

11 ½ QUESTIONS

to help you

**DATE
WITHOUT
REGRETS**

P E R R Y N O B L E

ENDORSEMENTS FOR *11 1/2 QUESTIONS*

This is *the* book every parent of a dating kid has been waiting for! Honest, encouraging, and challenging wisdom on every page. So proud that my friend Perry penned these pages and am thankful for the many lives that will avoid heartbreak because of his advice.

ART AND LYSA TERKEURST

New York Times bestselling author and president of Proverbs 31 Ministries

11 1/2 Questions to Help You Date without Regrets is an awesome book that I can't wait to share with others, including my own daughter. Perry is clear, compelling, and hilarious as he lays down biblical principles for dating and relationships. The insight here will save you so much heartache and show you how to get the most out of your relationships with God and others.

JUD WILHITE

Senior pastor of Central Church and author of *Pursued*

The message of our friend Perry Noble's latest book, *11 1/2 Questions to Help You Date without Regrets*, is a good one because it captures the heart of our good Father for the dating process and shows you how to do it well. Its message reinforces that God is for you in every area of your life and wants the absolute best for you. More than anything, He wants you to experience joy as you walk through the most important decisions of your life, including who you marry and spend the rest of your life with. This book is practical, helpful, and a real-talk guide to help you journey through this process with no regrets.

JUDAH AND CHELSEA SMITH

Lead pastors of The City Church in Seattle, Washington

In *11 1/2 Questions to Help You Date without Regrets*, Perry helps readers take an honest assessment as he guides them into a wiser

approach to dating. It's straightforward, sincere, and filled with best practices to date without regrets. This is a book I want to get into the hands of my single friends!

PETE WILSON

Pastor of Cross Point Church

Most people treat dating like a trip to Vegas—they hope to win the jackpot by the luck of the draw. But when people date without any plan, purpose, or guidance, they almost always end up with significant regrets. That's why Perry Noble's new dating book is a must-read for anyone who wants to grow toward a marriage that honors God. The book *11 ½ Questions to Help You Date without Regrets* is refreshingly honest, powerfully practical, and profoundly spiritual.

AMY AND CRAIG GROESCHEL

Pastor of Life.Church and author of *From This Day Forward:*

5 Commitments to Fail-Proof Your Marriage

Perry's book on dating arrives at the perfect time for us in this season of parenting. We have two children of dating age in our home, and it will be required reading for both of them. This is such a difficult culture to grow up in, and there is very little helpful advice on dating. Perry's book not only provides great wisdom about dating but is also a great resource to help parents navigate this season with their kids.

JEFF AND WENDY HENDERSON

Lead pastor of Gwinnett Church

There's no one better to help you walk through the dating journey than our friend Perry Noble. He brings a practical perspective to dating God's way, a subject that is a source of confusion in our culture today. His no-nonsense approach mixed with hilarious stories make this guidebook to dating helpful and fun.

DEBBIE AND ROBERT MORRIS

Founding senior pastor of Gateway Church and bestselling authors

It would have been great to have a book like this when we were dating! Perry shares some exceptionally practical (and biblical) advice on dating, but he does it in such an engaging way you could easily hand this book to a single friend, teen, or young adult you care about. After all, laying the groundwork for a healthy, exciting, and Christ-honoring marriage starts even before dating. Perry shows you how to position yourself for success.

CAREY AND TONI NIEUWHOF

Connexus Church

We believe that poor dating decisions have caused more people to be lost or damaged than any other area of the Christian life. That's why you need to read this book. This is a destiny-saving, destiny-changing book, filled with insight and practical wisdom for successful dating. Our friend Perry Noble is so passionate about the potential relationships of single people, and this is the handbook to dating we've all been waiting for. If you apply what you read, you will have confidence as you prepare and protect yourself for God's best!

