

Sex & Dating

Good to see you guys. If you have a bible, turn with me to 1 Corinthians 6. This morning we are continuing on in our *God of Sex* series, and today we're talking about sex and dating. So if you are here this morning and you're in the dating world, this is especially for you. If you're married, hopefully you are *dating your spouse*, but hopefully you're not still out in the dating *market*, so this won't apply to you as much. But especially as we get to the second half of today, I think there's some stuff about how to think about sex that will be applicable to all of us.

Before we get started, I've got a question for you: what comes to mind for you when I say the words *arranged marriage*? Romantic? Ideal? "Everything I've ever wanted"? No? How about the word *courtship*? A royal wedding? A recent episode of *The Crown* you watched? An obscure book about "kissing dating goodbye" from the 1990s? That one just me? No doubt, both of those ideas—arranged marriage and courtship—sound incredibly undesirable to most of us. Or maybe worse than undesirable, maybe even *wrong*. And that's because **for most of us, there's primarily just one way to meet potential partners, and that's dating**. The idea that we would approach it any other way just feels completely foreign to us. And that's our prerogative.

But you should know it hasn't always been that way. We haven't always met people the way we do now. There's actually a storied history to how we arrived at the way we currently meet and get to know romantic partners. Prior to the 1900s in America, "dating" was slang for prostitution. If you were "going on a date," that meant you were going to see a prostitute. Around that time, the primary method for finding a *romantic partner* was something named "calling." If you were a man and there was a woman you thought you'd want to marry, you would "call" on her. Meaning you would touch base with her and her family, and if they said it was okay, you would go visit her in a room of her home called the "parlor." Which you might hope meant ice cream was involved. There was no such thing. In this room—that I'd like to reiterate had *absolutely zero ice cream*—you would get to know both the woman *and her* family. And they would get to know you. Most all of your interactions with her were with her family in the same room, or at least within earshot. There were primarily two reasons for this: one was that it gave her family the opportunity to help discern if you were marriage material. But second, it obviously limited the opportunity for the man and the woman to interact sexually. ~~Someone told me this week that there was actually such a thing as a "courting candle." A courting candle was a candle that would only burn for a set amount of time, and when it went out, you had to stop hanging out with the person you were courting. That way there could be absolutely no hanky-panky between you.~~ But this was the way people went about the whole thing.

By the 1930s, all of that started to change. If you know your history, there was one major invention that happened in the early 1900s. Anybody know what it was? *The automobile*. The automobile was invented in the early 1900s, and by the 30s, they were being mass produced. Here's what that meant for dating: it meant that now instead of "calling" on a woman and getting to know her in her home around other people, if you had enough money, you could go pick her up in your car and take her *away* from the home to get to know her. And because the automobile was so new, it created an interesting dynamic: **it meant that women became interested in men who were rich enough to afford a nice car, and in response, men with nice cars gravitated towards women who were the prettiest and most sexually available**. So if you've ever watched a movie or TV show set in the 50s and 60s, where a guy in a leather jacket pulls up in his mustang and all the girls in poodle skirts gravitate to the car—that all

looks ridiculous to us, but it's actually not far off from how it worked. What happened with the invention of the automobile was that, to put it very bluntly, **the women who put out got asked out again, and the women who didn't, didn't.**

And then in the early 1990s another invention occurred, but this one turned out to be a way bigger deal than the automobile. This one would forever change the way human beings do life, the way we relate to one another, as well as the way we meet potential romantic partners. This was the invention of the internet. Almost as soon as the internet existed, people were using it to meet and flirt with people. At first it was things like AOL chat rooms, Craigslist, and Match.com. But for the most part, those were still on the fringes. They were successful, but they were successful with relatively small portions of the general population.

