



KEY TAKEAWAY: How you date affects who you become

KEY VERSES: 1 Timothy 4:12; James 4:14

[**Author Note:** Show the flower from week one. The flower petals should have changed colors. Recap week one and talk about how when our heart is in control, it can ruin us from the inside out.]

INTRO

Have you ever jumped into a relationship that ended badly? I’m talking “no one saw that coming” type of bad. It doesn’t even have to be romantic. Maybe you started a friendship that ended up being toxic. Life can be unpredictable like that, and no one really knows how relationships will end up.

The mystery is what makes it so exciting, which is why James says it like this:

James 4:14 (ESV)

You do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

Hang on to this verse, because this is going to be important in a little bit. But for now, I’ve got a story for you.

[**Author Note:** The following is a personal story from my life. You can use me as a fictional character for your students, or tell your own story.]

When I was in high school, I accomplished the unimaginable: I escaped the friend zone. The friend zone is this metaphorical nightmare where you want to be more than friends with someone, but you’re stuck with just being their friend. But I overcame it. The funny thing is, I friend zoned her first in middle school, and in the middle of 8th grade, I realized I had feelings for her.

But she was constantly dating someone else, and I was never quick enough when she ended a relationship. I was always too late, until my

sophomore year. It was the best month of my high school career. You heard that right; the relationship lasted a month.

Turns out, this girl had kissed some other guy, week three into our relationship. Her excuse was this: “It’s not cheating! It was National Kiss Week.” I had some things to say about that, but we’re in church, so I won’t say them now. I wish I could say I never saw it coming, but the truth is, the red flags were there all along. In middle school, this girl started a behavior I call “serial dating.”

THE PATTERN OF YOUR LIFE

Serial dating is when you date multiple people within a year’s span. A serial dater never goes a few weeks without being single. Does this sound familiar to you? Maybe you have a friend just like this. This type of person dates to fill a void in their heart. They can’t find any self-worth, so they find their value in who they date. Not only is serial dating unhealthy today, but it creates larger problems in the future.

A person who never deals with their self-worth issues and is constantly dating to feel better about themselves, they are more likely to cheat on their future spouse. That girl I dated isn’t the only person that carried some bad habits into a marriage.

[Author Note: Be brave and vulnerable for your group; share a struggle you had that carried into the future. If you’re not married, talk about a struggle in a relationship or friendship.]

For me, I was a terrible communicator. I would keep my emotions to myself, and eventually everything would spill out in a torrent of anger. I thought I was being strong by not communicating how I truly felt, but I was just running away from conflict, which caused a lot of bitterness in my marriage.

So what kind of person should we date? To be honest, that’s a destructive way to look at dating. If that’s where we start in the conversation of dating, then we need to change the question of “who we date” to “how we date.” How should we date other people? The answer to this question will always filter the “who should we date” question.

So, how should we date? Well, remember what James mentioned earlier? *“You do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes (James 4:14, ESV).*

Our lifetime is limited. This isn’t the biblical way of yelling “YOLO” before doing something stupid. This is God’s way of saying, “Your life is limited, therefore make every day and every decision count for something. Live as if everything can change your future; because the truth is, it can.”

So what if we dated with the future in mind? What does that look like? The bad habits you have now are creating a pattern for your future. Depending on how you date now, you’re either creating a strong marriage, or you’re practicing for your second divorce. That’s how important this is.

Every decision you make needs to have the future in mind, because your future is worth guarding. When you look at someone to date, you need to decide if this person enhances your future or brings it crashing down. Here’s a great question to ask about people when it comes to dating: “Can I see myself marrying this person? Would they be a selfless spouse, or would they be selfish?”

When you put marriage on the table of dating, it raises the stakes of the game. Now, if you answer “yes” to the marriage question, that doesn’t mean you should drive to Vegas tomorrow, but it means you’re willing to risk your future on this person. Is that a scary thought—risking your future on a person?

