a mentor or in a group, each person needs their own copy.

Use it with counsel. This book asks you, repeatedly, to bring what you are seeing to wise, independent people. Chapter 14 is about building that circle. The book is not a substitute for it, and it works far better alongside it.

It is written for single Christians who are dating or about to — and for the people who walk with them: parents, mentors, pastors, friends. It is not a premarital book. When a relationship reaches the threshold of engagement, the back matter will tell you how to recognise that, and *Talk Before You Marry* is the book for what comes next.

A word about the author’s voice. I write as a pastor, in the first person, from more than twenty years of sitting with people before, during and after their relationships. Where I say “in my experience,” that is what it is. Where I rely on research or specialist guidance, the

relevant source appears in the notes at the back; where I draw a conclusion from that material, I identify it as an inference, in the text or in the accompanying note, rather than presenting it as the source's own conclusion. Where Scripture speaks directly, I quote it; where I am applying a passage beyond its original context, I say that too, because you should be able to tell the difference between what God has said and what I think follows from it.

A Note on Safety

Most of this book is about the ordinary work of dating well — knowing yourself, choosing wisely, working on difficulties, deciding with clear eyes. It assumes two people of goodwill who can speak freely to each other. For most readers, that assumption holds.

For some it does not. If you are afraid of the person you are dating; if you have been threatened, hit, sexually pressured, followed, tracked, isolated from people who care about you, or controlled through money; if you have to manage your words and behaviour to avoid their reaction; or if you are being pressured into a relationship or a marriage by your family or community — then the ordinary advice in this book is not what you need first. Working on a relationship, slowing down, having an honest conversation, seeking joint counselling: every one of these assumes safety, and where safety is absent they can make things worse.

So before you go further, know where the safety guidance is. Chapter 6 names the patterns that are not ordinary difficulty. Chapter 10 addresses family and community coercion, including forced marriage. Chapter 19 covers ending a relationship safely, including digital safety and what to do if the other person will not accept the ending. *When to Seek Help* in the back matter gathers all of it, and *International Resources* lists specialist services by country.

If any of this describes you, go to those sections first. If you suspect monitoring, use a safer device where possible — one the other person has not accessed and cannot currently access. And if you are in immediate danger, stop reading. Contact the appropriate emergency service if it is safe to do so, or move to the safest available place.

This book is not a substitute for help. It will say that many times, and it means it.

Part One — Before You Start Dating

Chapter 1: Why Do You Want a Relationship?

Many dating books begin with the other person. What to look for. What to avoid. How to tell whether someone is right for you.

This book will get there. But it begins somewhere else, because before asking, “Is this person right for me?” you need to ask, “Why do I want a relationship now, and what am I hoping it will give me?”

That question sounds simple. It is not. Many of us have never answered it honestly, and some of us have never been asked. We assume the answer is obvious: because I am an adult, because I am lonely, because everyone else is married, because I want children, because God said it is not good for a person to be alone. Some of those reasons are good. Some are mixed. Some, if we are honest, are not reasons at all but pressures we have stopped noticing.

The reason this matters is practical, not philosophical. **The motives you bring into dating shape what you are willing to overlook.** A person who is dating because they are afraid of being alone may tolerate things a person at peace would not accept. A person who is dating to prove something to their family will often choose differently from a person who is dating to build a life with a companion. Your reasons shape your eyes. If you do not know your reasons, you do not yet know what your eyes may refuse to see.

So before we talk about red flags in someone else, we need to look honestly at what is driving you.

The desire itself is not the problem

Let me say this plainly, because some Christians have been made to feel guilty for wanting a relationship at all: the desire for companionship is not a spiritual weakness.

Genesis records God's assessment of Adam: "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18). In its immediate context, this leads to the creation of marriage. More broadly, it reminds us that human beings were made for relationship, not isolation. Marriage is one good expression of that design, though Scripture does not teach that every person must marry to live a complete and fruitful life.

Marriage, companionship and family are presented throughout Scripture as good gifts. Paul, who was himself unmarried and valued that freedom, still wrote that those who cannot exercise self-control "should marry," and that "it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1 Corinthians 7:9). The Bible does not treat the longing for a partner as something to be ashamed of.

So if you want a relationship, you are not in the wrong. The question is not whether the desire is acceptable. The question is what else is mixed in with it, and whether the mixture is leading you well.

