

RUF Bible Study – Dating Sex and Marriage
Doug Serven, RUF Campus Minister¹
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Introduction

We're doing something different at RUF this semester. We're going to talk about dating, sex and marriage, and we're going to tackle this topically. Usually we pick a book of the Bible and work through the passages as they come. But we're going to jump around the Bible this semester, picking and choosing appropriate passages in order to deal with this huge issue. I'm doing this because I think it is so important for you to hear someone talk about these issues in a biblical manner.

Some of you have no qualms about this whatsoever. You don't have any hang-ups at all in discussing sex. But many of you grew up in church. You are used to Velcro parties, moon bounces, summer camps and rules. Christianity has been a fairly surface-y experience for you. There hasn't been much depth to it. For you this may be a surprise, and I want to invite you into a real discussion about sexuality and its implications. I hope you'll stay with us.

The only way I know how to do this is to be straightforward and honest. I'm going to say words like "penis," "vagina" and "orgasm." Not for shock value but because I think it's the best way to talk about these things. Let's be adults and use the real words, and let's stay away from slang or euphemisms. If I am going to try to explain and talk about sex and sexuality and the Bible, I'm going to have to say the word "breasts." There's just no way around it. I'm not doing it to make you feel uncomfortable, but that may happen.

Let me also say that I know there is a lot of hurt surrounding this topic. I don't think any of you have escaped hurt to this point. Some of your hurt may be in what you have seen or the messages you have believed. Others of you have experienced abuse or rape or have been in seriously damaging situations. Some of you are currently living in pornography addiction, unhealthy sexual relationships or eating disorders. I want you to know you are loved and accepted here. My comments are not directed at you particularly. If you are willing, I'd like to talk about what you're going through or have gone through and what walking with Jesus might mean for you. Please talk to us about who you are and what story you've been through. I promise we'll listen.

My daughter Anna just turned eight years old. She is an amazing girl, and I'm so proud of her. One of the things she has loved to do is draw our former dog, Happy. He died last February. We'd had him for three or four years, and he was a great, great dog. Anna has probably drawn 5000 pictures of Happy. She drew them everywhere, all the time. On school papers, for people, in church – she loved to draw Happy.

There was a thankfully brief period of time though when all of Anna's pictures of Happy included his penis. This didn't last long – whew. But I can distinctly remember her drawing Happy in church, finishing up with his furry tail and then she went to work drawing his penis on the page. She wanted to get things right. What was and what made a boy a boy was very important to her. She was interested and noticed the equipment.

Here's another story. Last summer I took my son Cal on a trip where we talked over the birds and bees. The sex talk. It was good, and it was awkward, but it was necessary, and I hope helpful. After we were mostly done talking I asked him if the boys in his class ever talked about this stuff. "No," he said. I was glad about that. I asked him, "Cal, do you ever think about girls?" He thought for a minute. "Only as dodge ball targets," he said.

The fascination with the penis. Obliviousness to girls. They're dodge ball targets. Where do you find yourself on this spectrum? Does it vary from day to day? Minute to minute?

I think everyone is interested in this topic. We all care about it, even if we aren't dating someone at the moment. I am hoping to give you a few things to think about along the way, but there's no way I can answer every question or cover every situation.

You have entered into a very interesting world. The college campus is an amazing place. Diversity is everywhere. There are so many different people doing, saying and believing things. There is an unlimited sense of freedom. No one is going to stop you. I remember my first day on campus. My parents had left, and I didn't have classes yet. I walked around campus and downtown and thought, "I can do anything I want, and no one will ever know or care." That was an incredibly freeing feeling. But it also made me lonely. No one will stop me, and no one will care. I felt free and alone.

