

RUF Bible Study – Dating Sex and Marriage  
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Dating 1 – Why Dating Doesn't Work

Angi moved to our school in third grade. That happens to be the grade when I got glasses, which really helped me see so much better, but I'm not sure upgraded my social status very much. Everyone liked Angi. She was the cool new girl, very pretty, smart and popular.

In the fifth grade I finally made my move. Through my various emissaries, I sent her a note asking her if we could "go together," which was the phrase we used for this level of romantic boyfriend, girlfriend interest. "Will you go with me? Check yes, no or maybe." She sent me a note back. It had the yes box checked. I couldn't believe it! She said yes! Hooray for me!

So that started the next two weeks of – nothing. Nothing happened. I was way too scared. I didn't know what to do. We were in different fifth grade classes so I rarely saw her, maybe at recess. But I had a plan. The thing couples did at recess was they walked around the track and held hands. When they got to the other side, they would kiss.

I wanted to do this. This would be my big moment, my first kiss. I talked about it with my friends, and they all encouraged me to go for it. I muscled up as much courage as I could, and I asked Angi to walk the track with me. She agreed. I grabbed her hand, set one foot on the track and then – Mrs. Majors blew her whistle and said there were only three minutes left in recess so we couldn't go. Drat! Whew! I was saddened and relieved. Angi and I ran off in two different directions and spent another week or so not talking until she broke up with me. I can't blame her. I was a bad fifth grade boyfriend.

She and I became really good friends, but I always did like her. I blame Mrs. Majors for keeping us apart. Thankfully, I believe God is sovereign and Angi married a better man than me for her and I married a better woman for me than her. Plus, it was the fifth grade.

I really wanted some good dating tips from my friends. I needed to know how girls *thought*, how they *ticked*, how to kiss them and make them feel wanted and want you.

It's funny to think about this for a fifth-grader (actually it's petrifying now that I'm the parent of children this age). But so many of you are looking for exactly the same thing. You want to know what to do. You want to know how to get a date, keep a date, do the right things to get engaged, get married, have great orgasmic sex and raise perfect babies who can read at twelve months old.

It makes sense. You think there are certain rules. Some of them are rules of dating, but others are rules against dating. You *won't* date. Maybe you have a philosophical stance against the social construction of dating, and you want to promote group dating or courtship or some other model. You've kissed dating goodbye. Others of you won't date because you're working on your relationship with God, and you say dating will only get in the way. None of us are sure why, but we also agree with you to some degree. And then there is a third group of you that just throws out dating rules altogether. There are no rules at all for you. You may be into serial monogamy or not, you struggle with hookups, same sex attraction, kissing, drunk dialing or just whatever you think at the moment might be best.

In this lesson we're going to get to the fundamental bottom of why relationships don't work. Why time and time again they fail. Why you break up, mope around and hate yourself. We're talking about dating, but we're also talking about all relationships. None of us want to get rejected. Not by friends. Not by professors. Not when we get passed over for a job or a scholarship or a writing contest. It doesn't feel good when your team won't pass the ball to you. When you look and don't see your name on the list for the musical.

Even when you do get picked, passed to, listed, chosen – then there is this *pressure*. Now you have to come through or else you won't get picked, passed to, listed or chosen the next time. Why are we like this? Why are our relationships so fraught with difficulty?

### ***What is Wrong With Dating - You***

Let's look at what is really wrong with dating. It's *you*. You're a big problem with your relationships. In fact, you're really the common denominator in all of your relationships.

Okay, so I'm trying to be a little bit funny here, but it's true. You have problems, big problems. Coming up with new structures, better rules or no rules and no structures isn't going to solve the basic issue, the core dilemma because those strategies won't be dealing with you. Both Paul and John help us to see this.

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Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By Doug Serven, © Doug Serven, 2009, website: [www.ouruf.org](http://www.ouruf.org). For this series, I used several books as background reading and listened to sermons by as many people as I can find, especially Tim Keller, Les Newsom, Richard Vise, Jeff Ferguson and Jean Larroux. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

Let's start with John: *1 John 1: 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins...*

Look at what John says. He gives some important background in verses six and seven. God is light. Walking with God is walking in light. Walking in the light with God is walking with Jesus, who cleanses us from our sins.

But some of us say we don't have sin. People who say that deceive themselves and don't understand the truth. Then Paul says if we confess our *sins*. He's not really just repeating himself. There is a difference between *sins* and *sin*.

