

RUF Bible Study – Dating Sex and Marriage  
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Dating 2 – What’s the Deal?

One of the best Seinfeld episodes involved Kramer finding an old Merv Griffith set – all the backdrop, chairs and stage used to film the television show – in the dumpster. He sets it up in this apartment and starts interviewing his friends when they would come over.

There’s a side story in that episode. George keeps on accidentally killing pigeons and squirrels. He’ll be driving, assuming the pigeon will fly up and out of the way, and it doesn’t. He feels pretty bad about it. He doesn’t want to kill pigeons. They’re supposed to move. “We had a deal!” he says. “They broke the deal.”

In this lesson we’re looking at “the deal,” the agreements we have between people. I contend that really all relationships have “deals.” There are certain expectations and agreements and actions that are appropriate for all of our relationships. Some of these are spoken and stated, but others are intuitive and even sometimes a little murky. The Bible calls these relationships “covenants.” We’ll be looking at covenants and trying to figure out how these say something for us about dating.

### ***Making Covenants***

Like I said, ALL of our relationships have this aspect. You just can’t help it. What is your relationship like with the police? What do you do when you walk into the doctor’s office? Where is it appropriate for your massage therapist to touch you? How do fathers act with their daughters? What should a football coach be able to say to his players? What does the coffee shop girl need to do for you to give her a tip?

We operate within these expectations and relationships fairly well every day, but sometimes we’re not sure. Not too long ago I was getting a massage. I was facedown on the table and the woman was doing a great job aggressively kneading into my sore muscles. But then – unexpectedly – she jumped up on the table and straddled me. Um. Uh? Is this appropriate? I’d never had this happen before. I didn’t want to make a scene, so I thought I’d wait for a few more seconds to see what happened next. She ended up using her knees in my back, which was really, really effective. It wasn’t sexual at all. But I was freaking out there for a minute. It just didn’t seem to fit.

We have these experiences. Someone doesn’t do what we think they’re supposed to do. Or people use their authority and power. This is a huge, huge problem. People use our covenantal relationships of trust and expectations against us. Someone will dress up like a plumber to get into a house and rob it. They will take the authority and intimacy of a counselor and use someone for pleasure. It’s interesting to think about and sometimes very scary. OU has a whole policy statement paragraph on what is and isn’t appropriate for faculty, staff and professors.

Here it is:

*“The University’s educational mission is promoted by professionalism in faculty-student relationships. Professionalism is fostered by an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. Actions of faculty members and students that harm this atmosphere undermine professionalism and hinder fulfillment of the University’s educational mission. Trust and respect are diminished when those in positions of authority abuse, or appear to abuse, their power. Those who abuse, or appear to abuse, their power in such a context violate their duty to the University community.”*

*“Faculty members exercise power over students, whether in giving them praise or criticism, evaluating them, making recommendations for their further studies or their future employment, or conferring any other benefits on them. Amorous relationships between faculty members and students are wrong when the faculty member has professional responsibility for the student. Such situations greatly increase the chances that the faculty member will abuse his or her power and sexually exploit the student. Voluntary consent by the student in such a relationship is suspect, given the fundamentally asymmetric nature of the relationship. Moreover, other students and faculty may be affected by such unprofessional behavior because it places the faculty member in a position to favor or advance one student’s interest at the expense of others and implicitly makes obtaining benefits contingent on amorous or sexual favors. Therefore, the University will view it as unethical if faculty members engage*

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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. Les Newsom has a great paper on just this topic which has helped me very much. It can be found here: <http://www.olemiss.ruf.org/resources> - at the bottom of the page.

The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

*in amorous relations with students enrolled in their classes or subject to their supervision, even when both parties appear to have consented to the relationship.*"<sup>2</sup>

Notice what they're saying here. Because of the nature of the relationship in and of itself, there is no toleration for even consensual amorous relationships, which is a huge vague category. Certainly it isn't illegal or immoral for a 30-year-old man to fall in love with a 20-year-old woman (or vice versa of course). But there is a problem with *relationships*, the relationship of a student with a professor, with power, with the way things work. Enough so that the University has a policy about it, as they should.