HEATHER AND GARY SNOWZELL

Pastor of Freedom Church

We love Pastor Perry's ability to connect with young people! Having a daughter himself has given him the ability to unpack dating and relationships on a new level. God has given Pastor P. the unique ability to take what is complex and ambiguous and simplify it so that anyone can understand it. I am excited to know he has brought this gift of clarity to the foggy world of dating. This book is simple, clear, and attainable. It provides a way forward in the murky waters of dating.

BRAD AND CORY COOPER

Ministries pastor at NewSpring Church

One of the greatest qualities of our friend Perry Noble is his ability to cut straight to the heart of our struggles. The same is true for his new book, *11 ½ Questions to Help You Date without Regrets*. He gives great wisdom and insight into one of life's most complicated seasons: dating.

HOLLY AND STEVEN FURTICK

Pastor of Elevation Church and *New York Times* bestselling author

We love how Perry communicates on difficult topics like dating, relationships, and purity. He's winsome and honest, bold and funny, serious and direct while keeping our attention on what matters. There's great need today for clarity and leadership in this area, and you'll find this book to be a fantastic resource!

CLAYTON AND SHARIE KING

Founders of Crossroads Camps and Clayton King Ministries

11 ½ Questions to Help You Date without Regrets is a refreshingly modern look at dating from a Kingdom-minded perspective. Perry doesn't just lay out tired Christian dating themes; he gives you tactical advice that you can put to work immediately in your dating life.

WILLIE MORRIS

President and CEO of Faithbox

Dating and relationships have never been easy, but they are things God cares about. That makes them a really big deal. Perry Noble gets that, which is why he wrote this book! If you're looking for answers to some of the most common questions real people are asking about dating and marriage, this book is a great place to start.

DAVE RAMSEY

Bestselling author and nationally syndicated radio show host

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INTRODUCTION

DATING IS A BIG DEAL

I USED TO BELIEVE THAT a girl got pregnant because a guy peed on her.

It completely made sense to me. Keep in mind that I grew up in the 1970s. We didn't have Google, reality television, or Lady Gaga, so information about sex was not as available as it is today.

Every time I saw a pregnant woman, I would think, *I guess her husband peed on her, and now she's going to have a baby.*

It wasn't until the fifth grade that I actually found out where babies came from. Yes, I believed what I refer to as “the pee-pee myth” for nearly eleven years of my life.

As I look back on that time, I can smile because of my innocence; however, I'm also reminded that there are certain myths we believe (even as adults) that hold us back from an abundant life.

Over the course of my dating career, I made some mistakes. Correction: I made a *lot* of mistakes. Case in point: when I was in high school, I clearly remember thinking that if I got angry, raised my voice, and then jumped into my car and peeled out of a girl's driveway, it made me look macho and

would prompt the girl to call me in tears, devastated that she had caused me to act that way. Now I realize this behavior was simply idiotic, immature, and unproductive. (Plus, it costs a lot of money to get new tires after you peel out a few times!)

This is just one of the stupid mistakes I made, and while I would say that many of my mistakes could be chalked up to immaturity or selfishness or simple cluelessness, most of these missteps can be traced back to believing certain myths about dating.

There's one myth I bought into for years—and I know I'm not the only one. In fact, the core reason I'm writing this book is to dispel this misconception: far too many people don't see dating as a big deal.

In our world, dating is seen as a “recreational sport”—something we do for fun, to keep ourselves from being bored. However, that just doesn't work in real life, and it isn't the model God intended. I'm here to tell you there's a better way—but first we have to change our way of thinking.

The way we perceive a situation determines how we will pursue what we believe is right or wrong. If our perception is wrong, we are sure to make the wrong call. I clearly remember one of the stupidest things I ever did during my dating days.

In college I was dating a girl I'll refer to as Jennifer. One of the things I remember most vividly about her is that she wore one of the ugliest rings I'd ever seen. Now, I'm a dude, and I've *never* heard a guy tell another guy, “Hey, man, that ring you're wearing is awesome!” In fact, the only time a guy usually notices a ring at all is when he sees the price tag for

the engagement ring he's planning to buy and realizes he has to sell a kidney on eBay to afford it.