Sins are the things we do that are against God's will *and* the things we don't do that we should be doing. Our most common definition of sin is just doing wrong stuff. We feel guilty about that. We say a white lie. We cut someone off. We don't return a phone call. We get drunk. We have sex. We fail at something. I would guess most of us can admit to and relate to the fact that we sin. It's more difficult when God explains that sin is also *not doing* things we should be doing. So it's also sin when we aren't kind to someone even if we're also not mean. It's sin when we don't serve, not just if we take away. This really broadens our concept of sin to a huge, huge level. You are a sinner. Do you see that? Can you admit to that? Are you aware of how much and how often you sin? It's a lot. It's a whole lot.

So this is a big deal, and one I don't think you are really aware of. Then John goes farther. He says that we commit sins because we're sinners. It's not true that you're a pretty good person but sometimes you fail and fall and you sin. That's how we think of ourselves. That's we're basically good.

John says no. You're not basically good with a few black marks. He says you sin because you're a sinner. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. You have sin. You don't have to generate it. It's there. You do these things to others, to God and even to yourself because you just can't help it. Genesis 3 and the fall of man was really, really bad. It plunged us into ruin and destruction.

You just don't see it that often. Sin is so enmeshed in you and enculturated in you that you don't see it. Rev. Tim Keller talks about how you finally see your culture when you step outside of it. What you thought was normal, human behavior that is absolutely second nature to you finally gets illuminated when you enter another culture that does things a different way. It's not just the way people live. It's the way your culture lives, and you can't see it because you're in it. It's the air you breathe.

Sin has become your culture. You just think that way. It's not just the things you do that are bad and hurt people, it's the way you *are*, the way you think even. It's your *heart* that's deceitful beyond cure.

I saw a bumper sticker recently that said "Hate is a learned behavior." I laughed. I certainly think hate can be encouraged, but I don't think it has to be learned. I've watched my kids hate each other and they developed it pretty naturally. I haven't had to teach them how to hurt each other, tattle on each other, or deceive each other. They are mean to each other and push each other without much help or encouragement. They've been doing that basically from day one. Not only that, what if I was able to teach them to live lovingly, without bias or hate or problems? Do you know what would happen? They would look down their noses on those who didn't live and act that way. They'd hate the less enlightened people. The people with the bumper sticker hate people who hate. They just can't help it.

So John says you cannot live in light until you understand your darkness. Instead of blaming others for hurting you, you need to see and own your contribution. Rules won't help you if you think you don't need deep, heart help. You'll only be covering up the real issues. Relationships expose those issues, but most if us blame others and other circumstances. You can see this when people jump from relationships to relationship, marriage to marriage always thinking that just another person will fix the problems. The problem is *you*. You sin because you're a sinner.

Paul fleshes this out for us in regards to relationships in *Galatians 5: 13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 15 But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another....19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

We see how sin and sins work their way into relationships. Paul says we have been called to freedom. We've been called to love and serve one another. In our families, friendships, dating relationships, boyfriends, girlfriends, schools, teams, mentors, jobs. We're called to love each other as we would love our own selves.

Needless to say, we don't do this. We use our very freedom to tear each other up. Instead of loving and serving, Paul talks about the reality of our relationships as biting and devouring. We consume each other. We use each other up.

When we treat each other in a consumer relationship, we work on a paradigm of cost-benefit.<sup>2</sup> If you aren't giving me enough of what I need for the price I want, then I will go somewhere else that gives me a better deal. This makes sense to us for food, clothes, iPods, education and basically everything. You might have a relationship with someone whose business has been in your town for a long time, but if the price goes up and the service goes down, then you'll find somewhere else to go.

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<sup>2</sup> This thought is from Keller's sermon, *The Temptation of Beauty*.

This is fine, but people have always known that your most special relationships have not operated in this paradigm. Your best relationships aren't consumeristic but relationally committed. They're relationships of love commitment.

That idea of love commitments has been seriously eroded over time, especially in the past fifty years. Our consumeristic culture gets into our thinking and being, and it affects our relationships. You could say, perhaps cynically, that dating itself is consumeristic. You are presenting yourself, selling yourself and hoping for a good buyer. So you highlight areas and downplay other areas, hoping the person likes the good parts enough to not notice or overlook or brush off the bad parts.