We have other relational covenants that are less spelled out. Here's another one. When is it appropriate, ladies, for me to see you in your bras and panties? Um. That seems pretty awkward and inappropriate to me. But if you walk onto the beach, wham! all of a sudden most of you wouldn't even think twice to stripping down to something you would be appalled for me or anyone to see you in. I get it. I'm not saying it's the *same* thing. But don't you think this is strange? That once we get a certain amount of water and sun gathered that we feel more and more okay with wearing what we would never wear in other situations? What's the deal? Apparently there is a deal and it's called getting a nice tan and it's just the way swimsuits work I guess. How about me? What would you think if I took my shirt off right now and spoke the rest of the time shirtless. Not good. Not appropriate. Not enough water around. Not enough sun.

So are you tracking with me? Covenants are just the way we work. We were formatted for relationships, and we work in and through them most of the time intuitively. When certain relational covenants are broken or damaged, we can feel all the way from just awkward to outraged, inconvenienced to abused.

Fair enough. But we're talking about dating. So what's the deal with dating?

I think it should be fairly obvious that there isn't much about dating in the Bible. Not specifically. There was not dating in the Bible. People got married at age 14 or so, at least the girls did. The girls would marry either boys their age or be matched with someone much older, maybe someone who was a widower because his wife died in childbirth. You were married according to what would strengthen the status and economy of your family, not for love. Dating? Uh, no.

I don't think any of us wish to return back to that time. I'm certainly not advocating that (although I would like to combat the idea that it would be impossible or those people in that construction to be happy. They were happy and could be happy. Many people in our social construction are unhappy even though (perhaps even because) they have unlimited choices).

The only way I think we can make sense of what we are to do in dating is to look at marriage and then extrapolate backwards from there. That's why we talked about marriage first.

Marriage is a covenant between a man and woman in which they vow to be together as long as they both shall live. In this covenant, they bind themselves together in all possible ways – socially, economically, physically, and sexually. They become one. They become a new family, a new distinct unit working together for the love and peace and gospel of God.

There is a marker for this – the wedding. This is a time when two people stand in front of what counts as all the world and she says HE is the only one for me. He says SHE is the only one for me. I promise.

The Bible says then and only then is the time when you should be naked and have sex and orgasm with that other person. It's only when you have committed in love to marriage that you should then feel the freedom to give all of yourself to the other person and then in fact you must do so. Sex becomes the covenantal renewal ceremony you have with each other, as you give to the other something no one else gets. We'll talk more about sex.

But think about this. If you get married on Saturday, as per normal, then on Friday night it is not okay, not Biblical or godly or right or loving to have sex with her. But the next night, Saturday night, it is right and great and good before God for you to. What happened? You said words. You vowed vows. You exchanged rings. You made a covenant. You changed the relationship. As you cross that threshold into the covenant of marriage, new things are expected and allowed.

Do you see this? Does this make sense for you?

If we back up from there, the next covenant in this relational spectrum is engagement. Engagement is when you promise to get married. You are not allowed to have sex in engagement because it is not actually the covenant of marriage. Most of the time (unless you are really stupid), you get engaged in private. You aren't actually promising to be true all the days of your life, you're promising to promise that.

Engagement is the time when men put a ring on her finger (as per our culture's tradition but it doesn't have to be a big diamond), and single her out. That's when you set a date. That's when you buy your dress and start to make the plans. I think it is a breach in covenants when you start to make those plans, set those dates, buy those dresses and do all of that *before* you are engaged. I realize people do it, but don't let it happen. Keep things in their right places. So you may not have the church you dreamed about. It will be okay. Don't go look at rings when you're dating. Let him pick one out for you and be happy and thankful for it. He will do a good job, I promise. Another piece of advice – have short engagements. Long engagements are more and more the norm these days, but it's just not wise. One of the reasons people have long engagements now is because they're living together and already having sex together. So the length of the engagement doesn't really matter. It doesn't actually take that long to plan a wedding. Plan one that is fun, glorifying to God and fits into your budget. Make it a

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ou.edu/provost/pronew/content/InstructionalPolicy2008.pdf>

celebration, not a status symbol. Have dancing and alcohol if you can but scale back on pictures, flowers and food. I've been to weddings that cost \$500 and weddings that cost \$50,000. Both couples are just as married. Have a short engagement and get married as soon as possible.

Let me end this section by reminding you that God makes covenants with his people too. We have said before in previous lessons that the marriage metaphor is active and at work in the Scriptures. You can especially see this in Ephesians 5, but in many other places as well.

