

## Covenant Relationships include Dating

Everyone wants meaningful relationships - ones that are strong, life-giving, and lasting. We long for connection that brings peace instead of pressure, clarity instead of confusion, and trust instead of instability. Yet many of us have experienced the opposite: relationships strained by misunderstanding, weighed down by expectations, or fractured by disappointment.

What if a chief barrier, if not *the* chief barrier, is not simply *who* we relate to - but *how* we understand the purpose of relationship itself?

Most people enter relationships hoping to find something:

- identity
- security
- validation
- purpose

But relationships we develop with significant others, spouses, family, and friends were never designed to carry that weight. When we expect them to define us or complete us, they begin to strain under pressure they were never meant to bear. The result is often frustration, imbalance, or even breakdown.

How do you enter a relationship? Are your first aims to fill your loneliness? Do you seek to find a companion who makes you happy or a better person?

Too often our focus or priority to be about your gains and benefits in a developing relationship boils down to the basic question, “*What can I get from relationships?*” Instead, what if we begin by asking, “*What were relationships created for by God?*”

As we move forward, we will explore:

- why relationships exist
- what makes them healthy and enduring
- how identity shapes every connection
- and how love, truth, and purpose function together

You will begin to see that ideal relationships are not built on perfection, but on alignment - alignment of identity, intention, and design.

The blueprint for every healthy relationship does not originate with us. It originates with God. His blueprint is the way we are meant to love, honor, relate, and remain faithful is not something we invent. If we approach our relationships as He intended and showed us, we are reflecting His life through ours.

Ideal relationships reflect the way God relates both within Himself and with us.

And when we understand that relationship rightly, we begin to live and relate differently.

## 1 – IDEAL RELATIONSHIPS – GOD DESIGNED

### *Introduction*

Relationships are ideal if they are patterned after the relationship that God has with us.

The desire for ideal relationships is found within each of us. We yearn to belong, to have purpose, to be needed, to be cherished, to be loved.

That came from God.

The entire Bible is the story of the various ways God has had relationships with His people and does today. The Three-Person God, or the Trinity is God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is from Whom we get our need for relationship.

**Genesis 1:18** records God’s words, “*It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.*” The Hebrew word used for *alone* sums everything up: *bad*. The word means to be separate, alone, apart. God sought relationship with us. He intends relationships between us.

It is inborn and natural for us to have a desire to relate to one another.

The manner in which we relate, connect, and function forms the relationships one with another. These relationships take on different roles due to function and expectation. And, yes, those two go critically together.

If one functions in the role of parent but is expected to be a friend, the expectations are not met. If one functions in the role of friend and not as a more intimate relation, the expectations are not met.

Relationships are defined roles, but our expectations applied to those defined roles are imperative.

Relationships by definition are complex. The interaction of two divinely created humans should marvel us. Since each of these two beings has a mind, will, and soul, this interaction is no simple formula or naturally occurring state. So, why do we expect relationships to be easy or even natural?

Moving through this study, the goal won’t be to assemble tips or “how-tos.” Instead, the goal is to examine the pattern of ideal relationships to impact and inform our own between friends, significant others, family, spouses, coworkers, etc.

Let’s start with the pattern of relationship that God established.

Before moving forward, understand that relationships have a purpose in our lives. But those relationships do not give us the purpose for our lives.

Repeat. *Relationships have purpose in our lives, but those relationships do not give us the purpose of our lives. The Source of our identity is God. The Source of our purpose is God.*

If that is *not* the accepted truth in your life, you are set to navigate a difficult course in life, whether seeking a spouse, a close friend, or in dealing with coworkers.

Do you want ideal relationships? Sure. We all do. The answer begins in our relationship with God, having our identity established in and by Him, and *then* our relationships flow from that identity to allow us to express ourselves and purpose, as well as gain the benefit of the love of another.

The wrong pattern is set when we seek identity and purpose in the people in our lives with the relationships built on personal imperfections, as well as those of the other person.

What is a pattern? It's the model. A pattern is a structure that repeats or exists to guide or function. We have been given the right pattern or model in developing relationships.

The best way to understand our relationship with God is to see the relationship of the first humans and the first application of the term covenant in the Bible.

Is it the easiest way or the most accepted way in terms of culture, peer pressure, or popularity? No. What does culture tell us to do in forming relationships, especially ones involving dating and romantic ties?

What do our family and friends do in forming their relationships? They usually impact the model we choose.

What's the most common way to engage and maintain relationships in our current culture?

Now, what does God show us? Is our relationship with God meant to be situational or pervasive throughout our lives? Is our relationship with God meant to be convenient or based on commitment? Our relationship with God begins when we accept His invitation on His terms, but does it end? Finally, do the terms of God's relationship with us look like the love and commitment that today's relationships offer?

### ***Covenant Defined***

A covenant is a formal, solemn, and binding agreement. It binds individuals together to reach a common goal using oaths, ceremonies, and obligations. God is the primary stakeholder life's covenant and defined the terms and roles. God is God; man is not.

### ***Covenant Applied***

Not all relationships are to be covenant relationships. But the ones that are enduring are.

Covenant relationship is a committed, faithful bond where two parties give themselves to one another in love, guided by truth, sustained by faithfulness, and rooted in God's design-not personal convenience. reflects how God relates-through initiating love, faithful commitment, mutual honor, and enduring responsibility-where the relationship is upheld not by feelings alone, but by promise, identity, and purpose.

Use this comparison to reflect on your various relationships. Covenant relationships contrast with those of our culture.

In the Bible, covenant is the term *bʿrīt* (ber-eeth). It literally means to cut a binding agreement that binding between two flesh. In terms of relationships, it establishes an accord of responsibility and faithfulness that is enduring.

