

Worth Dying For

A Bible Study on Dating & Relationships

Leader Notes

by Brandon Metcalf

OVERVIEW

While serving as a youth group leader, I took time each year to do a series on dating and relationships. It was always one of the most well-attended series we did, mainly because of the subject matter. While the name of the study was about relationships, in reality it was a study on identity in Christ. But "come to a Bible study on identity in Christ" doesn't have the same appeal as one about dating, apparently. I got them to show up because it was a series on relationships and then also taught them about identity in Christ at the same time, because both are really important.

This Bible study is about dating and relationships, as the title demonstrates, but really is about so much more than that. Yes, it goes into specifics on what to look for in a partner, the purpose of dating, and all of that, but while doing so, you'll also talk a lot about identity in Christ, Christian contentment, combatting Satan's lies, discipleship, forgiveness, and so much more. Dating and relationships is really the vehicle for some huge, life-changing conversations. The reason I approach it this way is because my life was changed through Bible studies on relationships where I really grew in my faith regarding Christian contentment, discipleship, Biblical masculinity, leadership, etc. The truths in this study are the same truths from Scripture that changed my life and I hope they will do the same for your group.

WHY "WORTH DYING FOR"?

"Worth Dying For" is a phrase that has meant a great deal to me personally for a long time. When I was in high school, the phrase came to my mind in a Bible study at youth group (with my pastor Eric Gledhill) as we talked about what sacrificial love looks like in a relationship. "Worth dying for" has stuck with me ever since then, and for a while I thought I had an original idea that could be my contribution to theology. Then when I was in college, I heard an amazing sermon series by Pastor Aaron Stern that used that exact phrase in the context of teaching on dating relationships. Turns out my original idea of "worth dying for" wasn't as original as I thought, which is fine because what's far more important is that through that series I began to see that this focus on value and identity is a really helpful framework by which to teach about relationships.

The reason I approach relationships from the issue of value is because most of the problems that we get ourselves into, especially in relationships, is because we're searching for value. Why do many retirees really struggle with this transition? Because their value was tied to their work and without it, they don't know who they are anymore. Why will someone stay dating a person that everyone around them thinks is absolutely terrible? It's because they hear nice things from their date, feel valuable when they're with them, and as a result, are afraid to leave because all of that value will leave with the relationship. They believe it's better to stay in a bad relationship and still feel valued than to be alone. It's an issue of value. Or what about the girl who is trading the physical for the emotional in her relationship? She's crossing her physical boundaries at the request (or demand) of her boyfriend because when she does so, he tells her he loves her and she feels emotionally connected. That boyfriend is just using her to get what he wants and once that stops, he'll leave because she's only valuable to him as long as she's fulfilling his selfish desires. That is an issue of value, on both sides. If she knew that her value didn't come from her body, she wouldn't allow that kind of transaction to be a part of their relationship and would also value him enough to point him to his value in Christ. And if he knew that both of them had infinite value in Christ, he wouldn't be trying to push sexuality outside of God's plan for his own lack of self-control because they are both worth more than that.

That is why this study looks at value first rather than starting with the do's and don't's of dating. Most of the issues we get into (dating the wrong person, rushing into a relationship, feeling worthless without a relationship, dealing poorly with rejection, having inappropriate boundaries in a relationship, failing to treat one another with love and respect, etc.) are all symptoms of the search for value in that relationship. If all we do is talk about how to set boundaries for sexuality, but don't address the core reason why those boundaries are crossed in the first place, we're not really addressing the issue. It's like putting a bandage on a snake bite. You've stopped the outward issue of the bleeding, but you haven't dealt with the core underlying

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issue, which is the poison. Talking about the search for value addresses the core issue, which will have lasting positive impacts on all the outward symptoms. I strongly believe that if we equip young people to see everything in light of their value and identity in Christ, as a loved, chosen, forgiven child of God, it will change their relationships. Not only that, but this foundation will impact every single area of their lives.

THE ROLE OF THIS STUDY IN THE CONTEXT OF YOUTH MINISTRY

My philosophy on youth ministry is that we hold onto our young people's identities until they can hold onto it for themselves. I want this study to help you do that. This means that you as youth leaders and volunteers know what your youth's identities are: they are worth dying for, made to be disciples of Christ, and valuable to God and to His Church. You not only know that, but you continually tell your youth, "This is who you are." In Bible study, you go into God's Word and allow the Word to speak life and identity to them: "you are who He says that you are." When you walk with them through loss, disappointment, or rejection, you do so by continually reminding them that they are valuable, loved, forgiven, and chosen by God. In everything that you do, you remind them of who they are and whose they are. As you do that, over time, youth begin to take ownership of that and instead of fighting you on it ("I just don't feel valuable," or "that's not what other people are saying"), they begin to agree. "Even though I don't feel it, I am valuable. I am valuable because of Christ. That's who I am and it doesn't come from what I do, but from whose I am—I belong to God!" The goal is for each young person at some point to hold onto their identity in Christ and own it for themselves, and begin confessing "this is who I am and what I believe." Ideally this would be what we in the church call "confirmation." At this point, you transition into reminding them of their value rather than holding it on their behalf. All of us need constant reminders of who we are, given the amount of different narratives that we experience on a daily basis.

My prayer is that this study can be a tool for you in the midst of your youth ministry journey, to continue to hold onto young peoples' identity in Christ and continually remind them of who they are until they hold onto it for themselves. There's a whole section in lesson 4 about finding godly counsel and this hopefully will be a tool for your youth ministry to help connect young people with older generations in your congregation, which can have effects across your congregation and really benefit your whole ministry.

STRUCTURE OF THE LEADER'S GUIDE

This leader's guide is meant to equip you in order to get the most of the Bible study itself. Here are the categories of content that you'll see in the guide:

-Words in black: These are the actual questions and content from the participant handouts. Your page numbers will differ from the participant handouts, but you're all working with the same set of questions, verses, and commentary. What differs in the leader's guide is that instead of blank spaces below the questions, there are more words in blue and italics.

-Words in red italics: This makes up the bulk of the leader's guide. It is red and in italics so that you can print it out either in color or black and white and still know which parts are the leader's guide additions. Some of this content is simply sample answers to the questions that are being asked. This doesn't mean that these are the only possible answers, but hopefully it gives you an idea as to what your conversation could be about. Other sections of the leaders note content are ideas of follow-up questions, tips, examples, or application points that don't appear on the participant handouts. Certain questions can go in a number of different ways, depending on your group needs, and the notes are my attempt to identify a few of those deeper discussions that may be worth having in your group. The final type of information in the notes is commentary on the question or study itself, trying to explain what I'm trying to get at or accomplish here. This is like the "director's commentary" or "behind the scenes" info that movies have. Though these additions certainly make the guide significantly longer, my hope is that they keep the flow of the study clear and help you know some ways to connect this better to your group. Sometimes there are questions that a certain group may not understand clearly, and hopefully the leader notes will help you be able to know what the purpose of that question or section is so that you can get to that same point by asking a different question or using an additional example. Use what is helpful to you, skip over that which isn't, but please

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read through it ahead of time so you have an idea of what's there and what could be helpful. Otherwise you'll have 2-3 paragraphs of information that you're trying to read for the first time while your group only has 1-2 sentences.

*Warning Note to Small Group Leaders about the Red Words: I know I'm playing with fire a bit by putting so much content into the leader's guide notes. My concern as the person who put the amount of additional information and commentary that is here is that it can turn this study into a lecture instead of a discussion, which does not make for the best small group experience. What I don't want to happen is for a leader to ask the question, give the group 1-2 seconds to answer, and then jump into reading the leader's guide to them. Anytime the leader dominates the conversation or launches into a large commentary after each group member's contribution, it shuts down the conversation. Try to observe the 1/3rd Rule: No more than 1/3rd of the discussion time should be taken up by the leader talking. Give your group ample time to think of answers (10 seconds is recognized by educational researchers as appropriate wait time) and encourage contributions from everyone by having them write down answers to share with a partner or small group. Use the information in this guide to help you lead, but make it your own by changing wording, asking your own questions, and using examples from your context. Keep the focus on helping the group to discover these truths for themselves rather than quickly giving all the answers to them. A right answer said by one of the youth is worth more educationally than that same answer said by the group leader.

-Video clips: Each lesson has a link to a video clip that goes along with the teaching for that section. They're an optional addition to the study, so I'll just tell you why the clips are even an option in the first place and you can decide to use them or not. The clips are portions of a talk I gave at the 2019 LCMS National Youth Gathering on this topic and can be used a few different ways. You could use them at the beginning of the session to help lay the ground work for the lesson, in which case the discussion is your chance to dive deeper into the concepts from the video, get the group's own examples and situations, and help them to internalize and personalize the message. You could show the clip at the end of each lesson as a way of summarizing your discussion. Finally, you could show the previous lesson's clip at the beginning of the next lesson as a recap of the previous lesson's discussion. So you would show the clip from lesson 1 at the beginning of your discussion on lesson 2 as a way to get everyone on the same page before you dive into lesson 2. Either way, as with any of the parts of this leader's guide, these are meant to be a tool for you to use if you think it would be helpful.

-Appendices: Being a 4 lesson study on what is a pretty big topic, there's a lot of content that simply didn't fit into this particular study. I chose to emphasize a few core truths that will give participants a great foundation for Christ-centered relationships as well as impact their everyday lives and decisions. In order to do so, there are some topics that are not covered in detail in these lessons. Appendix 1 is a list of some ways to continue the conversation after the study series is finished. Appendix 2 is a discussion on the connection between this "Worth Dying For" message and sexuality. Appendix 3 looks more into why the study approaches men and women a certain way, targets specific issues with each gender, and shares thoughts on how to widen the conversation past these core ideas.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

-Individuals: While this study is designed for group discussion, the leader's guide is written to also help someone who was going through it on their own. If you want to go through it on your own as a way to grow on the topic, that's great! I didn't internalize these truths in my formative years just by hearing them once, but by studying them again and again. If going back through this lesson on your own a few months after your group does the study would be helpful to you, go for it! I still would recommend going through it with a mentor in order to get the most out of it, even if you don't want to do it with a whole group of people.