And then, in 2012, *Tinder* happened. *Tinder*, if you're unfamiliar, is a dating app that allows you to view pictures of potential partners, and then swipe left or swipe right, depending on whether you're interested them or not. By May 2013, just one year after its launch, *Tinder* had become one of the top 25 social networking apps on the web.¹ As of early 2015, there were nearly 50 million people on *Tinder*. 100 million if you include other similar dating apps.² Just for reference, there are only around 300 million people *in the U.S.* So we're no longer talking about a fringe part of the population. We're talking about a lot of people meeting other people on these apps.

Here's why I bring that up: **whether you use apps like *Tinder* or not, these apps are changing the way we date and think about dating.** And in more drastic ways than the automobile did. Here's David Buss, a professor of Psychology at the University of Texas Austin:

*Apps like *Tinder* and *OkCupid* give people the impression that there are thousands or millions of potential mates out there. One dimension of this is **the impact it has on men's psychology.** When there is a surplus of women, or a perceived surplus of women, **the whole mating system tends to shift towards short-term dating. Marriages become unstable. Divorces increase. Men don't have to commit, so they pursue a short-term mating strategy. Men are making that shift, and women are forced to go along with it in order to mate at all.**³*

Back in 2015, there was an article that came out in *Vanity Fair*—not a Christian publication, if you're wondering. The title was *Tinder and the Dawn of the "Dating Apocalypse"*. Very *subtle* title. By talking to psychologists, sociologists, and researchers, the author tried to articulate the tremendous impact that *Tinder* is having on the dating world. But maybe the most shocking parts of the article were the interviews she did with *Tinder* users *themselves*. Here were just a few of the excerpts from those interviews. As a warning, some of these are quite painful to read:

- Dan, an investment banker in New York says "*It's like ordering Seamless,*" referring to the online food-delivery service. "*But you're ordering a person.*"

¹ Based on frequency of use and number of users.

² <https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2015/08/tinder-hook-up-culture-end-of-dating>

³ *Ibid*

- A girl named Reese explains, “[Men on Tinder] start out with ‘Send me nudes. Or they say something like ‘I’m looking for something quick within the next 10 or 20 minutes—are you available?’ ‘O.K., you’re a mile away, tell me your location.’ It’s straight efficiency.”
- A girl named Amanda says “If he texts you before midnight he actually likes you as a person. If it’s after midnight, it’s just for your body.”
- One girl says “I had sex with a guy [I met on Tinder] and he ignored me as I got dressed and I saw he was back on Tinder.”
- One guy, Marty, says “I sort of play that I could be a boyfriend kind of guy,” in order to win them over, “but then they start wanting me to care more ... and I just don’t.”⁴

These apps are changing the way we date. Now, I know some of you in the room might be saying “yeah, but I don’t use Tinder for that. I just use it to meet people, and then we get to know one another in a more traditional, slower, normal kind of way. Isn’t *that* okay? Isn’t it okay to use Tinder just to find out about available people? And I think my answer would be something like “yes...technically.” Technically, I suppose it is possible to use apps like Tinder just to know what’s out there. But using Tinder as just a way to meet people is a little bit like going to Hooters because you like the wings. It’s like “yeah, mayyyybe...but just so we’re clear, there are much better places to eat wings. And you should probably know that pretty much *nobody* else at the restaurant is there for the wings.” **Because here’s the thing about Tinder and other similar apps—they are set up to speed up the rate at which you end up having sex with a person.** That’s what the overwhelming majority of people use them for. So to try to use them for something other than that, as innocent as it may be, is really an attempt to swim upstream in a very rapid current.

But I think the point being made in this article is that a lot of people (and especially women), feel like they *have* to use those apps. **Because that’s where a large portion of the available people are, and that’s the platform they’re using, if you want to meet anybody, you feel like you have to be on an app like that to even have a shot.** Which is precisely why she calls it “the dawn of the dating apocalypse.” Our ability to meet and get to know people in organic ways is quickly evaporating before our eyes.