<b>Contract</b>	<b>Covenant</b>
Based on terms and conditions	Based on relationship and promise
Motivated by mutual benefit	Motivated by love and commitment
If-then agreement	I will commitment
Limited scope	Whole-life involvement
Ends when terms are broken	Endures through failure
Focus on performance	Focus on faithfulness
Enforced externally (law)	Sustained internally (character)
Can be dissolved easily	Intended to be permanent

Taking these contrasts, apply them to your various relationships currently. Think about your friends, coworkers, neighbors, and family.

To sum these up, it can be said that an agreed upon contract declares, “*I’ll do my part if you do yours.*” In deep contrast, a covenant declares, “*I’m committed to you, because of who I am.*” God took the latter eternal approach with humanity.

God Himself declared, “*I am in covenant with you because of My nature and Who I am.*” We are covenant with Him when we relate to God in His nature and Who He is. Our relationship with God must be beyond the conveniences and benefits we seek in our typical relationships. And our relationship with God reflects how we will related to a significant other or spouse. Consider.

<b>Covenant Relationship</b>	<b>Cultural Relationship</b>
Commitment-based	Feeling-based
Faithful	Conditional
Identity-rooted	Performance-driven
Purpose-driven	Experience-driven
Enduring	Disposable

The word covenant is not used in the Bible until **Genesis 6**, but you can find the pattern of covenant in the creation and relationship of Adam and Eve.

God initiated the relationship between Himself and humanity. God created man. While we were conceived by the seed of man being successfully implanted into the fertile womb of our mothers to grow and develop into a child, this continued the promise of God’s

Covenant from the beginning that like would reproduce like, that seed originated to be in God's Image.

Our identify is *in Him*. **Genesis 1:26-27** is clear that the image of each human originates with the Trinity. We are mind, body, spirit. *“Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.”* This fact cannot be repeated enough. If we begin to find our identity in what we do, who our relationships are with, and anything else of this earth, then, who we are is defined by something other than God.

Who defines you? Does God or do you misidentify your life as a role you play or a relationship you have established?

In the Old Testament, believers in Jesus Christ can see ourselves in the lives of Hebrews who were created by God through conception and birth, but we are also set apart by God to be a people group by accepting His invitation to receive Christ. Just as Abram was called by God to leave his country to travel to Canaan and head an entire nation, God calls each of us into relationship.

**John 6:44** are Jesus' words explaining, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him...” John also expanded this in **1 John 4:19**. *“We love because He first loved us.”* Paul declared the same in **Romans 5:8** revealing that our relationship with God began when we were invited and accepted despite our failures: *“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

As the Source of the covenant, God sets the terms. And that relationship of His people living within His covenant is recorded throughout the Bible.

God's divine order in relationships is repeated even to this day.

1. We accept His invitation to have a relationship with Him.
2. We establish our identity in Him
3. We model our relationships after His relationship with us.

**Exodus 19:5-6** are key verses to understand the uniqueness and importance a born-again believer is to God, who has chosen to accept His Son, Jesus, as the Lamb of God Whose blood covered our sins. **Exodus 19:5-6** declares, *“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine, and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”*

The Hebrew term for covenant in the Old Testament is *bʾrît* (ber-eeth), which is a binding agreement that is solemnized by the cutting of flesh and shedding of blood to seal the terms. It's permanent and held by God as sacred with those He sought for relationship.

As Exodus notes, the Hebrews were God's “special treasure” or *səgullâ* (seg-ool-law). This Hebrew word describes something of great wealth, highly valuable, and set aside as a treasured possession.

In the New Testament, Peter declares that “*You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people...*” in **1 Peter 2:9**. Paul spoke of each believer in Jesus Christ as “*His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand...*” in **Ephesians 2:10**.

Take a few minutes to consider the meanings and applications of these simple but critical terms to your relationships, especially when dating that prepares you for a covenant marriage. If things are not in order, the alignment is wrong and will not function ideally.

These facts are critical in relationships because we often do exactly what Eve and Adam did. They listened to the words of satan rather than remembering the words spoken by God. They broke covenant with God in their sin.

While we all want meaningful relationships that are life-giving, healthy, strong, and lasting, we make mistakes by getting things out of order and failing to do as God did in making relationships that last.

If God wants us to first have a relationship with Him, find our identity in Him, and then have all other relationships to flow from that identity in Him, what goes wrong?

Most often our own individual desires and needs are the primary motivation in forming a relationship, especially relative to dating and marriage.

Too often, our desire for companionship to replace loneliness places an urgency and even impatience on the process of dating and courting for marriage. Even after finding the right person, our desires eclipse our reasoning and expectations are placed on the other person that will never be fulfilled. We might find our identity in the dating partner rather than from God, again, putting pressure on that person and guaranteeing conflict. Why? Only God is perfect and is able to fulfill our needs in the area of our identity.

We may even seek a dating partner who completes us, meaning they have strengths we do not have personally. This is where the idiom, “opposites attract” plays a role. If you happen to be insecure in an area of life, you should not be surprised to be attracted and find as a benefit a dating partner who is secure in that role or in that trait.

While chemistry does play a role in relationships, it’s important to see that our identity must first come from the relationship with God through Jesus Christ. What a blessing we experience to be able to express ourselves through the relationship first with Him. But then, also with all who are around us – our family, friends, coworkers, church, and community. The experiences of relationship give us a place to minister, share God’s love, and do life. They also add value to our lives in the same way as we receive the love of God through another, the ministry of God through another, and shared experiences that form our life story.

Not just chemistry and good feelings.

## 2 – MADE FOR WHOLE RELATIONSHIPS

Having an ideal relationship begins with me. Say that. Having ideal relationships begins with me.

You decide if you're complete in God as the person He fearfully and wonderfully made. You decide if you are His vessel, His special treasure filled with His love, His mind, His heart, and His ways. If you are, then, you have a great deal to bring to a relationship to express all of Who He is through you.

So, are you?

Are you seeking other people, other events of life, other activities, and attempting to remake yourself over and over again in some process in an attempt to fill a void in your life?

