

“DATING DILEMMAS”
by Rom A. Pegram (2/16/20)

Welcome back to our February relationship series called ‘Relationship Rescue.’ During this series, we’re looking at how to navigate some very difficult relationship issues in life—how to navigate issues in marriage, dating, and all that includes. Last week, we kicked off the series with a study on the Bible’s first relationship—Adam and Eve (Genesis 3). We discovered some biblical principles for relationships, while at the same time exposing some relationship *myths* that many have bought into. That was ‘Back to the Basics’ (online now). Today, we’re going to move on to look at how to deal with ‘dating dilemmas.’ Again, the principles we’ll talk about are good relationship ideas for *everyone*, so please hang in there with me today...

Let’s kick this message off by sharing in our key verse for the series—Psalm 144:7: “**Reach down from heaven and rescue me; rescue me from deep waters....**” There are few waters as deep and confusing, and as full of potential hurt, as a dating relationship! Because, when you’re dating someone, you’re trying to get to know them; you’re trying to decide whether this person is Mr. Right or Mrs. Right (if you’re seriously dating). And, in those situations, sometimes we make bad decisions; sometimes, *it’s just tough out there!* Have you noticed the dating scene lately?

Dating has its dilemmas, doesn’t it? But, folks, from a Christian perspective, dating serves a specific and important purpose. As mentioned before, it’s in dating that you’re trying to get to know another person. Is this Mr. Right ... or Mrs. Right? Am I going to invest further in this relationship, or am I going to go in a different direction?

Although the Bible doesn’t use the specific word ‘dating,’ it does share with us important principles about what to look for in a potential spouse that we need to know. BUT, before I go on any further, let me give you **a foundational, biblical principle for dating** (for believers). Here’s *God’s minimal standard regarding the person you date or go out with. **ONLY DATE IF THERE IS A MATCH OF FAITH.** ... Only date if there is a match of faith.* I can tell you, from personal experience and from counseling others, just how much *heartache* there can be when you don’t pay attention to this one...

Listen to Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:14 (MSG): “Don’t become partners with those who reject God. How can you make a partnership out of right and wrong? That’s not partnership; that’s war....” ... I’ll be the first to admit that’s a very difficult passage to think about. It’s a difficult passage to apply to our lives, but I want us to think about this passage in a little different way today. Because, when God talks about only dating if there is a match of faith, God’s not doing that to be harsh. God’s not doing that to block pleasure from our lives. God’s saying this because he cares for us so much—wanting us to receive only his best for our lives! So, God gives us this minimal requirement (principle) because he wants his absolute best for us!

The Bible’s pretty clear and experience shows that if two people get married who don’t share a common faith, they’re most likely going to be at war with one another throughout their marriage. Here’s what happens:

If you’re a believer, you know God asks you to put him first in your life. God’s will becomes your first priority in how you live life—manage finances, raise kids, spend time,

and talk to and treat other people---even in your marriage. If you're a Christian and you're in a marriage with someone who's not, your Christian priorities are just not going to make a lot of sense to someone outside the faith. There's going to be confusion and conflict ... and you may end up being at war with one another—in a variety of areas...

So, let me talk with you as a pastor for just a moment, because I know—for some of you—this is really, really tough ... and there's a couple possibilities:

- You may be in a relationship with someone who's not a believer.
- You may not be a believer and you're in a relationship with someone who is.

If it's the first scenario, you don't want to end up in a marriage with a spouse who won't pray with you, who won't go to church with you, who won't raise your children to know Jesus, who won't challenge you to grow in your faith, or won't support you spiritually. You see, if you're in a marriage where your spouse doesn't share your faith, and you're striving to grow closer and closer to God—and they are not, the distance between you will continue to grow greater and greater. (*I know that many are way down the road in relationships already, so this may not exactly apply to you; but you can relate to what I'm saying here. It's harder, isn't it?*) So, as we begin today, I want to challenge all who are dating or even thinking about dating ... to set your standards high; make it a priority to date only when there's a match of faith. Again, I know this is hard to hear; *if you want some real-life stories, see me later...*

Now, let's turn to see just how interested God is in your heart. Look at Proverbs 4:23 with me, would you? "Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life." So, *who you connect your heart to is HUGE!* And God cares about it ... so much! That's why today, we're going to look at *six questions that can help you guard your heart* (avoid dating dilemmas/build a solid relationship, etc.)—all drawn from one of the most famous passages in the Bible—1 Corinthians 13 (1-8)—the LOVE Chapter...

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud⁵ or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged.⁶ It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out.⁷ Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.⁸ Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will become useless. But love will last forever!

Folks, you can't wait to apply this to your life until the wedding day—to live out this passage in your life. Because ... if you don't see these traits of love in the person you're dating early on, you're not going to see them in the marriage. *Whatever the person is during the dating process is magnified, good or bad in the marriage.* (For the younger generations here, that's what your parents want you to know today!) So, begin looking for these traits of love early on in your dating relationships. When you're looking for Mr. Right or Mrs. Right, make sure you step back, take a look from the balcony, disengage emotionally for a moment (if that's possible), and ask yourself ... 'Is my dating relationship going in the right direction?' Am I going out with the person who's God's very best for me? A very wise person once told me: "**God reserves the very best ...**

for those who allow Him to do the choosing!” It’s held true all my life, both for me, and countless others. So, here’re the questions that’ll guide you today:

IS THIS RELATIONSHIP PROGRESSING TOO QUICKLY? What does God word say to us? LOVE IS PATIENT...

