CHECK YES OR NO: GODLY DATING

The Bible is silent on the topic of dating, much it has much to say about relationships. While cultural expressions of courtship change, the principles of purity, mutual respect and healthy interaction found in Scripture do not. If followers of Jesus are to be different from the world, this includes how we interact romantically.

Lesson #1 Right Thinking

Healthy relationships start with a healthy you. It is essential to have a healthy self-image and a healthy view of what you are looking for in a romantic relationship.

Introduction:

Proverbs 4:20 – 27 in the Message Translation
²⁰⁻²² Dear friend, listen well to my words; tune your ears to my voice. Keep my
message in plain view at all times. Concentrate! Learn it by heart! Those who
discover these words live, really live; body and soul, they're bursting with
health. 23-27 Keep vigilant watch over your heart; that's where life starts.
Don't talk out of both sides of your mouth; avoid careless banter, white lies,
and gossip. Keep your eyes straight ahead; ignore all sideshow distractions.
Watch your step, and the road will stretch out smooth before you.
Look neither right nor left: leave evil in the dust.

Keeping watch over our hearts is an important lesson. While Solomon's words are about the importance of righteous living, the words are applicable to relationships. This whole discussion of dating and romantic relationships is truly about watching over – guarding – your heart. Too many young adults give their heart away too quickly.

Followers of Jesus need to be different in all our interactions, including the interactions of romance and dating. Over the years of working with young adults, I've observed less differences and more similaries with those who are not Christians. We have to "date differently" – at least in the sense we have to date better.

Teaching/Discussion:

It's true there is no chapter in the Bible on dating nor a chapter on how and what to do on a date. But we can observe principles of what we can should do in general and apply them.

In these lessons on dating, we will look at two opposing principles on dating topics. It will help us establish the right frame of mind in building healthy relationships.

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You won't always agree with everything that is shared. Feel free to dialogue and even disagree. Much of dating is personal opinion. Each lesson will work together to form a complete healthy picture of romantic relationships. What you will discover is that most of this relates to you, rather than another person.

Dialogue Opportunity: Before you begin, talk about the reasons why people start relationships. What are the motivators for dating and spending time with the opposite sex? Are they all good? Are they all healthy? What are some danger areas in thinking about relationships?

Let's look at some areas of right thinking:

Area #1 - Your self-image affects your relationships.

We start each relationship right, when thinking about ourselves is right. Compare these two portions of scripture together:

Psalm 139:13-16 You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.

^{Eph 2:10} For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Dialogue Opportunity: What do we learn about ourselves? How does God view us? How should we view ourselves? What impact does selfworth have on our romantic relationships?

RIGHT THINKING: I don't need someone else to be happy.

We make a huge mistake if we need someone else to be happy. If we are not fullfed unless we have another person in our life we are in trouble. That gives someone else power over our happiness.

WRONG THINKING: If I'm not with someone I'm worthless.

Sadly, too many people fall victim to this way of thinking.

Self-worth and how you view yourself is the key to a wonderful relationship of any kind. Value and worth is not determined by the other person, it is determined by God!

Area #2 – Know what you are looking for when you find it.

Movies have taught us that true love will surprise us. We won't be looking for it and then wham! It will appear. While this does happen, in my experience, it is very rare. For centuries, people have dreamed of the perfect spouse and come up with "wish lists" for the person they want to be with. Those are

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Leader Notes: helpful, but I'm pushing a little deeper than surface things like black hair, brown eyes, likes long walks on the beach. You need to make a list of the non-negotiable values and expectations you have of a potential partner. What are your opinions/values on faith, children, family, politics, race, etc. What are your standards on morality, entertainment, generosity, and church involvement. How do you want to be treated in public and in private by this person? Establish these ahead of time and use them as a compass towards relationship establishment. Listen to Paul Eph 5:15 So be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise. ¹⁶ Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. ¹⁷ Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do. Here's the RIGHT THINKING: I will establish standards for who I spend time with. If you don't do that, you'll WRONG THINKING: I will lower standards if the person makes me feel good. Now I don't suggest on the first date you pull out your checklist and quiz the person. That might be a little much. But...if you know before you go this person violates your standards – you should be very, very careful. **Dialogue Opportunity:** Make a list of some of the things that should be important to us in our established standards? What are things that are important to you. Area #3 – Your spiritual lives need to be compatible more than anything else. Being on the same, compatible spiritual journey is essential. The Bible warns against yoking ourselves – attaching ourselves – to people who are going in a different direction that we are. Over the years, these relationships have proven to be filled with conflict. RIGHT THINKING: I'm looking for someone who will journey with me. WRONG THINKING: We can figure out spiritual stuff later. It's tempting, right now you are "in love" so you'll figure out the other stuff later. Later will come sooner than you think and has the real potential to rob you of the love you share. **Conclusion/Application:**

Discuss other healthy ways of building self-worth before starting a relationship.

