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We are in our third and final week of our *Relationship Goals* series. You knew it was coming. You knew it the moment you saw the series title. You were warned in Week 1.   
  
The time has come for us to talk about our goals for dating relationships. God puts certain parameters on dating, because He wants you to experience a full life in Him—a life filled with joy, a life protected from certain harm. God’s ways are for our benefit.

When we were talking about what types of close friends we need and what kind of friend we need to be, we talked about how godly friends bring you closer to Christ. That is true, and it is even more important when considering whom you date. It is important to date someone who will bring you closer to Christ.

The first question you can ask yourself is, “Is this person a Christian?” You should know that the person is a believer. If you are unsure, why are you unsure? Is it because you’ve never discussed it, or is it because you think they might be, but they don’t live like it? We should be pursuing an ever-deepening relationship with Jesus, and we need to join up with people who are moving the same direction. We can’t be joining up with people who will pull is in the opposite direction.

**2 Corinthians 6:14–16 (ESV)**

*Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God …*

Christians should not be joined up with unbelievers. That’s God’s rule. To someone in a situation where maybe they like a nonbeliever, or a nonbeliever likes them, this guideline isn’t fun. I have been there. But God tells us why, and knowing the “why” of God’s laws helps us obey the “what.”

First of all, what real fellowship can a true follower of Christ have with a person who doesn’t believe in Christ? This is a rhetorical question. The assumed and obvious answer is that we really can’t.

At our deepest, most intimate levels, we don’t have any sort of agreement. We don’t—or at least, we should not—have the same driving forces in our lives as someone who does not accept Jesus as God or accept His Word as the authority on right and wrong.

But it’s not enough to just say that they are a Christian. They need to be moving toward a deeper relationship with God, just as we are moving in that direction. If not, they’re still going to trip us up.

When Paul wrote this passage to the believers in Corinth, the people he calls “unbelievers” were actually people in the church who were living in rebellion against God.

There is no practical difference between dating a nonbeliever and dating someone who claims to believe but doesn’t follow God. Both will pull you down. Both will keep you from being where God wants you to go. Ask yourself, “Can I be who God has created me to be while dating that person?”

I understand that that can feel oppressive. Because sometimes, you *really* want to date someone who doesn’t pass these basic tests. I have been there.

[**Author Note:** The following is a personal story about my search for the right person for me when I was in high school. Feel free to use, adapt, or change out with your own story.]

Believe it or not, there were not a ton of girls fawning over me in middle and high school. I’m not sure what was wrong with them, but they just weren’t that into me. So when a girl did take notice, I noticed them noticing.

There was one girl in particular who I really did like then, and for a few years. She didn’t like me back for a long time, despite my best efforts. To me, that was unfortunate, because she passed my basic tests: she said she was a Christian, she was pretty, and she was one of only two girls shorter than me in my school. I’m pretty sure she knew I liked her, and I’m pretty sure our whole grade knew I liked her.

But she just wasn’t into me … until 11th grade. I did like her from 8th grade until 10th grade, and she passed my tests for most of that time. I was still interested in her in 11th grade, but something had changed. I knew what God wanted from me. I knew God wanted me to be a youth pastor. So when she showed interest in me in 11th grade, via a passed note, I was in turmoil. It was like a dream come true! Was she a Christian? Yup. Pretty? Yeah. Shorter than me? Barely, but yes.

But I did come to a fourth question: could I marry her? Would she be a benefit to me as a pastor’s wife, or would she keep me from that pursuit? The answer was no. Although she did claim to be a Christian, she didn’t live like one. She didn’t date like one. She wasn’t going to help me grow. So I had to turn down the girl I had liked for the better part of four years, because I knew I couldn’t be who God called me to be with her.

I’ll admit that I questioned my decision for a little while. In that moment and shortly following, I just didn’t know how I could have been happier following God and saying no than if I had done what I had wanted and said yes. But I did meet someone the next year who checked off all the boxes for me: she was a Christian, pretty, shorter than me, and would help me grow and be a benefit to me in my pursuit of being who God had called me to be. Her name was Sarah Van Solkema, or as you know her, Sarah Selph.

Sarah and I dated in high school and did get married, which I know isn’t necessarily typical. And although we have loved each other a long time, and we did wait to have sex until marriage, looking back, I would say that our dating relationship was not always God-honoring. I would say that we fell into a trap that a lot of young couples fall into, and you should be careful not to fall into. We became idols in each other’s lives.

The second goal we need to have if we are going to have God-honoring dating relationships is that we cannot allow our boyfriend or girlfriend to become an idol in our lives. God’s command to not have idols coming before Him goes all the way back to the 10 Commandments.

**Exodus 20:4-6**

*“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”*

I didn’t make a statue of Sarah and bow down to it. You likely are not going to do that with your boyfriend or girlfriend, either. But we do have the temptation to bow our hearts in devotion to them. We enter into idolatry when we allow any person, thing, or activity take a higher priority in our life than our relationship with God.

When we allow anything other than God to dictate how we live our lives, giving top priority to another, we commit idolatry. This happens so often, and it is so unhealthy. This kind of relationship can drive us away from God, drive us away from our friends, and even drive us away from our families. We become isolated from everyone but that person. It’s a dangerous place to be.

A major danger of making your boyfriend or girlfriend your idol, who influences your decision-making more than God's Word does, is that you may find yourself doing things with them that they want to do, even though God says not to. When you care more about what they want, what makes them happy, disappointing them than you care about a life that is pleasing to God, you can end up down some dangerous roads without clear exits.

This becomes especially dangerous in the areas of sexual intimacy. Despite what the culture tells you, despite what your friends may think, despite what you may want, sexual intimacy is supposed to be reserved for marriage. We call this idea sexual purity, and sexual purity is for you and for God.

**Hebrews 13:4:**

*Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.*

The Christian is called to esteem purity for, leading up to, and within marriage. God will judge all sexually immoral and adulterous people for their sins. The phrase “sexually immoral” comes from the word *pornea*, which means any type of sexual activity outside of marriage. This does includes both physical things we may do, but it also includes looking at thing we should not be looking at, whether online or through text messages.

**1 Corinthians 6:19–20**

*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, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*

God’s not saying, “Hey, don’t do this,” just because He wants to ruin your fun. He wants this to protect you, and He also doesn’t want that for Himself. Purity, as a goal, is not just for God. It is for your benefit. But it is also for God. Anyone who is in Christ has also been joined to the Lord. We become the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives inside of us. He doesn’t want to be dragged into that kind of mess, defiling His temple, which is our bodies.

When we are considering dating or are in a dating relationship, we need to keep these goals in mind. That person needs to be a growing Christian who will bring you closer to Christ and help you be who God has created you to be. Great as they are, their place in your life has to be kept in check. Never make them an idol by putting their feelings and desires ahead of God. And we do need to remain pure, for our sake and for the sake of the Holy Spirit, who is in us.

Let’s pray.