However, this ring was different.

Even I couldn't miss it. It looked like it came straight out of a gumball machine. Imagine a bug crawling on a girl's finger and dying there, and you'd have a pretty good mental image of what the ring was like.

The girl's fingers were tiny and the ring was so huge that whenever she had it on her finger, it was like a huge billboard that screamed, "Hey, look at me! I don't care about fashion or my dignity because I wear *this!*"

The only good thing about this ring was that it made me feel safe, because if Jennifer and I had ever been mugged, she could have thrown that stupid ring at the attackers. I have no doubt it would have killed them on the spot!

Jennifer didn't wear the ring all the time, just enough to embarrass me and cause me to feel self-conscious about the gaudy piece of metal on her finger. One day I picked her up for a date and noticed she'd been crying. (Note to guys, anytime you see your date cry, just start saying you're sorry. Always assume it's you—that way, even if it's not, you get points for being sensitive!)

I asked Jennifer what was wrong, and she said, "Do you know that ring I wear sometimes, the large purple one?"

I told her I knew the exact ring she was talking about.

"I think I accidentally threw it away," she said. "I've been looking for it for an hour, and I can't find it anywhere. I think it's lost forever."

God still answers prayers! was what immediately went through my mind.

Later that evening, I looked over when we were driving and saw that Jennifer was crying.

“What’s wrong?”

“I’m just really upset about losing that ring,” she said.

It was then that I said *those words*—the words I knew were a mistake as soon as they crossed my lips.

“I don’t see what the big deal is about the stupid ring. After all, it’s just a ring.”

Silence.

More crying.

A lot more crying.

When she finally calmed down, she said, “You don’t understand.”

Obviously she was right, because I was the most confused guy on the planet. How in the world could a ring that looked like it had been bought from a street vendor in the shady part of town matter so much?

That’s when she said something that put everything into perspective for me: “That ring belonged to my great-grandmother. It was passed down to my grandmother, then to my mom, and a few weeks ago my mom gave it to me. It was the only thing my family had that belonged to my great-grandmother, and I’ve lost it.” She sniffed loudly. “It’s a big deal!”

(Picture me with donkey ears, and insert a loud “hee-haw” right here.)

I learned a lesson that day that I have to continually remind myself of: the minute I justify something by saying it isn't a big deal, that's my first clue that it's actually the biggest deal.

All of us have “big deal” things that we deal with on a daily basis.

- Do these jeans make me look fat?
- How many selfies will I take before I find one I like?
- How many likes am I going to get on that selfie?
- How is the weather going to impact my hair?
- Is Wi-Fi free here?

Okay, not really. But the second biggest thing you'll deal with (after your decision about whether to follow Jesus) is who you date.

We live in a culture where dating isn't seen as a big deal; in fact, it's just what you do on the weekend so you don't have to binge-watch Netflix shows.

But our relationships are a big deal to God, and therefore they should be a big deal to us.

Who you date may ultimately lead to who you marry. And who you marry is a big deal. Even if you don't get married, who you date and how you date is a reflection of who you are. If we take dating seriously, then our dating decisions will lead to joy and celebration rather than pain and frustration.

So let's dive into this dating journey together.

WRAP-UP

Statements

The minute I justify something by saying it isn't a big deal, that's my first clue that it's actually the biggest deal.

Who you date and how you date is a reflection of who you are.

If we take dating seriously, then our dating decisions will lead to joy and celebration rather than pain and frustration.

#DATEWITHOUTREGRETS

CHAPTER 1

DOES GOD CARE ABOUT MY DATING LIFE?

I REMEMBER BEING INTERESTED in girls as early as the fifth grade. It caused quite a stir when I asked Jeanie Cantrell to meet me at the movies one Saturday. (She said no!) I was an insecure person from as early as I could remember, and I always thought that if I just had a girlfriend, all my insecurities and instabilities would disappear.