-Couples: If used as a way to get on the same page regarding your beliefs on relationships, dig into God's Word together, and set some ground rules and boundaries, this could be useful to a couple. I would still recommend going through it with a mentor couple together rather than just two people on their own in order to get the most out of it.

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-Families: One of the most common comments I receive after speaking on this topic is from parents that really appreciate now having a common language and framework by which to talk with their child about relationships. In that light, this study could work well if split up over numerous family devotional times or as a parent/child study in your congregation, as long as you know that some youth will not participate nearly as much if everyone's parents are in the room, and make adjustments to keep the participation active.

-Youth groups: My guess is that this is the context where the study will be used most often. Some youth groups already have girl's and guy's small groups that they meet in regularly and one or both of them will choose to go through the study in their small group. This can be a very successful way to do a study like this one, especially if there is a high level of trust among the group and members will be willing to get into the real issues that are involved. Other groups may do the introduction and video all together and then break off into gender-specific groups for the discussion, and with strong group leaders that can be very beneficial too. My personal recommendation for this study is to have as much of it as you can, at least in terms of teaching the key concepts, with both guys and girls together. What having everyone together does is works to build accountability and a group culture. When everyone is together and hearing the same thing, it shapes your group from then on. For example, when the guys are called to step up and work to grow and mature into a man of God because boys don't get to date daughters of the King, there's more accountability built in when the girls are there in that conversation too because now they know the standards too. They can work to understand each other better and support one another in it. While that is my recommendation, either of the previous examples have been done very successfully as well.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This whole project and really my years of study on this topic are due in large part to the fantastic mentors that I had in my formative years. The truths that are shared here are the same truths that changed my life as I learned from youth leaders like Brian King, Eric Gledhill, and Jeremy Becker as well as my parents Mike and Kathy Metcalf. Special acknowledgement goes to Pastor Aaron Stern (check him out at www.aaronstern.com), whose college series on relationships not only reinforced the "worth dying for" idea for me, but was where I first heard the concepts of "you're not the one, but you might be the two" and "in the beginning, God." I am so grateful to all these people who invested in me and taught me God's truth. Their influence on me and my thinking on this topic is seen throughout this study.

Finally, and most importantly, a world of thanks to Dana, my best friend, wife, and my Two. You are the best partner I could ever have for this race of faith and you continue to inspire me. Every time I speak or teach on this topic, I am reminded of what a privilege it is to be on this race of faith with you.

May you always remember: you are worth dying for!

-Brandon Metcalf

Leader notes are in red throughout.

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Session 1: The Search

VIDEO CLIP 1 (OPTIONAL)

Note: The study is designed that it can be used without the video clips at all, but some may find it helpful to watch a clip from the “Worth Dying For” talk first (or at the end) that goes along with the lesson. The link for clip 1 can be found here: https://youtu.be/6IzaJT_T9wg

Introduction

How do you determine whether something is valuable or not?

We tend to show how much we value something (or someone) based on the amount of time we give to it (or spend thinking about it), how we use our resources for it, what value other people put on it, etc. If something is broken, damaged, out of style, or not popular, we tend to see it as less valuable. Keep in mind that our perception and reality can be different. Just because I think something isn't valuable, doesn't mean that's true.

Finding Value

What about us? What are some ways that we determine our value?

Oftentimes we put our value on a sliding scale. It goes up when we do something good, succeed, receive a compliment, people want to spend time with us, etc. It goes down when we mess up or fail, get caught, receive criticism, are abandoned or rejected, etc. Especially for young people, a lot of it is based on what other people say and their own thoughts or emotions—if I don't feel valuable or what others say or do leads me to think I'm not valuable, then that must be true.

Try not to just list these out, but really get everyone to think about where they truly find their value, personally. Is it in a relationship? Is it based on what others say? From their achievements or lack thereof?

Why does Satan want to attack our value?

If he can get us to doubt our value, if we're worth it, then he can more easily tempt us to sin in order to try to earn that value back. If I don't think I'm worth much, then I can get so desperate to feel valuable from anyone that I'll do all sorts of things that I wouldn't normally consider doing, just to try to feel valuable again.

What are some ways that he tries to attack our value?

He attacks by trying to get us to find value anywhere other than Christ—even seemingly good places like achievements, status, or relationships. He attacks by convincing us to do something in order to earn back value, and then he turns around and accuses us for doing that very thing. The harsh words and deeds of others will replay in our minds until we begin to believe that they are true simply because they are said often enough or loud enough. He will turn any kind of rejection or failure into an issue of value: “Who will want you now?”

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The Truth

Satan will continue to attack your value, try to get you to do something (namely sin) in order to try to earn the value back (which never lasts), and then start the cycle all over again. He accuses you with this question: "Who will want you now?"

How does Jesus respond to that question?

"I want you!" This is so crucial—take this time to have an honest conversation in your group about the Gospel, which is Christ coming to us not because we are worthy of His love and forgiveness, but because He chooses us regardless of the fact that we fall so short.

What do each of these verses say about your value?

Note: I recommend anytime you're working with Scripture with another individual or a group to have them read the passage out loud and talk about what it says rather than you giving them the answers. Having them read and say out loud the truth from the Word can help personalize it, which can help them take ownership of the truth personally.

Genesis 1:27

You are created in God's image. The "image of God" is a huge theological concept worthy of a whole separate study, but the point here is that there is a uniqueness to humanity from creation. Image of God is not the foundational place where we root human dignity and value; that is given to us ultimately at the cross, but it is a helpful place to start. You and I were created by God, and there is value in that gift of life.

Matthew 6:25-26

"Are you not of more value than they?" These words of Jesus echo the value that we have in being created by God. We are, mysteriously and miraculously, even more valuable than the rest of God's beloved creation. Christ didn't say "because of what you have done, you are more valuable than they" or "since you're great people, you are more valuable than they." The value that Christ is talking about is an unconditional gift from our heavenly Father!

Romans 5:8

Christ died for us while we were still sinners. Not while we had everything together, when we really had a lot to offer, or when everyone else agreed that we worth it, but when we were the enemies of God, stuck in our sin. This is where we root our value—it is given to us by God and demonstrated most fully and irrevocably at the cross. You don't have to shape up your act in order to earn value or forgiveness. The truth of the Gospel is that you can't get your life together. That's why God sent Jesus while we were sinners and He came down and died for us! Your value is not dependent on your behavior, but on Christ's sacrifice for you.

1 John 3:1

A lot of people, young people especially, think that they're just "some person" and this verse reminds them that they are not just "some person" but a loved, chosen, and redeemed child of the King of Kings! As the famous hymn proclaims: "God's own child I gladly say it, I am baptized into Christ!"

Key Point:
Christ comes to us not because we are worthy of His love and forgiveness, but because He chooses us regardless of the fact that we fall so short.

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Colossians 3:12

There's a lot jammed into this one verse, but one word that stands out to me is "chosen." Even if you are not chosen by the person you want to be in a relationship, you are chosen by God. The difficulty is moving that from a nice trite statement (yeah, I know I'm chosen by God and that's fine, but I really want to be chosen by this guy/girl) into an earth-shattering truth: I am chosen by God!

Isaiah 44:5

I am the Lord's! I belong to Him! Those are the truths that we, by faith, hold onto no matter what. This is a great verse to memorize, write down, and keep in front of you regularly.

You are created, loved, and chosen by the God of the Universe. Not because you are lovable, but because God chooses to love you—it is a pure gift. He doesn't just tell you about His love—He shows it, ultimately at the cross. Jesus died for YOU. Why? Because He says that you are worth dying for! You have infinite value in Him—you can't earn it, take away from it, or change it. The promises of the cross and empty tomb are forgiveness, life, salvation, and value. These promises are yours in Baptism—you are His loved, redeemed, forgiven, and valuable child! This is who you are!

Consider reading this section again, this time out loud together, with each person inserting their own name in place of "you."

Why is it so important that you have not and cannot earn your value in Christ? What's so amazing about this undeserved gift?

As a note on the discussion of value, I don't think it's very helpful to talk about "inherent value," because that quickly turns into "earned value" and can make someone think that there's something in them that makes them worthy of God's love (which then means they could lose that and will no longer be loved by God). Instead of "inherent value," talk about how value is another undeserved gift that we are given by God. Because it is an undeserved gift, I can stop playing the game to earn value or thinking I've lost it. It is given to me at the cross, and that is something that I can't add to or cover over. The cross becomes the anchor point not only for forgiveness, life, and salvation, but also my infinite value given to me by God—and that changes everything.

No matter what I do, what my dating life looks like or anything else, I am valuable to God. I don't need to chase that value anywhere else. I think this is the key to drive home. See the introduction of this leader's guide for more details on emphasizing value on this topic is so important.

Truth that Matters

It's awesome to hear that you're worth dying for. But you can hear something and then still choose to ignore it or reject it. The purpose of this study is for you to not just hear these truths, but to anchor your life in them, knowing that these promises are true for YOU today, tomorrow, and always. This is crucial, because there are going to be many times in your life where your value will come under attack. God says you're worth dying for, but other voices in your life may try to convince you that you're not worth much of anything at all. The big question is whose voice are you going to believe?

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Read 2 Corinthians 10:5.

What does it look like to “take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ”?

Taking every thought captive means that you’re filtering every statement, both external and internal through the lens of the Gospel. It means evaluating statements with the question, “Does this line up with who I am in Christ?” If not, then I’m not going to let it define me anymore. This process of evaluating everything through God’s Word is what I firmly believe is the definition of Christian maturity that we all, regardless of age are called to.

A great follow-up question to ask at this point as your group is processing: “Can anyone think of an example of a thought that you need to take captive and make obedient to Christ?” As a leader, always be prepared to give a real example from your life first if needed, but be sure to give everyone a few minutes to write something down first before jumping in and seeing if anyone feels comfortable sharing an example.

Why is this important?

