

Goals

Love is something we all seek. Many people in this world never find true love. One of the many reasons could be that they do not have a pure attitude towards love relationships. Many people in the world approach love with the mentality of simply having short-term fun. Hence, they move on from one relationship to another. They cannot commit themselves to one relationship for life.

As children of God, we must be careful not to be swayed by the trends of the world. God meant for His creation to enjoy love on earth. True love can be found, and it is a blessing from God. So, when dealing with issues of dating and marriage, we must maintain purity in our relationships with members of the opposite sex. By trusting in the Lord, we can hope to find true love and a beautiful and stable marriage that is blessed by God.

unit
2**Teacher Devotional**

Love is a word that has launched a thousand poems, so to speak. Human beings across the millennia have been motivated by love in what they do. Artists write, paint and compose about love. Lovers lose their lives in the name of love. Many more live and work because of love. Love is a profound, multi-faceted feeling humans have been blessed with by God. Unfortunately, it is also in the name of love that people have done harmful things to others and to themselves. It is important that we understand what true love is and pursue love in accordance with the beautiful will that God had in mind when He granted love to the human race. God is the source of love. True love cannot be experienced without God and His blessings. As children of God, it is essential that we keep in close contact with God and His word, so we can always keep the right perspectives about love.

Live a Life of Love Through God

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love."
(1 Jn 4:7, 8)

Lesson 3

Dating 101

Listed Scriptures

Gen 24, 29; 1 Cor 6:12, 7:13, 10:23; 2 Sam 13:1–19

Lesson Aim

- 1) To examine the purpose of dating from the biblical perspective
- 2) To understand the difference between love and infatuation and to resolve not to pursue infatuations at any time.
- 3) To help our students resolve not to date until they are ready for marriage.

Memory Verse

"Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails." (1 Cor 13:4 – 8)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Proverbs 7-9

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D



There is no Bible background information for this lesson.

Teaching Tips

This is a topic that students will love to talk about quite a bit. Much of this lesson is in the format of a discussion. Be sure to create an open and accepting ambience for the students so that there can be an exchange of ideas, views and questions. You can always bring in life experiences, both from your own life and examples you have seen, in addition to materials in this chapter. To the teacher: Go through with them each characteristic of love as mentioned here and discuss briefly why such is the essence of true love. There is a good article in Manna Issue 31 on this topic of match-making/dating (p.44 – 47: “From Isaac to Jacob to Courtship Today: Dating vs. Matchmaking”). Perhaps the teacher can print copies of the article for the students one week before the lesson and have the students read the article at home first. That article is a good base for the discussion of today’s lesson.

W A R M U P



Today’s topic is probably very interesting to many of you. Some of you may have some questions regarding this topic. What are some of the questions you have about dating? (Let students respond. Some other questions that may arise include: Is dating something that can be found in the Bible? Is it ever really approved by God? When can I start dating?) Perhaps not all of your questions will be answered at the end of this lesson. But surely you will learn more about the biblical perspective to dating. With more discussion with older brothers and sisters, prayers and study of God’s teachings, you will find the answers to other questions you may have.

B I B L E S T U D Y

Love relationships are a very fundamental aspect of life. Surprisingly, the Bible does not talk much about dating per se. Let us not get it wrong. God is definitely very concerned with the emotional aspects of our life and the Bible gives us a lot of insights into relationships with our fellow human beings and marriage.

While the Bible does not specifically tells us much about dating, it does give us many principles to guide us in dealing with life issues. It is on these guidelines that we should act wisely in all that we do in life.

We often hear people talking about dating or marriage in terms of whether it’s “Isaac-style” or “Jacob-style”. Are you familiar with the courtships of Isaac and Jacob? Read Genesis 24 and 29. So, when one talks about “Isaac style” and “Jacob style”, what comes to your mind? Write down some impressions and share your thoughts with the rest of your class.

Many of us tend to associate the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah with the notion of matchmaking. Jacob’s marriage to Rachel, on the other hand, is thought to be more liberal. So, to many young people, Jacob’s style seems more in tune with their modern ideas. It seems risky or even old-fashioned to simply be matched like Isaac. Most young people prefer to get to know the other person on their own.

We see that God does not disapprove of either Isaac’s or Jacob’s style of marriage. In fact, both styles share fundamentally very important characteristics that we can learn from, no matter how liberal a generation we are. Let us take a closer look at these two love stories.



Part 1

“Do the people of God date?”