Lesson #2 Dating and Purity

Sexual purity is more than having/not-having sex. Purity speaks to the whole relationship. Christians must strive to maintain purity in their relationships.

Big Idea/Focus: Keeping a sexually pure, healthy relationship

Introduction:

^{1 Cor. 6:18} Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price.

Therefore honor God with your body.

When we start talking about sexual purity the following people usually stop paying attention:

Married people – "I don't have to worry about purity, after all I'm married."

Hurting people – "I've already had sex, so it's too late for me. Listening to you talk makes me feel even more guilty."

People not in a relationship – "I don't have to worry about purity, I'm not with someone."

Skeptical people – It's seems to you that the Bible and the church are just a bunch of uptight people who are trapped in the stone ages about sex. You check out because the Bible's view on homosexuality seems like prejudice and it seems cruel that God would give you a sex drive but then not allow you to act on it.

Uncomfortable people – there's another group that's just uncomfortable talking about sex.

Is this right? Who should be concerned about sexual purity?

Dialogue Opportunity: How should we respond to people who say, "I've already failed, it doesn't matter anymore?"

Teaching/Discussion:

Part One: Common mistakes about sexual purity

- 1. Sex is the only way to intimately connect with someone. Intimacy is much more than sexual contact.
- 2. Being sexually pure only means I have never had sexual intercourse. Impurity takes all forms. Pornography, lust, and objectifying others are all examples. There is more to being sexually pure than abstaining from sex.
- 3. When I get married my problem with lust will go away.

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If this was true, we would have no such thing as adultery. Sexual impurity begins in the heart and the mind. Leader Notes: Matthew 5:25 "You know the next commandment pretty well, too: 'Don't go to bed with another's spouse.' But don't think you've preserved your virtue simply by staying out of bed. Your heart can be corrupted by lust even quicker than your body. Those leering looks you think nobody notices—they also corrupt. **Dialogue Opportunity:** Allow the group to discuss their agreement or disagreement with these ideas presented. Have them come up with some of their own mistakes/misconceptions about sexual purity. Part Two: Steps to remain sexually pure: So what do I do? 1. Decide now to be sexually pure. Job 31:1 I made a covenant with my eyes not to look with lust upon a young woman. ^{Col 3:5} So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual sin, impurity, lust, and shameful desires. Prov 2:11 Wise planning will watch over you. Understanding will keep you safe. ¹² Wisdom will save you from evil people... ¹⁶ Wisdom will save you from the immoral woman, from the flattery of the adulterous woman. This is more than just saying, I'm not going to do it. It's setting up boundaries in advance and maintaining standards throughout the relationships. **Dialogue Opportunity:** What are some good boundaries to set up to remain sexually pure? 2. Run away from temptation. ¹Cor. 6:18</sup> Run away from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body Don't place yourself in tempting situations. Don't hang around with people or at places that lead to failure. Run away from the sin. Move yourself to a safe place. When it comes, respond in the right way. 3. Stay away from temptation. Proverbs 7 ...take these words of mine most seriously. Don't fool around with a woman like that; don't even stroll through her neighborhood. Countless victims come under her spell; she's the death of many a poor man. She runs a halfway house to hell, fits you out with a shroud and a coffin.

Solomon warns about the immoral woman, but his warning is more to the man. She exists, so don't go where she is. Don't place yourself in places where you will end up falling sexually. Delete the apps from your phone, remove the

channels from your cable, stop visiting this person at work, and don't go to his house. Stay away!

Dialogue Opportunity: Do you think this is an overreaction?

Conclusion/Application:

Discussions about sexual purity are emotional ones. Be prepared for emotions throughout the discussion. Also be prepared for raw emotion to come out from the hurting. It is likely that you will have one, or all, of the following in your group:

- The novice who has no idea what you are talking about.
- The victim who has experienced sexual trauma.
- The sexually active couple who are worried you are calling them out.
- The homosexual who is waiting for you to blast them.
- The person who failed and cannot shake the shame and guilt from their sexual experience.
- The sex addict who watches porn every night just to fall asleep.