The question of “whose voice are you going to believe” seems obvious at first—I should believe God, of course. But when we’re pressed with whose voice we actually spend time worrying about, the answer isn’t as simple. A lot of the hardships we put ourselves into in life is when we buy into a voice that is not God’s.

We need to be careful not to turn Christian maturity, spiritual warfare, and identity questions into merely an intellectual exercise that is separate from the powerful work of the Spirit to transform our hearts and minds. But we also shouldn’t forget that we are called to stand for God’s truth in every area of our lives, which involves discerning those ideas which are not in line with God and choosing not to allow them to have staying power. You can’t always choose what ideas are thrown your way, but you can choose which you allow to stay there and have power. For example, none of us would choose for a close friend to say “no one likes you, go away” and we really can’t unhear those words. When that statement comes roaring back into my mind, I can’t really control that my memory brought those words back, but what I am called to is to fight against that statement with God’s truth—I am loved, forgiven, and chosen by God. I am worth dying for!

Key Point:
This is God’s truth—I am loved, forgiven, and chosen by God. I am worth dying for!

Even when you don’t feel like it, you’re still worth dying for. You still have infinite value because of Christ. No matter how loud or how frequently other people tell you, show you, or treat you like you’re not worth it, that doesn’t make it true. They cannot cancel out or overpower what Christ has done for you on the cross. You are worth dying for!

But Wait...Isn’t This a Bible Study on Dating?

Yes, this is still a study on relationships, but starting the study by jumping straight into who to date or not to date would overlook the fundamental problem with most relationships: people date for value.

What are your reactions to that idea? What does it mean to date for value?

There’s a good chance that most people haven’t really thought about this concept of dating for value. But with a bit of prompting, I think deep down we realize that most relationships are built

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on just this—I'm with this person because they make me feel good, they say nice things about me, I get more attention, etc.

What are some problems with dating to get value?

What happens when they break-up? Most couples think that will never happen in their case but hypothetically what could happen to someone whose value is built on their relationship and suddenly it ends? Where do they find their value now?

Other problems: you're not finding your value in Christ and that is a very dangerous path to lead. When do you have enough value from the person? How do you get more over time? Do you need to keep doing more and more or crossing boundaries in order to keep hearing nice things from them? Let's be honest, that's what happens in far too many relationships—one person is being dragged along and crossing physical and emotional boundaries just so they keep hearing "I love you" from at least one person in their life.

The search for value is the root cause of all sorts of harmful things, not just in relationships. For each of these examples, talk about how the search for value is impacting the scenario (where are they finding their value):

Consider breaking into small groups with each group taking a scenario and discussing it, then sharing with the whole group. Or pick one example that really resonates with the group and just talk about that one. Also feel free to add your own examples based on what you know the temptations and struggles are in your area. Take this opportunity to speak into other issues that they may face or are currently facing. You may also want to talk about the follow-up question about how knowing their value in Christ would change things as you go along each one rather than going back through all of them again at the end.

-A college student choosing to start drinking alcohol at parties

Many students had plenty of earned value in high school because people knew them, they had built a reputation, or been identified as the athlete or smart person in the class. But in college, few will know them, they no longer have a reputation, and most aren't doing the same activities that got them attention and where they tried to find their value in high school. So in this transition, they get lost, not knowing who they are anymore. Since they're not getting the same attention they did in high school, they think going to parties and drinking will be the solution: then people will notice me, appreciate me, or accept me. If this student knew that he was worth dying for, he wouldn't have to get drunk in order to try to earn value and status. His value is in Christ, so he doesn't need to act out to find what he already has in Christ. He can respond to the tough transition by seeing it as an opportunity for a fresh start, to determine what he wants to be known for among this new group, and the living out life as a witness for Christ on this campus.

-A parent who puts tremendous pressure on their kid to be perfect (get all A's, be the top at everything they do, never get into trouble, etc.)

This example is in here to show that adults struggle with the search for value too. This parent is trying to find their value in their child's performance, so that they can feel better about themselves compared to their other parent friends. Whether they mean to or not, oftentimes what they are communicating to their child is that they are only really someone if they are the best. Knowing they are worth dying for helps this parent to not find their identity in their role as

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a parent. Yes, being a parent is a big part of their life and a huge joy and responsibility, but being a parent is a vocation, not an identity. Identity is from God, while vocation is how we live and serve in this world, from our identity not for it. This also helps them to know that their child will not be perfect, which is why they need Jesus. It takes the pressure off of performance and turns vocation into the joy of serving with your gifts to the best of your ability, knowing at the end of the day you are God's, He is at work in and through you, and that is enough.

-A star athlete is absolutely crushed after a season-ending injury

Like the previous scenarios, this athlete is getting identity and vocation confused. She thinks that her vocation of athlete is where her identity and value comes from, so having that taken away due to injury seems earth-shattering. Knowing that she's worth dying for resets her identity as being from Christ, not dependent on what she is doing on or off the field. Her value is secure in Christ, so while transitioning to a new role will be tough, she can faithfully live out her life as a disciple in a different way. Even if she's not as good at whatever this other role is, that doesn't impact her value. Even if others don't notice her as much, God still chooses, loves, redeems, forgives, and calls her as His own.

-A girl continues dating a guy even though all her friends say he's bad news

Filling in a few of the details for this situation based on what is likely going on, this girl is probably dating this guy because even though he doesn't treat others well, he says enough nice things to her to convince her that he's good. He probably tells her he loves her, but then turns that into a contract—"if you really love me, then you'll..." This isn't actually love, it's manipulation and selfishness, but she can't realize that because she's so desperate for value and acceptance that she'll overlook all kinds of things because she's hearing those words she wants to hear. Knowing she's worth dying for means she doesn't need to stay with this jerk in order to be loved, accepted, or valued. She is already treasured by God, and since this guy isn't reminding her of that value, he's not boyfriend material (as her friends are correctly identifying). Simply put, knowing her value in Christ changes everything for this girl.

How could knowing that they're worth dying for, that their value is in Christ, change how they respond to the situation?

While these scenarios are about other people and how they could be helped, try to continue to make it personal for each person in the group so that it doesn't turn into a "nice truth for others but not for me."

Conclusion

Your value in Christ doesn't only change your relationships, it is meant to impact every area of your life. Knowing that you don't need to search for value anymore frees you in so many ways. In terms of relationships, it frees you from dating for value and brings a better model—dating from value. When you know your value in Christ, a relationship becomes one way to reflect that value to the world. It's based on forgiveness rather than your own perfection, it's about reminding of value rather than earning it, and it's centered in the unchanging Gospel rather than your ever-changing emotions. Simply put, it's about Christ, not you—and that's a very good thing. We'll look at that more in the next lesson.

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Taking it Home

Write out a few of the verses from this lesson and place them somewhere where you will see them regularly. Do the same thing with the phrase "Worth Dying For." Place it on your mirror or somewhere you'll be reminded every day of your value in Christ.

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Session 2: The One

Introduction

What are some key ideas that you remember from the previous lesson?

Another way to ask this question is, "How have you used what you learned from the last lesson?"

Write down the list on a white board or paper for the group.

Take a few minutes and write down your own answers to these questions:

How do you know who you should you date?

When should you start dating?

How long should you date?

What's the purpose of dating?

Give everyone a few minutes to write their answers down and then you can have them share if you want, otherwise just move to the next question, which is the key one for this section.

Where does this information come from? Media, parents, peers, mentors, etc.?

Have everyone look at the answers they wrote down to the previous questions and for each one write next to it where that answer came from—did they get that idea from their parents, media, a couple they look up to, their friends, Scripture, etc.? Do they see a trend in what has the primary influence on their view of relationships?

One of the purposes of this whole study is for each participant to come to a point where they want what God says to define their relationship rather than anything else.

VIDEO CLIP 2 (OPTIONAL)

Note: The study is designed that it can be used without the video clips at all, but this clip from the "Worth Dying For" talk goes into more detail on this concept of "the One," so it may be helpful leading into the rest of the discussion. The link for clip 2 can be found here: https://youtu.be/zInyG_ia20g

The One?

Many people go into dating with the idea of finding "the One." They believe that there is one perfect person out there for them and their job is to go find them. They'll know that they've found "the One" because they'll have all sorts of qualities in common, their relationship will be so easy because they are "perfect for each other," and no one has ever made them feel the way they feel with this other person.

What examples have you seen of this concept of "the One"?

This is embedded deeply into most movies, media, and even just the way we talk about relationships. Basically every dating app is based on calculating your compatibility and trying to match you up with "the One" based on that profile.

Key Point:
Because God is truly present always, we can courageously step out in faith knowing that He is with us.

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What are some issues with this mentality?

First of all, there's seven billion people on the planet! So if there's only one person for you, good luck finding them. But I think a more compelling issue is the idea of the One being "perfect for you." Are they really? Most of the time relationships built on this idea end up dissolving once they hit a rough patch and realize apparently we're not perfect for one another. If this mentality is maintained, that person will just keep moving from relationship to relationship or even marriage to marriage, trying to find that perfect person and always falling short. Everyone you're looking at in a relationship is a sinner, so you're not going to find a perfect person for you in any aspect, much less every aspect.

Another issue is what "the One" is based on: compatibility. If you're simply "compatible" enough your relationship will be successful, apparently. But the problem is that compatibility is oftentimes determined by outward qualities like appearance, interests, or status and none of those last. You want the foundation of your relationship to be on something that doesn't change.

The idea of finding "the One" is so engrained in our society that we can end up believing that this is the purpose of life. My goal in life apparently is to find that one person out there who will give me meaning, identity, value, and purpose. They will complete me, and the relationship will be easy because we're so perfect for each other. So if things aren't good or we hit a rough patch, it must be because they're not "the One," so I need to move on and continue to search because it should be easier than this. Or I will ignore all kinds of red flags and focus on the one quality that I want "the One" to have simply because I don't want to be alone. Either way, this search ends up with a lot of broken relationships and dissatisfied people.

We need a new foundation for relationships, and we can find it in the very first four words of the Bible.