But it's not just that specific. There are also many other places where God defines and delineates the relationship in covenants. One of those is in Genesis 15.

*17 When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. 18 On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, 19 the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, 20 the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, 21 the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."*

God is doing something here. He's using words and symbols and making a vow with Abram (later his name gets changed to Abraham). In this covenant he is saying that he will do certain things, and in fact those things are very specific as they pertain to the land. They're big things, but also not vague things.

So we see that God makes covenants with his people. That's a part of who he is and what he does. He doesn't just act and react. He sets boundaries and uses words and actions to mark off what is right and appropriate expectations and actions for his people.

You want these. You need these. You want to know what the deal is with people and friends and when two people start to like each other you think or you observe the flirting. Something "happens." So what is it that happens? Are we just waiting to see when your facebook status changes and you become "facebook official"?

### ***Breaking and Faking Covenants***

Let me tell you a story first. In high school I got to know a girl from up in Springfield, the "big city." This was through youth group and youth group friends. I must have been a junior in high school. Her name was Michelle, and she was super fun, really short and also half Egyptian. So she had the really beautiful olive skin and long, black kinky hair. I'd never known anyone like her. We sort of hit it off, and I ended up taking her out on a few dates. After the first date, I walked her to the door and was going to kiss her on the cheek and drive home. But she thought I was going to kiss her on the lips, so she turned her head for a kiss, a guess a long kiss. I was still in on-the-cheek mode and didn't switch over fast enough. I ended up giving her a really lame kiss on the lips, and I knew it right away. It was legitimately awkward. But oh well. I figured there would be other times to improve.

But no. Word got back to me that, according to Michelle, she just couldn't go out with me any more because, "He kisses like my brother." What! What does that even mean?! I never got another chance, and I also didn't get to explain myself. To this day, Michelle probably thinks I am the worst kisser in the world. She may be right, but not based on that one kiss.

I got mixed up between a friend covenant, a dating covenant and a brother covenant I guess. She's right – you don't want to kiss your brother.

So there are only two more steps of relationships, at least the ones we're talking about. One is dating and the other is friendship.

Friends are two people walking together with shared interests, time and a care for each other. For a more cheesy definition, try: It's the deep oneness of two people journeying towards a common horizon. Ah.

Friends hang out. Friends call. Friends talk. Friends care about and show that care for one another. Friends can morph into closer or farther. We have a lot of fun times with friends, but also we can have some tough times with good and close friends. Friends know things about each other. Friends have secrets.

We need friends. Friends are so important. I think men and women can be friends too. Shocker, I know! Sure, it takes wisdom and restraint at times for men and women to be friends. But I think it is possible and also very helpful to have opposite gender friendships *in wisdom*.

Some of you seem to be in college as if you're on a reality show. And the ultimate cliché of reality shows is – "I didn't come here to make friends." Not here to make friends. NHTMF. If you type in that phrase you can pull up several youtube montages that will take you through a NHTMF frenzy.<sup>3</sup>

Are you NHTMF? I think you should be here to make friends, and I think you should be making friends with both men and women. You will learn so much about people and men and women if you would take the opposite approach and say I AM here to make friends! What would people say if the reality show was "Here to Make Friends"?

I want to suggest to you that you *are* here to make friends. You're here to work and study and further yourself and do a lot of things, but making friends is a big, big one. In fact, the friends you make in college may stay with you forever.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.thisamericanlife.org/Radio\\_Episode.aspx?episode=389](http://www.thisamericanlife.org/Radio_Episode.aspx?episode=389)

Here are a few tips. Friends talk often, but they don't have to talk every day. Friends are honest with each other about how they feel. Friends love and serve each other. Friends don't demand from each other. Friends are fun to be with. Friends help each other. Friends are interested in each other. Friends don't use each other. Friends don't put embarrassing and damaging and life-changing videos of each other on the internet (see: I just wanted to make it snow girl's friends). Friends come to RUF together. They go to church together. They talk about the Bible and Jesus together. They affirm each other in goodness. They bless each other. They laugh together. They aren't so defensive all the time.

