



Start a Conversation about... **Dating**

Why date someone? Our world gives all kinds of answers to this question. You should date someone because you like them, they make you feel good, you don't want to be alone, the search for "the One" is what life is all about, sexuality is the source of your identity, etc. All of these are insufficient at best, and downright harmful at worst. The world's answers are rooted in a transactional understanding of relationships, an emotional understanding of love, and "doing what feels good" as the primary litmus test for boundaries.

This is what our young people are hearing all the time from the world around them, so we as the church need to talk about what God says about dating. We can lay a foundation for who an individual is in Christ apart from any dating relationship, how our value in Christ impacts our relationships, and what sacrificial love looks like. What follows are some suggestions on how to go about having that discussion.

Potential Activities

- Host a Relationships Q&A night as a youth event, with adults from your congregation of varying ages and relationship statuses serving as the panel. Be sure to gather questions ahead of time so you can prepare your panel. Alternatively, over the course of a few weeks pick out few Godly couples in your congregation and invite one of those couples each week to a youth group gathering for 20 minutes to share their story, talk about their relationship, and answer a few questions. The more positive examples you can connect your young people to, the better.
- Many youth workers find dating is a topic that especially draws teens so set a time each year to dive into dating and relationships. Plus, teaching the same core content in different ways each year helps to develop a strong foundation on relationships for your young people long-term. You will be amazed at how many times a student that has heard a key point multiple times before will suddenly grab a hold of that point in a new way their junior or senior year. Don't assume that since you talked about it once, you don't need to repeat it or that repeating it will not be a fruitful endeavor.
- If you're working with an individual youth (especially in your own family), have them put together a written list of qualities they are looking for in someone to date. After they spend a few days thinking about the list and write it out, go through it with them. Help them to evaluate what on the list is most important and what can be reconsidered. Some will have standards too low while others will have unrealistic standards. In every case, guide them towards Biblical standards.
Help them to think about how they can tell if someone is heading in the right direction, even if they aren't able to meet all of the standards today. Perhaps most importantly, discuss with them about how they can develop those qualities in their own life. Help them to think about how they can be the kind of person they would want to date and how what they are looking for may change over time.
- Watch the video presentation "Worth Dying For" (<https://youtu.be/-m12VqZEWCo>) and use it to springboard your discussion. The discussion questions on this handout are a good place to start in terms of follow-up questions to ask.

Discussion Questions

For these questions, refer to the scriptures below for guidance and direction.

- In your opinion, what is the purpose of a dating relationship? What is informing your answer? (media, peers, mentors, examples, etc.)
- Our world says that relationships are all about happiness and the search for "the One" perfect person out there for you. What are some problems with this as the foundation for relationships?
- What is the Biblical basis for dating or marriage?
- What does God say about who you are? How should this impact and inform a Christian dating relationship?
- "A dating relationship should not be where you find your identity and value, but a place where you are reminded of your identity and value in Christ." What are your reactions to this statement?
- What is the connection between value in Christ and setting physical boundaries in a dating relationship?
- Why should the qualities you looking for in someone to date be the same as those for someone you would marry?
- What is an example of a healthy, Christ-centered relationship in your life? Why does that couple come to mind?
- What is the difference between sacrificial love and emotional love? What role do each play in a relationship?
- How can you have contentment in life even if your relationship status is not where you want it to be?

Foundational Scriptural Truth

Ephesians 5:21-33

These verses form the core of Biblical teaching on relationships. Marriage, and therefore dating, is designed to reflect Christ and His Church, to be centered in sacrificial love and not selfishness, and is centered in God's love for us in Christ.

Matthew 6:25-26

Christ didn't say "because of what you have done, you are more valuable than they" or "since you are great people, you are more valuable than they." The value that Christ is talking about is an unconditional gift from our heavenly Father!

1 John 5:12

Jesus is not only what life is all about, He is life itself! If you have Jesus, but don't have a relationship, you still have life. He is all-sufficient!

Hebrews 12:1-2

"Fix your eyes on Jesus"—that's what the whole Christian life is all about, whether you're in a relationship or not. A dating relationship is never separate from the rest of your Christian life. Christ still must be central in your heart and mind.

Other Resources

- Youth E-Source has a Bible study series called "Worth Dying For" that explores the connection between dating relationships and our value and identity in Christ. You can also use the book *Sexuality Mentality* by Heather Ruesch from CPH and the attached FaithCourses.
- Listen to Gathering Sessions podcast via KFYO or Spotify, specifically "Worth Dying For" with Brandon Metcalf, "Sexuality in the Digital Age" with Jeremy Becker, or "My Body, My Life, My Value In Christ" with Heather Ruesch.
- Check with your pastor about what resources he uses for premarital counseling and brainstorm ways to incorporate those key concepts and truths into your discussions and teaching on relationships.