

Pathway

PERSONAL CHRISTIAN GROWTH SERIES

Set aside a special time each day to go through a *Pathway* study. Even if you miss a day or two, don't skip those studies. Begin again where you left off! Each daily study is designed to take only 10-12 minutes, or longer ... it's up to you! Be honest with yourself. This is a private time just between you and God.

Introduction — *Dating*

What does dating mean to you? Are you going with someone special right now, or just wish you were? Or maybe you don't even know anyone worth your interest! Are you curious what the Bible says about boyfriends and girlfriends? How should you choose a date? What can you do when you're out together? When should you consider breaking up? And, what about physical involvement? As you work through this *Pathway* study, you'll find biblical answers to these important questions, and more!

DAY ONE — Dating

TALK TO GOD: Tell Him about your feelings concerning dating. Tell Him your good thoughts and perhaps your frustrations. He's ready and waiting to hear from you.

VERSE TO THINK ABOUT: Delight thyself also in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass (Psalm 37:4-5).

Why Date?

Mike and Tricia sat in a booth near the back of the restaurant. They held hands across the table. Neither said much, but their minds were full of warm thoughts.

Tricia, a 5' 5"brunette, was thinking, *It's so wonderful having such a cute guy to go out with. I'm so lucky. He makes me feel great when he takes me out and says I look beautiful. I wonder if this will last forever. I think I love him ...*

Across the table, Mike finished his cheeseburger. His thoughts were similar. *She's gorgeous! All the guys say I'm really lucky to have her. I wish I knew what she was thinking.*

Mike and Tricia are typical dating teenagers who think they're in love. Their story could come from anywhere — Florida, Tennessee, Iowa, or Texas. To them, dating is a warm, comfortable feeling. Yet many teens don't feel that way.

What does dating mean to you? Are you going with someone special right now, or just wish you were? Or maybe you don't even know anyone worth your interest. Take a minute to write what's going on (or not going on) with you concerning a boyfriend or girlfriend.

Why date? What's the purpose and reason behind this ever-popular, yet ever-frustrating, teen pastime?

1. First, you spend time with guys and girls in dating situations for companionship. Every teen knows what loneliness is. A boyfriend or girlfriend gives you someone with whom to share experiences and feelings. As Christian teens, you can share your relationship with Jesus and help strengthen one another's faith.

2. You also grow and mature personally from your time spent with those of the opposite sex. As you have fun, you become better at communicating with others and gain self-confidence. You recognize who you are and how you relate to other people.
3. As you date, it's also exciting to begin to determine how God is leading in your life. Eventually you may marry someone, and dating begins the process of selecting that person.
4. But most important, dating, a normal part of teen life, allows you to honor and trust God. You honor God by pleasing Him with your every action. You trust Him by believing He loves you and knows what is best — dates or no dates.

A Look in the Book: Take a look at Psalm 139:1-5. *O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, Thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me.*

These few verses tell how perfectly God knows you.

If God knows your every thought and feeling, what does this mean about trusting Him in a dating relationship?

God loves you so very much! But will you trust His wisdom in knowing what's best for your life? This week you'll study several different aspects of dating and developing guy/girl relationships. If you have a boyfriend or girlfriend, you can apply these studies immediately. If you aren't dating anyone, you can still think through the issue now, before you confront them someday. But most of all, you'll have an opportunity to think about how you, a Christian teen, can honor God in all aspects of your life. It's exciting, just as every part of following Jesus Christ is!

DAY TWO — Dating

TALK TO GOD: Ask for His guidance in whom you date. Share with the Lord your feelings about what kind of person you want in your life.

VERSE TO THINK ABOUT: *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? (2 Cor. 6:14)*

Eenie, Meenie, Minie, Moe

Tom Atkins leaned against his locker and took a deep breath. He wanted to take a girl to the game Friday night. But to him, the question wasn't if he'd get a girl to say yes. The question was which one?

First, there was Sandy. She seemed to like him. (But she seemed to like a lot of guys, too.) She always flirted with Tom in Business Ed Class, and was pretty, popular, and sorta wild.

Christine wasn't quite as pretty, but she wasn't bad. She didn't flirt, but sometimes they talked on the bus ride to school. Tom's friend said that he'd seen Christine doodling "Tom" on her notebook. Tom also knew Christine was a Christian.