Do you seek relationships to “complete you?” Think through your answer before you give it.

If God fearfully and wonderfully made you and is our Creator, Who best and only to complete us other than our Maker? Why do we try in vain to use a substitute or counterfeit instead of God?

There are no surrogates to stand in for God. No one will complete us other than God. He knows our imperfections and, as the Potter, refashions us, shapes us, and makes us useful and His masterpiece.

The wrong relationships form when we are drawn to love that is not Biblical; closeness comes in the form of dependency and enabling; values are compromised to be accepted and affirmed; and fear weaves its way through most every aspect of the relationship.

Fear? Yep.

Fear of being inadequate. Fear of losing ground or face. Fear of failure. Fear of being vulnerable in honesty and truth.

Fear of loss rather than the decision to give in God's love, ways like joy, kindness, and vulnerable truth.

Do you want to present yourself as the best catch on the relationship market? Then begin with becoming whole in Christ. How in the world is one to be made whole in Christ?

Look at **Colossians 2:6-10**.

It certainly does NOT mean to adopt the ways of this world. Finding relationship tips online, via social media, or from friends who struggle themselves provides no solid solutions. Why are we surprised when we ignore what God says only to see that His ways are best, not just a suggestion?

Read these five verses over and over and see that we “*are complete in Him*” if we make the decision to walk in His ways, not our own.

Let's start with verse 10, the end result. The goal of each human should be to find our identity in God the Father, Jesus Christ His Son, and the Holy Spirit – the Trinity. This identity is not lacking.

The word used to describe this complete state in **verse 10** is *plēroō* (play-ro'-o). The Greek word means to fill to the full. There's no room for anything more; the supply abounds; the state is rendered consummate, or made perfect.

Are you just finding this promise? We can be made complete in Christ Jesus. How? Return to **verses 6-9**.

Since we have received Christ Jesus the Lord, or we have taken Him as a close companion or joined ourselves to Him, then we are to walk in Him. The Greek word used in **verse 6** is *peripateō* (per-ee-pat-eh'-o) means the state in which we live, how we tread all around, and our conduct.

“There's no way I can have the same conduct as Jesus,” you might say to yourself or at least receive that whisper from your doubts and the one who hates Jesus...and you. Well, you're right. In your own strength, your own efforts, and your own plans, you can't. No one is able.

Only through dying to self and allowing Jesus to put His super on your natural are any able to be in Christ Jesus. Then, we are “made complete” or filled to the full with His Spirit, in His work, and walking in His truth and ways, we are able to have His conduct.

Keep reading in **Colossians 2. Verse 7** instructs us to not only walk in Jesus Christ, but we are also to be rooted in Him and established in the faith of Jesus that teaches to love, serve, and give. Why are these statements just as critical as the one directing our actions and life to reflect Christ?

The type and kind of soil you're rooted in determines if you grow, how you grow, and your capacity to thrive.

This truth reveals that our completeness comes through a process that begins with our own decisions of where we are rooted, where we remain planted, and the environment in which we cultivate our lives. Process. Process. Read it again. Process.

Building and establishing a life of stability, completeness, and goodness comes through the process of being rooted in faith in Jesus and God's word. The process includes mistakes, failures, and decisions to either grow or quit. Those are decisions.

This process also includes building upon the foundations that are firm in God and not based on the everchanging sands of culture, convenience, and our cravings. Our stability comes from that which we build on and have around us.

Have you done a building inspection of your life lately? Have you placed the foundation of who you are – your identity – in Christ Jesus? Do you say what God's word says about you? Do you look in the mirror to see with human eyes the flesh that is temporary as

assessed by a heart that “is deceptive above all things” (**Jeremiah 17:9**) and the whispers of the one who wants to steal, kill, and destroy your life and future (**John 10:10**)?

**Verse 7** also teaches the manner in which we are to live, or our approach to life. We are to live in gratitude and thanksgiving. What does this look like? **Philippians 4** paints the picture perfectly.

**Philippians 4:11-13** tell us that Paul focused on his blessings and not his need. He experienced difficult times, good days, miracles, and times of suffering. Yet he learned “to be content.” Think through this a minute.

As we constantly scroll through social media with eyes of curiosity and assessment of so much that gets posted, are we able to find sufficiency in our own lives, our own self, and our own purposes to just look and not envy or covet? Do we consume this content as entertainment or seriously looking to be informed? Sadly, we take notice, often copy or duplicate what we’ve seen, and model our lives to look more like the people we follow on social media than how God created us.

In Christ, our perspective should be first on our blessings, then on our opportunities. All, however, from the discipline of gratitude, or a grateful heart. The believer in Jesus Christ is supposed to reflect His love, His goodness, and His provision...even in our tough times, our struggles, and in times of need. We must be different as His special treasure that is filled with Him...not this world.

Applying this truth to the relationships that God wants us to have both with Him and people around us, we find our identity in Him, not the people we’re around, not the companions of our lives, and not even the ideal dating partner we seek. We are to be made complete in God for the very reasons cited in week one as the purpose for relationships.

We are not to complete ourselves with others. We’re to be made complete in God. We are not to fill the holes of insecurity or weakness by finding a secure, strong dating partner. We are to be made secure and strong in Him.

Then, as we have relationships with others, we may express ourselves, represent Jesus, and find purpose in giving and sharing love to another.

**Colossians 2:8** drops a big warning in our faces that demands our attention. “*Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.*”

Do you like being cheated out of something valuable for something empty and cheap? Do you want to lose something of unique worth made just for you by God for the substitute of a temporary relationship that may seem popular to a crowd, but is not rooted in Christ?

This verse is clearly positioning ways of this world as those that will not just rob or plunder your worth but will also take you captive in a ploy that is echoed as acceptable by culture but not Christ.

Today, many in the dating scene are already victims of some type of betrayal or broken relationships. Why would you not take the care encouraged to do important things like develop relationships like Jesus did? If you have trust issues, decide today that you'll take the way of Jesus by finding your identity in Him and not others in your social circle.