Friends don't hold hands. I cannot believe how many times I have asked someone about the amount of time she is spending with a certain guy. Hey, I've noticed you and Billy are spending a lot of time together. What's up? That's not a pressuring question, and I usually hold off asking it as long as I can. "Oh, nothing," she says. "We're just friends." Which is a totally fine answer. Except it's not true. "Have you held hands?" I ask. She grins, embarrassed. "Yes." Oh, so they're hand-holding friends. "Ah. Hand-holding friends. How many hand-holding friends do you have?" "Just one." Well that's good. Friends don't hold hands with each other! I know ladies many of you are confused at this point because sometime women do hold hands with each other (which I don't get). But a man does not hold hands with anyone that is his friend.

It may seem obvious that friends also do not kiss. I don't think women break this rule. Friends don't kiss. Friends don't make out. Friends don't give each other orgasms, oral sex or touch each other's breasts. That's not what friends do. I don't think friends text every day or even talk every day.

But this is what we do in our dating. Most of the time, two people start to hang out and spending a ton of time together. Something happens, and they want it to happen. "What's the deal?" people start asking. They ask it with each other and at some point to each of the members of the couple.

A lot of the time, things just progress. There is no talk ,no DTR, just spending more and more time together. Sometimes there is a DTR, but it's so often something incredibly lame or vague. I guess we're dating. So are we dating? Yes. Can we put this on facebook? Yes.

And that's really it. Not much has changed, but inevitably what follows is an intensification of time and sexuality. From holding hands quickly to kissing, to heavy making out, to hands up the shirt to clothes off, to oral sex and nakedness and then sometimes to stopping there, but really why stop there? Some do.

What accompanies this is a demandingness of time and calls and texts. It seems like they more and more are unhappy with each other. There is more complaining. More fights. Bigger drama. People start to get tired of hearing about you and your boyfriend or girlfriend. Often you've already lost a lot of your friends by this point. You've become so insular and ingrown because you've been spending more and more time together every night by yourselves, ending in making out, feeling guilty a lot of the time, not talking about it, getting really defensive, making rules and the doing it all over the next night.

Does this sound good? You're not friends any more. In act many of you start to become "frenemies." Are you friends? Are you enemies? None of us are really sure. You're devouring one another. You consume each other. You think you own each other. You are "frenemies."<sup>4</sup>

These things cross so many boundaries. They break covenants. I have a friend who was texted at 5:30 in the morning by a co-worker. He wrote "I want you." But he was married and at home with his wife. "Sexting" (sexual texting) crosses boundaries.

Talking about the future together crosses boundaries. Saying I love you in the first week or two of dating crosses boundaries. I remember one student started really talking to her boyfriend when we were at Summer Conference. Her friends came to me concerned. "She's saying 'I love you' on the phone to him. It's only been two weeks," they said. I asked her about it and she said she really did love him. But – alas! They didn't get married. Saying I love you only made things worse in the end. It felt so right, but it wasn't.

There are so many ways to break our covenants, and I want you to know I've tried them all. Julie and I even stealth dated for awhile. That's the time before you're officially dating when you really are dating but you're just not calling it dating yet. Many of you have been there. It's very common. You just "end up" seeing each other every day and talking for hours and hours – but you're insistent you're not dating. It's pre-dating dating. Fine. Just realize that's blurring the lines between friendship and dating.

I want to pull you to thinking that dating is more like friendship than marriage. If you can continually try to think "What would a good friend do?" instead of "What would a wife/husband do?" then you will be on a far better track. Keep dating closer to friendship. Keep the physical aspects of dating closer to what friends do than what spouses do. Get much, much closer to how friends talk to and spend time and touch each other than what happens in the marriage covenant.

We'll say more about this in the lessons to come.

Remember this – it is because of our breaking the covenant with God that we are in so much trouble. All throughout the Bible, God continues to make covenants with his people, and his people continue to break them over and over again.

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.thisamericanlife.org/Radio\\_Episode.aspx?episode=389](http://www.thisamericanlife.org/Radio_Episode.aspx?episode=389)

Here's just one example in Jeremiah 11:10 *They have turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, who refused to hear my words. They have gone after other gods to serve them. The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant that I made with their fathers.*

We have not done the things we should have done. We have done the things we should not have done. Because of this confusion and disobedience, we suffer just wrath, condemnation and penalty. Bad things happen to us because we do not keep God in his rightful first place in our lives and hearts. The Bible often talks about this in terms of idolatry, which is a part of what Jeremiah is talking about. Going after other gods to serve them. Putting other things, other relationships, other "must-haves" in the place of God. When we do that we're breaking our covenant with God that he would be our God and we would be his people. That we would have no other gods before him.