All of these individuals need compassion and need to hear the message of sexual purity found in the Bible. Don't minimize experiences or assume anything when talking about purity.

Do your best to keep confidentiality in these moments – never share someone else's story. Even in they are not there, it makes the people listening wonder if you will tell their story to another group.

Provide a safe, restorative place of healing and understanding. Don't call people out or force them to admit things they are not ready to do.

Leader Notes:

Lesson #3: Is This the One?

In this lesson we will cover some basic, practical dating tips/advice.

Introduction:

Some people accuse the church or even God of having the wrong motive when it comes to dating, relationships, and sex. They say we are against fun, are judgmental, are close-minded, or that God is some kind of cosmic prankster to give us a sex drive and then say we can't use it.

Some people believe it's nobody's business what their relationships look like, who you date, or who you spend time with. I want you to have healthy wonderful dating relationships and live regret and conviction free. My motive is to give you information on the front end that will prevent you on the back end from being crushed with pain and sorrow.

God is into relationships. When Adam was in the Garden he said it is not good for that man to be alone. What you find is a God who created us and a God who loves us. He created us to be in relationship with Him and He created us to be in relationship with each other. And as our loving creator – he knows best what we need in our lives to be fully and completely fulfilled. The God who created us, knows what's best for us – especially in the area of our emotions, feelings and relationships. There are a lot of opinions about how we should live and what we should do – let's look at what our loving creator and our loving God says about relationships.

The following dating tips are from 20+ years of working with young adults. They are common sense (although they are not as common as one would hope) and most of the time they are easy to implement. Feel free to adapt to your personal situation as you see fit. Some, are clearly more important than others. In this checklist of sorts, you will see ways to know if "she is the one" or "he is the one" you should spend life and time with.

Teaching/Discussion:

Tip #1 – The person you are with is interested in YOUR life.

Well, it should be that and vice-versa. If all the person does is talk about themselves and what they want to do, be concerned. If they never do what you want, never spend time with the things you care about, and force you to change to their way, you are in an unhealthy space.

Tip #2 – The person involves themselves in my existing relationships.

We all know the story well. A friend starts dating someone and then, just like that, our friend disappears. All their time is with the new person and their

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friends. Parents are avoided, friendships abandoned, and spiritual leaders left out. While it is true new relationships replace old ones naturally, this is not a great pattern. If the person you are with values YOU, they value all of you, including your old relationships. They want you to be integrated and connected to their whole selves. If this person works against the established, trusted authorities in your life, you should be very wary of where they are leading you.

Dialogue Opportunity: How do you know when a new relationship is a healthy or unhealthy break from old patterns? How do you confront a friend who seems to be falling into this trap but doesn't know it?

Tip #3 – The person shares your values and priorities.

Does this person share my values? Are they asking me to violate my commitments to God and my other values? Are the things that are important to me also important to them? Are they willing to listen and be passionate about the things I am passionate about?

Dialogue Opportunity: What are examples of values and priorities that should be shared? What should a person do if they love someone who doesn't have those shared values/priorities?

Tip #4 – We are following reasonable timelines for commitment.

In the movies, it is love at first sight. Over the course of 2-hour movie, a couple meets, falls in love, gets married and has a child. But real life usually takes longer. I understand there are exceptions to this rule. I am aware of people who met and were happily married in a short amount of time.

But I know more stories of where hasty engagements and unreasonable timelines for commitment led to disaster. In fact, way more stories are like that

On the other hand, I know people who have waited for years for the person they are with to commit to them. They hope someday it will change. There is no magic formula or set amount of time. But there are reasonable ones.

Dialogue Opportunity: So, what's a reasonable amount of time a person should be thinking about before major commitments? How long should a person wait before admitting the other person just doesn't want to commit? There are no right answers here – just get others' opinion!

Tip #5 – The person I am in love with is in an appropriate age range to me.

What is age appropriate? What is the right age for me to date someone. I understand there aren't hard and fast rules about people 3 years older or 5 years older or even 10 years older than you. You will also always find exceptions, couples that defeated the odds, people who connect. The older

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you get the less important some of the distinctions are. However, there are some basic guidelines and even some laws you and I have to go by.

