



WEEK 1

SERMON GUIDE



THE BIG IDEA

Staying close to Jesus makes every relationship better.

THE BIBLE

Matthew 22:36-40
Genesis 1:26, 2:18; John 15:9-17

WHAT?

WE'RE STARTING A NEW SERIES

POLL | What do you think about dating?

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Create a live digital poll with a service like polleverywhere.com so students can participate in the poll anonymously and you can show the results on-screen. You could either give students a few moments to respond to the questions when you begin teaching or you can provide instructions for how to participate before the service begins so you have time to review the results. Use this poll as an opportunity to learn about your students, so ask straightforward questions you want to know the answers to, like: Have you ever dated someone? Are you dating someone right now? At what age were you allowed to get your first boyfriend or girlfriend? What do you think is a good age to start dating? So far, has dating made your life better, worse, or neither? Get creative!
- Today we're starting a four-week series about dating and what it means to be "meant to be" in our relationships. But first, let's take a look at those survey results. *Show and talk about the results.*

QUESTION | What's your favorite on-screen romance and why?

- Give a few students a chance to respond.
- In most of those examples you just gave, I think it would be appropriate to say those couples were all definitely "meant to be."
- That's how all of our favorite movies, songs, and books talk about love, isn't it? It's as if the secret to an amazing relationship is a little bit of destiny, a whole bunch of feelings, and a tiny dash of magic. But you can't exactly use those relationships as models for your own, can you?

QUESTION | What unrealistic dating advice do those movies give us?

- If we took these movies or TV shows literally, we'd have to do some pretty crazy things in order to get a date or fall in love. What's one way your favorite movie romance is totally unrealistic?
- *Give a few students a chance to respond.*
- Our favorite movies definitely paint some unrealistic expectations of what love and dating is like in the real world. So it makes sense, when we observe the not-so-perfect, real-life relationships modeled by our friends, parents, or maybe our favorite celebrities, that we might start to wonder, "Wait—I'm confused. Is *that* how relationships are meant to be?"

DATING IS . . .

- There are three reasons we're going to spend an entire month talking about dating.
 - **DATING IS COMPLICATED.** It can be easy to look at someone in a happy, healthy relationship and think they were just "meant to be." Maybe that's true, but it's also true that love is pretty complicated for the rest of us.
 - **DATING IS HARD TO TALK ABOUT.** It seems like everyone has an opinion about dating and none of those opinions are the same. It's hard to know who to talk to and which opinions to trust.
 - **DATING IS CONFUSING.** You probably have some questions about dating, right?

DISCUSSION | What are some questions you or your friends have about dating?

- *Give your students a few moments to share and discuss.*

VIDEO | When Harry Met Sally Couple Interviews

- I get it! When I was your age, I had the same kinds of questions.
- It seems like every movie tells us that love is something you just fall into, doesn't it? Like if it's "meant to be," you'll just know! Kind of like these ridiculously adorable couples . . .
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Play the first 1:20 of [this clip](#). You'll return to this video each week of the series.*

SO WHAT?

STORY | Talk about your experience with dating in middle or high school.

- I think we'd all agree that a relationship like those relationships we just heard about would be the goal, right? We all want to find someone we're madly in love with, who sticks with us no matter what, and who we can grow old and maybe start a family with. We want a partner.
- But . . . how do we find that special someone? How will we know when we've found them? And what do we do in the meantime, before we're ready to really "settle down"?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Give your students some insight into your experience or state of mind on this subject when you were their age. Were you dating? Did you want to date? Did you get turned down by your crush? What were your biggest worries, problems, or questions about love? The point of this story is to be relatable, not to point to your teenage years as a perfect model of teenage relationships.*

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT DATING

- Looking back on my teenage years, there are definitely things I regret about the way I saw and handled my relationships. I would have loved a dating instruction manual.
- Unfortunately, I don't have a dating instruction manual to give to you. I wish I could tell you God gave us one, but to be honest, the Bible doesn't really give any specific advice about dating.
 - Dating wasn't really a thing when the Bible was written.
 - Back then, people got married really young—like, right after puberty.
 - Most marriages were arranged by people's parents.
 - And neither Tinder nor ChristianMingle.com had been invented yet.
- So the Bible doesn't really have anything to say about dating specifically. But Jesus did give us a guiding passage about relationships that I want to take a look at together.