A. Isaac and Rebekah (Gen 24)

- Who were the “match-makers” for Isaac and Rebekah?
(The old servant of Abraham, Abraham himself, and of course God whom they relied on throughout the whole process)
- Where could we see God’s guidance during this process?
(The old servant prayed for a sign—that Rebekah would give him and the camels a drink, and she did.)
- How can we tell that Rebekah is a good woman?
(She was compassionate towards the old man who had traveled from afar. Even though it was physically tiring, she was willing to draw water from the well for him and his camels.)
- What do you understand about Isaac’s character from other events in Genesis?
(Isaac was a very obedient child to Abraham. He was quiet and calm when

Abraham took him up to the mountain in Moriah to offer him as a living sacrifice. Later in life, he was also gentle and giving when his neighbors filled up his wells. He did not fight with them but simply entrusted everything to God.)

- e. Do you think his personality had a lot to do with his acceptance of a wife whom he had never met before, whom his father had chosen for him? What else is important in such a situation? Explain your answer.
(Faith in God has a lot to do with Isaac's acceptance of the marriage arrangement. It does not mean that we should be blind in our faith and accept any matchmaking. Faith in God where marriage is concerned is NOT about closing our eyes and leaving all responsibility to God.)

In this case, we see God's blessings. The marriage of Isaac and Rebekah was built on Abraham's faith in God's words as well as Isaac's trust and obedience. Isaac trusted his father and his father trusted the old servant. The faith of the old servant is also very important here. The three of them had a very close relationship. Rebekah possessed certain important qualities that close kin can attest to. In other words, this is not an arrangement done hastily or blindly.)

B. Jacob and Rachel (Gen 29)

- a. What is one main difference between how Jacob and Isaac met their wives?
- b. What was Jacob's plan of action when he decided that he wanted to marry Rachel?
- c. How is his plan of action different from the conventional way of dating as we understand today?
- d. A lot of times, what is unsaid can give us clues to understanding a situation. From the case of the mix-up on Jacob's wedding night, what can we infer about the relationship between Jacob and Rachel (specifically, how close the two of them were before marriage)?
- e. Jacob's love for Rachel lasted until she died. How is this love different from the love of many dating relationships that you know of today?

(Jacob's style of courtship is actually not at all like what is commonly practiced today. First of all, he did not have the attitude of just trying it out with Rachel. He made the decision right from the outset to work seven years so as to be

with her. In a way, he had no plans to move on to other girls during these seven years. It was a commitment from the beginning, not a try-and-see attitude, which is what most young people today have when they start dating someone.

Secondly, it is very likely that he did not actually start a relationship with Rachel. There are a few reasons for such a belief. (a) Laban would not have permitted it. (b) If he had been physically close enough to Rachel, it is unlikely that he would have mistaken Leah for Rachel on his wedding night.

The biggest difference between Isaac and Jacob's paths to marriage is that Isaac did not meet his wife prior to the wedding, and that he did not actually pick his wife himself. Other than that, both Isaac and Jacob had clean and pure courtships. We should not misuse the term "Jacob-style" to infer that we can therefore simply date as we like. As children of God, whatever we do, there are guidelines to follow. Let's take a look at some of the biblical encouragement.)



Part 2

Principles in Dealing With the Opposite Sex

As children of God, we must never cause harm to anyone. In things to do with our emotions, we must therefore be very careful. We need to have wisdom and self-control. Read the following Bible verses and discuss the questions.

A. 2 Samuel 13:1-19

- a. What were the reasons Amnon was so attracted to Tamar?
- b. How can we tell that Amnon's feelings for Tamar were not true love?

(It is important to explain to our students that infatuation should not be equated with love, as clearly seen in the case of Amnon's feelings for Tamar. It is a common misconception among teenagers that an infatuation is different from true love in that infatuations do not last long. That is a superficial way to analyze one's emotions. Infatuations can last for a long time, and such feelings of attraction often last until we actually meet that person. Attractions usually fade

when we get familiar with a person and share many experiences. But, through sharing of common experiences, there is also opportunity for true love to grow.

As children of God, we must hold our emotions in check, and not pursue every single attraction we may feel for someone of the opposite sex. Attractions come and go, but we have to preserve our heart for the one person with whom we will spend the rest of our lives with.)

B. 1 Corinthians 6:9

- a. Among young people of the world today, pre-marital sex is very common. What does the Bible say about fornicators? (They will not inherit the kingdom of God.)
- b. When there is attraction and infatuation between two people, physical closeness is often desired. How can we maintain purity in such a situation? (It is important that their interaction with each other be in open and public spaces. It is best not to spend time alone in any closed room or space.)

C. 2 Corinthians 6:14

- a. In the case of Amnon, we have seen how destructive infatuations can get. What is the principle stated in this verse about how we should look for our potential spouse? (We should not go by our feelings at the moment or by looks. Amnon was infatuated with Tamar for a long time. So we should not use length of time to dismiss something as mere infatuation. In fact, an infatuation can last a long time, if one continues in his own desires and fantasies or refuses to heed others' advice.)
- b. What does it mean to be in communion with darkness? (When one is in communion with darkness, one does evil things and commits sins.)