Key Point:
Because God is truly present always, we can courageously step out in faith knowing that He is with us.

A New Foundation

Genesis 1:1- In the beginning _____

In the beginning God

What's not in that blank?

Your name, a relationship, someone else's name, sports, movies, grades, money, etc.

How do most people deal with rejection?

Eat ice cream, listen to sad break-up songs, get angry, try to get even, move on right away to another relationships, etc. Talk about what the shortfalls are of these ways of handling rejection.

To make it more interactive, pick 2 youth (a guy and a girl) to act out a short demonstration of a bad way to deal with rejection. For the demonstration have the guy ask the girl on a date, have the girl say no in some way, and then have the guy ham it up with his reaction to this rejection. Then switch and have the guy break up with the girl and have her dramatically and humorously deal with that rejection.

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How does having a foundation on “In the beginning, God” change that?

“In the beginning God” gives you a place to reset to each time something happens in life. He is your foundation, not that relationship, job, sport, or whatever else it is. He is what life is all about, as we’ll see in the next verse.

1 John 5:12

Jesus is not only what life is all about, He is life itself! If you have Jesus, but don’t have a relationship, you have life! He is enough!

Key idea: Jesus is enough!

Why is Jesus enough (more than enough actually)?

He is enough because in Him we have everything that we need. He gives us life and apart from Him, we have nothing that will last. Think of the main things that we need in life:

- Identity: Jesus tells you who you are. You are a beloved child of God, forgiven, and chosen.*
- Hope: There is no hope apart from Christ. We know that He holds all things in His hands and that even when our circumstances don’t look ideal here on earth, we have true and lasting hope in “the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come” as we say in the Creed.*
- Forgiveness: In Christ, we are reconnected to God in the one relationship that matters eternally. Your past, your sins, and your burdens are all forgiven because of Christ’s death and resurrection.*
- Purpose: In Jesus, you don’t just have a purpose, but the purpose. You are a part of The Story of Grace, sharing the good news of Christ to the world using the gifts and time that He has given you. There is no greater purpose than this.*

In Jesus you have meaning, hope, purpose, identity, value, forgiveness, and life itself! That makes Him **the One**.

Why is it important that Jesus is your One?

You have everything you need in Christ. He is consistent and perfect in a way that no fallen human can be. He gives you everything that you need, so you don’t need to desperately look for that in someone else. Having Jesus as your One allows you to put a relationship into its proper place—not as the ultimate goal of life, the pinnacle of human existence, or the center of your world, but as one of many blessings that God gives to remind us who He is, to bring us joy, and to help us in living out our lives as disciples.

The things that we oftentimes look for in a relationship, or in another person, are things that only Christ can provide. If I’m finding my identity and purpose in my relationship and we break up, suddenly I am lost. If I know that my identity is secure in Christ, then no matter my relationships status, I am a child of God, I am chosen, I am loved, and I have infinite value. If Jesus is my One, then I’m looking for someone else in a relationship to have that same focus and foundation. If Jesus is my One, that gives me a model for what to look for in a relationship—we should love each other sacrificially like Jesus loves us.

**Key Point:
Jesus is
enough!**

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What Now?

If Jesus is your "One", that changes what you're looking for. You're not looking for the One anymore because He's already found you. He finds you through His Word, Baptism, and Communion. And this is good news for any other relationship, because Jesus is your Savior—so they don't have to be. He is the source of your meaning and value, so they don't have to be. He is your One and He is enough!

So now you can tell someone flat out, "You're not the One." Then after you pick their jaw up off the floor, you can continue, "But you might be the Two." You might be the Two, as in someone who will come alongside me and run the race of faith together, as we point each other and those around us to Christ.

Why is having Jesus as your One and the other person as the Two actually a really good thing for a relationship?

You're no longer looking for that other person to be your world. That frees them up to be a good partner for you rather than the center of your universe. They're no longer expected to be perfect, since they're the Two, not the perfect One who is Jesus. With Jesus as your One, your relationship with the Two is centered on what you have been given by Christ. His forgiveness, love, and mercy flow into your relationship and keep both of you centered on the sure foundation of God's Word.

We'll look more in depth in lesson 4 about what to look for in the Two, but here's the main thing to know: the Two has to have the same foundation you do.

Why is it important that they have a foundation on Christ too?

Having Jesus as your One gives a direction for your relationship. You're running the race of faith with Christ and what you're looking for in the Two is someone to run that race with you. It's hard to run a race if you're going in different directions. If Jesus isn't their One, then they won't have the same identity, hope, and purpose as you. They won't treat you the way God wants you to be treated because they don't have the same foundation and sense of value in Christ that you do.

Key idea: You can't be the source of meaning, identity, and value for someone else. Why not?

Having them be "your everything" sounds nice on a greeting card, but it will destroy your relationship because you're putting a burden on them that they can't possibly carry. Let Christ carry that burden and allow Him to give you the gifts of meaning, identity, and foundation and for Him to be your foundation, because that is the only foundation that lasts.

You can't be the source of these things for someone else, but what you can do is point to where their meaning, identity, and value can be found: in Christ alone. In fact, that's what we're called to do in all of our relationships, whether dating or not.

What do you think about the idea of being "truth sharers" (you remind each other of God's truths) in a relationship?

Here's what this question is getting at: a lot of dating relationships between Christians are just that, a relationship between two people who are Christians rather than a Christian relationship. A Christian relationship is one where the relationship itself is centered on Christ and His Word.

Key Point:
You can't be the source of meaning, identity, and value for someone else. Let Christ carry that burden.

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In order to be centered on Christ, you need to be willing to speak God's truth to one another. This means not only speaking the truth in love when they have sinned, but also speaking the promise of Christ's forgiveness to them. "I forgive you because of Jesus" has to be something that we are willing to speak to one another. If we want to get rid of the "because of Jesus" part or don't want to talk about God's Word with one another because that seems weird or "too churchy," we've bought into the lie that our relationship and faith should be disconnected. Part of the purpose of this study is to bridge that divide so that we see our relationship through the lens of Christ.

Conclusion

If you're in a dating relationship, but don't have Christ, you don't have true life. If you have Christ (or more aptly, Christ has you) but you're not dating anyone, you still have life and everything you need. He is life, now and eternally!

Taking it Home

-Talk with a peer or mentor about the purpose of a dating relationship. How is the concept of the One/Two impacting your idea of the purpose of relationships?

-Daily take the opportunity to communicate with your One, Jesus. Read His very words in the Bible, talk to Him through prayer, and receive His gifts in worship this week.

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Session 3: The Model

Introduction

What are some key concepts that you remember from the study so far?

Other ways to ask this question: What ideas that we've talked about in this study have you been thinking more about? What has been messing with you from this study? What do you want to dive into more?

As you look at the world around you, what does the world say relationships are all about? How well is that model working out?

There are a variety of answers to this question, depending on your context, but here are some common ones: relationships are all about happiness, falling in love, sex, having fun, getting to know someone, etc. Regarding how well it is working out, the success rate of relationships and marriages in our culture is not very high. Clearly we're missing something.

VIDEO CLIP 3 (OPTIONAL)

Note: The study is designed that it can be used without the video clips at all, but this clip from the "Worth Dying For" talk goes into more detail on this teaching from Ephesians 5 and so may be helpful leading into the rest of the discussion. The link for clip 3 can be found here: <https://youtu.be/I-E0WhC54ek>

A Different Model

Ephesians 5:21-23

What stands out in that passage? Why?

Most likely, the word "submit" stands out. The whole idea seems antiquated, not "with the times," and can actually make us really nervous. This is the danger of reading verses out of context, because we tend to add in alarm and concern where it doesn't belong. But many people today discount the whole passage because of this one verse, so it's definitely worth digging into with your group.

We don't like that word "submit." It tends to bring to mind all sorts of negative ideas—that if the husband is "in charge," he must be free to do whatever he wants. We're worried that he's free to be a tyrant. But that's not the model here.

Guys, if you're reading this passage and thinking, "This is great! I get to do whatever I want," hear this loud and clear: **No dates for you!** If you think a relationship is about whatever you can get out of it (physically, socially, emotionally, etc.), you're being a boy not a man. And boys don't get to date daughters of the King.

Why shouldn't daughters of the King of Kings date self-centered boys?

The short answer is because they're worth dying for and are worth being treated better than a self-centered boy will treat them. In a four-part Bible study, there's only so much you can cover,

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so you have to fight for a few main points. For the girls, the main point is to make sure they know that they are worth dying for. Their value is in Christ, and one of the things that changes is the way they should be treated in a relationship. Being worth dying for also changes the way girls see themselves, how they view the purpose of relationships, how they treat others, what they contribute in a dating relationship, and so much more. Take every opportunity to bring that truth home, to help them internalize it, and see tangibly how it makes a difference in their lives.

While the questions in the handouts are geared in this section towards addressing the issue of immature boys, I think a good follow-up question, depending on your group could be, “What about the sons of the King dating self-centered girls? How does this same principle apply to them?” For further explanation of why the basic study outline focuses where it does, check out appendix 3 of this leader’s guide.

This section may sound harsh, but we have too many boys running around in our world, not just in high school but in college, in their 20’s, 30’s, 40’s, etc. These boys think that life is all about them, and they leave broken relationships, fractured families, and disaster in their wake.

What are some examples you have seen of this?

Try to avoid listing names or throwing anyone under the bus that the group would know in this conversation, but don’t be afraid to have the group share stories like “I know someone who...” Honestly, the vast majority of young men are actually living life as boys, so examples probably aren’t too hard to find even outside of movies, TV, or media. Talk more about the damage that is caused by these boys. To give an example from the Bible, Adam not only is passive when his wife is being tempted by the serpent, but he responds to God by blaming both God and His wife. Adam was created as the first man, but he was being a boy in his selfish and passive behavior in the Garden, leading to disastrous consequences for all mankind.

From your experience as well as from culture, what does it mean to be a man?

Give your group time to think about this and write a few things down. Try to come up with a list based on what they hear from those around them, from school, from media, etc. For example: a man provides for his family, a man is tough, a man doesn’t cry, men like football, etc.