**Verses 9 and 10** continue to declare, "*For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.*" In Christ, we are complete. In Christ, we experience God and have access to God in His complete Image.

We are able to relate directly with the Trinity (God) in our imperfect humanity to be made full. Take a moment to look at the "Image" of God we have and have access to through Jesus Christ.

- Father: Mind / Will (source, intention)
- Son (Jesus): Body (visible expression)
- Holy Spirit: Spirit (inner life, connection to God)

If we use relationships to extract value, including some type of identity in ourselves, we are certain to realize that all humanity is imperfect. We learn fairly quickly that our expectations may be just that, our own and no other's. First and foremost, our identity most come from God Almighty – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We are made complete in His fullness.

Remember, relationships that last will be patterned after the relationship that God has with each of us – one built on unconditional love where our identity is from Him and in Him. Our relationships will reflect the type of love God had for the Hebrews, in the Old Testament, and the love Jesus has for the church, His Bride, in the New Testament.

### 3 – DATING – ARE YOU READY?

Having a covenant partner to date and eventually marry are our hearts' desire and God's, too. He wants the very best for us. According to **Psalm 139:13-16**, not only has God made us, but He knows every single aspect of our lives has been known to our Creator from the beginning.

**Verse 16** in the New Living Translation reads, “*You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a singled day had passed.*” These verses not only tell us how special we are in our creative essence, but also how very purposed our lives are that we are being, doing, and alive. God knew in advance where we would be at this very instance of our lives. He knew of our trauma, our failures, our hurts. He knew we would have a longing to find more and seek Him, His ways, and words on the topic of love and relationships.

Whether you are single as a function of your desire, a failed relationship, or a search that has been fruitless to date, God knew where you would be at this moment. He also knows the best for you and what's next. That means we must trust Him. Take in what His word says and apply His truth to our lives while praying for the Holy Spirit – the Jesus who is with us on this earth – to guide us in His wisdom.

While you in are the midst of this study, you are already in relationships. You have jobs, families, friends, and neighbors. Each of these relationships are defined through the titles within those designated relationships.

But the commands Jesus gave us as the two greatest commands are to universally apply to all with whom we interact. Remember those two?

**Matthew 22:37-40** should be marked in our Bibles and words that resonated in our minds, hearts, and souls as we live our entire lives. Read these words out loud. They apply to our dating partners, our spouses, our families, our friends, our neighbors at home, our coworkers, to everyone. Why? Jesus said. He said to love first and always. That is the mark of those who love Him and will distinguish us from all others.

Oh, and yep. This love is *agapaō* (ag-ap-ah'-o). It is the Greek word describing unconditional love that is sacrificial in nature and deliberately prioritizes the best of another. Compare the words used for love in the Greek language that reveal the very different meanings for our one word of “Love” used in English.

1. Agápē - Selfless, self-giving, sacrificial love without condition
2. Philía - Friendly, brotherly love that shares values and connection that comes with mutual loyalty and care
3. Érōs - Romantic love that is rooted in passion and desire
4. Storgē - Familial love that is instinctive and caring as a parent
5. Philautía - Self-love that can often be prideful and ambitious beyond the health of self-respect and worth

Understanding the differences, take a moment to assess your approach to other people. Your approach to other people form your relationships.

Do you have relationships out of necessity? All do to some extent as we live in a very interactive society. Do you have relationships out of convenience? Again, all do to some extent as we make transactions in retail, for example. But in those relationships that are daily and ongoing, do you apply the two greatest commandments?

What does this have to do with dating? Because our relationship with God through Jesus Christ is going to be reflected in every relationship we have, you will either reflect Christ in the dating relationship or this culture and sinful world. Plain. Simple.

God sees things as one or the other. God sees the blood of Jesus Christ applied to our lives, or He sees us naked in our flesh and filth. God sees the blood of Jesus that covers our sins, or He sees the wickedness and defilement of our sin that we carry and will be held in account of as our own. God sees the righteousness of His Son, or He sees the unrighteousness of our ways in a decaying world, even when we attempt to do good or religious acts.

So when Jesus Christ, the Son of God tells us that the two greatest commandments of our lives involve sacrificial love of God first and others as ourselves, then that's what God expects to see reflected in our relationships...all of them.

Agápē love is attractive. And Paul tells us over and over to put on Jesus Christ.

- Romans 13:14 - *“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”*
- Galatians 3:27 - *“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”*
- Ephesians 4:24 - *“and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.”*
- Colossians 3:10 - *“and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.”*

Are you adorned in Christ Jesus? Does He look good on you? Does He love unconditionally through you? These are important questions, because dating involves presenting your best self to the one you have interest in or desire to know better.

Will he or she see you in your best set to impress? Or will he or she see Jesus shining through?

Make the decision that the best you is the one that has allowed the pure love of Jesus that is unpretentious, warm, and seeking the best of others to be seen as your calling card.

When you make this committed change to your life expect to gain several benefits. Yes, you'll be blessed. But consider a few things.

If the Fruit of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is allowed to grow in your life, your mindset, your heart, and your personality will reflect love, joy, peace, longsuffering (patience), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (**Galatians 5:22-23**). These virtues are desirable. They also announce to the world that you are different from the typical person giving the “serve-and-return” responses of life, or you're nice to me, I'm nice to you; you're not nice to me, I'm not nice to you.

When the calling card of your personality reflects Jesus, you are marked as unique, special, and desirable.

Now, when you are in any relationship, involving friends, coworkers, family members, and prospective dating partners, the pressure is off you. Your job to reflect Jesus in your smile, in your words, in your mannerisms, in your choices, and in your care are genuinely experienced.

*That* is attractive. These are the traits that are prized and unusual in our culture today giving you magnetism that others don't have if they depend on their own personality traits and appearances.

This becomes important relative to the type of people we will likely be drawn to and choose to associate throughout life.