We give in order to get. We use before we get used. We take and we take and we take. When we're not happy, we move on.

Paul says this is not love, but it's eating and devouring. These are graphic words.

When I think of biting, eating and devouring in a consuming way, two images come to mind. The first is that of wolves bringing down an elk up in the northwest. It's slow motion footage action on Animal Planet. They're chasing, nipping at the elk's heels. They're wearing it out. They've gotten it separated from the pack. They finally get their prey down, and they tear into the haunches, devouring every bite in huge, insatiable gulps.

Some of you treat each other that way. You blow up at each other. You yell and scream and fight. You use each other in huge gulps of sex, oral sex, elongated make out sessions. You have primal urges and you will take someone down in order to get filled. It certainly doesn't look like or sound like love. It's biting, devouring, consuming someone's time, energy or body.

The other image I have is the slow devouring of the parasite. In a recent episode of Radio Lab<sup>3</sup>, the hosts discussed parasites, so maybe I just have it on my mind. They tell the story of the zombie wasp, which wrestles with a cockroach. It injects its stinger into the roach's brain which stuns it into submission but doesn't kill it. The wasp lays its eggs inside the roach, and they grow in there, eating away the cockroach from the inside until the wasp larvae is finally big enough to come out. It doesn't want to kill the roach, because it needs it to live itself.

So there's that type of devouring. Slow. Seemingly painless at least from the outside. But a person ceases to be himself or herself. He's being consumed, just slowly. His time, his brain, his heart are being eaten. Mind control happens. It's not love. It's not serving. It's owning and using.

Paul talks about this when he begins his list of ways these consumeristic behaviors work in our relationships. *Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.*

That's quite a list of bad behavior, some of it you may think of worse than others. We don't like jealous people or really angry people. We don't like it when people disagree and dissent. Most of us don't appreciate drunkenness because we view it as annoying to deal with. I had a friend who hosted a guy he didn't even really know – a friend of a friend – over to his house. They guy got drunk that night, came back to the apartment and then at three in the morning vomited everywhere. Just everywhere. When Justin woke up the next morning, the guy was gone. That sucked. But Paul says drunkenness isn't just annoying. It is sin. It's darkness. It is consuming each other.

Sexual immorality means any sexual behavior outside of sex with the person you are married to. It's a big category that includes masturbation, pornography, oral sex and nakedness. Paul also includes sensuality in his list. I'd say that is using your body to entice someone else in a sexual way. Which is pretty much what we do and how we've been trained to attract attention. The clothes you buy are geared toward sensuality, which makes it tough to go against that, but it has to be possible.

Stay away from sorcery, I know that is a big problem these days. Impurity is using your body and your eyes in ways that are not holy and helpful. Idolatry is loving anything more than you love God. Not little idols in your closet, but any thing in your life that you have to have more than God. The bottom line for what you want and live for – that is your functional god.

These are the things that keep our relationships from going well. These are things that ruin and wreck our dating. It's you.

I have a book called *Relationship Obits*. The author started a website where people could write in and proclaim the time of death and cause of death for their relationships much like they would a personal obituary in the paper. It supposedly provides closure. Maybe you should try it. Some of them are funny, but most are just sad.

On page 10: Haley and Jeff the Asian – He told me Coors Light was his best friend, not me.

On page 25: Funbags and Eli – They met at a campsite in a foreign land while backpacking. Over several drinks and a raging campfire, their love blossomed, culminating in a romp in the steamy, mossy, nasty campground showers. Missed will be the exciting adventures and the desperate need for one another. Soon forgotten will be the jealousy and feeling of wasted time experienced by both... There are no survivors other than the dignity she left when she realized his request for space meant it was over, and she ended it.

On page 29: S and N – Cause of Death: Narcissism stage 4 – He will be remembered for his generosity because although he is one of the most self-centered people I have ever known, it is not because he does not wish to be good to others. He will also be remembered for his lies, his temper, his manipulations, his empty promises, his lack of dependability and his disinterest in my well-being.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.wnyc.org/shows/radiolab/episodes/2009/09/25>

On page 41: C and V – We met on eHarmony because I know my man-picker is broken. So I decided to let the computer find me a man. We seemed to have a lot in common at first. He had a very nice manly voice on the phone. Knew just what to say. Was very good at keeping his real self hidden. Seemed very civilized and educated.... I decided to give it a go. But as the months went by, I came to realize this man had a one track mind: sex, sex, sex. He also suffered from hypochondria – his back pain was never-ending. He whined about it constantly. But the back pain never stopped him from wanting sex at all times. I became resentful of him and his whiny ways.... One night, when I declined to have sex with him, he threw a hissy fit, so I made up my mind that it was over. I left the next day, never to speak to him again. Since he did not call, I figured he was just as sick of me as I was of him. There are no happy memories.