SCRIPTURE | **Matthew 22:36-40**

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Matthew 22:36-40.*
- I know, I know—at first glance, this passage has nothing at all to do with dating. It's not like Jesus said, "The greatest commandment is to wait until you're sixteen to date and also not to have sex before marriage!" But hang with me for a second. I think you're going to see that this passage actually has *everything* to do with dating.
- In this conversation, Jesus said that loving God is the most important thing you can do. But then He follows it up by explaining that loving God is connected to loving people. I think it's safe to assume Jesus was talking about all people—including the people we choose to date and marry.
- So before we go any further with this conversation about love and relationships with people, I think we need to start where Jesus started: with the most important kind of love and relationship there is. Let's start with our love for, and relationship with, the God who created us.
- If we don't first love God well, we'll never be able to love people (or date them) well.

SCRIPTURE | **Genesis 1:26, 2:18; John 15:9**

- Let's see what else the Bible has to say about relationships.
- **GOD EXISTS IN COMMUNITY:** *Read Genesis 1:26.*
 - God has always existed as one God in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - God is a relational God.
- **GOD MADE US TO EXIST IN COMMUNITY:** *Read Genesis 2:18.*
 - We were created in God's image, designed to reflect Him and His character.
 - Just like He is a relational God, we are relational people and have a deep longing to live in a way that is connected with other people.
- **GOD MADE US TO EXIST IN COMMUNITY WITH HIM:** *Read John 15:9.*
 - Sometimes we make the mistake of ignoring this part of our design. We try to fill the need in our hearts with a relationship with a person, rather than a relationship with our Creator.
 - We are designed to crave relationships with other people, but a relationship with Jesus, your Creator, is the first and best way to satisfy your need for connection. Then let your other relationships follow. That's why Jesus said to love God before He said to love others.
 - **Staying close to Jesus makes every relationship better.**

NOW WHAT?

DISCUSSION | What do you think?

- Give your students a few moments to share and discuss the following statements.
- I'm going to give you a few statements to think about. Then I want to hear if you agree, disagree, or aren't sure what you think, and why.
 - If you're hoping a guy or girl will satisfy your loneliness, then you will always feel alone.
 - If you're not at peace with God without a boyfriend or girlfriend, then you won't be at peace with God if you have one.
 - If you want a great dating relationship, then you've first got to be okay with not having one.

ASK GOOD QUESTIONS

- I could give you all of my personal opinions about dating and relationships, but I don't think that's going to be all that helpful for you. I believe the best questions lead us to the best answers. So instead of giving you the "right" answers, I want to give you good questions.
- Based on what we've talked about today, I think there are three big questions I would encourage you to ask and talk about in your small groups:
 - **IS THIS THE RIGHT TIME FOR ME TO DATE?** Do you think you're old enough? Do you think it's the right time in your life? At this moment, do you believe you can make wise dating decisions based on Biblical values? The answer to all of those questions may be "yes," but that's not for me to say. That's something for you to examine honestly.
 - **DO I EVEN WANT TO DATE?** The world we live in makes dating seem mandatory—like if you don't have a boyfriend or girlfriend, or you haven't checked certain things off your relationship "To-Do List," that you're missing something. But I'm here to tell you that's not true. There is nothing wrong with not wanting to date right now. If you want to focus on you, your friends, and your relationship with God, that is totally okay.
 - **HOW WILL I KNOW WHEN I'M READY?** I'm not sure there's one answer to this, but here are a few thoughts. If you're okay with not dating, you might be ready to date. If you're clear about what boundaries you will not cross, you might be ready to date. If you're prepared to say "no" if someone wants to push you past those boundaries, you might be ready to date. If you're prepared to handle a break-up, you might be ready to date. But here's the most important one: if you already have a healthy and growing relationship with Jesus, you might be ready to date.
- Again, if you showed up tonight because you wanted some clear guidelines and instructions on how to date well, I'm sorry if I disappointed you. This subject can be unclear and confusing, but I hope that over the next few weeks we can get some clarity together.
- This week, though, there's one thing I hope we've made really clear: loving others well starts with loving God well. So in preparation for a month of these conversations about love and relationships, I want to challenge you to take a few steps closer to the God who created you and wants a relationship with you. Because **staying close to Jesus makes every relationship better.**