D. 1 John 4:11

- a. The Bible teaches us many things. The fundamental principle in our relationship with people is love. How can one practice responsible love in issues of dating and emotions? (Love is not self-seeking. We should not date for the purpose of having fun or to satisfy our desires. The sole purpose of dating is for marriage. If you are not ready for marriage, you should not be dating. This is responsibility towards oneself as well as the other person.)

C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G



- 1 In what ways were Isaac and Jacob's paths to marriage different and in what ways were they similar?
- 2 Why is infatuation sometimes a dangerous thing?
- 3 What is the guiding principle from the Bible that we should apply to all aspects of our life?
- 4 How can we practice that principle in issues dealing with our emotions?

L I F E A P P L I C A T I O N



To Date or Not to Date

There are obviously differences between us and Isaac or even Jacob. We live in a totally different social and cultural setting. We meet more people, including people from the opposite sex. Social patterns of human interaction have also changed. But, there is one thing we must always remember: God never changes. So every generation of God's people faces the challenge of living out the principles of God no matter their social or cultural settings.

1. Does matchmaking still exist in the 21st century?

Yes, of course, and it is not done only in our church or in very traditional soci-

eties. People are often set up through friends. Online agencies are also very popular today. Basically, matchmaking should be taken as an opportunity to meet someone and to get to know the other person first as a friend. Then perhaps later on, the friendship could develop into something more. Depending on our spirituality and maturity, matchmaking can be an edifying and faith-building experience in our search for God's will in marriage.

2. Is dating okay in the eyes of God?

The straightforward answer is yes. But, perhaps this is not the right question to ask. (Read 1 Cor 6:12, 7:13, 10:23) The right question to ask is whether we can bring glory to God, benefit to ourselves and to others around us in whatever we do. For a start, we may want to ask the following questions.

3. Why do I want to date someone?

Do you sometimes feel that you want to have a girlfriend/boyfriend? What are the reasons? Here are a few stories about teenagers and their dating experiences. For each story, discuss if you think their motives for dating were correct or healthy. What do you think the consequences will be if one plunges into a relationship based on the motivations described in the stories? Would you do the same for yourself?

Story 1

Jason hung out a lot with a group of friends who really knew how to add fun to their lives. They always had activities after school and on weekends. One thing Jason noticed that separated him from his friends was that they all had girlfriends. Most of the time when they hung out, the girls came along. Jason always felt awkward being the only "bachelor" in the gang. He decided that he should try to get himself a girlfriend as soon as possible. Although it seemed awkward, Jason started to chat with girls more at school. He succeeded in finding a girlfriend. However, his girlfriend did not like to hang out with his friends at all. They often had fights over where to go, who to hang out with, and what to do. Jason started to realize that maintaining a relationship with someone was harder than he thought. It wasn't as simple as just having a girlfriend. He began to regret having a girlfriend, because he missed his freedom when he was single. But he did not know how to tell her.

Story 2

Ann is a very introverted girl. She is not really pretty or popular. She has always thought of herself as being "plain". When she saw that many of the girls in her school had guys, she wished she were more outgoing, and pretti-

er, because having a boyfriend seemed like a really cool thing. If she had a boyfriend, she would definitely be less lonely, she thought. Perhaps then, she would also have envious eyes staring at her.

Story 3

Growing up, Rob has always been a "goody-two-shoes". He always obeyed his parents. In the eyes of his elders, he's the perfect boy. In the eyes of his friends, he's the nicest person around. His only vice seems to be that he's too conservative and even too strict with himself. After entering high school, Rob gradually started to feel tired of being "the good boy". He wanted to be more "normal", to be more like his friends at school. He decided that he would try many of the things that other teenagers were doing. Among the first few items on his list was to try dating. After all, what's wrong with asking girls out and trying to find a soul mate if a nice girl came along?

- a. What are the motivations or attitudes of people who do not revere God when it comes to dating?
(kill time, kill loneliness, for sex, for fun, trying it out)
- b. What are some of the harmful consequences of those kinds of attitudes?
(It can lead to a lot of hurt for both parties, because human emotions are very fragile and precious. Emotional hurt can lead to a lot of insecurities, and even loss of faith in love. Also, it leaves behind a history that you can never erase. You don't want to marry someone who has a long history of trials with his/her ex-boyfriends/girlfriends, so you should demand the same of yourself and preserve your love for the one you want to marry.)
- c. What should be the right attitude towards dating—one that is acceptable in the sight of God?
(As Christians, we do not date to fill our loneliness or kill time. Our time should be spent drawing closer to God and His people, as well as doing useful things to glorify His name and bring benefit to all around us. We should not date for fun, just to try things out, or even worse, for physical indulgence. Dating should therefore be for the purpose of being serious about the other person, leading to marriage. Marriage should be the ONLY purpose for dating. We MUST NOT allow infatuations to grow that may lead to an emotional and/or sexual relationship. Then we would be committing a mortal sin against God. We should flee from this type of risky situation at all times.)