Okay, I know a lot of you are currently deleting an app from your phone—if I could, let me get your attention back up here briefly. **Here is my point, and I think it’s relevant whether you’ve ever used an app like Tinder or not. Apps like these ultimately are having an impact. But ultimately, the reason they’re having an impact is because they’re simply making it easier to do what so many of us want to do already.** Any economist will tell you that the most successful businesses are ones that identify a *demand* that there’s not currently enough *supply* for. That’s what Tinder and apps like them have done. **They’ve identified a demand in the American population: easy, commitment-free, consumeristic sex. And they’ve simply found a way to better and more efficiently supply that demand.** They’re creating easier avenues to do what we already want to do.

So if we want to get anywhere with this conversation about sex and dating, we need to go a little further than just dating methods and dating apps. We need to address what’s underneath it all. We need to know the unhelpful *mindsets* about sex that make those apps what they are. We need to talk about some of the most common misunderstandings of what sex is and then try to understand it from a more helpful perspective. We need to understand *why* it is that apps like these are so popular—the desire that fuels

⁴ Ibid

them—and then we get to work forming a better worldview than they offer. And for that, let’s take a look at 1 Corinthians 6.

Briefly, let me just give you a little bit of background on what we’re about to read. The city of Corinth was sort of like the Las Vegas of the ancient world. You know the saying: “what happens in Corinth...haunts you for the rest of your life or lands you in jail...” exactly right. The city of Corinth was so hypersexualized that *corinthian* became a moniker for “prostitute.” If you called a girl a corinthian, you were implying that she was very sexually promiscuous. My point is that the people of Corinth were *really into* sex. Their views on sexuality were actually crazy progressive, even by today’s standards. And what we’re gonna see is that **some of the beliefs they held were actually strikingly similar to the ones we hold today. Much of what we think about sexuality isn’t actually new or progressive at all—it’s actually about two thousand years old.** So we’re gonna read a little about these beliefs that they held, listen in to how Paul responds to them, and then talk about what all that means for us and for dating. Take a look with me in 1 Corinthians 6, starting in v. 12:

[12] *“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything.*

So here we have the Corinthians’ first *justification* for why sexual promiscuity was no big deal: “all things are lawful for me.” So their thinking was “if this is legal, and socially acceptable, what’s the big deal with participating in it?” “There aren’t laws against being sexually involved with people you’re not married to, and everybody else is doing it, so why *wouldn’t* we do it?”

This is actually very similar to people’s mindset today. The pushback I hear most often from friends of mine that don’t follow Jesus “why is sexual expression such a big deal to Christians?” “Why do followers of Jesus care so much about something that’s just human nature? This seems like much ado about nothing. If people want to sleep around, let them sleep around.” “You should do whatever makes you happy.” Those are all just 21st century ways of saying “all things are lawful for me.” “If it’s allowed, why not do it?”

But let’s take a look at Paul’s response. He says “okay, maybe all things are lawful for you—but that doesn’t mean all things are *helpful*.” He’s saying just because you *can* do something, doesn’t mean you *should*. There are plenty of things that are legal, but still aren’t wise to do. It’s *legal* to go around being a jerk to every human being you meet. But I wouldn’t recommend it as a life strategy. It’s *legal* to smoke three packs of cigarettes a day—still wouldn’t say it’s a *beneficial* thing for you to do. It’s legal to listen to nothing but Cardi B music every day all day—but that’s even more harmful to your health than the cigarettes. Why shouldn’t we do everything we’re allowed to do? *Because not all things are helpful. As followers of Jesus, we are called to something way higher than just doing what’s allowed—we’re actually called to do what’s helpful.*

Okay, let’s look at the next cultural belief that Paul answers, v. 13:

[13] *“Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food”—and God will destroy both one and the other.*

“Food is meant for the stomach, and the stomach for food.” This was a common expression in Paul’s day that essentially meant “sex is just an appetite.” So the belief was when you get hungry, you eat. When you get thirsty, you drink. So when you get turned on, you should have sex. It shouldn’t be any more complicated than that.” This one should also sound very familiar to us today. Many people believe that sex, like any other physical appetite, should be fulfilled when felt. The belief is that to deny yourself sexual fulfillment is on par with denying yourself food. It’s at best pointless and futile, and at worst harmful and cruel. **Much of why people are so confused and put off by the Christian sexual ethic is because it seems to go against the grain of human nature.** “If we have sexual desire,” people think, “what’s the point in suppressing it?” “Food for the stomach, and the stomach for food.” “Why would you deny yourself something like that?”

