

‘If you’re swamped with guidance about dating, and just need a bit of practice advice to know exactly how to get started, then read on. Aukelien’s guidance comes out of stories and experience, which I think will resonate with many of you.’

André Adefope, head of Naked Truth Relationships  
and co-author of *The Dating Dilemma*

‘*Dare to Date* steers a masterful course between the cultural relativism of contemporary attitudes towards dating and marriage, and the fanciful notion that “marriages are made in heaven”. Aukelien brings together the wisdom of a practising psychologist, the faith of a committed Christian and the pragmatism of a self-help manual to give us an invaluable resource for today’s Church.’

The Revd Canon Dr Adrian Chatfield,  
Fellow of Ridley Hall, Cambridge

‘Does your church teach on how to get from singleness to marriage in a godly way? Probably not, but this book brilliantly helps to bridge that gap. *Dare to Date* is essential reading for church members and leaders to further develop a much-needed healthy Christian dating culture. Aukelien is a Christian psychologist who understands this topic from personal and professional experience. With God at the centre, her book warmly encourages single

people with really helpful insights, stories and strategies that will improve their dating lives.’

Annabel Clarke, chartered psychologist, Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society, and founder and co-chair of the Engage Network: ‘making Christian marriage possible’

‘At Christianconnection.com we have been bringing single Christians together for over 16 years. But time and time again, we encounter Christians who are afraid, discouraged or uncertain on whether or how to date. Church life can often put great pressure and expectation on Christians but without offering help and support. *Dare to Date* really addresses these issues with wisdom, faith, insight, practicality and true stories.’

Jackie Elton, founder and MD of Christianconnection.com, a dating site for Christians

‘This accessible and practical book is most welcome. Rooted in deep experience of how we are made as human beings, it offers a means of interacting with others and exploring romantic possibilities which resonates with culture today. Buy it, use it and discover the adventure of dating that is both godly and fun.’

Dr David Pullinger, Director and researcher into Christianity and singleness at <[www.singlechristians.co.uk](http://www.singlechristians.co.uk)>

Aukelien van Abbema has a degree in psychology and philosophy and owns a private practice as a licensed counsellor in Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (EFT). Aukelien has developed a dating course in her church, Crossroads International Church in Amsterdam, a spin-off of which is running at Holy Trinity Brompton in London. She teaches on dating, singleness and the Church throughout the Netherlands and the UK. Follow her on Twitter @avanabbema or find her on Facebook at Dare to Date.



# DARE TO DATE

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*To Anna, and every other wandering  
singleton who hopes to be found*





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## Foreword

Life is about the quality of our relationships, with God and with others.

Many people today are crying out for connection. We live in increasingly fragmented societies and can find ourselves isolated. The current rate of geographical mobility has meant that more and more people are living away from the community in which they grew up and the network of relationships through which they were supported. We have more opportunities than ever to connect digitally but this has not replaced the longing and the need for more permanent face-to-face relationships.

Dating has not gone out of fashion but it has become more complicated. Hooking up for sex is one thing; dating that is both healthy for individuals and for society is another.

The old 'rules' to test the possibility of a long-term relationship no longer apply. The social conventions that allowed people in the past to explore marriage within certain boundaries have been lost. Living together and having a child without being married are no longer social taboos. In some countries, the marriage rate is at its lowest since records began. More people today are wary of commitment and, as a result, do not experience

the deep trust and intimacy that the covenant relationship of marriage makes possible.

All of this has had an effect on dating. In the Church and in society at large, we need new approaches that enable people to meet, to explore if there is a growing connection between them, to form romantic relationships and to break up well if they discover they are not suited to each other. To create a common understanding between those seeking a life partner that will help make these processes a lot easier, new social traditions are needed, suited to the modern world and based on mutual respect.

That is why this book is so important. Aukelien brings years of experience counselling about relationships, as well as her own experiences of dating, to help people to find a new and better way forward. She knows that dating, with a view to building a lasting relationship, takes courage. It requires people to step out, to be proactive, to make the first move: to *dare* to date.

Dating also requires social skills, and Aukelien offers invaluable advice on how to date well, how to widen the pool of potential marriage partners and how to explore the possibility of a longer-term relationship.

We have much enjoyed getting to know Aukelien – and more recently her husband, Maarten – and talking with them around this subject of dating. We not only recognize the wisdom Aukelien brings from her professional and her personal life; we also love her passion to see single people and couples make better relationships.

We believe this book could change your patterns of dating, which could in turn alter the course of your whole life. As you read on, you will discover you are not alone in facing the challenges

that twenty-first-century living brings to forming lasting, romantic relationships. But you will also discover how to take the pressure off, how to have fun and how to make good choices about other people, based on a lot more than immediate attraction.

Our hope and prayer is that through applying the practical wisdom found in these pages, many people will experience connection, friendship, love and, eventually, marriage.

*Nicky and Sila Lee*

# Acknowledgements

I've been very fortunate not to have to write this book on my own.