Psychological research repeats a finding that perceived and actual similarities of people have a tremendous impact on the quality of a relationship. We gravitate to people who are like us, share interests, and have similar styles and traditions.

So, if your personality involves projecting the love of Christ, there will be a noticeable difference between you and others. If you enjoy events, activities, and conversations that involve and include your faith, reflect the values and people that share your opinions and views, as well as the types of entertainment and outings that are without moral concern, then your outward behavior will set the tone.

It's not quite as simple as attracting those who are similar to your own qualities. But we are attracted to people who share our values and likes.

Ever heard any of these sayings?

- Birds of a feather flock together
- It takes one to know one
- Water seeks its own level
- Cut from the same cloth
- Two of a kind
- Every pot has a lid
- Tell me who you walk with, and I'll tell you who you are

Consider how we are instructed to wear Christ Jesus as the adornment of our life. If we project His great love, His Fruit of the Spirit, and His ways, will we attract the same? Will we be attractive to others? Will we attracted to the same?

It matters who we are as we consider dating.

## WEEK 4 – DATING – WHERE DO I START?

In order to find a person who has the capacity to be the “help meet” to you, as God created Eve to be for Adam, take just a moment to consider how God used that same Hebrew word to speak of Himself.

“Help meet” in Hebrew, from **Genesis 2:20**, is the word *ēzer* (ay'-zer). God said it was bad for Adam to be alone and that there was not a suitable help meet found among the created beings. The word means an equal partner and counterpart who stands face-to-face, bringing strength, balance, and completion to the covenant relationship.

God is referenced as our help and shield by David in Psalm 33:20 and 115:9. Throughout Exodus and Deuteronomy, the Hebrews experienced God’s help and the word *ēzer* is used. There should never be a disparaging association with the term “help meet” when we reference a woman’s role countering a man.

Women are to look toward the attributes of Jesus Christ to find their best beau. Men are to do the same, just in a different fleshly being. Both man and woman have distinct and valuable roles, strengths, and purposes in a covenant relationship.

But where do you go...literally?

Well, where you don’t go are to the places where the atmosphere is set to maximize feelings, emotions, and superficial encounters. In these environments operating in our flesh is the rule, not the exception.

Finding a date is not a destination trip. There are no sure locations that feature a selection of the ideal specimens who are set for meaningful relationships. Just use common sense and consider a few facts.

In our current culture, people are found doing the things that interest them, that are important to them, and where they are rewarded. Sports, entertainment, taking in art, and engaged in outdoor activities are obvious places individual spend free time.

But don’t discount chance meetings that happen during work lunch breaks at a local deli or coffee shop. Be wise not to ignore people you encounter picking up groceries or a take-out order.

It’s not where you go, a perfect line that catches the attention of another, or any charm. Get in God’s word, pray for His mind, heart, eyes, and ears for understanding and see the basic truth that God desires for us to have thriving relationships.

Considering the relationships for dating, you have to ask yourself a few questions:

- What did and does God intend for the dating relationship?
- What do I expect from a dating relationship?
- What am I prepared to give in a dating relationship?
- How will I reflect Christ in a dating relationship?

## God's Intentions for Dating

What are the intentions of God? He is silent on the topic in the Bible relative to the use of the specific term. The Old Testament featured a societal construct that secured marriage for the ancestral bloodlines to continue of the Hebrews. In the New Testament, the writings about relationships involving men and women separately speak to marriage. The teaching is pretty simple: Men are to love their wives just as Christ Jesus loved the church, and women are to submit to their husbands in alignment and commitment to the relationship established.

The Bible is pretty clear regarding one issue, however, as it relates to who we marry. This direct teaching should influence our dating choices.

Look at **1 Corinthians 7:39**. Paul is writing to the church at Corinth in Greece. It's a thriving city of many cultures with values of education, commerce, and culture. The Corinthian Christians were constantly battling their own flesh and ways within the walk of faith in Jesus with the extremely secular culture that worshipped many gods, idols, and embraced worldly reasoning and wisdom.

Sound familiar? It should.

Paul's words explain that the culture at the time provided few rights to women. Because God views marriage as a holy ceremony meant for covenant, which is eternal, the teaching of becoming one flesh was to be literal. Once marriage was consummated, a couple had their own identity, but their flesh was united by the marriage covenant.

That explains why divorce was associated with a violent act. **Malachi 2:16** reflects the result of two flesh becoming one in marriage, just as Genesis 2:24 and Matthew 19:6 instruct. *"For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence."*

Divorce is contrary to God's design of marriage to be lifetime covenant. You see, in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, Israel is told that God Almighty is as the Husband of the nation. *"For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of Hosts is His name; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth" (Isaiah 54:5).*

Looking back to Paul's letter to Corinthian Christians we see again in **2 Corinthians 6:14** an unmistakably direct statement by Paul. *"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what fellowship has light with darkness?"*

This boundary God set as best for a marriage is best understood when we consider the word picture Paul just painted. Being unequally yoked would resemble a beast of burden harnessed into a yoke with the expectation of working with a second animal. However, if the animal was weak, untrained, and unable to pull equal weight, a great burden would be placed on the other animal with a failed pairing for the job.

Similarly, where light exists, darkness flees. There is no co-existence of light and darkness. None. But in our minds, we sadly believe and look for exceptions when it

comes to relationships. Setting the bar that high can be intimidating. But it reveals our trust in God and His word.

What does our current culture say about divorce?

Yes, God hates it. But He loves all people and wants our very best. Outside and inside the church, divorce is now extremely common. Has God changed?

No. Only we have. Find peace with God in His word and in His fellowship if you have walked the road of divorce. Just develop the mindset, if you don't already, that God's ways are best.

The way He offers to avoid the violation of covenant that occurs in divorce is to be equally yoked with a Christ follower from the beginning. And that should inform our answer to the question of a starting point for dating.