Well, here’s why, Paul says. Starting halfway through v. 13:

[13b] *The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.*
[14] *And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.*

Paul goes after this one at its very *root*. He says “actually, the body isn’t *for* sexual fulfillment.” It’s for something higher than that. The body, Paul says, is for *God himself*. **I think one of the biggest misunderstandings people have is that God mainly cares about *spiritual things* in our life.** He’s mainly just concerned with your prayer life, your reading of Scripture, your religious activity, and that he really doesn’t care all that much about the rest. Paul says *nope, not at all*. The *body*, he says, is for the Lord. Not just the spirit, but the *body*. Not just the spiritual, but the *material*. **God cares about what we do with our time, our resources, our money, our relationships, and yes—especially about what we do with our *bodies*. God made *all of you, not just the spiritual side of you*.** To the point that Paul says in v. 14 here that when it’s all said and done, at the end of human history, God will raise not just our *spirits* up from the dead, but our *bodies*. His point is that *what we do with our bodies matters*. And that certainly includes our sexuality.

See, the temptation when you’re dating is to try and separate out your spiritual life from your sexual expression. So you have your relationship with Jesus and church and religious activity over here in its neat little compartment, and then you have your sex life and your sexual expression over here in its neat little compartment. And because those two things need not ever interfere with one another, it doesn’t matter how you go about your sexuality. I know this because this is what I *did* for so many years of my life. I truly believed that what I did sexually had no impact whatsoever on my relationship with Jesus. Boy, was I wrong. It turned out my relationship with Jesus during those years was all superficial. I was in church, I was praying, I was reading the Scriptures, but turns out I had no real relationship with Jesus—as evidenced by the fact that I was flat out ignoring the main thing he was engaging me on. That is not a genuine relationship with Jesus, because as Paul says, **you *can’t* separate out the spiritual from the physical. They are deeply, *intimately* connected.**

And because of that, Paul says, here’s what we should do. Take a look down at v. 18 with me.

[18] ***Flee from sexual immorality.*** [Repeat this]

There are two very important terms you need to know in that sentence. One is the word translated here as “sexual immorality.” That word in the original language is *porneia*, where we get the English word

“pornography.” **It’s a word that includes any and all sexual activity outside of a marriage. If it is sexual at all in nature and it’s not with someone you’re married to, it’s “sexual immorality.”** That’s the first word you need to know. The second is the word “flee.” You know what the word “*flee*” means in the original language? *Flee!* As in, run as far as possible in the opposite direction. That could be translated “escape.” Like *the thing you do when you’re in a burning building*. Get out and get as far from it as possible. We are called to *flee* sexual immorality. Not flirt with it, not cut back on it, not live in the same apartment with it, not stay up until 1:00 in the morning with it and see what happens, not minimize it—not any of that. A follower of Jesus is called to *flee* sexual immorality.

But here’s what I want you to see—and this is very very important. Paul isn’t saying “flee” because sex is *bad*. That’s not it at all. He’s about to talk in the very next chapter about how beautiful and powerful sex is. His point is to run because **outside of marriage, you are not ready for the power that sex carries with it. You’re not ready for what will happen as a result of it.** Here’s how he puts it, starting where we left off in v. 18:

Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.