Seven motives that can shape dating — and what each one does to your judgement

What follows is not a list of sins. It is a list of motives, most of which are ordinary and human, and most readers will recognise several of them at once. The purpose is not to make you feel condemned for having them, but to help you see them clearly enough that they stop steering you without your permission.

1. Loneliness

Loneliness is real, and it is heavier than people who are not lonely tend to understand. Long evenings. Holidays. Coming home to silence. Having good news and no one particular to tell.

Loneliness is a legitimate reason to want companionship. Psalm 68:6 describes God as one who "settles the solitary in a home." Marriage can be

one expression of that gift, but so can friendship, spiritual family and belonging within the church. Loneliness, though, makes a poor decision-maker. When you are lonely, presence feels like love. Attention feels like care. Someone simply *being there* can feel like an answer to prayer, whether or not they are good for you.

The test is not “Am I lonely?” — you may well be. Better questions are these: What do I value about this person besides the relief of not being alone? What evidence do I have of their character? If their attention became less intense, would I still believe this relationship was wise? If you cannot answer those questions with anything concrete, loneliness may be doing your choosing for you.

2. Pressure from church and family

In many Christian communities, singleness past a certain age is treated as a problem to be solved. Aunties ask. Pastors hint. Small-group leaders pair people off. Parents mention grandchildren. Some cultures apply this pressure openly; others apply it through silence and disappointment, which can be harder to bear.

This pressure is often well meant. It is also a common reason people say yes to someone they should have said no to. If you find yourself thinking, “At least my mother would stop asking,” or “At least I would not be the only single one in the group,” you are not choosing a spouse. You are trying to end a conversation.

Scripture does not tell you to marry in order to satisfy other people’s expectations. Paul went so far as to say that the unmarried person can be free of certain anxieties and undivided in devotion to the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:32–35). He did not say singleness was better for everyone; he said it was not a deficiency. If your community treats it as one, that is a weakness in the community’s teaching, not in you.

3. Sexual desire

Christians are often reluctant to name this one, which is odd, because the Bible names it without embarrassment. Sexual desire is a normal part of life for many adults, and Christians should be able to acknowledge it without embarrassment or shame. Scripture reserves sexual expression for marriage,

and for those who intend to honour God with their bodies, wanting to marry is one honest response to that.

Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 7:9 recognise sexual desire honestly, but they do not mean that strong desire is sufficient reason to marry a particular person. Marriage requires character, covenant and wisdom — not attraction alone.

Sexual desire has the same weakness as loneliness: it makes proximity feel like compatibility. Strong attraction can convince you that you have found something rare, when what you have found is something common — chemistry — dressed up as destiny. Chapter 4 deals with this at length. For now, it is enough to ask yourself honestly: if the physical attraction were removed, what would be left? If the answer is “not much,” you have learned something important, and it is better to learn it now.

4. Age anxiety

“I’m thirty-two.” “I’m thirty-eight.” “I’m forty-five and everyone my age is on their second marriage.” “If I want children I’m running out of time.”

Some of this is simply true, and it would be dishonest to pretend otherwise. Fertility has limits. Life stages pass. But anxiety about age has a specific effect on judgement: it lowers your standards while telling you that you are being *realistic*. It whispers that you cannot afford to be careful. It reframes patience as pride.

Age anxiety says: “This may be your last chance.” Wisdom answers: “A bad marriage is not a chance. It is a loss that lasts longer than singleness.” Many pastors and counsellors have sat with people who married in a hurry because time seemed to be running out, and who later found that the years they were trying to save had become years they wished they could recover.

5. Social comparison

Social media has made this worse, but it existed long before. Engagement photos. Wedding albums. Anniversary posts. A friend's baby. A younger sibling who married first.

Comparison does not tell you what you want. It tells you what other people appear to have. Those are different things. Some of the marriages you envy from the outside are struggling on the inside, and even the good ones are

not evidence that you are behind. There is no schedule you have failed to keep.

If your desire for a relationship rises and falls with what you see on other people's feeds, it is worth asking whether you want a relationship or whether you want to stop feeling left behind. Those require different solutions.

6. The wish to be rescued

This one is subtler. Some people want a relationship because they are hoping it will fix something: financial instability, a difficult home, a sense of aimlessness, low self-worth, a life that feels stuck. The hope is that the right person will arrive and things will finally start.