### **Definitions – What Exactly Is Dating? According to Culture?**

What is the definition of dating in practice today?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

### **According to the Bible and God's Heart?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

The definitions are different. Consider this: *Dating is a relational process where two people spend intentional time together to explore compatibility and connection for the purpose of a lifelong covenant that aligns with God's word.*

Just notice the differences between the definitions of culture versus God's intentions. Who has our best interests in mind?

Is the person you have interest in as a dating partner a believer in Jesus Christ?

"Well, I only want someone to be with to avoid loneliness. It's not like I'm going to marry every person I date," you might say to yourself.

Really? Have you straight up told the person you may be courting for a dating opportunity that same thing? Have you said, "Hey, want to give me several weeks of your time, hang out, have some fun, but understand, I only want to date you because I'm lonely?"

Or maybe, as you read these verses warning against being unequally yoked and, as 1 **Corinthians 7:39** says, “in the Lord” which means “in Jesus Christ” your thoughts tell you, dating is just a social thing to find out if you have the right chemistry and like a test drive of a longer relationship.

Friendships between men and women are certainly just for social purposes. Dating, however, is a step toward what the Bible called betrothal, which in the Hebrew culture meant a binding agreement of a man and woman to enter holy matrimony or marriage. Betrothal, like marriage, would end only by divorce in the Bible. While it was not marriage, it was beyond today’s engagement.

Keeping the Bible in mind, consider if you had a social friendship with a person of the opposite sex. During your interactions with him or her, you begin to notice that your shared experiences are mutually enjoyable and that you find a great deal of interests in common, as far as how your values line up, how you spend your time, and your overall interests.

If a person seems as if that friendship has potential to be a dating interest, then, your next step is to know their faith story. Ask them. Find out where they worship on Sundays. If there’s an upcoming concert, ask of their interest to attend. Find a way to approach the topic of church and your own personal faith. Or it may be something as general as, “This world is so very bizarre. I can’t imagine getting through life without Jesus who gives me strength. What about you?”

## 5. The Right Person for You is Known by God

There are differences in opinion about how one might find Mr. or Ms. Right who God has for us in a covenant relationship. Even deeper is the question as to whether there is just one Mr. or Ms. Right.

Look at **1 Corinthians 7:39**. The instructions of Paul to widows who “*are at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord*” are revealing and pertinent. God gives us freedom to select our best counterpart within the body of believers to have the relationship He wants for us.

With this in mind, are your efforts of dating, are you making it a priority to find out the faith walk and commitment of the people around you that form those possible relationships? In your interactions with people that you consider prospects for dating, do you openly discuss and live your faith in Jesus Christ? Or does your behavior look very little from any other person in a social circle that is affirmed and accepted in current culture?

God’s words assists in helping to understand His idea of relationships and His intentions revealed in text for us to put within the context of our lives.

That may not be the answer you want. Those looking for a formula or a list that features a bullet-point directive on tips and key “how-tos” just don’t work. Why? There are no two people exactly the same. We have similarities. But our individuality and uniqueness are from God.

Only individuals who recognize their identity in God and walk in Christ are the ones who govern themselves with a framework of Biblical principles that help us deny our flesh, die to self, and live a life humbled for service in love and service.

Others approach life based on feelings, working to attain approval and affirmation by others, not God, and sadly, live way beneath the intended graces and provisions of God, walking in Him.

God knows all. **Isaiah 46:9-10** declares, “*...For I am God and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done...*” We kid ourselves when we attempt to outthink or reason in opposition to God’s ways. We also don’t appreciate that all the stuff that we bring to relationships are known by God, too.

He knows about the betrayed friendship you had in grade school. He knows about the verbally abusive parent. He knows about the unfaithful spouse you had in a broken marriage. He knows of your fears to trust.

These are a tiny list of examples things added to our individuality that make relationships a true test of our faith in action to let *agape* love lead in our lives. Relationships are not easy when all things have gone right. Add on top of that the convolutions of our tests, trials, and our own testimonies in relationships, and you see the complexity of dating advice, as well as the actual process!

But consider what God said about a good spouse in the Bible. Both **Proverbs 18:22** and **Proverbs 31:10** inform us as to how it is a partnership of two good people is formed.

*“Who can find a virtuous woman or a wife of valor in all the sense of excellence?”* A virtuous, or valorous, excellent in strength, courage, and honor is to be found. The process of looking means, as we’ve learned, that you must live vigilant, sensitive and aware.

Are you praying for a dating partner whose life is rooted in the soil of God’s word? Are you yearning for a person who can be your life’s counterpart to fulfill serve God in an entirely new way? Remember, God does give His children the desires of our hearts. He also lets us reap what we’re sowing.

So, if our actions are those that would reveal to God that our hearts do want relationship to be all that He created us to be for His glory and use, and if we have been humbly serving Him all along in our singleness, even during those lonely times, He knows our hearts bear witness to our actions. He can trust us.

If, however, we are looking for someone to meet our needs, and not God, and if He sees that we have not sought Him, His word for His ways, and pursued them, He will allow us to tread the same road of culture to attempt to find the person we’re seeking.

Consider your heart’s desire in a partner. In looking for that person, make sure that it’s not to compensate for something you sense is missing in your life that they will not truly be able to fill.

But, still, **Proverbs 31** speaks to the fact that a virtuous spouse is found after a process of looking.

Likewise, **Proverbs 18:22** expands the process to include an additional blessing of favor from God. *“He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD.”* God is delighted when we are successful in seeking Him in prayer with our heart and petition for a Godly partner and then go about finding that person.

Consider, however, the fact that when one is looking for a virtuous or excellent partner, there is a process of preparation and presentation. If you have already made sure you are approaching dating to find a person who is a counterpart who aligns with God’s word, is excellent in the virtues that are meaningful in the kingdom of God, and is committed to serve God by loving unconditionally in a mutual relationship that is a covenant before God, you have acknowledged His ways. You have determined you are best when made whole in God, not attempting to make yourself whole through some earthly relationships, and you find your identity in God.