My thanks go first and foremost to my love, Maarten, for his support and confidence in me.

I'm also especially thankful for the ongoing reading and collaboration with Karin Timmerman, Elise van der Kooij, Johannes Verelst and Leon Oosterhuis. Their very cool, awesome, phenomenal feedback, written between the lines, their substantive and well-founded commentary, helped make the book what it is and increased my confidence in my own writing.

This book was created through the process of leading a dating course at my church, Crossroads International Church, Amsterdam. I am so thankful for the church body and the opportunity they have given me to develop this course, in complete freedom. A large thank you is also owed to my students and friends who have heard me endlessly on the subject of this book: it is because of you that this book has become what it now is; and also that there is a book.

I'm also very thankful for the connection made with SPCK and especially Juliet Trickey, who was enthusiastic about publishing my book in the UK right away!

This English translation couldn't have happened if I hadn't met Erin van Santen-Hobbie. I'm thankful she and I became friends and that she did such a great job at translating exactly what I wanted to say. I am also thankful to Annabel Clarke of the Engage Network for her thorough editing work on the translation, to make my Dutch bluntness more suitable for delicate British ears. I love her commitment and the time and energy she puts into the Engage Network! Along with Annabel, Nicky and Sila Lee have been a great help and inspiration from the start of writing this book. They are such loving and warm people to be connected to, and I'm thankful for getting to know them.

Finally, I'm thankful to God for the doors he continues to open, such as the opportunity to write and share this book.





# Introduction

## Dating from connectedness

When I was single, I felt powerless over the state of my singleness. I thought it was something I simply had to accept, a reality I had to learn to be satisfied with. But my perspective changed when I first began studying singleness and the nuances of relationships, both for my work as a psychologist as well as out of my own curiosity. Through my research a new world was opened to me and a fresh insight revealed: singleness wasn't something I simply had to suffer through but was a state I could be intentional about, a subject on which I could educate myself. In fact, singleness could be a place of growth.

Sue Johnson, a fellow relational therapist and founder of Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy, asserts that this is precisely our task: to understand the holistic concept of love. Love is not simply a mystery that we must resign ourselves to as forever mysterious. And given the number of divorces, Johnson adds, we cannot permit ourselves to shut our eyes to the knowledge that is available. After all, the latest scientific research offers us more insight into love than ever before.

The good news is that relationships do not always have to be a complex mystery. Dating can be *understandable*, just as singleness can. There is an increasing need for knowledge and discussion

about both, given the growing number of single people in society. A reporter once asked me if I had ever been asked surprising or unexpected questions on singleness and dating. I told her that truthfully, it had been at least a year since I had heard a new question. People keep asking me the same questions, time and time again. Much of this book is based on these conversations.

In addition to the latest research, my hope is to give people insight into *how* they date. Daring to date is not about reading all of the recent scientific literature before you step into a relationship but more about developing a basic knowledge and fundamental beliefs that provide a strong foundation for *any* relationship. This is what I hope this book gives you: a firm foundation for forming solid relationships, including dating.

We live at a time in which relationships are increasingly under pressure. Creating a firm foundation for a relationship is more important than ever. A good start to any relationship begins with ‘good’ dating. Dating in this book is defined as ‘having an encounter with someone else, getting to know them as a person, their character, their interests. It is *not* getting to know their body, their income or their internet dating profile.’

*Healthy* relationships begin with *healthy* dates, dates that are intentional, meaningful. At this point it is important to understand that when I use the term ‘dating’ I mean nothing more and nothing less than a time and a place where a man and a woman intentionally meet, spend some time together and connect in a meaningful way. And a meaningful encounter begins with a heart connection, not a physical one. Dating is not about kissing (although this may be involved at some point), and it is definitely not about having sex. It is important to make that distinction clear, because undefined terms can lead to a lot of misunderstanding.

So what is good dating? Dating with realistic beliefs and expectations about relationships and their possibilities can only help your relationships. Open communication leads to honesty with the other person about what's bothering you. It isn't possible for another human being *always* to know intuitively what you want or to understand *perfectly* who you are.

This means that consistent communication with the other person is essential. If everybody were more conscious of how they actually date, as a relational therapist I would have much less work to do. In my job I often hear people talk about difficult things in their relationships that were actually difficult from the beginning. Maybe one person was aware of a negative thinking pattern or behaviour in the other person but pushed away any possible concerns by thinking: 'It doesn't matter that much' or 'It will change.' The issue wasn't intentionally addressed; therefore it kept on being an issue.

This book isn't just about dating (that topic in all its practicalities will eventually come in Chapter 4), but is particularly about the elements that create a firm foundation for dating. For Christians, if you can connect with God and are able to connect with yourself and love that self, then you can more easily connect to the people around you.

I use a model in this book called the 'Model of connectedness' (see Figure 1).

I divide connectedness into four sections:

- connecting to God;
- connecting to yourself;
- connecting to a community;
- connecting to the other person.