That’s exactly what you’re doing every time you date someone—you’re allowing them to shape who you are and how handle conflict in the next five years.

[Author Note: Get out some Jenga blocks or a deck of cards. Show students how the base (decisions of today) affects the stability of tomorrow (the next two levels of your structure). When we build a stronger today, it builds a stronger future. Build a weaker base and show them how the next two levels become unlevelled, and let the structure fall. But the beautiful thing about integrity is, it can be rebuilt with the right foundation. Integrity is strength of a person’s foundation. Integrity affects everything.]

When you date with the future in mind; you’re dating in a way that guards your future. Because how you date affects who you become.

CAPTURE THE SMALL FOXES

How you date affects who you become. That doesn’t just include who you choose to date, but how you handle conflict. The way that you deal with conflict now is creating a pattern for your future.

Maybe you don’t fight fair in your conflict. This can look like you bringing things up that you already forgave the person for, taking their words out of context, or being manipulative to get your way. Maybe for you, it’s confronting the conflict itself. This can look like not forgiving someone at all, not listening to their side of things, or not letting people know how you really feel.

Or maybe you don’t respect people’s boundaries. These boundaries can be sexual (you get them to do something with you physically that they don’t want to do), or the boundaries can be emotional (you don’t allow them to speak their mind and refuse to give them compassion or equality in the relationship).

Maybe to you, these things aren’t so bad. You’re thinking, “It’s not like I’m an alcoholic or physically hurting anyone.” All of these things may appear to be small, but these negative habits are cancer to your future relationships. What may look like a tiny imperfection may be the reason for your future divorce. Song of Solomon says it like this:

Song of Solomon 2:15 (ESV)

Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards, for our vineyards are in blossom.

In this analogy, it’s not the big foxes that bring down the grape vine; it’s the small foxes. Every vinedresser is on guard for the big foxes, because they can see them stealing the grapes. The small foxes can’t even reach the bottom branch, so no one feels threatened by the puppy’s presence. But what they don’t know is, the small fox will gnaw at the base of the vines until the whole thing comes crashing down. The big foxes will steal a little fruit, but it’s the small foxes that will destroy the whole garden.

It's the same with your relationships; both romantic and with your friends. The small negative habits are what eventually ruin everything. Bitterness builds up, and anger turns into depression. One second, you're holding hands, and the next, you're telling them that they're “number one” with your middle finger. Do you want to guard your future? Then you need to deal with the small foxes. Because how you date affects who you'll become.

LIVE FOR TOMORROW

You might be feeling like you're too young to even start thinking about the future. You're probably thinking, “I'm a teenager! I'm supposed to do really dumb stuff.” Growing older doesn't mean you stop making mistakes. It means the mistakes keep getting worse. That's why Paul writes this:

1 Timothy 4:12 (ESV)

Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

Don't wait until you're 40 to get it right in the dating department. Start building your future today. Start figuring out how to communicate better and speaking life into a relationship. That's what Paul means by “set an example in your speech.”

Guard your future, and be selective in who you date and how you date. That's your conduct. Your love is what you're willing to sacrifice. Are you willing to sacrifice your own ego in dating?

Or, how about that faith stuff? That's seeing your relationship from God's point of view. Would God be OK with the person you're dating, or is He sending some not-so-subtle signs about how toxic it is?

The last is purity. Last week, we talked about how, if you don't work on your heart, it will work against you. That's purity. Are you in control of your heart, or is it in control of you?

Again, you might think you're too young to be thinking like this, but Paul isn't saying all this because you can't do it. He's saying it to give you a license toward changing your future. The world will look down on you because of your age. But your age is a blank canvas to make a better future. So use it. How you date will affect who you become.

[Author Note: After service, empty the water from the mason jar. Let the flower hang upside down to dry out so that it's nice and crispy. The next week is titled “Thirsty,” so it's all about how we need a source that will give life.]