When you are college you shouldn't be meeting people and dating people in high school. In some cases, it's against the law and most of the time its creepy. The only time it isn't creepy is if your parents, their parents, and people you look up to for direction and advice are ok with it. Beyond that, don't do it. You are just asking for trouble. Usually this is an older guy asking out a younger girl. It's flattering to the girl, it makes her feel good when an older guy asks her out. I understand that. But you need to understand a couple simple things: First, usually when a guy is interested in a girl much younger than himself, it is because he cannot get a girl his own age to go out with him. Secondly, usually he thinks the girl is an easy mark. Someone who he can get to have sex with him or do what he wants without having to go through all the harder things he would face with a girl his own age. A younger girl says "yes" quicker to his plans, his choice of what to do, and even where to eat. She looks up to him more than one his own age. It makes him feel good. I understand there are exceptions, I've already talked about that but this is the general rule of thumb for guys, especially guys who aren't serving Jesus Christ.

Tip #6 – The person I am with treats me with dignity and respect.

Are their words affirming? Do they praise you? Are they the same way in private as they are in public? Do they raise their voice? Do they hurt you with words or physically harm you? Do they listen when you talk?

Do they struggle to find good things to say about you? We are not talking about flattery or false statements of love, but genuine affirmations of affection and honor. Are they proud of you? Do they share their pride and love for you with others?

Life is too short to spend with someone who does not articulate their care for you.

Conclusion/Application:

A smart person will not just evaluate the person they are with, but will also evaluate themselves. If you really love someone, do you do these well? Are YOU the one – at least through your actions and thoughts?

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Lesson #4 Relationships Matter

Rather than taking typical relationships strategies, we have to remember that our relationships matter to us and to others.

Big Idea/Focus: A Godly Approach to Dating Passage Covered: 2 Corinthians 6:13-14

Introduction:

^{2 Corinthians 6:13 – 14} Don't become partners with those who reject God. How can you make a partnership out of right and wrong? That's not partnership; that's war. Is light best friends with dark? Does Christ go strolling with the Devil? Do trust and mistrust hold hands? Who would think of setting up pagan idols in God's holy Temple? But that is exactly what we are, each of us a temple in whom God lives.

There are numerous approaches to relationships. Some people have a movie approach to relationships.

Common Relationship Approaches:

- Princess Bride Approach This person is perfect and can do no wrong. (Fantasy Dating)
- 2) Fast and Furious Approach Hello, would you like to marry me?
- 3) Transformer Approach Dating is about pretending to be something I'm not.
- 4) War of the Worlds Approach The fight is on!
- 5) Remote Control Approach I'll manipulate the person to get what I want.
- 6) Addicted to Love Having someone in my life gives me value.
- 7) Sin City Approach It's all about my pleasure.
- 8) The Rescuers Approach I can save them!
- 9) Mission Impossible Approach I'm going to do whatever it takes to not date.

10) Willy Wonka Approach – Everything is just weird.

Rather than this, we need a Godly approach.

Teaching/Discussion:

1) God speaks to us when we are in a right relationship with Him.

My relationship with God is the most important component of every relationship. Our relationships with others impact our relationship with God. In fact, much of Paul's argument in the New Testament is that it is through our relationships that people see and know God. Our relationships with others, impact their relationship with God!

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2) God's plan for our relationships does not contradict his word.

Godliness is the most important quality I look for in an intimate relationship. We need to look to the Bible for guidance and wisdom. Our relationships are mechanisms for God to speak to the world.

3) Questions to confirm whether you should be in this relationship?

- 1) Do I like this person or the idea of being with someone?
- 2) Do my spiritual leaders/mentors agree with me?
- 3) Have I lied to this person about important things in my life?
- 4) Have I caught this person in lies?
 - a. Once a liar always a liar....
- 5) Does my family approve of this relationship?
- 6) Are we doing things in secret, hiding it from others?
- 7) Is this person involved in helping others through ministry?
- 8) Is this person's family crazy? Can I deal with that?
- 9) Have I spent as much time in prayer about this person as I have physically expressing my affection for them?
 - a. Paraphrase are you praying for each other or praying together as much as you are making out. Yes I am serious.

10) Is this person hurting me physically or emotionally?

- 11) When we are together, do we sin?
- 12) Is this person committed to Jesus Christ?
- 13) Is this individual growing in their commitment to Jesus Christ?
 - a. Are they committed to church attendance?
 - b. Do you see a desire to sin less?
 - c. Does this individual push you to be more like Jesus?

It's really hard to quantify these – how many bad answers do you need before you break up? No firm answer, but there are deal breakers: #10, #11, #12, #13.

Conclusion/Application:

Quick Checklist of what your relationship should be:

- Healthy
- o Holy
- o Growing
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If it isn't these things, work to make it that way or end it.

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