There's a strong work hard/play hard ethic here on campus. I don't think OU is especially rigorous, but it's a good school and you have to study hard to make good grades and do well. There's enough time then to play hard too, and people definitely do that. Add to this a hook up culture, one where sexual freedom is explored and promoted. You may not see this all

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

the time, but I constantly hear stories about hook ups, pretty graphic sexual encounters at sorority and fraternity parties, sexiles (being exiled from your room while your roommate has sex), sleepovers, and sometimes just confessions of going too far even though it wasn't sex. Oklahoma may be a few years behind, but the culture is moving more and more away from restraint and what the Bible calls chastity. Do these sexual freedoms bring the happiness they seem to promise? I would submit they don't. Neither do researchers. In her *Sex and the Soul*, Donna Freitas writes, "Yet the freedoms of a spiritual college...do not necessarily make life easier or more liberating for the students, especially when it comes to sexual freedom."²

So there is sexual freedom here. But so much brokenness. So much pain and hurt. In a culture of openness, there are hundreds of freshmen girls getting raped or talked into sex or taken advantage of. That doesn't sound good or healthy.

Some people come to college with rules they follow. Some break those rules pretty quickly, or they slowly get broken down and worn away and lose the morals and values they grew up with. Some were only outwardly conforming, and they didn't really understand why sex was wrong in the first place. It's confusing. Hot girls get attention. Who doesn't want attention? At least some. So the message becomes clear if you want to compete – get sexy.

There is a certain ambiguity about all of this morality, sexuality and spirituality. "Ambiguity" is a key word. As Freitas observes, "Students know even before college that their sexual yearnings and, for some, practices do not fit into the do's and don'ts of their faith. But once they arrive on campus and encounter unfettered sexual freedom, many want something outside themselves – something divine – to help them make sense of what can be a disorienting experience."³

There are two ways to handle this dilemma. The most common is to enter into a private world of personal spirituality. I see and hear about this all the time. Faith becomes a personal thing, something not talked about, expressed or really lived out in any public or communal way. Students start to shift away from their faith traditions and into a more private realm of spirituality, one that seems to be safe for them to try to understand their sexual experiences. But it's an unmoored spirituality. It can't help you or correct you. It's inside yourself. It's too poorly defined to help you navigate the waters or make sense of things. It's ambiguous.

This internal dialogue and self-discovered morality may make you feel better and less guilty for a little while, but ultimately I think it will leave you unsatisfied because you will sense that your "religion" isn't bigger than you. If you have your own sense of God and spirituality, and what is right and wrong, then how will you ever make sense of things? How can you ever be corrected? You're turning inward. In her book *Sex and the Soul*, Freitas quotes a student named Amy who comments, "I look within myself for my spirituality and to answer the meaning of life."⁴

I don't think she will find many solid answers there. That a vaporous way to create and hold onto meaning.

There is another way to handle this. There can be an actual discussion and a community that cares about this topic of sexuality and faith. If you're going to 'explore your spirituality' then okay really do it. Really see what *the Bible* has to say about sexuality instead of just the things you like or want it to say or caricatures of it. Or just what your youth pastor said when you were 13. Really think about and explore what the Bible says about sexuality and spirituality. It's a great topic, and I'd guess you'd find people willing to talk with you about it.

I want to submit to you that you need the communal dimension on this topic, not just the private dimension. That's what we're going to do through this series. To try to have a real conversation about how our sexuality and our faith fit together. What it's all about. We'll try to do that without being a sex education class or locker room talk or the latest tips in Cosmo or your youth group clichés and speeches.

ALL of the major religions say sex before marriage is wrong. That is amazing agreement. But "you" (maybe not you personally but you, your peers) are having sex outside of and before marriage. So what is the disconnect?

Religion has become a marginal influence. As Freitas writes, "Most students live their sexual lives as if they were religiously unaffiliated."⁵

Does Amy feel empowered? Used? Disenchanted? She wants to be taken out on a date, but instead she's worried about her push up bra, hot body, getting guys to notice her and then getting drunk and having oral sex. She wants a boyfriend, she wants a romance, but she's not sure how to get it or even if it's possible. What do you think? Does this sound like a happy life or a liberated woman?

With all that in mind I want to say a few things to get us started.

God created sex, and it is a great thing.

I love sex. It's one of my favorite things to do with my wife. It is so incredibly great to have sex with your best friend who is your lover, your equal and your spouse. Don't worry, I'm not going to go into details or anything, but I want you to know that sex is incredible when it's done right and so connecting when it's done correctly. To be honest, sex can also be incredible when it's *not* done right. So I don't want you to think that sex outside of marriage feels bad and sex outside of

² Donna Freitas, *Sex and the Soul*, 15

³ *Sex and the Soul*, 16

⁴ *Sex and the Soul*, 18

⁵ *Sex and the Soul*, 16

marriage feels good. That's too simplistic. We need to be more nuanced than that in our understanding of sex. We can't say everything here, so right now I'm merely wanting to affirm that sex is good. Hooray for sex.