These are sad, sad stories of brokenheartedness. Some of them are wry and funny, but they're also brutal. I want you to see that sin really is real and really is bad and is a part of your life.

If you don't think you're a sinner then you're not a Christian. If you only come to church or RUF or Jesus for happy stories and inspiration, then you're not a Christian. You're following Jesus as teacher or guru but not Savior. Jesus is not here for your inspiration. He came to save sinners.

Do you see this? Do you see your sin, the way you just are? How bad you really are, how wicked and deceitful and how you use people? Do you see your sins in particular? Can you name how you hurt and consume people for your own good, your own glory, your own needs?

### ***How Dating Can Work – Jesus***

So what is our solution? Are we completely stuck? Some of you may be thinking that I'm ruining self-esteem and hurting our chances. Actually I think I'm helping out a great deal by telling you what John, Paul and Jesus tell us about ourselves. We ruin stuff. Sin is real. We are really bad and hurt others and hurt our relationships.

Education doesn't work. We have the most educated world that has ever existed but in the last 100 years we have done more damage than ever before. We are just more educatedly sophisticated in our destruction of others. We're able to explain things away more perversely.

We need redemption. We need Jesus to help us. All of us need this. This isn't just a message to nonbelievers and the rest of you can just check out. No. Sin is still in you. You need Jesus. You need repentance and grace. You are devouring and eating and consuming each other. Jesus is not yet real and present in your relationships – that's why you're living for yourself and stealing glory from others.

So what can we do?

John says we must recognize and admit we sin and are sinners. We must confess our sins. As we see Jesus as the light and life, as we encounter God, and as we see our own faults, misdeeds, screw ups and failures, we confess. We speak. We talk about our lives and our sins. Confession needs to be a real thing in your life. You can't just hide away and try to do better. You can't just ignore the hurts in your life and the things you have been doing. John says we must confess our sins.

I think you should confess your sins to someone out loud. We don't need an official confession box where you make appointments to a priest behind a veil, but there is something to talking to a real person who really can tell you the truth and give you the words of grace and truth for you in your life.

You should be confessing your sins. It is tough. We don't like to do it. Because it's sin. We're embarrassed and ashamed to do it. I understand. I get it. I've been there. I hate confessing my sins. I would rather of course just not ever sin – that's one of my strategies to keep from confessing. It rarely works, and often goes wrong. My other strategy is hiding things away and vowing to never, ever talk about it.

John says don't do that. Bring it out. Get forgiven by bringing it out and talking about, owning it and talking it to Jesus.

You should be doing this. My calendar should be filled with appointments where we're confessing to one another and hearing about the Lord's forgiveness. It's so hard because we think we're the only ones struggling. We look around in this room and see such good people, such committed Christians. Ha. It's not true. You are all struggling. Every guy in here is struggling with masturbation and porn, so stop thinking you're the only one. Every girl in here is struggling with eating issues and food, so stop pretending you're the only one. You're bad people. Admit it and let's talk about walking with Jesus together instead of trying to act like we're so good or we're so bad that people can't find out. Let's let Jesus forgive us and walk in the light together. Let's be real and honest and confess our sins. Not on facebook. In private but with someone you trust who knows the gospel and can handle it.

What happens when you confess your sins? Jesus forgives them. *9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*

God is faithful and he is just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. This is absolutely amazing. This is such good news! The fact that you're not rejoicing in this means you don't know how bad your condition is. If you only realized it, you would be jumping for joy that there is a solution. Jesus saves. Jesus forgives. Jesus cleanses.

Tim Keller has been helpful to me on this as I've listened to his sermons. He points out that God is faithful and just. That means there is justice. We all want justice. We all want sins to be paid for. It's just we'd rather have other peoples' sins paid for and our let go. We don't want to live in a world where wrongs are left unpunished. That would be chaos and not a good society to live in.