We do that with God, and we do that with other people. Do you see how covenants work? Do you see how confusing the covenants we have with people causes harm and damage in our lives and in the lives of others?

When I was just out of college, I worked at Oklahoma State University with The Navigators, which is a campus group similar to RUF or Campus Crusade or InterVarsity. I was only 22 or 23 years old, just a year or two older than the oldest students and only four or five years older than the freshmen. So we were pretty close in age. We would hang out all the time, and I was almost living in the dorms I was over there so much with the guys in the ministry. I'm sure they thought of me as just "one of them."

I'll never forget one day when a bunch of us - coed - were hanging out playing wallyball. This is volleyball inside of a racquetball court so the ball bounces off of all the walls and goes everywhere, but people don't play much anymore. One of the student's name was Bobby. Bobby was a junior I think, maybe a sophomore. Really competitive and a fun outgoing guy.

All of sudden, my shorts are at the ground. Bobby had "de-pants" me. Classic junior high, high school trick. Can be funny, though mostly embarrassing and inappropriate. But in that exact instant, besides the embarrassment and awkwardness, Bobby and me and everyone in the court knew that he had broken a covenant. I wasn't just one of the guys. That would have been wrong too. But I was a campus minister, and you just don't do that. He confused a relationship, and that wasn't good.

### ***Reshaping the covenant***

Okay so now what? I'm sure we're sufficiently both confused and concerned. At least I hope so.

Well, let me give you the gospel first and foremost. That is what you need. Your heart is probably looking for rules to follow, and in the next lesson we'll give you some, but I don't think you need rules as much as you need Christ.

You see, the only way I was able to restore my relationship with Bobby and the groups right after my shorts were on the floor and I was standing there in my underwear was - *forgiveness*. Forgiveness. Bobby asked for my forgiveness, and I forgave him because of Jesus. I was pretty embarrassed, but he was even more so. He was ashamed he had done that. I didn't have to "make him pay" because of Jesus in my life and also Jesus in his life.

You see, when we break covenants, we bring confusion, pain, hurt and even death into our lives and relationships. That is true with your boyfriends, professors, car mechanics, and it's also true with God. Breaking covenants and faking covenants is not a good thing.

We definitely have broken covenant with God. *BUT*, and here is one of those big, beautiful buts, God loves sinners. God pursues breakers of the covenant. God pays the penalty, the very penalty we owe. He pays it himself with the death of his son, Jesus Christ who was the propitiation for sins. He was the sin offering, the peace offering to God because we broke the covenant with God and he fulfilled it on our behalf.

Hear the way the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it:

*Q. 19. What is the misery of that estate whereinto man fell?*

A. All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever.

This is the bad news. The result of breaking covenant with God. Of harming our relationship with him. Of confusing roles and responses. Of switching up who he is and what we should be doing.

*Q. 20. Did God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery? A. God having, out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a redeemer.*

This is the greatest news! God enters into **a covenant of grace** with his people! He brings them out of this sin and misery and into salvation by a redeemer, who is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 7:22 puts it this way: *This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.*

We are all formatted for relationship. We must find and enter into relationship with God. If we can do this, and as we do this, and as we rest into this relationship, it sets in order our other relationships.

Do you see how God relates to his people in terms of covenants? I want to encourage you to think about that covenant of grace and what it means for you each day. One of the best times for you to think about this is on Sundays at church when you renew that covenant through confession of sin, through hearing that you are declared forgiven, for hearing the Word of God rightly preached, and by especially in this regard taking the Lord's Supper. It is at that table that you see, hear, taste and

touch the Lord's goodness to you in the covenant of grace, a relationship you don't deserve that he gives you by his mercy and favor.

If you will live in that truth and relationship, then I think it will matter in your relationships with others. You will be more humble and more confident. You will be able to stop grabbing at people and using them because you will be able to rest in something and someone else. You will be able to go out confidently because Jesus loves you. He thinks you are amazing, so you don't have to have someone else's opinion to make you.

If that is true, if you can live within that covenant of grace, then you will better be able to live within your other covenants. That's what I want to encourage you in. Stay within the covenant you are in. Stay within the covenant you are in with God. If you are friends, then be friends. Don't push marriage things into the friend covenant. You don't have to. You have Jesus to make and reshape you and to meet your needs and desires.