Simply, you have set yourself aside for God to have His way in your life to be the person He has created you to be. He wants you to flourish. He wants you to thrive. He wants you to find relationships with others that bring the best out in you, and similarly, you bring the best out in them.

Now, consider the dating process itself.

## Approach Dating as a Time for Discernment, not Entertainment

Discernment is one of those words we likely don't think of when putting a toolbox together to construct a dating partnership. But the word becomes critical if you apply God's word to your dating life and process.

Need convincing? Let's go!

I'd bet you have heard the saying, "*So-and-so is just a hammer seeing everything as a nail.*" What does that mean to you?

In this case, consider that if we could personify a hammer who is seeking its purpose to drive nails, then he or she would look for nails, see nails more than any other identifiable thing only because sighting a nail translated into an opportunity and a benefit. We operate in our strengths and our comforts.

If we are focused on filling an emptiness in our lives through dating, we often literally just seeking companionship without too much effort to distinguish the quality. If we're seeking someone to spend a great deal of time with for a more serious relationship, then other compatibilities are considered and even sought, but there is a desire to find specific qualities.

Discernment is the ability to distinguish between things, even when there are subtle differences. In the case of a Christian seeking a dating partner, it involves the ability to distinguish between someone suitable for a social friendship or a relationship that does *not* involve commitment and a type of love that God says is best versus one who possesses the capacity to be a vessel God is using, will use, and is suitable to be matched with another vessel of God.

Discernment equips you to see the covenant fitness between you and another. Said simpler, discernment is the way you see the right qualities in the person who could be a covenant partner.

This assessment transcends one's appearance and personality type that are often used in the effort to find chemistry between dating partners. Instead, discerning one's spiritual alignment and their evident fruit or Fruit are such valuable actions in dating.

Discernment guards your heart, as instructed by **Proverbs 4:23**, so that the very "issues of life" are kept in God. Corrupting your standards and morals through compromise is just not part of God's process or God's intention.

Two people cannot physically walk alongside one another without first agreeing on the direction of their journey. This obvious statement is echoed in Amos 3:3, "*Can two walk together, unless they agree?*" The New Living Translation spells it out exactly: "*Can two people walk together without agreeing on the direction?*"

If dating is pure entertainment, then agreement and alignment matters little. This explains the underlying issue that is found in the cultural approach to dating and marriage.

Instead of using our heads, we lead with our hearts. Discernment is formulating an awareness of the nonnegotiable qualities of a dating partner using God's word.

- Is this person a Bible-believing Christian?
- What fruit or Fruit is obvious in his or her life?
- Does this person share my desire to serve God and show the capacity to love unconditionally?
- Does this person allow me to be the best person God created me to be and wants my best?

These are questions based on **Matthew 7:15-20**. Our hearts might want us to believe that a person can improve, have a change in their personality, but most often, you'll learn quickly if a person answers those four questions to reflect the Fruit of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit.

A tree has a nature. People have a nature. Unless that nature is given to and governed by God, or to apply it to the tree metaphor, unless the tree is rooted in the right soil, nurtured and cultivated to grow and flourish, the fruit will be less than ideal. Further, as much as we might want to have sweet, juicy oranges grow from an apple tree, it won't happen.

As much as we want someone to have a character that reflects Jesus in how they love others, are motivated to live and serve, or not, we may just experience good chemistry or good feelings based on a preconceived notion or need in our lives.

God's word gives us a great deal of freedom in our choices on dating. Choosing to apply the principles He does give are proven to yield great results if we abide, or remain in Him as an individual and as a couple as you begin to date.

## 6. God's Boundaries are Good

Culture tells you to find the person who meets your needs and enjoy that relationship without restraint or concern for a long-term commitment. Culture also tells you to go as far physically and sexually as you want as a mutual couple.

We've already established that our hearts deceive us. We also know that our flesh communicates through our feelings. When Jesus said in **Mark 8:34-35** that we are to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him, it doesn't mean to deny your feelings.

Oh, there's such a deeper meaning.

The Greek word used for the word deny describes a person literally abandoning their own identity, putting to death the acquaintance of who you are, and letting it die so that the Holy Spirit is able to fill you with His presence and be born again to live a life in Christ that is new.

Then, not just dying in your own identity to take up the Identity of Jesus, but to carry a cross while following Jesus has a tremendous lesson. We are to identify with Jesus by declaring to this world that your flesh is no longer alive. It's been executed in sacrifice to Jesus. Now, you carry the weight of burden that He did. That which burdens us should resemble that which burdens Jesus.

Those markers that identified Jesus, should be seen in our lives. We must reflect His identity and not this culture that operates in feelings of individual satisfaction, personal gratification, and a very self-driven worldview, or frame around all aspects of life.

In the Old Testament, God announced Himself to be Israel's husband, established covenant, and expected faithfulness to the commands He gave regarding how life was lived, how relationships were formed and existed, and how He was to be the priority.

In the New Testament, Jesus was the fullness of God in the flesh. Yet He, too, is the Bridegroom of the Bride, or the New Testament church. He established the New Covenant with two primary but serious commands that involved loving God with all of our entire being and loving others unconditionally and sacrificially.

Christians are to make the best neighbors, the best people to encounter in public places, the best as a coworker, the best as a leader, the best as a follower, the best as a friend, the best as a church member, the best as a dating partner, and the best as a spouse. We are to be the best, "The Catch," and ideal reflection of Jesus.

Wow. Wouldn't this world be so very different if we understood these principles and roles?!

When we don't take our covenant seriously with Him to be in God's word, faithfully communicating with Him in fellowship through prayer, church participation that includes corporate praise and worship, and developing community for the purpose of serving God and accomplishing the calling He's placed on us in our community, we reveal an unfaithful heart. And God sees this unfaithfulness as adultery.