So we want justice. But we don't want to pay. We don't want to die for our own sins. So we're stuck. We often get the idea that Jesus is up there with God pleading on our behalf like he's down on his knees saying, God not this time! Just give Doug one more chance. He'll be good, I promise. Don't zap him. He deserves it we all know, but be nice to him. I'll vouch for him.

So God says, Okay, Jesus. I'll do it again. I'll forgive him again this time.

That's scary because we don't know how long it can last. But the text doesn't read like that construction. Instead, it goes on to better explain what it is that actually happens. Jesus isn't pleading with the Father that way. John writes in 2:1 that Jesus is our *advocate*. He's our defense attorney and our stand in. He speaks for us. What happens to him happens to us. And then in verse 2. He is our propitiation. That means that Jesus stands before the Father, the Judge, and he says that payment has been rendered for his son or his daughter and he, Jesus, has already paid it. Justice has been served. The crime has not gone unpunished. There is no egregious injustice at all and there is also not a double payment. If Jesus has paid for it, then we don't have to pay for it again. Jesus is standing before the bar of justice and saying that he has paid it all in full. Because he suffered we get to rejoice. Because he paid, we go free. Because he took it, we are released. The debt doesn't just evaporate. It is paid for.

That is so awesome. It's just incredible. It means that you have been forgiven. It means you are accounted as righteous before God. That should set you free. There is an amazing benefit to understanding this.

Some of you don't think you are very bad. You are far too confident. You think that bad stuff happens to you or around you because of *other* people. These passages are telling you to stop fooling and deceiving yourself. They humble you. They should cause you to reconsider this position of blaming others as not being as smart or good as you. Your definition of who can get into heaven is far too narrow if you're only allowing in good people. Who is good enough? The gospel is telling you that you don't just need a guru or pithy statement generator or a teacher or mentor – you need a Savior. You're "goodness" is keeping you from loving people and being loved. You think you are better than others, and that is a form of eating and devouring others. In fact, there is so much more evil in your heart, an ocean of wickedness that I assure you that you will discover. The gospel seeks to flatten this overconfident outlook and place the blame of your brokenness at your feet in a realistic way.

Others of you think you are far too bad for the gospel. You don't think you can ever measure up to what it is good people do. You have sinned, and you know it. You're very aware. You don't need me to point it out. You're ashamed. You cower in fear. You feel so guilty, and don't think God could ever love someone like you. You don't think anyone could love someone like you. This passage and the gospel for you says you need to understand forgiveness and Jesus' payment for you. Yes, you get that you're a sinner. But you don't get that Jesus loves you, pays for you and sets you free. Jesus stands for you. He represents you because he loves you. Receive his forgiveness and walk in confidence. Being a sinner is not what defines you; you are redeemed and set free from those things. Stop cowering and come out and walk in newness and strength – Christ's strength for you. You are loved in Jesus, and that is what matters. You can accept rejection from others because you have acceptance in Christ.

When you understand this and live this way, you are walking in the Spirit. The Spirit does the things that God wants and Jesus wants. The Spirit points to and directs things to Jesus. So when you are walking in the Spirit you are walking with Jesus in his ways. Paul tells us what this looks like in Galatians 5:22 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.*

How amazing would it be if we loved each other as we love ourselves? If we treated each other as Jesus treats us. If we would walk in the Spirit out of a sense of our confession and forgiveness? We would date in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. We would stop devouring each other and instead live for each other. We'd be more honest and truthful because we were humble and confident in Jesus. We would admit our weaknesses and insecurities because we were strong and secure in Christ. This would be totally different. This would transform our dating and really everything.

Lastly, Paul says we would do this together. *6:1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

We work these things out in a community of faith and friendship. We confess sins to God and to each other because we love each other with the love of Christ. It's really amazing that we would be able to show each other Jesus in this way. God works through our relationships of love with each other. We restore each other gently through time as we walk in the Spirit with each other in love. We fulfill the law of Christ as we stop using each other and instead love each other. This comes through conversations. It comes through acts of service. It comes through kind words and hard words. It comes through patience. It comes through honesty and forgiveness. It comes through awkward true talks with each other. It comes over time

and not all at once. It comes through dating and breaking up and loving each other by hearing each other. That's how we see and understand Jesus together. It's really a cool thing as it happens. It's my prayer we could do this together and see transformation in our relationships.