Guys, you’ve heard this before. You may have seen it in a Hallmark card. You may have seen it cross stitched on your Grandmother’s wall. But, don’t just put these words aside. *There is power in these words.* So, what I’d like to do is give you 3 ways to evaluate whether your relationship is being patient (not in your notes—write off to the side): First...

- LOVE IS PATIENT RELATIONALLY – So, when you’re out on your first date ... it’s probably not the best time to ask someone how many kids they want when you get married ... or if you want your honeymoon in Tahiti or Tahoe. Am I right? Love is patient *relationally*... Slow down. Breathe deep. That’s a good start...
- LOVE IS PATIENT EMOTIONALLY – Proverbs 4:23 is a good one here. “Above all else, guard your heart.” Yes, it’s a funny phrase. Guard your heart? What does that mean? For those going through high school, the reality is ... our heart is responding differently when we’re attracted to someone. It used to just go ‘bump’ if we were slightly attracted to someone. Now, for some reason, it goes ‘bump, bump, bump!’ So, you’ve got to be patient *emotionally*, guarding your heart along the way... Which leads to this one...
- LOVE IS PATIENT PHYSICALLY - Ah, yes, the sex part; now it gets interesting. Just to throw cold water on your life, let me remind you of what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:18: “Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body.” Alright, the verse didn’t say ‘run away from sex.’ Clearly, the Bible teaches that God wants us to run toward sex ... *when you’re married.* God created it. It’s good, in context. (*Invite me to your youth group sometime and we’ll talk about it...*) Now, I’ve opened a can of worms, haven’t I?

So, are we moving too quickly? Here’s the second question to ask...

IS THIS PERSON KIND? Not whether the person has good manners, but what’s going on inside his or her heart? The Bible says ... LOVE IS KIND...

Here’s a good way to gauge this—the ‘*out in public test.*’ In other words, how does the person you’re with treat the waiter/waitress at a restaurant? Or the cashier at the grocery store? Or the clerk at the DMV? (O.K. Sorry. Bad example... They get a free pass at the DMV.) But that’s what you’ve got to do. *How do they treat people in everyday life?* This is key because when you start dating, you’re beginning to show each other who you really are, so—with that—let me say this... She may be whispering sweet nothings in your ear, but if she’s also yelling at the waiter/waitress ... watch out! Be warned! LOVE IS KIND... Next:

IS THIS PERSON A TEAMMATE? What does the Bible say (V. 4-5)? “Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵ or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged.” Does that describe *who* you’re dating?

I know. There’s a lot here in this one verse, so let’s just concentrate on the last part today—LOVE ... *keeps no record of being wronged*. I’ve got to tell you, I already know I’m an imperfect person; and this is about the only thing I ever really wanted—deep down inside—from a relationship. I wanted someone who knew how to forgive—God’s way, who wouldn’t continually hold things against me. And, I’m happy to tell you ... *I found her (or God found her)!*

But, if you have someone who’s constantly coming at you, pulling the list out of their back pocket, and letting you know why your way is always wrong, let me tell you ... *they’re not a team player!* That’s not a teammate! It shouldn’t always be ... me vs. you!

So, here’s ‘*the pronoun test.*’ When you’re dealing with certain issues in your relationship, are you using the word ‘you’ all the time? Do you consistently use the word ‘you’ or do you use the pronoun ‘we’? It matters, you know... Competitors fight one another; *teammates work together*. Next:

IS THIS A PERSON OF INTEGRITY? Verse 6 reminds us, “[LOVE] does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out.” Here, I’d say *you just need to watch and listen*. For instance, if you’re out shopping, they purchase something with \$10, but get change back as if they’d given the cashier \$20, what do they do? Do they keep the change or return what’s not theirs? That’ll tell the story; *LOVE reflects integrity!*

IS THIS PERSON A QUITTER? Up to now, you’ve wanted all the answers to be ‘YES,’ but not this one... Here’s what we mean by this: Is this someone who would give up on a relationship when the going gets tough? Would they quit if things didn’t go exactly as they wanted them to go?

Verse 7 says, “Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.” In other words, LOVE DOESN’T QUIT! And this leads us to the final question of the day:

IS GOD THE FIRST LOVE OF MY LIFE? When you think of all the loves in your life—all the people and things you could possibly love in your life, *is God the first love of your life?*

Verse 8 says simply: “...love will last forever!” Other versions of this verse say, “...love never fails!” But the only way that will happen is if God’s at the center of your relationship—if God is the first love of *both* your lives!

Do you understand God’s foundational rule for dating now? To always date where there’s a ‘faith match?’ If you want love to last—to never fail, our love for God must be ‘numero uno!’ *That’s the only way God can (and will) bless our relationships ...* if we’ve got that priority right...

The truth is ... we don't know what true love really is until we first experience God's unconditional and unending love for us! *You can't love until you've first been loved; then you can only love to the extent you've been loved.* This is how our relationship with God affects our earthly relationships, too. And that's why God must be the first love our lives...

At the risk of simplifying all I've talked about today too much, let me end with this simple illustration: Our daughter, Rachel, when she was a young girl, loved having her hair long. Many times, she would ask her mom to braid her hair (especially if she was playing sports). Now, I never got involved in that process at all—never learned how to braid hair. But what I discovered was this: *What looked like two strands of hair—one from the right and one from the left—were really 3 strands.* And it was that third strand that gave the braid its strength. It was the only reason the braid held for the day.

It's the same in our relationships, too—the way God's designed them. God is that third strand that gives our relationships strength—the only reason relationships can 'make it through the day,' so to speak. *God must be the first love of both lives in the relationship.* Don't ever forget that ... as you work on avoiding dating dilemmas...