So my reason for dating in my pre-Jesus years had nothing to do with wanting what was best for the girl I was dating; rather, it was about how I could use her to fulfill my self-centered desires. This may be pretty obvious, but I didn't do dating right before I met Jesus. I made so many mistakes

that caused harm to others and brought regrets on myself—regrets I deal with to this very day.

In May of 1990, I finally understood that Jesus died on the cross for my sins. I invited Him into my life, and everything began to change. Please understand: I wasn't a bad person who needed to become good; I was a spiritually dead person who needed to be brought to life. And only Jesus can do that.

God began changing every area of my life. He changed my plans for the future, as I went from thinking I would be a restaurant manager to knowing I wanted to work in a church. He began a healing process in my heart after the death of my mother when I was twelve years old, setting me free from the bitterness and resentment that had built up against Him.

He also began changing my desires and habits. He changed the way I felt after I sinned. Before I met Christ, I felt no guilt after I did something wrong, but after meeting Christ, He worked in my heart, reminding me that the sin I had enjoyed momentarily wasn't ultimately what was best for me.

And very significantly, God began changing the way I viewed dating and relationships. Before I met Christ, I believed in God, but I thought He was some sort of disconnected figure "somewhere out there." I assumed He had so many things on His plate that there was no way He cared about whether I had a date or what I did on a date.

However, the longer I followed Jesus, the more I began to understand that God cares about *everything* in our lives—and He wants more for us than we could ever imagine.

A BETTER WAY TO DATE

When I was in my twenties, I joined the staff of a small church in upstate South Carolina. I had the privilege of working with a small group of teenagers there—a really great group of kids. They were active in church and really wanted to make a difference in the world. However, the number one area most of them struggled in was dating.

I saw really great girls dating guys who weren't serious about Jesus and were more concerned about the girls' bodies than their souls. I would listen to those girls justify their relationships by saying, "I can fix them" or "They need me." And I would watch those same girls drop out of church, claim they were madly in love, and then have their hearts absolutely shattered by the dudes.

I also saw really great guys struggle with leading the pursuit of purity in their relationships. They sincerely wanted to fight through desires they knew weren't right, but they would often make decisions that led to a lot of guilt.

There has to be a better way! I thought. However, as I began to look around for material to teach about healthy dating relationships, the only message I could seem to find from the church was, "Don't have sex!"

"Don't have sex" isn't wrong (we'll talk about this later in the book); it's just that this message is incomplete. It lacks vision about what dating is really like.

After serving at that church for a little over two years, I went to another church about an hour away (near the

college I was attending) to serve another group of teenagers. Different students, different schools—but the same dating issues.

Girls dating guys they shouldn't be dating.

Guys who really did love Jesus but had a tough time being pure in their dating lives.

It wasn't just an "issue"; it was an intense battle.

While serving at the church, I also had a part-time job as a dorm supervisor at Anderson College. That fall one of the students asked if I'd be willing to teach a Bible study for college students. I told him I could do it, but because I was working two jobs and was involved in some sports rec leagues, the only time I could fit it into my schedule was at 11 p.m. on Wednesdays.

"No one will show up," he said.

"That makes it easy," I replied. "If no one shows up, we'll cancel it."

That first night eight students showed up in my apartment, and we studied Scripture for about forty-five minutes. As everyone was getting ready to leave, I asked, "What would you really want to dive into next week?"

"Dating," one girl said.

"Marriage," another girl said.

"Sex," a guy said with a smile.

"Okay," I agreed. "Next week we're going to talk about sex and dating."

The next week twenty-two students showed up.

The week after that there were forty-two.

Within four weeks, we had more than a hundred students.

I prayed, studied, and taught on relationships like a madman throughout that year. I was trying to learn as much as possible, and I was surprised that Scripture had so much to say about relationships.

The next fall, the Bible study leader asked me if I would lead the relationship Bible study again. I told him I thought I'd taught enough about the topic, but he was convinced we should try it anyway.

