



He Said, She Said: Can I Please My Parents and Still Be Myself?

by Kris Swiatocho, Cliff Young

EDITOR'S NOTE: is a biweekly advice column for singles featuring a question from a Crosswalk.com reader with responses from a male and female point of view. If you've got a question about anything related to singleness or living the single life, please submit it to hesaid-shesaid@crosswalk.com †(selected questions will be posted anonymously).

QUESTION: I'm 26 and for two years I have been dating an older guy, who is 45 now. We love each other very much and would like to get married in the near future. He's divorced with two children. He's a very good father to his kids and I know he'll make a good husband. We are both Christians. I'm Nigerian, but have been living in the states since I was 17. My parents still live in Nigeria. The problem is they want me to end the relationship with him because of our age difference and the fact that he has been divorced and has kids. My dad referred to him as "second hand," and says he will never give me in to him. My parents say he will divorce me too, and reminded me that the Bible says God hates divorce. They are worried that I'll bring shame to them and people will talk about it.

I have been praying about our relationship because I knew it was going to be challenging. We have both prayed for God's guidance and discernment in helping us make good decisions that will honor God. I have often felt afraid of him passing before me because he's much older. The thought of being without him hurts. But with prayer I've been able to deal with it.

I love my parents and do not want to disappoint them. I've always done what they wanted but I'm at a point where I don't want to end the relationship and I don't think my parents will ever change their minds. I also feel I cannot live my life for them or for the Nigerian culture and what people back home would think or say. I feel torn. What do I do?

HE SAID:

As we get older, start formulating our own ideas and making our own decisions, it's difficult when what we believe and how we want to live conflict with what our parents want for us (or for themselves). Especially since you have lived so far away from home and they have not been a part of your daily life for so many years, it is challenging for both of you to fully consider and abide by the other's desires and wishes.

Despite the distance and the years, your parents may still see (and treat) you as that same young woman of seventeen when you left rather than accepting you as the adult you are today. As a result, they probably feel they have the right and the need to continue to speak into and direct your life.

Every relationship and marriage has its challenges. The blending of two people, two lifestyles, two families, two needs and two wills will always have obstacles to overcome. Nevertheless, it can be done.

We as a society do a great disservice when we "classify" others by things like ethnicity, culture, affiliations, physical attributes or age. God created us all uniquely different, and for us to compartmentalize or label one another based upon a characteristic, many of which are God-given, we are in essence judging God's own work.

There is an age difference between the two of you; however that difference does not make the two of you incompatible. I have witnessed many couples with even a greater age variance thrive relationally and serve the Lord in incredible ways.

Your boyfriend has been married and divorced (and yes, God does not like broken marital covenants), but that does not guarantee he will divorce you (although "statistically" there is a higher rate of divorce among divorcees). None of us are perfect and we all carry some "blemishes," but through Christ we are all redeemed.

It is not proper for your father to "speak words of negativity" into your life and from the sounds of it he seems more concerned with how others will look at and judge him rather than your happiness and what is best for you.

Honor your parents by receiving and considering their "counsel" sincerely (not defensively), at the same time trying to share the qualities and attributes of your boyfriend, and the reasons why you are attracted to him.

You are a grown woman and can make your own choices. Granted, it would be nice for your parents to "approve" of who you want to spend the rest of your life with, but that is their personal choice, just as it is yours to date whom you desire.

SHE SAID:

Thanks so much for sharing your story. As much I would also agree that it's important to honor your parents, there also comes a time when you must stand alone and make your own decisions. At some point in time you decided to date this man, knowing that his background would not be acceptable to your parents. As stated, you have lived in the US since you were 17. You have also wanted to separate yourself from your Nigerian culture and what people might think of you back home. Please know, as much as I like to think I am all grown and do not need my parents to approve of what I do, I do need to respect them. When I was as young as you I did something horrible. I not only dated a man who had been married several times but I even moved in with him. I greatly hurt my parents and extended family. It was only through prayers that got out of the situation and back to God. I am just thankful I never married him.

On the contrary, I realize that your boyfriend loves the Lord and you are not living together. I also have no problem he has been divorced. Divorce is not the unforgivable sin. What does raise a red flag, is...are you so troubled over your parents' opinion because some part of you knows it's wrong? Not wrong because you are sinning, but wrong because you always knew that your parents would not accept this man's background. Is this man worth losing your parents over? It is true once you are married the two of you will become one. That your life will be with your husband, not your parents. But can you live with that?

Here are some ideas, some things to pray about. First, is there a way you and your boyfriend can go home to Nigeria so your parents can meet him, and hear from his own words his love for you and for God? If you can't fly home, perhaps you could Skype. If you fell in love with him, despite his age and background, maybe your parents will too!

Another thought is that your father says God hates divorce. Yes, that is true. But God also hates a lot of other things. I think your father's concern are normal. Second marriages have a higher rate of divorce than first. But again, with God leading, and with God being the focus, your marriage can be successful. I know several people who were once divorced, remarried and are now serving as . Perhaps you father needs to know more of the circumstances of your boyfriend's divorce. Was he a Christian then? How long since he was divorced? (And so forth.) The more information your father has, the more he gets to know your boyfriend, the more likely he might change his mind.

If this is the man God has chosen for you and you have kept God as the center, if you have had some great counseling by your pastor and he is in agreement (maybe even have your pastor talk to you parents), then I

think you will have to do what you feel God is leading you to do. You can't change people. If your parents would disown you, this tells me that their pride is more important than you are to them. In time, hopefully they would see their error and things could heal and be restored.

Bottom line, do what God tells you to do. God is the only one you need to please.

Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ ().

Cliff Young, a Crosswalk.com contributing writer and a veteran single of many decades. He has traveled the world in search of fresh experiences, serving opportunities, and the perfect woman (for him) and has found that his investments in God, career and youth ministry have paid off in priceless dividends.

Kris Swiatocho, the President and Director of The Singles Network Ministries and From His Hands. Kris has served in ministry in various capacities for the last 25 years. An accomplished trainer and mentor, Kris has a heart to reach and grow leaders so they will in turn reach and grow others. She is also the author of 3 books.

DISCLAIMER: We are not trained psychologists or licensed professionals. We're just average folk who understand what it's like to live the solo life in the twenty-first century. We believe that the Bible is our go-to guide for answers to all of life's questions, and it's where we'll go for guidance when responding to your questions. Also, it's important to note that we write our answers separately.

GOT A QUESTION? If you've got a question about anything related to singleness or living the single life, please submit it to hesaid-shesaid@crosswalk.com (selected questions will be posted anonymously). While we are unable to answer every inquiry, we do hope that this column will be an encouragement to you. [Click here to visit the He Said-She Said](#).

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