Dig in a little more into not just stereotypes, but also their own lives—do men lead spiritually, how does a man relate to his family, what do men do in relationships?

Biblical Love and Leadership

If we keep reading in Ephesians 5, we are given a different definition of what true love is, as well as what it means to be a man.

Ephesians 5:24-25

Husbands are to love their wives. How does our culture define love? In our world, what does it mean to love someone?

Love is a feeling, something you can fall in and out of, and is powerful but oftentimes temporary. To love someone in our culture means to try to make them happy (especially as long as they make you happy).

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What we call “love” oftentimes is just infatuation, attraction, or lust. Since it is based primarily on emotions, which change regularly, it means something very different to our ears today than how the Bible talks about love.

How does Ephesians 5 define love? How is this better than just an emotional feeling? Who's the example/model for what love looks like?

In Ephesians 5, and throughout the Bible, love is about a commitment and self-sacrifice. It is “laying your life down” as Christ did for His bride, the Church. In marriage, this love looks like an unconditional commitment towards putting the other person's needs first, forgiving them because of Jesus, and speaking God's truth to them. When two people love each other in this way, with Christ's model of sacrificial love, their relationship is changed and becomes a witness of the Gospel to the world.

The leadership, responsibility, and headship that men are tasked with is a call not to do whatever they want, but to lead like Jesus. How does Jesus lead and love His bride, the Church? What does it look like, then, for a husband to model this type of leadership with his wife?

Christ led and loved His bride, the Church by giving His life for her. In the same way, husbands are to lead, not by doing whatever they want or insisting on their way, but to lead by laying their lives down for their wives. Why? Because she's worth dying for. Every day. You see how this all comes together? You're worth dying for isn't just a nice phrase, but actually something you build your life and relationships around.

Leading like Jesus, leading by dying daily is a big responsibility, yes, and this is why only men of God, not self-centered boys, are allowed to date daughters of the King. Specifically, men who are trying to love and lead like Jesus. But what about the woman? How does she respond to this kind of leadership? Depending on your group, these might be key questions for you to discuss further.

A godly woman won't take advantage of a man of God's sacrificial leadership and try to manipulate the man to get whatever she wants, because she is following Christ and knows the relationship isn't about her—it's about Christ, then the other person, and then her. She doesn't look at this man of God and selfishly think, “Look at what I could get out of this relationship!” No, the woman of God thinks, “Maybe I want to run the race of faith with that guy.” This is how the model all comes together—both partners need a foundation on Christ in order for any of this to work. This is where you can bring back up the concept of “submitting” from earlier in the passage. This passage is directed at husbands and wives, so it's not calling for girls to submit to their boyfriends in the same way. But the point of intersection is in looking at the way a boyfriend lives his life of sacrificial leadership and the girl asking herself, “Is this the kind of godly leadership that I'm wanting to walk alongside?” If yes, that's a good sign that this man will lead like a godly husband in the Ephesians 5 model as the relationship progresses. If not, there is growth needed before taking another step forward in the relationship.

Living as a boy is all about selfishness. Being a man is about sacrifice and giving for the sake of others. Jeffrey Hemmer in his book *Man Up* writes, “Manliness does not mean exerting your will over against your wife's. It does not mean Adam got to order Eve around. It means that he existed for her good as much as she was created for his good” (168).

Key Point:
Love is about a commitment and self-sacrifice. It is “laying your life down” as Christ did for His bride, the Church.

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What is the Biblical definition of being a man? Evaluate it against the other definitions you've heard or seen. Is it better or worse? Why?

One of the keys to the Biblical definition of being a man is that men sacrifice. They lead by giving for the sake of others. Get your group to really dig into why this is so important, because chances are almost everything they've been taught about manhood is probably flat out wrong or at least incomplete and focused on the wrong things.

As stated earlier, a main point of this study for the girls is to really bring home the truth that they are worth dying for, their value is in Christ, and how this changes their outlook on relationships, how they treat others, how they are treated, and so much more. The main point for the guys is that we need them to be men, not boys. Many of them might not have a clear idea of what it looks like to be a man and that's why you point them to Christ as their model, though more than that, He is their Savior, their One. It's also why lesson 4 will look at mentors and you can have an opportunity to help show them some models then. But in this section of the study, as boldly and passionately as you can, appeal to the guys in the room to step up, lead, be men of God. They may be young and considered boys by so many other criteria, but that doesn't mean that they can't be developing the maturity in Christ to learn how to lead like Jesus. Those are the men that this world needs. Even better than you telling them that we need this is to get them to say it for themselves. Ask questions like, "If men are supposed to sacrifice and lead, where are all those men?" or "Guys, what about you? How are you going to lead?" or even more pointedly if you have a combined group, "Ladies, how awesome would it be to have guys in this group, in our church continue to step up to be men that lead like Jesus? What difference do you think that would make?"

If you look at the Biblical model of relationships being about running the race of faith together, shining His light to the world, living out the roles that He has created you for, and serving each other like Christ, the model isn't the issue. In fact, the model is great—it was set up in God's perfect creation before the fall into sin. The issues come when we fail to actually live it out, when guys "lead" like self-centered boys, forgetting that the women they are mistreating are worth dying for. Or ladies similarly lose sight of Christ and focus on outward appearance rather than inner character, forgetting that their value is in Christ not in appearance. When we lose sight of our value in Christ is when we fail to live this out.

This Biblical model all hinges on Christ. This whole passage is centered "out of reverence to Christ" (v.21). Without Him at the center, things begin to fall apart.

Why do we need Christ's forgiveness, grace, and truth as the center of our lives and our relationships?

Without Christ, this model makes absolutely no sense. He's the one who gives us value, declares us to be worth dying for, and sets the standard for relationships. Apart from Him, we can do nothing (John 15:5).

Hopefully this study has gotten people excited about stepping up, growing in maturity, and becoming a man or woman of God. This question is designed to bring some reality back to the situation. As excited as you may be, you will not do this perfectly. You can't, that's why you're the Two, not the One. The only way we grow and mature in faith is through the Holy Spirit, so this model always begins, continues, and ends with God at the center of it all. Be in His Word, receive His gifts in His Word and His sacraments each week, and gather with His people to strengthen

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and encourage you. Men and women of God don't try to do life on their own, but realize they are fully dependent on God, who gives them everything they need.

At the other end of the spectrum, there may be those in your group that aren't excited about getting out there and living this out, because frankly, they're far too busy thinking about how they've messed this all up or how their current relationship is nothing like this model. This next section is meant to speak truth into those hearts and lives.

Baggage Claim

Maybe you've been going through this study and are now thinking, "I have totally messed this up!" Or you're carrying the weight of the times where you haven't treated a boyfriend or girlfriend like they are worth dying for as well as the baggage from the times you've been treated likewise. God's Word for you today is that you don't need to carry that sin, that baggage, that brokenness with you anymore.

1 John 1:9

Psalms 103:12

With each of these verses, have the group read it out loud and then have them talk about what those verses say about their sin and baggage. Always have them hear the truth straight from God's Word itself, have them apply it to their situation, and then speak that truth back to them from the Word. Remember, as God's people, members of the priesthood of all believers, we are called to speak God's truth to one another in our individual relationships as members of the body of Christ.

Hear these truths from Christ: You are forgiven. Your sins have been paid for at the cross. Leave your burdens there. But also know that there is a better way to do relationships than the broken mess you've been living in. Reset your definition of relationships, focus on following Christ, root your value in Him alone, and ask for forgiveness from those you have sinned against in your relationships. Remember, Jesus is your One—He is enough. Don't settle for a relationship that does not reflect that of Christ and His bride, the Church.

For this section, consider inviting your pastor to come to this part of the study (if he's not already there) where he can play an active role in leading corporate confession and absolution with your group or even being available for individual confession and absolution. There is such healing that is found through the powerful words of absolution spoken in individual confession and absolution, so introducing young people to the great blessing of that opportunity is always a good idea.

Conclusion

The Ephesians 5 passage talks about husbands/wives, but it is important for any relationship stage. Why?

The foundation for a healthy relationship doesn't magically happen at the next stage (ie. engagement or marriage). It is built and cultivated along the way. What you are looking for

Key Point:
You are forgiven. Your sins have been paid for at the cross. Leave your burdens there.

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in someone to marry should be what you are looking for in someone to date. What exactly should you be looking for? That's what lesson four will dig into more specifically.

A lot of ground has been covered in this lesson, so take a few minutes with your group to have them summarize what you talked about. Then give them the take home challenge below and encourage them to go home and physically write out their answer to those questions.

Taking it Home

-Based on this study and the Biblical model, write out your answer to these questions: What is the purpose of dating relationships/marriage? What is God's role in them?

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Session 4: The Two

Introduction

What stood out to you from the previous lesson about the Biblical model for relationships? What did you learn? What challenged you?

Depending on how much time you have with your group, if you want to do an introductory activity, give each person 2-3 minutes to write up a list of qualities that they look for in someone to date. Then have them evaluate that list. What are the non-negotiables? Are there more external or internal qualities? Will they change over time, like looks or interests? Why are these certain qualities important to you? The purpose of this list activity is to prep them to not only put down on paper some of what (hopefully) they've learned so far in this study, but to prep them for what they will learn in this final lesson, which narrows down that whole list to 3 main questions that you ask first. Once those questions have been asked, then factor in personality, looks, interests, and whatever else you have on the list. But most often, we put more weight to the external qualities, and while those are a factor for initial attraction, they are not the main factors for a long-term Christ honoring relationship.

VIDEO CLIP 4 (OPTIONAL)

Note: The study is designed that it can be used without the video clips at all, but this clip from the "Worth Dying For" talk goes into more detail on what to look for in the Two, so it may be helpful leading into the rest of the discussion. The link for clip 4 can be found here: <https://youtu.be/4O1jhf7kfwE>

Since this is the last lesson, if you have people that missed one of the previous weeks, you could play one of the video clips from a previous session to get everyone caught up before you start up into this video. Especially with this lesson, you will at least need to explain what the idea of the One and the Two is, because that will not be familiar to someone who missed lesson 2.