It rarely works. A relationship adds a person to your life; it does not replace the work of building one. When the wish to be rescued becomes strong, controlling people may be attracted to the opportunity to be needed. You may also become drawn to someone who wants you to rescue them. Either pattern can produce dependency rather than partnership.

Genesis 2:24 describes marriage as the formation of a new primary bond: a person leaves father and mother and holds fast to a spouse. This does not require wealth, perfect independence or a problem-free life. It does require enough personal responsibility to build with another person rather than expecting that person to become your identity, purpose or rescue. If you are hoping someone else will supply those things, the kindest thing you can do for both of you is to begin some of that building first.

7. Genuine readiness

Finally, and I say this gladly: some people want a relationship because they are ready for one.

They are learning to receive their identity from Christ rather than from their relationship status. They are building meaningful relationships, accepting responsibility for their lives and growing in emotional and spiritual honesty. Their circumstances may not be perfect — they may be between jobs, changing churches, recovering from loss — but they are not asking another person to become their entire source of identity, security and purpose. They would like to share what they have with someone, to

build a family, to serve God alongside a partner, and they are prepared to be patient and careful about who that person is.

Readiness, in other words, means responsibility and teachability, not a perfectly organised life. And nobody is entirely in this category. Every honest person has some loneliness, some pressure, some anxiety mixed in. The goal of this chapter is not to purify your motives until only readiness remains. The goal is to know the mixture, so that when a decision comes, you can tell which voice is speaking.

An honest word about contentment

Some readers will have been told that the answer to all of this is to “be content in Christ” and stop wanting a relationship until God brings one. I want to be careful here.

Paul did write that he had “learned in whatever situation I am to be content” (Philippians 4:11). But contentment in Scripture is not the absence of desire; it is the presence of trust. Paul was content in prison and content in plenty. He did not stop preferring freedom to chains. He learned that his peace did not depend on which one he had.

That is the standard for singleness too. Contentment does not mean you have stopped wanting a spouse. It means your sense of who you are, and whether God is good to you, does not rise and fall with whether one arrives. A person who has that kind of contentment can date carefully, because they can afford to say no. A person who has not yet developed that contentment may struggle to say no, because every no can feel like a door closing on their last hope.

That is why this chapter comes first. The work of the next nineteen chapters — recognising red flags, holding boundaries, discerning wisely, walking away when necessary — all depends on your being able to survive the relationship not working out. Contentment is not the opposite of dating well. It is what makes dating well possible.

A note on where you are right now

If you are reading this while already in a relationship, you may be tempted to skip ahead. Please do not. The questions in this chapter are more useful,

not less, when there is a real person on the other side of them, because it becomes possible to ask: which of these motives made me say yes to this person, and would I still say yes without it?

If you are reading this after a painful ending — a broken engagement, a divorce, a relationship that turned out to be harmful — some of these motives may carry extra weight. Loneliness after loss is not the same as ordinary loneliness. The wish to be rescued after a season of being harmed is not a character flaw; it is a wound. Be gentle with yourself in the reflection that follows. You are not being graded. And if any of what surfaces feels too heavy to carry alone, that is a good reason to talk with a pastor, counsellor or trusted friend before you go further, not a reason to press on by yourself.

Tool 1: Relationship Readiness Reflection

This is a guided self-reflection, not a diagnostic or psychological test. It will not tell you whether you are “allowed” to date. It is designed to help you notice which pressures are present in your life right now, how much they are influencing your decisions, and what foundations you already have for dating wisely.

Set aside twenty to thirty minutes. Answer alone, in writing, and answer honestly — nobody else will see this unless you choose to show them.

For each statement, mark how true it is of you at the moment: **1** = Not true · **2** = Slightly true · **3** = Somewhat true · **4** = Mostly true · **5** = Very true

Part A: Pressures I am experiencing, and how they affect my decisions

Each motive has four statements. The first two ask whether the pressure is present. The third asks whether it has influenced your decisions. The fourth asks whether you have ways of responding to it that do not involve a dating decision.