God is super duper for this. I don't think he is bashful about this at all. He created sex, and he uses sex as a metaphor all the time, as we'll see. Sex is good, and it's for our good.

Look at Proverbs 5⁶: *15 Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. 16 Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? 17 Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you. 18 Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, 19 a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love. 20 Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman and embrace the bosom of an adulteress?*

Did you know this was in the Bible? What do you think the Bible is talking about here?

Well, cisterns are images of female sexuality. The writer is talking about the glory and mystery of a vagina. That is where you go into to draw deep waters. And the springs are pictures of male sexuality, of the penis. This is pretty graphic language then, and perhaps enough to make some of you blush as we pray for the fountain to be blessed. God is blessing sex here for this couple. He's entreating a husband to take joy and delight in his wife's breasts. That those very breasts would intoxicate him. He'd be drunk and staggering with the goodness of these amazing creatures.

We won't spend a ton of time on this today, but do you see how high a few of sex this is? It isn't begrudged. It doesn't sound like using or powerplays. It's not spoken of in a dirty way. It's true love and friendship. It's delight.

This is a really high view of sex. It's erotic. It's not fundamentalist or conservative.

It's also protected. Proverbs is written to boys for them to study in school. So this proverb has a male focus. The same applies to women, but it would be like picking up a Boy Scout manual. The Girl Scout manual is really similar but not exactly the same and we don't have to be mad or confused that there are two of them. The other side of the coin to the eroticism is the writer entreats the men and us to keep our sexuality in its place. *Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets?* Your penis and orgasms are for your wife. Do not be promiscuous. Keep yourself for your wife. *Don't be intoxicated with a forbidden woman. Don't embrace the wife of an adulteress.*

We'll talk about this more later, but the Bible says that a man is to be faithful to his wife because he loves her. Love. That's a powerful word. You have to realize when this proverb was written people didn't talk about love. People married to obtain social status, to preserve their family, to move up the ladder and to have children. Love? Intoxication? The Bible says you are to love, really love your spouse. That's where you go for deep friendship, intimacy and delight.

So the high and provocative view of sex still comes with some boundaries. We'll talk about those more later, but I want you to see the Bible is not squeamish about this topic. Yes, there are metaphors here, but everyone knows what they're talking about. You were made for this deep connection. Chances are you will experience this for yourself. Know that it is good and good for you.

I must move on. I can't say everything about this now.

You are relational because God himself is relational.

It is key to understand that you want relationships because that is how you are created. It's in your DNA to be in relationship. I'm not saying all of you WILL get married, though I am certain most of you will, if not all. God has seemingly called very few of his people to singleness, so let's not get hung up on that.

Marriage is just one of the ways we are relational. We have families. We have friends. We meet new people. We form groups. You get lonely because you want people to love you. We serve and help those around us. We need relationships. Why?

In Genesis 1:26, we read this: *Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."*

The Bible says we are made in the image of God. What we sometimes call the *imago dei*. This means a whole host of things, but for our purposes it means that God himself is relational. We see a hint of this when we read *Let us make man in our image*. Do you here those plural pronouns? God didn't say, "Let me make man in my image."

This is tapping into the glorious mystery of the Trinity. God is one. God is three in one. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the same in power, glory and essence but three person in the same God.

Here is how the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it:

Q. 5. Are there more Gods than one? A. There is but one only, the living and true God.

Q. 6. How many persons are there in the godhead? A. There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.

Jesus speaks of this in Matthew 28:18 *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

There are three persons in the Godhead, and we call the Trinity, which is one of the most amazing, revolutionary and important doctrines ever in the world. I was listening to Professor Doug Kelly recently, and he said the Trinity and adoption

⁶ Much of these thoughts come from Tim Keller's sermon on *The Temptation of Beauty*.

were the two most important theological concepts we could ever offer to people. I'm offering you one tonight, one you probably do not think about very often, but which makes everything else go and move in the Christian life.

