



[Author Note: I opened this message with a story about my first kiss experience. Feel free to insert your own or steal mine, saying, "I had a friend who had his first kiss when he was 10 years old ..." etc. Then, share about your first few steps into the dating world. If you have a good story, awesome. If your story isn't great, share how you allowed your heart to be broken and how you needed to fix it every time you broke up.]

I had my first kiss when I was 10 years old. Her name was Lauren. I thought it was magical. We were sitting under a stairwell in an apartment complex waiting for the rain to pass. She asked me if I had ever kissed a girl before. I lied and said yes. She said, "Cool, wanna kiss me?" I said, "Sure." So we did. We were only kids, but that was the day girls no longer had cooties. From that moment on, all I knew is that I went from wanting to tease girls for being so different from me to me wanting to date one.

My first real girlfriend that I made MySpace official was when I was about 15. Her name was Rachel. We dated for about 6 months, and then she broke up with me. About a week later I began dating another girl.

Yes, I was a total player. I'm not proud of that fact. I leveraged football to get a lot of girls to go out with me. I don't say that as a badge of honor. I say that because I was insecure and needed a girl to validate me. For every girl I was with from age 10 until age 20, I opened my heart to them. When we broke up, I had to restart the process of mending my heart back together. Over and over again.

I look back and I wonder if I could have gotten through middle and high school with less scars and less wounds, Could I have done better?

Over the next several weeks, we will be talking about dating, flirting, friends, and sex. I have done message series like this before. Inevitably, this is how it goes: There will be some of you who will listen for the next few weeks and will flat out think I am crazy and ignore me. But there will be some of you who will listen. You will hear that I am teaching honestly from the Word of God. You will see that what I am saying is really rational and even realistic.

Some of you are so tired of being hurt by relationships, or seeing your friends hurt by relationships, that you will agree that what I share with you is the best route to go.

I hope you listen to me over the next few weeks. Listen to God's wisdom for you in your relationships. Listen to how you can avoid self-inflicted wounds. Listen to how you can have God write your love story

Let's talk about dating. What is dating? How do you learn how to date? How do you even get a date? If we are honest, a lot of what we know about dating is from what we observe from others, either on TV or in real life from our friends. There isn't a class on dating, nor do we really even see examples of it in the Bible. We are kind of figuring it all out on our own and learning as we go. So for today, let's talk about what makes a dating relationship different than any other relationship.

There are three examples of male/female relationships in the Bible.

The first one is family. You don't date family. Even if you have a cute cousin. That is just weird. The Bible even says it is weird. In Leviticus 18:6, God prohibits us from sleeping around with relatives, and in 1 Corinthians 5:1-2, Paul said some harsh words to the Corinthians because someone was sleeping with his stepmom. I don't have to prove to you it is weird to date family. It just is. There are laws in our country that says that is weird and inappropriate. God says, and just about everyone agrees, that you don't have that kind of intimate relationship with family members.

A second guy-girl relationship we see in the Bible is between friends or strangers. We have heard since we were kids that the Bible says we are called to love our neighbor. Well, who is our neighbor? Our neighbor is everyone: friends and strangers.

We don't date strangers. Imagine if you were on a blind date and the waiter asked you if he was your boyfriend. You would be like, "Heck no! I don't know them yet."

With our friends, we may go on dates with them but we don't "date" them. With our friends, we don't do the stereotypical actions associated with dating like holding hands and kissing, because that would be confusing and may make your friendship awkward.

In Mark 12:31, Jesus says we are to “love our neighbor as ourselves.” So there is a sense of dignity and respect we should give to everyone. But the type of love the Bible is telling us to give isn’t a romantic love, but a selfless love. A love that helps and cares for others.

The final kind of relationship we see between men and women is marriage. This relationship has laws where you are legally responsible for each other. It costs you actual money to break up. You get tax benefits for being with each other. Commitment is sacred. In this relationship, having kids is expected, not a surprise. You are supposed to be romantic with each other. The Bible commands it:

1 Corinthians 7:3–5 (NLT)

The husband should fulfill his wife’s sexual needs, and the wife should fulfill her husband’s needs. The wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and the husband gives authority over his body to his wife. Do not deprive each other of sexual relations, unless you both agree to refrain from sexual intimacy for a limited time so you can give yourselves more completely to prayer. Afterward, you should come together again so that Satan won’t be able to tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

That may have been more than you wanted to know about married couples, but God commands this for a reason. God gave us a sex drive and a desire for intimacy. God didn’t make a mistake when he created men and women to desire each other. God has wired us this way because it reflects a bigger picture. When God brings together a man and a woman in marriage, it is a metaphor for Christ and the Church. God created us to find the opposite sex attractive and to find someone to be with forever.

But the problem with all of this is sin. Sin has corrupted our view of love, relationships, sex, and marriage. Sin is what says, “God, I don’t care what you have in mind for my love life. I will do what I feel is right in my own heart.” The problem is, your heart can lie to you.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9, ESV)

So our job is to get back to what God wants for our love lives because He is the author of love.

So let's talk about dating. The Bible is clear about how we should handle those three categories of relationships.

- Family – Love, but no romantic stuff.
- Friends/strangers – Love, but no romantic stuff.
- Marriage – Love, and lots of romantic stuff.

But what about dating relationships? The Bible doesn't talk about dating. Nowhere in the Bible does it give us advice on how to go from friends and strangers to marriage. So the advice that is often given in youth group is: Pray and ask God to show you what direction you should go in your relationship and ask Him to give you the boundaries you need to honor God. In other words, "Just try not to have sex or anything like that."

The problem is, the space between "no romantic stuff at all" and "having sex" is so vague and unclear that it can be hard to tell what is right and what is wrong. We often ask ourselves to make the right decision ourselves. The issue is, we don't know what the right decisions are because we don't have any examples of it.

Dating is so arbitrary and subjective, that there really isn't any clear definition of what is right and what is wrong. We might say, "What is right for me is right for me, and what is right for you is right for you, and you can't judge me because you are not in our relationship." It is ultimately up to you to decide.

So we step back and ask. "What is dating?" Is it more than friends but less than marriage? Is it that the person you date gets the benefits of the physical side of dating and no one else does (but still no sex)? Is it that you are committing to only date each other and no one else?

Let's talk about commitment. We say we are committed, yet we know it's not true. What is the commitment and how do we know how long we are committed to it? We know that when one person is done dating the other person, they break up with them. What if the other person still likes them? Is there really a commitment, or is it really, "Stay together until you get tired of them?" In these "committed relationships," what is stopping someone from dumping you on Monday and dating someone else on Tuesday?

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