Well, what about you? What's important to you in a person? On the lines below, write what you look for in a boyfriend or girlfriend.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

A Look in the Book: Are you interested in what the Bible says on how to pick a date? The same biblical principles can also apply to those people you just spend time with in casual fun.

- **Look for a friend, not a lover:** Look for someone with whom you can share a part of your life. If a person is mostly interested in physical involvement, that person isn't really a friend. In contrast, Proverbs 18:24b tells what a friend will do. Read this verse, relating it to a dating situation. . . . *there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.*
- **Look for personality,** someone who shares your interests and can help you grow spiritually. There's nothing wrong with being attracted to a great looking guy or girl. But a "beauty with no brain" or a "hunk with no heart" isn't really much fun. You may date many people before you marry, and each date can have an influence on making you what you are or will become. Take advantage of these experiences and

spend time with people who might contribute to your life. Read Proverbs 13:20: *He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.*

- **Look for common interests,** especially in your Christian goals. Read Amos 3:3: *Can two walk together, except they be agreed?*

Christians dating Christians is a biblical principle. If you involve yourself with a nonbeliever, there's a part of yourself you can never really share. You will struggle with different value systems. One of you will have to change or compromise. But when you date other Christians, you can make God a real part of this important area of your life!

Now think back to Tom, who's a Christian. He plans to ask either Sandy or Christine to a basketball game and out to eat afterwards. This one decision may not seem very important. Yet, on the other hand, it could affect Tom's entire life! Do you think one evening with an unsaved person (or someone not quite right for you) matters?

- No, not at all, if it's just for fun.
- Not if he or she won't lower my standards.
- Yes, because I might end up liking that person and want to get serious together.

Often, we look at high-school dating as superficial entertainment. But the decision of whom to spend time with is important. God's Word gives clear instructions on what to look for in a person with whom we could develop a lasting, permanent relationship. Since dating can lead to marriage, it's important to consider the values and priorities of those we date.

What characteristics do you want in the person you date? Check what defines "right" to you.

- Seeks after God's ways.
- Stands up for what he/she believes; doesn't just follow the crowd.
- He is thoughtful, considerate, kind; she is gentle, caring in spirit.
- My parents like him/her.

DAY THREE — Dating

TALK TO GOD: Discuss with God what you learned today. If you're involved in a bad dating situation, ask for His special help to do what would honor Him.

VERSE TO THINK ABOUT: *Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify [uplift] another (Rom. 14:19).*

Making Up or Breaking Up?

Lisa knows what it's like to have it going good. In January, Al gave her his class ring to wear. Later that month, she was wearing his school jacket, too. She often thought about how boring life would be without Al. Every so often, he'd surprise her with a rose in her locker. On Valentine's Day, he gave her a two-pound heart-shaped box of chocolates and a necklace. On Saint Patrick's Day at lunch, he delighted her with a teddy bear wearing a big green bow.

But Lisa knows what it's like to have things turn sour. By April, Al seemed to grow tired of spending money on her. He stopped sending notes. Instead, he started making subtle demands. At school, Al seemed to drag her everywhere he went. After school each day, he never asked where she wanted to go. He just automatically drove to his house, where they did a little homework and watched TV.

Although the relationship didn't seem special or fun anymore, both felt security in it. Neither suggested breaking up until one afternoon when an argument exploded in Al's car. Then Lisa yelled, "THIS IS IT! IT'S OVER! Let me out of this car!"

Spending time with that someone special is great! You develop a closeness and learn what each other likes. But if tensions and problems begin to surface, it's time to take a good, hard look at the relationship. You need to decide if this is really what you want and what pleases God.

A Look in the Book: The Bible offers help for everyday living and in your dating relationships. We can apply scriptural truths to know when it's time to either make up or break up.

