

In Mark 12:31, Jesus says we are to “love our neighbor as ourselves.” So there is a sense of dignity and respect we should give to everyone. But the type of love the Bible is telling us to give isn’t a romantic love, but a selfless love. A love that helps and cares for others.

The final kind of relationship we see between men and women is marriage. This relationship has laws where you are legally responsible for each other. It costs you actual money to break up. You get tax benefits for being with each other. Commitment is sacred. In this relationship, having kids is expected, not a surprise. You are supposed to be romantic with each other. The Bible commands it:

1 Corinthians 7:3–5 (NLT)

The husband should fulfill his wife’s sexual needs, and the wife should fulfill her husband’s needs. The wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and the husband gives authority over his body to his wife. Do not deprive each other of sexual relations, unless you both agree to refrain from sexual intimacy for a limited time so you can give yourselves more completely to prayer. Afterward, you should come together again so that Satan won’t be able to tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

That may have been more than you wanted to know about married couples, but God commands this for a reason. God gave us a sex drive and a desire for intimacy. God didn’t make a mistake when he created men and women to desire each other. God has wired us this way because it reflects a bigger picture. When God brings together a man and a woman in marriage, it is a metaphor for Christ and the Church. God created us to find the opposite sex attractive and to find someone to be with forever.

But the problem with all of this is sin. Sin has corrupted our view of love, relationships, sex, and marriage. Sin is what says, “God, I don’t care what you have in mind for my love life. I will do what I feel is right in my own heart.” The problem is, your heart can lie to you.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9, ESV)

So our job is to get back to what God wants for our love lives because He is the author of love.

So let's talk about dating. The Bible is clear about how we should handle those three categories of relationships.

- Family – Love, but no romantic stuff.
- Friends/strangers – Love, but no romantic stuff.
- Marriage – Love, and lots of romantic stuff.

But what about dating relationships? The Bible doesn't talk about dating. Nowhere in the Bible does it give us advice on how to go from friends and strangers to marriage. So the advice that is often given in youth group is: Pray and ask God to show you what direction you should go in your relationship and ask Him to give you the boundaries you need to honor God. In other words, "Just try not to have sex or anything like that."

The problem is, the space between "no romantic stuff at all" and "having sex" is so vague and unclear that it can be hard to tell what is right and what is wrong. We often ask ourselves to make the right decision ourselves. The issue is, we don't know what the right decisions are because we don't have any examples of it.

Dating is so arbitrary and subjective, that there really isn't any clear definition of what is right and what is wrong. We might say, "What is right for me is right for me, and what is right for you is right for you, and you can't judge me because you are not in our relationship." It is ultimately up to you to decide.

So we step back and ask. "What is dating?" Is it more than friends but less than marriage? Is it that the person you date gets the benefits of the physical side of dating and no one else does (but still no sex)? Is it that you are committing to only date each other and no one else?

Let's talk about commitment. We say we are committed, yet we know it's not true. What is the commitment and how do we know how long we are committed to it? We know that when one person is done dating the other person, they break up with them. What if the other person still likes them? Is there really a commitment, or is it really, "Stay together until you get tired of them?" In these "committed relationships," what is stopping someone from dumping you on Monday and dating someone else on Tuesday?

Commitment is “the state of being dedicated and faithful to a cause.” So when we start dating someone and say we are committed, though we say that, we actually say, “I am committed until it gets to hard, until I find differences I don’t like about you, or until someone that makes me feel better comes along.”

We like the *idea* of commitment because it gives us security, value, and trust. We want those things because we were wired that way. That is why God created marriage, so we can experience that kind of commitment. Our souls desire commitment and consistency. This is also why marriage is a picture of Jesus and the church. Christ is committed and consistent with the church. But we get into trouble when we turn dating relationships into mini-marriages without the commitment of marriage.

What we don’t realize is that this idea is harming us rather than helping us. Imagine getting on a roller coaster. Everyone gets strapped in and you look and around and realize your safety harness hasn’t locked. The coaster begins its slow move forward, and you realize that you’re not securely locked in. You would yell as loud as you could for help because you realize you are not safely locked in. At any moment or wrong turn, you could be thrown off the coaster. You could hold the harness down, but the reality is, you’re not locked in. You’re not secure. It is just the illusion of safety. This is dating. The illusion of commitment when there really isn’t any. This is dangerous.

Commitment and security aren’t real unless there is a ring involved. Either you have experienced it, or have seen it. The repercussions of a breakup are rough. Girls are crying, guys are crying, lots of heartache and pain. All because we have joined into a relationship that is emotionally too heavy for the level of commitment it offers.

So how do we deal with that? People might say, “Heartache is just a part of life. You will have a ton of boyfriends or girlfriends before you find the right one. That is just the way it is.”

But is it? The Bible has lots of practical wisdom for us. It also has lots of wisdom on how to deal with almost every kind of relationship you could have. Yet we see that the Bible is silent on dating. So does that mean we are just left here to figure it out? Does God ever do that with any other aspect of our lives? Leaving us to figure out what is the right thing to do?

Perhaps the Bible is silent about dating because dating is a man-made idea of relationships. Maybe it's because dating is a whole other category that was non-existent to God because it was not intended to be a category of relationships. Perhaps the reason why God separates family, friends and strangers, and marriage relationships is because God intends for our hearts to go to just one other person and no one else. Maybe because God never intended for us to date around from guy to guy or girl to girl, with breakup after breakup and our hearts broken and being mended again and again. Maybe God isn't silent. Maybe we just aren't willing to listen to Him.

There remains one question. How do we find that person we're supposed to be with if dating isn't a thing in the Bible? I am not going to answer that today. My goal today was to show you the shallowness of modern-day dating as we know it. It will lead to heartache, even if you try to just not have sex. It will lead to these mini-divorces that your heart was not created to experience.

God has a greater story for you. Let him write it, and we will learn what that looks like later.