Loneliness - I regularly experience significant loneliness. - ***Attention from a potential partner quickly creates strong emotional attachment in me.*** - I have considered remaining in an unhealthy or unsuitable relationship because being alone felt worse. - ***I have relationships and practices that help me respond to loneliness without making a dating decision.***

Pressure from church and family - People close to me regularly ask when I will get married, or make me feel that my singleness disappoints them. - ***I feel like the odd one out at church or in my family because I***

am single. - I have pursued, continued or considered a relationship partly to satisfy other people's expectations. - ***I can hear other people's opinions about my relationship status without letting them decide for me.***

Sexual desire - Sexual desire is a significant part of why I want to be in a relationship. - ***I find it difficult to imagine a serious relationship without a strong physical spark early on.*** - Physical attraction has, in the past, led me to overlook things I should have noticed. - ***I have honest ways of managing sexual desire that do not depend on rushing into a relationship.***

Age anxiety - I feel that time is running out for me to find someone. - ***I worry that being careful now might mean missing my last chance.*** - I have lowered my standards, or considered doing so, because of my age. - ***I am able to think about my age honestly without it making me hurry.***

Social comparison - Seeing engagements, weddings or babies on social media affects my mood. - ***I feel behind compared to friends or siblings.*** - I have felt pushed towards a relationship mainly because of what other people seemed to have. - ***I can see other people's happiness without measuring my own life against it.***

The wish to be rescued - I hope a relationship will help me feel settled, stable or secure in ways I do not feel now. - ***I sometimes feel my life will not really begin until I am married.*** - I have been drawn to someone mainly because they seemed able to fix something in my life, or because I could fix something in theirs. - ***I am taking responsibility for building my own life, whether or not a relationship comes.***

Part B: Foundations that support wise dating

- My relationship with God is steady whether or not I am dating. ☐
- I am actively part of friendships and a church community. ☐
- I have people in my life who would tell me the truth about a relationship, and I would listen. ☐
- I could say no to a relationship that was not right, even if I liked the person. ☐

- I can receive correction without feeling attacked. ☐
- I am taking responsibility for my own life — my work or study, my finances, my health, my past. ☐

Part C: Reading your answers

Your totals are conversation starters, not diagnoses. A higher number simply identifies an area that deserves closer attention. More important than any total is whether that motive has caused you to rush, overlook warning signs or remain where you were not treated well.

For each motive in Part A, look at the four answers together:

- If the first two statements scored high but the third scored low, the pressure is present but has not been running your decisions. That is worth noticing and worth protecting.
- If the third statement scored high, the pressure has already influenced a decision at least once. Write that motive down somewhere you will see it. When you next feel strongly about someone, ask whether this motive is speaking.
- If the fourth statement scored low, you may have few ways of responding to that pressure apart from finding a partner. That is one of the most useful things this reflection can show you, because it is something you can work on now.

For Part B: a high score does not cancel strong pressures. It means you may have useful foundations from which to address them. A low score does not mean you must not date. It means there are things worth building first — Part D asks what.

Part D: Written reflection

Answer each in a few sentences.

1. Which motive is strongest for you right now? Were you surprised? Why or why not?
2. Think of a past relationship, a strong attraction, or a pattern you have noticed in yourself or in people close to you. Which of the seven

motives was most active? What did it cause you — or them — to overlook?

3. Finish this sentence honestly: “If I never married, the thing I would find hardest to accept is _____.” What does your answer tell you?
 4. Finish this one: “If I never married, my life would still be worth living because _____.” If you struggle to complete it, that is not a failure. It is one of the most important things you have learned today, and it belongs in a conversation with someone you trust.
 - *If this question leaves you feeling that your life is not worth living, or you are thinking about harming yourself, stop the exercise and seek immediate support from a qualified mental-health professional, emergency service or crisis service in your country. Do not remain alone with those thoughts. The resources page at the back of this book lists where to begin.*
 5. Which one of the following would make you more ready than you are now? Choose only one and write what the next step would be.
 - A steadier daily walk with God that does not depend on my circumstances
 - Deeper friendships or a real place in a church community
 - A clearer sense of my own purpose or work
 - Financial or practical stability
 - Healing from a past relationship, loss or harm
 - Learning to tolerate being alone without it feeling like a crisis
 - Other:
-

Part E: Before you turn the page

Ask God to search you rather than only searching yourself. The psalmist’s prayer is a good one to make your own: “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” (Psalm 139:23–24).

TOOL 1: RELATIONSHIP READINESS REFLECTION

Then keep this reflection. You will return to it in Chapter 18, *When to Slow Down*, and again at the 90-Day Relationship Review, to see whether the motives that were loudest at the start are still the ones doing the talking.