Paul says here that sexual sin actually affects you on a different level than other sins. There is no shame quite like sexual shame, would you agree? In my own life, there has been no shame that I’ve experienced quite like sexual shame. In the lives of men and women I’ve counseled as a pastor, there is no shame quite like sexual shame. **The shame from sexual sin affects us on a deep, psychological, emotional, even physical level.** And Paul would say that that’s because there’s a sense in which sexual sin is a sin *against your own body*. It affects your own sense of self and self-worth, like nearly nothing else. And yet we still believe it can be taken lightly, that it’s not a big deal.

But Paul “*flee* sexual immorality.” And here’s why, v. 19:

[19] Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, [20] for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

So it is important to note here that Paul is obviously speaking to followers of Jesus. If you’re here today and you *don’t* follow Jesus, we wouldn’t really expect you to think about sex this way, because you’re not working from the same framework as we are. If you’re not a follower of Jesus, we’re not here to yell at you or shout you down on how you practice your sexuality—not at all. We’d love to first talk to you about Jesus.

But if you *are* a follower of Jesus, you should be coming from a radically different perspective in regards to sex. And here’s what that perspective is: “you are not your own, but were bought with a price.” That’s language straight out of the Corinthian slave trade. If there was a person who was in literal slavery their entire life, and had no chance of escape, what would sometimes happen is that a wealthy benefactor would swoop in and purchase their freedom. Paul is saying that that is precisely what Jesus accomplished for people who follow him: that **God has actually purchased us out of slavery to sexual sin. That God had come and done what none of us could: purchased us out of something awful and into something incredible.** Paul is telling us here that **through the death and resurrection of**

Jesus, we have been purchased out of sin, and into freedom. Into the ability to practice our sexuality the way God intended it. Even when it's tough, even when it's inconvenient, even when our desires tell us something altogether different—we have been purchased out of all of that and into something better.

And our response to that, as followers of Jesus, should be that we “glorify God in our *bodies*.” So let's talk before we close about what that might look like in the context of dating. If you're in the room and you're in the dating world—what does it mean to “glorify God in your body”? As a follower of Jesus, what does it look like to live into what Jesus has made possible? I think it looks like at least a few things practically in the context of dating:

Involve community, from the start.

I know it sounds incredibly old-fashioned to us, but there was a reason that back in the day, people's families were involved in helping discern if somebody was right for them or not. They knew that **when it comes to romance, it is so easy to be blinded by it all.** It's so incredibly easy in the dating world to get so carried away by the attraction you feel towards someone, that you neglect to see the *clear* warning signs about them.

So to help counteract that, **involve people that love Jesus and love you, from the start.** You need Spirit-filled followers of Jesus to help you discern if a person is right for you to date or not. **They likely aren't gonna be blinded by the same things that you are,** and that's precisely why you need to take into account what they say. If there's somebody you're interested in, bring them around the people that know you well, and let them get to know that person before you make any moves towards dating them. **And when they are all telling you it's a bad idea, trust them on it.** If someone has blind spots in this scenario, it's more likely to be you than them.

And don't just do this *before* you date, but also *while* you date. One of the most harmful things is that usually, when we start dating someone, we tend to go MIA from all our other friends for a while. We spend most of our free time with the person we're dating and away from the people that know us best, the people that can spot when something is off. So instead, you and the person you're dating should try to hang out together, *with other people, at least as much* as you hang out alone, with just the two of you.

If they don't follow Jesus, don't date them.

If they don't follow Jesus, *don't date them* (sorry, my voice just naturally gets louder when I say that for no reason). Thor mentioned this briefly in the teaching a few weeks ago, but 2 Corinthians 6 makes it *clear* that **it's not a good idea to align your life with another person who doesn't follow Jesus.** So **before you even consider dating somebody, be confident that they are a follower of Jesus.**

And just to be clear—I don't mean “ask them if they're a Christian.” I also don't mean “have they said something about God once?” I don't mean “have they been to church one time in the past three months?” We're in the Bible Belt—qualifiers like that don't rule out hardly *anybody*. What I mean is *do they have a genuine relationship with Jesus?* Like, when you observe their life, is there *obvious fruit* of following Jesus? Are there concrete examples of them acknowledging and repenting of their sin? Are

there clear instances of them submitting their desires to him? Are there regular efforts to make disciples out of the people around them? That's way different than just "do they say they're a Christian?"