On opening night, we had around 150 students, and once again, we talked all year about relationships. We had students there who would never have considered going to church, but when it came to talking about dating relationships, they never missed a session!

What really stood out to me as I led that study was that the students didn't fully understand how much God cared about their dating lives. They didn't grasp that their decisions about dating directly affected their walk with Christ.

I am now the pastor of a church I started almost twenty years ago, and although I'm no longer working solely with college students, people still have a burning desire to learn what God says about relationships. People who have been divorced are asking questions. People who are parents are asking questions. It's not just an age issue; it's a real-life issue. Every time our church does a series about relationships, our attendance increases significantly.

I tried to dig into this phenomenon to see what was drawing people in, and I finally realized that most of them were

asking this question: “Can God really forgive me?” They had messed up in their dating lives, and they wanted to know if it was possible to move on despite their regrets.

One day, after hearing so many stories of heartache, I’d simply had enough. I didn’t want people to have to live with the shame and guilt they were carrying as a result of past relationships. I told myself, *Someone has to let people know that it’s possible to have a dating life without regrets.*

I held on to that idea for a while, wondering who could share that message.

DON’T MAKE THE MISTAKES I MADE

Then my daughter, Charisse, was born.

The more I thought about her and her walk with Jesus, the more I thought, *I want her to get this right. I don’t want her to make the same mistakes I made!*

Then I started thinking about the guy she will marry one day. *I want him to fight for her heart, take care of her, and put her needs before his,* I thought.

What I want my daughter to know someday—and what I want every person who’s single to know—is that dating is about so much more than having someone to hang out with or having a fun distraction on a Saturday night. It’s something God can use to develop our character.

I remember reading Genesis 2:18 one day and being completely awed by an idea I’d never considered before: “The LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I

will make a helper who is just right for him.” The reason the verse seized my attention was because the first man, Adam, wasn’t alone when God made this statement—Adam already had a relationship with God. They walked together in the Garden. Maybe they even drank coffee and ate ice cream together. Yet even so, God said it wasn’t good for the man to be alone.

In other words, God created us for companionship with one another—and He cares deeply about who we spend time with.

I’ve read too many books and heard too many speakers talk about how single people should just “get over” their desire to date and get married. They claim that God is enough and that until singles realize that, they won’t meet the person they are going to marry.

But if God wasn’t enough to fulfill Adam’s desire for companionship, then why in the world would we send single people on a guilt trip, making them feel condemned for their desire for a relationship?

Of course, the desire for companionship can become an idol. However, I also believe that singleness is a season God will use to shape you today so you can become the person He wants you to be and so you can be a great gift to someone tomorrow.

My prayer for you is that you don’t make the same mistakes I did when it comes to dating. I want you to have healthy, successful dating relationships with no regrets. (Yes, it’s possible!) I hope you will consider this book to be a

conversation between you and me about dating. I don't have all the answers, but I do know the questions you need to ask. Based on more than twenty-five years of experience working with people of all ages, races, and backgrounds, I hope to help you avoid some of the common pitfalls in dating. These questions may point you in the right direction, help you set realistic boundaries, and encourage you all along the way.

I've never met a married couple who had what people refer to as "marriage problems." You may think I'm a little insane at this point, but I can assure you I am telling the truth. Married people don't have marriage problems; they have unresolved single problems they brought into their marriage.

I believe this book will radically change the way you live now as well as your marriage in the future, because the best way to prepare for marriage is to start becoming the person God intends you to be right now. In this book I will show you the questions you need to ask to discover how.

WRAP-UP

Statements

Dating is about so much more than having a fun distraction on a Saturday night. It's something God can use to develop our character.

God created us for companionship with one another.

Singleness is a season God will use to shape you today into the person He wants you to be so you can be a great gift to someone tomorrow.

Married people don't have marriage problems; they have unresolved single problems they brought into their marriage.

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