What Am I Looking For in "the Two"?

1. IS JESUS THEIR "ONE"?

Why is this first? What makes this the most important characteristic?

This isn't first because I just randomly decided it should be. Having Jesus as their One is the most important because if it's not there, none of the rest of this will line up either. The Biblical model works when two individuals who have a foundation on God and His Word are brought together, and eventually in marriage those two separate foundations become one. That only works if they're working with the same material—the solid rock of Jesus Christ.

A lot of people think that who they date is different than who they'll marry. It's a very popular notion and depending on how prevalent it is in your group (learn by simply asking them the question "How many of you would date someone that you know you won't marry?"), you may

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need to take time to address it. Go back to “what is the purpose of dating?” and talk through with them the wisdom of dating someone you don’t think you’ll marry.

Many Christians also don’t have an issue with dating non-Christians. Bring it up and speak truth into it. Dating is not meant for evangelism—friendship is. The longer you date someone that is a non-Christian and the more serious your relationship gets, the more attached you get and the harder it is to break it off if that’s what’s needed. So what oftentimes happens is that the Christian in the relationship will, without even realizing it, start becoming more and more like the unbelieving partner. If you need to press even harder into this with your group, have a discussion with them about what this looks like if you never deal with it, get married, and now kids are in the picture. Parents are the biggest faith influencing relationship in a child’s life, and when the parents are split on that issue, it is very likely that the child will follow the less active or inactive parent. For the sake of the discipleship of the next generation, we need to take this very seriously.

If the two is meant to be running the race of faith with you, how important is it that you are heading in the same direction? What does this look like in a Christ-centered relationship?

If any of your group members are runners, ask them about running with a partner and what is important for that to work. There are a lot of good potential connections between those and the race of faith, but one of the main ones is that you can’t run a race with someone if they’re not going in the same direction as you.

In a Christ-centered relationship, this looks like praying together, being in youth group together (if applicable), worshipping together, and speaking God’s truth to one another (see lesson 2). But more than what you do together, it’s also what your walk with God is without the other person in the picture. Am I just involved in church because of this other person, or am I there because I know that I am God’s child, a part of His body, and that I need to live out my life as a disciple?

In the previous question, I referenced the wisdom of avoiding dating non-Christians and in this question a wise follow-up would be about even the differences in dating other believers. By running the race and going in the same direction, ultimately, this is a very specific calling: you believe the same things about God, the Bible, the Church, etc. You will worship together at the same congregation, have the same confession of faith, and are going to raise your children, if you are blessed to have them, in the same specific belief system. I am convinced this has to be decided at least before marriage, however, it then is wise that the journey towards marriage is a journey towards this spiritual unity as well. A few good follow-up questions to spark this discussion in your group are: What does spiritual unity look like in a relationship? Why is it important? What do church membership, denomination, common confession of faith, and church involvement level have to do with a dating relationship?

Hebrews 12:1-2

“Fix your eyes on Jesus”—that’s what the whole Christian walk is all about, whether you’re in a relationship or not. Christ still must be the One in your hearts and minds.

Here’s what dating from value looks like: I know I’m worth dying for, my value is in Christ and that a relationship is meant to remind me of that and help me live that value out as a witness of Christ to the world. So for anyone to be dating material, they need to have that same

Key Point:
I know I’m worth dying for, my value is in Christ and that a relationship is meant to remind me of that and help me live that value out as a witness of Christ to the world.

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foundation and that same mission. I'm not in a relationship to get value, but to be reminded of my value and to share that message of value in Christ to the world!

2. ARE THEY MATURE IN CHARACTER?

What does it mean to be a person of Christ-like character? Why is this more important than external qualities like appearance or interests?

Being mature in character means you're looking for someone who loves and serves others like Jesus does. The following verses will go into more detail about what maturity in Christ looks like, but keep the second question in the forefront as you look at those verses: why is Christ-like character more important than appearance, interests, emotions, or any of the other outward and temporary qualities?

The Bible is not primarily about our character or behavior—it is about the God who gives us His name in Baptism, calls us His own, and calls us out of death into life. But as His redeemed people, God also cares deeply about how we live as His children. For each of these verses talk about:

- What does this verse have to say about being mature in character?
- Why is this important in a relationship?

Since there are a number of verses, consider assigning individuals or groups a verse to look up and answer the questions about before summarizing their findings for the group. One possible downside with that is that oftentimes then the only verse people will have anything written down on their handout for is the one that they looked up rather than really engaging in what the other groups found in their verses.

Philippians 2:3-8

This verse talks about your attitude being of humility like Christ and looking to the interests of others more than yourself. This aspect of maturity is important for a relationship because if all you do is think about your own interests, you will ruin the relationship. Also, it emphasizes your attitude and not just your actions. Even if you are doing the right things, are you serving with the right attitude? This is really important for a relationship, to not serve begrudgingly, but out of love for the other person.

1 Timothy 4:12

"Set an example." Those are Paul's words to the young pastor Timothy. Don't make excuses because of your age. Instead, set the example for those around you. Even if you don't have good examples of relationships in your family or friends, set the example (and find some mentors- see number 3).

Matthew 20:26-28

Christ tells His disciples that they are not to love others for what they can get in return, but simply because serving is what they do. Relationships that go into a "you owe me" mentality quickly become very unhealthy. When both partners are loving and serving each other out of reverence to Christ and forgiving one another because of Jesus when they fall short, this model really works beautifully.

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Micah 6:8

While there's a lot going on in this short verse, emphasize the "walk humbly with your God" phrase. Again, the individual walk with God is essential. The verse doesn't say "walk with your girlfriend or boyfriend" because that's not the end goal of discipleship—fellowship with God is. Mature Christians fight to keep their relationships properly ordered- Christ is the One, then comes the Two.

1 Corinthians 13:11

"When I became a man," or to put it a different way, "when I grew up and became mature," I put childish ways behind me. Talk about the difference between children and mature adults, and what it would look like to actually put childish ways behind. In an age where "adulting" is a very scary concept for many, this is a verse to really chew on.

1 Peter 3:3-4

This verse talks about the importance of inward adornment versus external adornment. This is where you can pull in the discussion of how most of us look primarily on outward qualities that determine initial attraction, but fail to look deeper into inner qualities like their character, "gentle spirit" as this verse notes, and their faith life.

Psalms 1:1-2

Delighting in the Word of God and meditating on it "day and night" is one of the foremost signs of Christian maturity. Not only that, it is actually the fuel towards Christian maturity, because maturity and growth come through the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit comes to us through the Spirit-breathed Word of God. Regular wrestling with the Word of God keeps us grounded and focused on what matters and turns into a regular "reset" for any relationship that begins to stray off the path.

More than anything else, the greatest sign of maturity is that you listen to God's voice above all others. What are some competing messages about relationships, dating, sexuality, marriage, etc. that are contrary to God's voice? Why is it important to listen to God's voice above everything else?

These questions return to one of the main points of this whole study: we are called to listen God's voice above everything else. There are so many competing messages on these issues: relationships are all about having fun and nothing more, sex is merely physical and shouldn't be a big deal, marriage is temporary and not a big deal, etc. God's voice is where truth is found, so that's where we need to continually come back to.

As a brief side note on sexuality, pushing boundaries sexually is one of the biggest red flags in this area of maturity. Ask your group, why is this the case? How are maturity and obedience to God demonstrated in this area specifically? For further discussion on sexuality, see appendix 2 at the end of this leader's guide.

Consider taking this opportunity to broaden the scope past dating and relationships. When a professor teaches ideas contrary to Scripture, how can you respond? If you feel like you're worthless and no one wants you, how can listening to God's voice help you find the truth? When you're confused about what job to take, major to pick, or city to live in, why should you turn

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to God's Word and His Church for answers? Use whatever other examples best fit your context, but the point is that the more opportunities you as a leader can take to help the teachings in this study not become compartmentalized only to dating, but to become a part of their overall growth and maturity in Christ, the better. They're not worth dying for only in regards to dating, but in every area of life.

The call to Christ-like character and sacrificial love is a big responsibility that you're looking for in the Two and you want God to develop in your own life. But keep in mind, neither you nor your partner will be perfect at this. The Two will never be perfect, that's why they're the Two and not the One. So you're not looking for someone that's doing this perfectly, but are they growing in character? Are they heading in the right direction?

These questions are designed to help reassure the person that is despairing at this point that they will never find anyone because these standards are too high. Yes, the Biblical standards are high because marriage is meant to be a reflection of Christ and His Church, and because you are worth dying for and worth being treated with very high standards in such a crucial relationship. However, you also have to guard against fleeing at the first sign of sin—because you'll never find anyone that's perfect other than Christ. Instead, look at the direction they're heading. Are they following Christ? Do they repent when they fall short or are they okay continuing in sin? Help your group to see a more nuanced version of the standard "list"- not, "Do they have it all together already?", but, "Are they growing? Are they headed in the right direction overall in maturity, while still having the core foundational pieces too?"

How should we respond when we fall short in our character? How can even our failures be a witness to the Gospel of Christ?

Failure is never the goal, but it brings an opportunity for confession, forgiveness, and repentance and those all preach Christ. In a relationship that doesn't have Christ, I never want to admit sin or fault because that not only impacts my value, it will lose their trust, and I can't handle the burden or guilt of breaking this relationship. This begins the elaborate coverup of the forgiveness-absent life, never letting anyone see the "real you" because they won't like what they see and they'll leave.

Contrast this with a relationship under the cross of Christ, where we know going into it that we are going to fail, which is why we need Jesus. We acknowledge our brokenness but rather than hiding it, covering it, or celebrating it, we confess it openly with the other person. When I reveal my sinfulness to my wife and she doesn't leave, run away, or abandon ship, but rather shares that the cross of Christ is greater than my sin and I am forgiven because of Jesus, those are the moments that bring the most beauty in a relationship. Now there are still rebuilding, accountability, and consequences but bringing failure into the light in order to be dispelled by the Gospel is infinitely better than attempting (always unsuccessfully) to hide it which only makes things worse. Christian relationships are built on forgiveness.