1. When it isn't fun anymore. The Bible teaches that marriage is forever, but this doesn't apply to dating. If you've grown tired of a dating relationship, and it's not fun anymore, why not get out? Take a look at Psalm 133:1. Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!
2. When the situation includes irreconcilable differences. If you can't talk through a problem and reach an understanding, you should reevaluate the relationship. On the other hand, if you can talk through and solve difficulties, you really have something special. Read Matthew 18:15. *Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.*

3. When your boyfriend or girlfriend brings you down emotionally, spiritually, or lowers your Christian standards. When this happens, you need to end the relationship. When a guy or girl you date brings you down, GET OUT! In contrast, if he or she is a spiritual encouragement to you, thank God for this friend. Psalm 1:1-2 talks about the company we keep. *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in His law doth he meditate day and night.*

IT MAY BE TIME TO BREAK UP IF:

- Your boyfriend or girlfriend unloads problems on you that you can't handle. Being around him or her isn't uplifting. It's more like depressing.
- Your boyfriend or girlfriend doesn't encourage you spiritually. God and His ways aren't a part of your relationship.
- Your boyfriend or girlfriend lowers your beliefs and standards of Christian conduct. He or she tries to influence you to do things that you know displease God.

From your personal observation, what are three specific situations in which teenagers should break up?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Being in a relationship that dishonors God is sin. If this is your situation, you need to get out. But breaking up is really hard to do. From what you've studied today, do you need to get out of a bad dating situation? If so, are you going to do it?

DAY FOUR — Dating

Hiding It in My Heart: Sensitivity in a dating relationship is the key to having something really special. It's important to treat the other person with respect. Memorize this Bible verse today. *Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them ... (Matt. 7:12a).*

TALK TO GOD: Ask Him to help you treat your friends kindly, and with respect. Ask God to help you demonstrate His unselfish love towards those you date.

VERSE TO THINK ABOUT: *And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you (Eph. 4:32).*

When the Going's Good

Someone special — is that something for which you're looking? Doesn't everyone want someone special in his or her life? Someday maybe you'll find someone who is really worth loving. Someone worth keeping. But how do you keep that relationship surviving and growing?

A Look in the Book: Today, let's look at one of the great love stories of the Bible. Grab your Bible and read Ruth 2:2-23 and 4:1-11 to get a picture of what was happening.

Ruth's husband had died, but she was still young and attractive. She was now interested in another man, and he was interested in her. From your reading, what do you think Boaz saw in Ruth that made him want to marry her?

If you have a good relationship with someone, it will probably be a result of who you both are. The story in Ruth tells us that Boaz cared about God's ways. He was also generous, kind, and loving. We see that Ruth, besides being beautiful, demonstrated courage, unselfishness, and strength.

List some good traits about yourself that would make you an attractive person to date.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Now, list four favorable traits of the guy or girl in whom you're interested. If you don't have a boyfriend or girlfriend, list four traits you especially want in a date.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Now, look back over both lists, Circle the traits God would consider priority. Then take a close, hard look at those items not circled. Do you need to reevaluate the importance they have in your thinking?

Boaz and Ruth ended up getting married. And the Bible seems to indicate they had a great marriage! Here are some tips on helping a relationship grow into something wonderful. After each suggestion, list one or two ways you could practically demonstrate it to a boyfriend or girlfriend.

- Show sensitivity. _____

- Don't put your date in a situation where he or she has to say no. _____

- When you disagree, find a way to resolve the problem. _____

- Don't use your boyfriend or girlfriend to make yourself look better. _____

DAY FIVE — Dating

TALK TO GOD: Before every date, ask God for wisdom. Dedicate yourself to walking with Him. Prepare in advance to do His will and ask for His guidance.

VERSE TO THINK ABOUT: Be not deceived: evil communications [companionship] corrupt good manners (1 Cor 15:33).

Scarring Your Temple

Sandra and Kenny never thought they could feel so ashamed. They sat on the front steps of her house. Neither spoke. Kenny leaned against the railing on one side of the steps, Sandra on the other. Unusual. Most evenings they snuggled close. Kenny's face was solemn. Sandra's eyes glimmered with tears. Finally, aloud, she began to blame him. Then he blamed her. Yet deep inside, Sandra and Kenny knew they were both at fault.

These two 17-year-olds thought they'd rather die than let the truth be known. But it was there — soon for the world to see. Sandra's not the first Christian girl to find herself pregnant, and Kenny's not the first Christian guy to have to face up to his responsibility.

"Not me," you say. But that's what Sandra said, too. In the months before her son was born, she had countless days to think. One day she told her mom, "I just can't believe it's me. I never imagined this would ever happen." Guys and girls do have great natural desires for each other. And God designed it that way. But He also wants His children to act responsibly and leave sex alone till marriage.