If you can focus on Christ and his covenant of grace with you, that will help you wait for marriage in God's right time and his right way. It will not be easy, don't hear me say that. But you will be thinking about your relationship to him and how that sets the tone and atmosphere for your other relationships. If he owns you, then you don't have to own other people. If he is your "vision" then you will better be able to keep other people from having to bear that weight, a weight they cannot possibly bear.

What I'm trying to ask you to do is to think more about covenants and relationships, and be more okay with living within those proper boundaries. Admit they are good and helpful. Keep marriage out of dating. Move dating to be more like friendship. Grieve the breaking and faking of covenants and resolve to keep right thoughts and acts in the right places. Think first on Christ and how he loves you.

Let's finish with Genesis 15 again. This is a covenant (15:18) which is truly incredible. We read the covenant promise, but we didn't see the actions that go along with that promise, the things that "seal the deal."

God tells Abram to go and get some animals. Abram does that, but then cuts them open and arranges the two halves in two rows opposite each other. Huh? When God tells him to get the animals, Abram knows that God is going to be initiating a covenant ceremony and gets it all ready. In those days, in their oral culture unlike our written culture, they acted out a covenantal ceremony. We sign papers to make contracts – I will pay \$300 a month for 36 months for this car or you can take it away, or you will build my house in so many days and I will give you so much money – and that obligates us to each other with penalties if we don't fulfill our end of the bargain. In their time, they acted out the bargain. The animals symbolized what would happen to the people if they broke the covenant. That is why the exact terminology isn't "make a covenant" but to "cut a covenant." This is further explained in Jeremiah 34:18: "The men who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between the pieces." Yikes. When you act this out, you're saying, "May I be cut in half, may I be dead, may I be torn in pieces like these animals if I don't fulfill my covenant with you." Fairly effective imagery, I think. You might try that with your cell phone company next time. Or maybe not.

So Abram has the covenantal ceremony ready. He is expecting that they will strike this deal. They will walk through the pieces together and promise each other to be faithful to the covenant. The sun begins to go down and darkness hits. Not only a physical darkness, but the text reads it as a spiritual darkness as well, because it says the darkness fell over "him." Delitzsch translates the verse this way: "And when the sun was just about to go down and deep sleep had fallen upon Abram, behold there fell upon him terror, great darkness." Terror, darkness, wrath, oppression. Something ominous is approaching.

God tells Abram what He will be doing with His people over the next few centuries, essentially outlining the book of Exodus.

And then what does Abram see? He sees God passing through the carcasses. He sees the manifestation of God revealed in the same theophanies as on Mt. Sinai and when God leads Israel out of Egypt. The smoking firepot and blazing torch are "theophanies" – pictures of God, physical representations of God since there is no way we could see and understand God in His fullness. God walks through the covenant, showing Abram that He will keep His part of the covenant.

What happens next? As incredible as God passing through the covenantal ceremony is, it is even more amazing that nothing happens next. Abram *doesn't* go through the ceremony. This is not the way it's done. If only one side is required to keep fulfill the obligations, it is always the lesser of the two, since kings hold all the cards and the power. But God is saying that He will keep His promises and Abraham is brought into that one-sided covenant. Abraham's jaw must have dropped as He realized what God was doing in this.

God is saying that curses will be upon Him if He doesn't do what He has promised. That is the meaning of the animals and the passing through. That God will fulfill all these things.

And He does, doesn't He? Yes. He does, and all the more in Christ. There too a darkness spread on the land. There too was a cutting off, a death ceremony to exact justice and penalty.

Our covenants don't seem quite as dramatic as that, do they? But so often they really are. So often I'm sitting with you at Café Plaid and you're saying, "This is life or death to me!" Why won't she like me! Why is he doing this to me!

Rest in God's covenant with you. Receive his love and blessing because he has done the work. Respond to his work in love and faithfulness to him.

Isn't it good news that there is forgiveness in the covenant? As you can tell by my dating experiences, I certainly didn't do everything correctly. I did and have messed up my relationships. If we were treated according to our actions only, then we'd be in big trouble. But there is a covenant of grace. That is good news. As a result of that good news, let's try to live within our covenant with God in a way that glorifies him and enjoys him forever. And, because of that, let's treat each other with love and respect according to the commitments and boundaries of our covenants with each other.