3. WHAT DOES YOUR GODLY COUNSEL SAY ABOUT THEM?

Proverbs 12:15

"A wise man listens to advice." Don't go through this journey on your own. Ask others around you that you respect to give you thoughts on this other person, your relationships, and how you need to grow.

Key Point:
The call to Christ-like character and sacrificial love is a big responsibility that you're looking for in the Two and you want God to develop in your own life.

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2 Timothy 3:16

God's Word not only shows us who our Savior is, it also is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." We need people around us who are going to share the Word with us for this purpose as well—the Law and the Gospel. That is what godly counsel is there for.

Godly counsel are people who speak wisdom and God's truth into your life. Who could this be in your life?

Many people have not thought about mentors or godly counsel ever in their lives, so you may need to take some time on this question. Have the group take a few minutes and write down a list of who in their lives they respect in regard to their faith, their relationship or marriage, the way they live out their faith in the workplace, the way they raise their kids, etc. Have them write down those names, whether they know the person well at this point or not. Share some of the names with the whole group either of people who already are godly counsel in their lives or who could be.

One of the 7 Characteristics of Healthy Youth Ministry identified by the LCMS Youth Ministry Office is the presence of supportive adults in the lives of their young people: "Supportive congregations seek to connect every youth with at least 5 engaged adults." This section of the study is geared towards helping you take steps towards that goal. Some youth may have no adults outside of their parents that are engaged in their lives, others may not even have parents who are engaged in their lives.

Try to encourage each person to reach out to one adult (or a married couple) that they respect in this area, and get to know them. The challenge is this: move someone from the "could be" godly counsel list onto the "is godly counsel" list. How do you do that? Most likely, the first step isn't saying "will you be my godly counsel?" or "Will you mentor me?" That may work with some, but will scare off others who don't think they're good enough to be a mentor. A better model is just to take someone off of that "could be" list and tell them, "I really respect and admire you and the way you...(raise your family, treat your spouse, lead in the church, manage your finances, etc.) Would you mind going to get coffee/ice cream/donuts with me sometime so I could ask you a few questions about that?" Then actually follow through on that request, get to know their story, ask about their life, invite them into your own, and simply ask them for godly advice and counsel. Suddenly you'll find that you not only have godly counsel in your life, but you will be a blessing to each other in that friendship and mentorship.

Why do you need wise, Christ-centered mentors and counsel in your life, specifically when it comes to your relationships?

All of us have blind spots in our lives, where we are simply not aware or choose to ignore what's going on. This is especially true when it comes to relationships. Ask the group what some of those blind spots are. What unique perspective will godly counsel bring that will be helpful to you? Why don't we involve others in this way in our relationship more often?

We are in need of people who are wiser than us to look clearly into our lives and be honest with us. Here's an example of what this could look like: Talk to someone you respect about whoever it is that you want to date or are currently dating and ask, "What do you think about this person?"

Key Point:
You need mentors and godly counsel in life because you need good examples of what a Christ-centered relationship looks like.

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Assuming they've gotten to know him or her over time, they will bring a good perspective for you to listen to. However, be warned, they might come back and say, "They're great! You're great! No problems!" They may say, "She's great, but I'm noticing that she doesn't seem to really be involved in church and that's a red flag" or "He has potential, but seems like he really has a long ways to go" or "I'm not sure if you're ready for a relationship now." Instead of getting defensive or dismissing their comments right away, ask follow-up questions or ask for specific examples. See if there is Scripture that connects to the topic, and if you've gotten off track somewhere and need to repent and walk again on God's path. Good godly counsel will not only help you avoid bad relationship decisions, they can help you make even better choices if you're on the right path, and help you avoid some of the pitfalls that your mentors dealt with.

You need mentors and godly counsel in life because you need good examples of what a Christ-centered relationship looks like. If you're thinking, "I don't want to be a boy anymore, I want to step up and grow to be a man of God", that's awesome! But what does that look like? You need brothers in Christ around you to not only be examples, but to be walking alongside you on this journey. The same is true for young women. We all need to be in outside relationships with friends, mentors, and godly counsel in order to have a successful and healthy dating relationship. Beware any dating relationship that tries to pull you completely away from your support system, especially your church family.

The Need for Community

There are a few overarching themes resounding through this study. One is that your value in Christ lays a strong foundation for your life and your relationships. Another is that in Jesus you have everything you need—He is your One and He is enough. But one more theme is the need for community. All of these keys for what to look for in the Two are best cultivated within community, namely the community of faith. The community that you are created for primarily is not a dating relationship or marriage, but Christ's church. No matter what your relationship status is, you are not alone. You are made to be an active part of God's family, the Church.

Why is it important to still find your community in the Church, regardless of your relationship status?

Your group, especially those who are highly relationship people will probably have great answers to this question. Even those who may seem less relational at first, get their thoughts too because they also realize the great benefits of having a small, core support community.

Here are a few thoughts: You are created to live out your life as a disciple of Christ within an active community of believers. When we think that marriage is the pinnacle of human experience, we tend to look down on those who are single and think "something must be wrong with them" or "they are missing out on so much." Unfortunately, this happens especially in the church oftentimes. We are all designed for relationship, for community, and so regardless of relationship status, we as the church need to be that community. Single people should not be alone, because they should be surrounded by the community of the church. Dating or married couples should not be off on their own, totally isolated from everyone else, but rather immersed in the community of the church.

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In the Meantime

As I'm waiting for a relationship, what do I do? What we're all called to do as believers: Run the race of faith! As you're running the race of faith, in obedience to Christ, look around at who's going in the same direction as you...they might be the Two. As you're walking through life with your One, Jesus, know that you already have the greatest relationship. Because the ultimate gift, the great promise in Scripture is not a dating relationship or a spouse, it's Christ. He is your One. He is real, present, God, and He is enough.

How can I have contentment in life even if my relationship status is not where I want it to be? How does my value in Christ keep me anchored no matter what?

Impatience is the enemy of growth. When we get impatient with our relationship status is when we begin to ignore red flags or issues simply because we want to be in a relationship so badly. When we become impatient regarding God's gift of sex, we try to move the line outside of marriage and that sin leads to all kinds of brokenness (that thankfully in Christ can be healed, but that does not give us a license to sin). Contentment in Christ is found when I know that in Jesus, I have enough. He's not just a step along the journey of life, He is life itself. He isn't only the end goal of the race of faith, He's with us every step of the way. He's not a prize, He's the only prize. Since Christ has me, as He holds me fast in the waters of baptism, as He gives me Himself in the Lord's Supper, and as He ministers to me through His body, I am secure in Him. That's what keep me anchored. I have infinite value because of Christ, so I'm not less than anyone else if I'm not in a relationship. Jesus is the prize, He's the goal, He's the One, and He is enough. Ironically, in my experience it is this contentment of not needing to be in a relationship, of being content with Christ as your One, that is a sign that your foundation is on Christ and you may be ready for a healthy Christ-centered relationship.

Key Point;
The ultimate gift, the great promise in Scripture is not a dating relationship or a spouse, it's Christ.

Final Words

Your value does not come from your body or your mind. It does not come from how many people notice you or how many don't notice you. It does not come from how many dates you've been on or how many you haven't been on. It doesn't come from the choices you've made or the mistakes you've made. Your value comes from Christ. You are worth dying for! You are forgiven! You are chosen! You are loved!

SUMMARY STATEMENTS FOR REFLECTION:

- God cares more about you walking with Him as a disciple than with you walking down the aisle.
- He cares more about you becoming someone than you finding somebody.
- "I am a child of God" is your identity, not "I am single" or "I am in a relationship."
- The purpose of a relationship is to remind you of your value rather for you to find your value.

Depending on time, you may not have the opportunity to really dive into these statements more in detail. This is fine, because they are truly meant to summarize the study and are bite-sized

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pieces for reflection throughout the week. Just make sure each person in the group has a copy of these statements or has written them down, and then periodically bring one or two of these statements back up in the upcoming weeks to continue the discussion. See appendix 1 for more ways to continue the discussion past lesson 4.

CLOSING QUESTION

How does my value in Christ lay a foundation for not only my relationships, but my whole life?

This is the question that, if I was teaching this as a class, I would have as the take-home essay question, because their answer to this question goes a long way in showing how much they've really internalized of this study. Even just with a youth group, you could throw out the offer that if anyone actually writes out a substantive answer to this question and talks with you about it, you'll give them a gift card or something like that. Or split them up in groups and have each group work out an answer to this question (maybe by creating a poster, social media upload, or blog post) to share with the whole group.

It's my prayer that this study has been a blessing not just to your group, but to you as a leader. Don't forget, these truths are not just for them but for you. You are worth dying for too! I pray this study has been a tool to get you into God's life-giving Word and that through that Word, your heart has been changed, encouraged, and strengthened. Blessings to you as you continue walking together as the body of Christ!

Appendix 1: Continuing the Conversation After the Study's Done

One of the struggles of any Bible study series is that over time, the truths learned in that discussion tend to get forgotten. Here are a few ideas on how you can continue the "worth dying for" conversation after the study is done, so that you are regularly reminding your group of these important truths:

-Question and answer panel: Host a Relationships Q&A night as a youth event, with adults from your congregation of varying ages and relationship statuses serving as the panel. If the panel members went through this study or watched the video at some point, even better, because they will be able to use some common terms that your youth will know (the Two, dating from value, godly counsel, etc.).

-Mentor couples: Rather than doing a full-blown panel event, just pick out a few godly couples in your congregation and invite them to a youth group gathering for 20 minutes to share their story, talk about their relationship, and answer a couple questions.

-Rewatch a video clip or revisit a session: Periodically, watch one of the session video clips again or revisit one of the lessons and have a discussion on what stands out to the group this time. Are there points that they had forgotten about? Is something really resonating with you the second (or third) time around?