As His Bride, we are set apart. We are His prized possession and treasure set apart for His love. He promises to return for His prepared Bride to join Him in eternity at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

**Revelation 19:7** describes the culmination of our faith. *“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.”*

What does it mean that the Bride of Jesus has made herself ready? Very simply that Jesus will return for a prepared people who have lived set apart. That distinction involves our confession of faith in Christ Jesus, the lives we have chosen to live abiding in Him and not one bearing the fruit of this world.

If you keep reading in Revelation 19:8, you see that the Bride is *“granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.”* It matters to Jesus that He is wed to a pure and prepared Bride, His Church whom He died for in love.

It matters to Jesus that we are wed and partner with a prepared counterpart, a spouse, and a help meet that is loved as Christ loves the church and serves God as a reflection of His sacrificial love and Identity in a relationship that is an example of faithful love made one flesh.

As men and women of God, there don't seem to be challenges to the idea that in dating and in pursuing a partner for a covenant relationship in marriage that preparation is expected and required. That seems to convey a sense of effort that provides a benefit for all involved in the relationship.

There doesn't even seem to be an issue with the notion of faithfulness between individuals who are committed to loyalty and devotion to one another in a bond.

But when it comes to purity, there are all sorts of opinions. So what is purity? Define it. What does it look like to be pure in our current day? \_\_\_\_\_

---

In **2 Corinthians 11:2**, Paul is writing to the church at Corinth as a father of a daughter who was pure, undefiled, and chaste. He was expressing his committed work to betroth her to Christ in a perfect covenant union was in jeopardy as this church and her members flirted with the dalliances of culture and false teachings that would sully and defile her.

We can learn from the Greek meanings in this verse about the description of the chaste virgin intended for one covenant relationship. The Greek word *hagnos* means pure from every fault, immaculate, clean from earthly defilement. In the same sentence, the noun virgin is described by the Greek word *parthenos*. This means one kept pure from unholiness, idolatry, and uncleanness.

Paul was attempting to set a boundary around the Corinthian church to protect them from a choice of convenience that culture enticed them to accept. But one that was terribly inferior and counter to the plan God had.

This pictures the Bride that Jesus expects and will return for. He has said through His parables that those who await for the return of the Master often grow weary, tired, and are dull in their preparation. These will not be prepared at His return.

Jesus even warned in parables that many will even call out to Him, “Lord, Lord,” yet He knows their state of preparedness and faithfulness before Him.

God set boundaries for His people, the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whom He renamed Israel. He told them to live set apart as His covenant people.

Jesus established the New Covenant in the New Testament. This covenant prioritized love as He defined it and a people who set themselves apart by living that love in every single relationship. Since God the Father created marriage, Jesus Christ the Son honors the same pattern of love for the Church as to be demonstrated in this holy matrimony.

Turn to **1 Corinthians 6:12-20** and read these words out loud. Paul had addressed the church at Corinth about the idea of glorifying God in both body and spirit once before his writings in 2 Corinthians. His teaching here should be pretty clear.

Paul noted that faith in Christ Jesus permitted much more freedom than did the law of the Jews, giving him the lawful right to do many things. Yet, as he said in verse 12, he “will not be brought under the power of any.” We all make choices, then our choices begin to make us. If we make decisions to adopt a certain practice or tradition, that practice and tradition has a controlling presence in our lives.

In **verse 13**, Paul first mentions foods that were often in dispute in culture relative to religious consumption. But he finishes with a powerful statement. *“Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.”*

**Verses 15-16** give the details that our bodies are the members of Christ’s Body. Paul asked rhetorically if we, as part of Jesus’ Body, be joined sexually with a prostitute, becoming one body with her or him? If we do as culture says, and even the desires of our bodies, to engage in sexual immorality – including sex outside of marriage, pornography, which involves sexual unfaithfulness in one’s mind and heart – is to expose the entire Body of Christ to the defilement of the prostitute.

**Verses 17-18** instruct us to remain united in one spirit and flesh in Christ and flee sexual sin of all sort.

In **verses 19-20**, every believer in Jesus Christ must see the reason for purity. Our physical bodies are the temple to house the very Spirit of God and to reflect His Image. When Jesus willingly died on the cross as the Lamb of God, His blood purchased us back from the enslavement of sin.

We were captives of sin, owing a debt for our defilement, failures, and imperfections that we could not pay. Jesus’ pure, sinless blood was the only acceptable and adequate sacrifice to pay for our freedom. He paid it. When you enter into covenant with Him, you

“are not your own.” Instead, “you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

When considering the boundary of purity, don’t be mistaken that it only involves sexual abstinence. Jesus took the Old Testament teaching of adultery from the Ten Commandments and escalated it. Look at **Matthew 5:27-28**.

*“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”* Yes, those words are written in red. Jesus made sexual sin a matter of the mind and heart.

Our minds and hearts are to be fixed on things that we meditate, dwell upon, think, and say those things that are “are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy” as Philippians 4:8 instructs.

While God gives us freedom in our relationships, especially in dating and the pursuit of marriage, there are ample words that provide direct instruction and revelation as to God’s ways and His intentions...all of which we will be held accountable for as those who take His Son’s Name.

### **Covenant Relationships and Covenant Love**

Our relationship with God is established by His love and His covenant. As a child of God, we are to be vessels of that love and reflect His Image and represent Him in every aspect of our lives, especially in relationships.

In the one relationship that God created – marriage – we are to model that relationship after His relationship with His people and the Church formed by those accepting the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ.

Covenant relationships are established by and sustained with covenant love. The *agape*, Biblical love that says, *“I will give myself for your good, I will remain for your growth, and I will honor God in how I love you - even when it costs me.”*

Do you see this shapes the process of dating for a covenant relationship around a very unique decision and commitment.

Remember, *agape* is a choice before it’s a feeling; it’s a sacrifice before it’s a benefit experienced; and it’s a commitment before it’s a convenience.