And here's why I say that: **the purpose of dating someone as a follower of Jesus is to discern whether or not they are the person you are supposed to marry. Period.** That's the goal of dating if you follow Jesus. Not just to have fun, not to test out compatibility or sexual chemistry, not even to find out if marrying them would be *romantically fulfilling*. The goal is *to discern whether or not that is the person you are supposed to marry*. It's to ask "would the kingdom of God be *better off* with us together than separate?" So, listen—if you are a follower of Jesus and they are not—there is no further deliberation required there. The answer is just "no." Do not pass go, do not collect \$200. Just "no." "But what if I want to date them so they *become* a Christian?" Statistically, just so you know, that almost never happens. It's actually far more likely that you will decide *not* to be a Christian as a result of dating them.

Here's my plea to you: *it's not worth it*. I know in our culture where romance is everything, most of you just want to not be lonely. I realize that. **But the loneliness you will experience if you end up marrying a person who doesn't see life the same way you do is far worse than the loneliness you're trying to avoid.** So when I say "don't date someone who doesn't follow Jesus," I'm not trying to take something from you—I'm trying to protect you from something. I'm pleading with you to not go down that road. And lastly...

Set boundaries that you will not cross.

I think a lot of the mistakes people make when dating is due to them not "fleeing" from sexual sin. From waltzing into dating relationships with no practical boundaries set around physical stuff with each other. Sexual sin when you're dating can go from 0 to 60 in practically no time. So **if you're going to have success in that area, you need to set some clear-cut boundaries with the person you're dating.**

The question with boundaries is not "how close can we get to sexual sin?" but "how far can we flee from sexual sin?" Practically speaking, I think that means as a follower of Jesus, anything past kissing definitely has to be off-limits. Beyond that, I think there are even certain types of kissing that one or both people in the relationship *know* is sexual in nature. So fleeing would look like setting boundaries on those too. But more than just boundaries on *physical interaction*, **I think it also needs to look like deciding what type of environments you will and won't be in with the person you're dating.**

I remember talking to one of our college students one time. He was telling me that him and his girlfriend kept "stumbling into having sex." I asked him what type of settings they were in when sex usually happened, and he said it was usually when they were watching a movie with each other late at night in his apartment, with nobody else around. And I said, "you mean that you and your girlfriend were all alone in your apartment, with the lights turned down and nobody else within earshot, and you ended up having sex? I'm *shocked*. That's not "stumbling into having sex." That's *planning* to have sex.

While you may not be quite *that* naive, there still may be situations that you're putting yourself in that are royally bad ideas. Part of **setting boundaries should look like identifying the settings that you are most vulnerable to sexual sin, and doing whatever you can to eliminate those.** Things like not ever hanging out in a house or apartment alone, not being in one of your bedrooms alone, not hanging out

past 11:00 at night—whatever it needs to be to help you “flee.” And once you have those boundaries, again: *tell your community* what they are. You want them to be able to check in with you to ask how those are going, but also call you out when you’re pushing the limits of those boundaries, or for some of us, *leap-frogging* over them.

So 1) **involve community, from the start.** 2) **if they don’t follow Jesus, don’t date them.** And 3) **set boundaries that you will not cross.** I am fully aware that to the outside world, these types of things sound like utter foolishness. So it’s likely that if your friend who doesn’t follow Jesus catches wind of any of those things in your life, they’re going to either be weirded out or mercilessly mock you for them. And that’s fine—they are working from an altogether different framework than you are. But for followers of Jesus, this is what it looks like to “flee sexual immorality” and “glorify God in your body,” because of what Jesus has made possible for us.

I’d love to pray for us to that end.