-Use this series when talking to youth: This is especially an opportunity when they come to you about a breakup or relationship question. The more you reference the truths from this series in these moments, the more they will become a part of your culture. In your counseling and walking through life with these young people, talk about their value in Christ, how they're worth dying for, and whose voice they're listening to. These are the moments where what was talked about in a Bible study suddenly becomes real to them, because the promises of God are meeting them in a spot where they really need to hear them. Take them to some of the key verses from the study and have them read one and reflect on what is being said there. It won't become a part of their vocabulary and witness if it's not a part of yours.

-Summary statements: Put the 4 summary statements from the end of lesson 4 somewhere in your youth room or gathering space. Reference them in your time together. Pull one of the statements out every so often and toss it out as a topic for discussion and reactions.

-Annual study: When I served as a youth leader, we always did a series on dating and relationship each year. While there were different ways that I approached it each year with a different image or thread running through the study (Amazing Race, Under Construction, and DTR were a few of the themes I used), the core content was consistent, because the truths from Scripture are consistent. It was amazing to see each year that I shared these truths again and again how a youth that had been heard something (in theory) at least twice before would suddenly grab a hold of one of the key points in a new way. I had youth that enjoyed the study when they were in 8th grade, but repeating those same truths to them their junior year of high school made an even bigger difference. Don't assume that since you talked about it once, you don't need to repeat it.

-College study: Going along with the previous idea, the conversation doesn't have to stop after they graduate high school. In fact, college and young adult life may give your youth the right perspective and maturity level to really be able to dig into this study even more. Host a College Night where you watch the "Worth Dying For" videos or do an abbreviated version of the study. Have a young adult Bible class or small group that goes through the study together.

Appendix 2- Worth Dying For and Sexuality

Whenever people hear that I'm speaking or writing about dating and relationships, one of the most frequent comments I get is, "Oh, so you get to give the sex talk. Lucky you!" There's normally a hint of sarcasm in their voices too. I respond by explaining that I don't really get into the topic of sexuality much, unless I have a lot of time to work with, simply because I need to use the limited time I'm given to deal with the heart issues that cause the physical boundary problems. I'm convinced that most issues with premarital sex are issues of value and listening to voices other than God's. This study is designed to really hit those issues, which will hopefully then have impact on the way they treat God's gift of sex. What follows is a list of some of the main truths from this study, a few quotes demonstrating the impact of someone applying these truths in his or her life, and how those truths can be used as a foundation for conversations about sexuality.

TRUTH: I AM CALLED TO LISTEN TO GOD'S VOICE ABOUT ALL OTHERS, BECAUSE HIS WORD IS TRUE AND IS FOR MY GOOD.

Impact- "Everything I see on TV, social media, and even at school is telling me that sex outside of marriage is no big deal. But God's Word says that marriage is the context where this gift is a blessing with none of the other baggage attached. Even though it seems like the world's view is more appealing, I'm going to trust that God knows that He's talking about and that living His way is what's best for me."

"All the other guys are always sharing stories of their latest sexual exploits as if it was a competition for who was the manliest. But that doesn't match up with what God says, so I'm going to follow His path with my girlfriend. She is worth dying for, and she is worth waiting for."

"I haven't followed God's plan for sexuality so far and it feels like I'm damaged good now. My ex even told me that. But even though it's difficult to believe, I'm going to trust God's voice which proclaims that I'm forgiven because of Jesus. I'm not damaged or broken beyond repair. I am loved by God and that is enough for me."

Questions- Who created sex? What is His design for it? Why does He get to set the boundaries? Why are boundaries good for us? How does this compare to culture's view of sex? Why should you listen to God's voice instead on this topic specifically?

TRUTH: I HAVE INFINITE VALUE IN CHRIST. I AM WORTH DYING FOR!

Impact- "I keep getting these requests to send pics to this guy, and he keeps saying nice things about me and it doesn't seem like it's a big deal. But I know where my value is from and that makes all the difference. I don't need to give up anything in order to feel valued by this guy or anyone else, because I already have my value in Christ. Instead of sending an inappropriate picture, I'm going to send back this: "I'm worth dying for. Grow up." And then I'll block him because I'm worth being treated with respect."

"I'm going through a break-up and it's really difficult. I miss her and it's been hard for me to imagine a future without her. I just don't know why I'm not good enough for her- what's wrong with me? What keep me sane is knowing that I belong to God. I have to keep reminding myself that my value is not diminished because of this rejection. Jesus is my One, not her, and He is enough. It doesn't feel that way right now, but I'm going to trust God at His Word anyways."

"I love him and we both want to follow God's plan and keep sex in the context of marriage, but it's difficult. The temptation is tremendous, especially the more serious our relationship gets. But thankfully I have friends and mentors that check in on me and remind me that he is worth waiting for. I'm not going to diminish my boyfriend's value or dishonor him by rushing past God's plan. Even our marriage will not be built on sex, but on Christ."

Questions- How does your value in Christ impact the way you interact on social media? How does it help you reset after a break-up? What difference does being worth dying for make as you navigate sexual boundaries in a relationship? Why do I need to keep my partner's value in mind? Why do I need to remember my own value in Christ?

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TRUTH: RELATIONSHIPS ARE ABOUT SACRIFICE, NOT SELFISHNESS.

Impact: "My boyfriend keeps telling me that if I really love him, then I'll do what he wants sexually. But now I know that he is just being a selfish boy, not a man. A real man isn't going to push me to abandon God's plan in this area. I'm worth dying for and I'm not going to settle for some boy. I'm going to keep looking for a man of God who has Jesus as His One and leads like Christ."

"It'd be so easy for us to give in. We're planning on getting married someday anyways. But I want to honor her and not be selfish. Relationships are about sacrificial love and dying to myself every day so I can better serve her. At least that's what I'm trying to do, by God's grace."

"I can't believe what just happened. I told her all about my past relationships and my issues with pornography, and somehow she said, "I forgive you because of Jesus." Wow! That's what grace and unconditional love feel like. I can't believe that she saw me at my worst and didn't run away. I need to put my selfishness to death and flee the sexual sins I've been trapped under. She's worth more than any fake reality that's out there on the Internet. I'm not defined by these choices; I am forgiven by God and am worth dying for. But this also means that I'm worth more and made for more than the choices I've been making. Help me, Lord, to be faithful in this journey!"

"We just got married and I'm so thankful that God redeemed our sexual pasts so we can be fully committed to one another in this marriage. I seem to be wanting sex more than my spouse does, but one of my mentors warned me not to try to manipulate my spouse in order to get more of what I want or to constantly bother them. This is one area where we can both sacrifice on our own needs or wants in order to better serve each other. Marriage is more work than I expected, but the sacrifices are worth it."

Questions: What does sacrificial love look like in a relationship? How does it not turn into manipulation? Why is it important to die daily to ourselves in a relationship? How can keeping Christ at the center of our relationship help us maintain boundaries? What does sacrificial love look like in the area of sexuality in a dating relationship? In a marriage? Why is this view of sacrifice not selfishness not only important in dating but also in marriage? What is the role of forgiveness in a Christian relationship?

Appendix 3- Issues of Gender Generalities

This study talks a lot about men and women. We are created by God equal in value, but different in roles. There is a ton of beauty that is found in our differences, yet we have to agree that it's tough to make generalities about our genders such as, "all men do this, need that, or struggle in this way." While generalities may not be 100% accurate in their application to every person, they still are beneficial. Let me explain the gender generalities that we are using in this study and why we're doing so.

My foundation for what issues to target with each gender in this study comes from reading Genesis 3, focusing on the first sins of Adam and Eve. If we look at the temptations that they fell into, we can see if we're perhaps still the same as the first humans. Eve was tempted verbally by the serpent, and the statement that got her to eat the fruit was this: 4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:4-5). "You will be like God" is the great temptation for Eve. The underlying lie is, "You're not good enough the way you are." Eve bought into it, and women have been struggling with issues of identity, image, and value ever since. Think of issues with body image, comparison, parent-shaming, anxiety, eating disorders, and depression. All of these exist for both male and females, but all of these are more prevalent in women than men. There seems to be a weakness in the area of identity and value that Satan wants to exploit. This is why when it comes to the message to women in this study, the focus is on centering identity and value in Christ. You are worth dying for! You have infinite value, so stop comparing yourself to others to find value, thinking you're lacking, or that you're not good enough the way you are. There's a lot else that can and needs to be spoken to women on this topic, but in a limited study, we want to really hit the areas of vulnerability first. The fact that this message really seems to resonate with women every time I have taught it seems to prove that there really is something here.

For the guys, their vulnerabilities seems to follow Adam's first sins rather than Eve's: "She took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate" (Genesis 3:6). While his wife was being tempted by the enemy, what was Adam doing? Standing there, doing nothing. He didn't protect his wife, get in the way, reminder of God's truth, or do anything helpful. He was passive. Then God shows up and confronts Adam about what happened. Adam's response is stunning: "12 The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate" (Genesis 3:12, emphasis added). Adam blames literally the only two other people in creation! It's everyone else's fault but mine! Adam was passive, selfish, and refused to take responsibility- he was acting like a boy, not a man. Men have been struggling with the same issues ever since. Think of the issues of dead-beat dads, households that lack a spiritual head, men that only provide and hardly do anything to raise the kids, the increasing number of fatherless households, and the staggering statistics on sexual addiction among men. Clearly we are still struggling with passivity, selfishness, and a refusal to take responsibility. That is why in this study, the men are hit more with the Law to grow up! Passivity has to be killed with a call to repentance and action. We have to teach sacrificial love more to men than to women. As was the case with the women, the fact that this targeted message for the guys seems to hit home every time I have taught it seems to prove that we're onto something here.

Not all men struggle with passivity and not all women struggle with identity and value. There are women who struggle with passivity and men who struggle with identity. Either way, the Scriptural truths remain for all, even if they may be directed in the study towards one group or another. This is important to keep in mind when leading this study, that everyone doesn't struggle in the same way or fit the same mold, so the more you allow God's truth to speak instead of just your thoughts, the more the Holy Spirit will bridge the divide between generalities and each individual present.