A Look in the Book: If you've been a Christian very long, you probably already know that your body is the *temple of the Holy Ghost*. That's the teaching of 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. *What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*

Think about this idea of a temple for awhile and how it affects your actions with a boyfriend or girlfriend. Listed below are several facts about a temple. After each statement, write how it relates to the temple of the Holy Spirit — your body.

1. In a temple you worship God. _____

2. A temple should be clean and in good repair. _____

3. Sacrifices were offered in a temple. _____

4. When Jesus drove money changers out of the temple, He demonstrated that corrupt people sometimes get into temples. _____

Your body, as a Christian teen, is God's temple. So treat it with respect! Honor God's dwelling place! Paul discusses sexual relations and the Christian in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8. Read these verses.

As you date and develop relationships with boyfriends and girlfriends, what does 1 Thessalonians 4:3 say God's will is for you? (Note that fornication means premarital sex.)

Fooling around with sex before marriage leaves many scars. This is especially true for you as a Christian because you know you're disobeying God. Many teens, like Sandra and Kenny, say it didn't seem so wrong at the time. How does 1 Thessalonians 4:7 answer such reasoning?

SEXUAL INTIMACY is the culmination of many smaller steps: a little kiss, longer kisses, touching, and so on. Where you say "this is it" makes a big difference in how you feel about yourself. Here are some ideas to help keep your dates honoring to God. (Don't take these proven tips lightly. They can save you many problems and heartaches now and in the future.)

- Avoid secluded and dark spots. (Girls, if that's where your boyfriend wants to go, question his motives!) Also, stay away from sexually explicit movies and music videos.
- Enjoy going out in groups, spending time with your families, and doing fun things. Plan your time together. Don't just let things "happen."
- If you find yourself tempted, get away immediately. Then in the future, stay far away from situations which arouse those same emotions and feelings.

DAY SIX — Dating

TALK TO GOD: Tell Him how you feel about your parents. Ask God to help you always honor them, and Him, in your dating life.

VERSE TO THINK ABOUT: *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you (Matt. 6:33).*

Who Knows Best?

Sometimes you may feel like you'll never get a boyfriend or girlfriend. "I'm too ugly," you say, "or too fat, or skinny, or clumsy, or don't live in the right neighborhood." Well, join the crowd! Everyone experiences times of questioning and insecurity.

How's your dating life? Do you have it all together, or does it just look that way? Perhaps you've been able to fool your friends, but inside you're scared. You feel scared to be rejected, and yet scared to be alone.

What about your parents? Do they hassle you about dating? Maybe they don't like your friends. Maybe they think you're too young. Maybe they're afraid you'll do something you'll regret later.

Do you think your mom and dad understand, or are they out of it? Do you feel they expect too much, or cramp your style in dating? Think about these questions and then write your feelings below.

A Look in the Book: You may not want to admit it, but nearly every mom and dad want what's best for their kids. Today, let's focus on a father who wanted the best for his son. King Solomon in the Bible had many children. In the verses you'll read today, however, he seems to be writing to just one, probably Rehoboam.

Turn in your Bible to Ecclesiastes 12:1-4. Read how Solomon describes what it's like to grow old and look back on an unfulfilled life.

When you're the age of your parents and look back on your teen years, what two things do you think you'll remember most?

1. _____

2. _____

Although parents want the best for their children, they don't always express themselves with the sensitivity and understanding you crave. If you were a parent (such as Solomon) talking to a teen, what would you say about dating?

Solomon concluded his advice to his son by saying, "*Fear God, and keep His commandments . . .*" (Eccl. 12:13). When thinking specifically about dating, what can the following verses tell you? Look them up, then write the part which applies to dating.

2 Corinthians 6:14: *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?*

Proverbs 4:14-15: *Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.*

1 Timothy 5:1-2: *Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; the elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity.*

Hiding It in My Heart: Memorize these Bible verses which tell you to always listen to and obey what your parents say. *Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother ...* (Eph. 6:1-2).

On My Own: When you face dating problems, your parents may be the best friends you have. Ask what they feel is the most important advice they can give you about dating. Write your findings below.