Think about this. 1 John 4:8 says *God is love*. Well, what is love? Love is many things, but it is giving of yourself for another person. It is thinking of and acting for another person. Love cannot be self-centered or selfish. So if God is love, how can he love unselfishly? He can he not be utterly consumed by himself?

Many of you might be familiar with 1 Corinthians 13. Some of that chapter says, *Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

Again, here are characteristics of love. These show us the unselfishness of love, how it is directed at others. Let me ask you this – there was a long, long time before God created the world, before he created people, right? So if the Trinity were not true, how could God keep from being selfish all that time? He would only be himself, so how could he *be* love?

I think he could be love because he was a Trinity, three persons in one Godhead forever. From all eternity past. There never was a time when the Son and Holy Spirit were not. They were not created. They are persons of God. I can't totally explain that, but I can observe it, affirm it and try to understand implications of it. God was not lonely. He didn't create people because he was lonely and needed someone to love. He loved already. He had a community. God is relational in his essence.

Does that make sense?

This is why you long for relationships. Why you get hurt by relationships. Why you want to be well-thought of. Why you want to be close to someone. Why you hope and pray that someday you'll get married, even though that is a very scary proposition. It's because that's how you were *made*.

So you can embrace that. It's not weird or unnatural or even something you should hide. I'm not saying you should get married in the next semester or even this year. But it's a fair topic. And so is friendship, dating and sex. You have good reasons for not being involved in dating, sex and marriage, and I don't want to suggest this should become the overwhelming fixation of your life. But don't feel strange for being interested in it. It's big. It's important. It's a part of who you are because you are created in the image of God.

One last thing. The Trinity not only implies and fills out our relational need. It does something else too.

Your relational need is ultimately met in the gospel.

The Trinity tells us about the Gospel. There is a Father. But there is also a Son. And that Son has always, always, always planned on coming to earth to die for his chosen people.

We read about this from the pen (or stylus) of Paul in Ephesians 1: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

Jesus chose us before the foundation of the world. He predestined us for adoption, that other glorious doctrine Professor Kelly talked about. He made us his children. He brought us into his family.

This is the gospel. That God himself in the person of Jesus Christ, God's only Son, was going to pay our debt, live our life and die for his people to forgive them of their sins and bring them to God. The Holy Spirit applies this work to us, and lives and moves within us.

Your relational need is best understood as being rooted in the Trinity. But so is your redemptive need. Before you were created, God knew what he was going to do with you. In fact, before *anything* was created. It was always his plan to pay for and save his people through death and bring them to life.

Do you understand your need for the gospel? Do you think being hot will save you? Maybe it's not a six pack in front of the mirror in the rec center or bigger biceps. It could be something else like a 4.0 or a certain standing in the business school or the latest iPhone. I'll bet there is something in your life that you think would give you more value if you could get it. It might be an boyfriend. It might be a date. It might be a wife or husband or a degree. Whatever it is, it will not satisfy you. You were created ultimately for relationship with God, and you must love, believe in and have faith in Jesus to find that. Do you understand and follow Jesus? Is he real in your life? Is he making a difference to you?

I pray that he will.

The very first question and answer in the Westminster Shorter Catechism is a pretty famous one. It asks and then answers What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

The thing we are about and the thing we are to do is to glorify God and enjoy him forever in everything we do. What is the chief end of baseball?⁷ To glorify God and enjoy him forever. What is the chief end of college? The chief end of college is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. That should help you when you get down or discouraged or stressed. The chief end of college isn't to graduate and be successful. It's to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

So what is the chief end of dating, sex and marriage? What is the chief end of your breasts? What is the chief end of your penis? What is the chief end of your eyes? To glorify God and enjoy him forever.

May we learn together what it means to do that this semester as we walk with him together in community with Jesus. May we confess together our lack of faithfulness and regard to these matters. May we ask Jesus to walk with us in a new obedience given by him in his gospel of grace.

⁷ I've been thinking about this because my good friend, Mat McIntosh pastor of University Fellowship Church, has been coaching my son in baseball. He has been asking him, What is the chief end of baseball? The right answer is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.