4. Is there a right age to start dating?

In principle, a person who is ready to date is one who is prepared and determined to commit his/her life to someone forever (i.e. two become one), living according to biblical teachings. Since we have established that dating should be for the purpose of marriage, it makes sense then that we should start dating only when we're ready for marriage. There is not a "right" age to start dating, but there are factors to take into serious consideration:

- a. Emotional maturity – Emotional maturity entails being able to accept ourselves and others around us. It also involves being able to live and work with others in a considerate manner. A lot of hurt can be done to someone if we are not sure of what we want emotionally. We may think it's okay to move on to another relationship because it is not working out. But we could be scarring the other person for life because we are not emotionally mature enough to handle dating.
- b. Financial security – Someone who is not able to take care of himself financially should worry first about finding some stability, such as a stable job. Genesis 2:24 tells us that "a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife." This entails the ability to lead a life apart from his parents, and that includes having the financial means to take care of himself and his partner.
- c. Spiritual maturity – It is hard to pinpoint what it means to be spiritually mature. But a person who pursues and seeks after God all his life will know how to behave in a godly, responsible and loving way towards people he interacts with. This is an important factor in being able to deal with relationships.

5. Is it okay to put off dating?

Being ready to date does not mean we should plunge into dating right away. In fact, there are people who are ready for dating who choose to defer this stage of life because they want to pursue other more important things. Here are two real-life stories of youths in church who did just that:

Story 1

Sister W. is the dream of many brothers. Not only is she physically attractive, she attends a very prestigious college and is very fervent in serving God in church. All throughout her high school years and college, there were guys who tried to ask her out. When she was in her final year in college, she

started to become closer friends with one brother whom she had known for many years. Although they are not from the same locality, they email each other very often. Somehow, she could sense that the brother is interested in her. She liked that brother too, for he is a very exemplary youth in church and has a good job.

One day, the brother asked whether she would like to be his girlfriend. She was put in a serious dilemma. Although she was just a year away from graduation, she felt that it was still too early for her to be sure that this brother is the one that she would really like to marry. More importantly, she wanted to go on to graduate school. She knew that she would not be able to juggle fulfilling her potential, serving God in church and handling a relationship at the same time. After all, a relationship is not something trivial; she wanted to make sure time and effort are put in to make the relationship an edifying one for both people.

Although it seemed to run contrary to her feelings, she turned the brother down. She decided to entrust this matter into God's hands and she believes that God will take care of her marriage when the time is right.

Story 2

When brother L. graduated from college and found a well paying job, he started getting a lot of attention from sisters, parents and even more elderly members in church. Obviously, everyone thought he was ready to get married! In his mind, he had thought so too. He had always loved kids and he had secretly wished to be married young so that he could have his own kids.

However, as he started getting all this attention, he began considering what dating and marriage really meant. Having just started his career, he began to realize that juggling work and service to God in church was already tough. He didn't need to have an extra commitment at this stage. Therefore he made up his mind that he would rather wait a few more years before considering dating or marriage.



Some have said that unless one knows God, and fears God, one cannot really love another person. Indeed, love is of God. As children of God, we should practice love in all that we do. In emotional affairs, we must not be carried away by emotions of the moment. We should always watch and pray and not allow infatuations to develop. Remember that relying on the flesh leads to death, but relying on the Holy Spirit and putting to death the flesh will lead to life (Rom 8:13). We need to see things in a long-term perspective and observe the teachings of God. That way, we will not hurt others or ourselves, for that is part of practicing God's love on earth. May God guide everyone so that we will always seek His guidance.

Lesson 4

Why Stay Pure?

Listed Scriptures

Deut 7:6-14; Ps 119:11; Job 31:1; 1 Cor 6:19, 20; 1 Cor 6:9, 10, 10:12; Jas 4:7; Gal 5:15, 16; 2 Tim 2:22

Lesson Aim

- 1) To move students to be determined to stay pure with the help of the Holy Spirit.
- 2) To encourage the students to sign a pledge of purity.

Memory Verse

"Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord." (Heb 12:14)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Proverbs 10-12

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D



"For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth" (Deut 7:6). From the very early stages of creation, God chose Abraham and his descendents to be a special people unto Him.

This exclusivity comes with a price and responsibility. This special people of God have to be separated from the rest of the nations. They belong to God, and therefore, they have to abide by God's commandments. This is so that they may have blessings as well as glorify God.

Today, we are the special people that belong to God. "Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham ... There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal 3:7, 28, 29). In the same way, we have to keep