

PURESEX

30-day sex challenge

GUIDE FOR SINGLES IN A
RELATIONSHIP

DR. DOUGLAS PEAKE

FH

WWW.FOOTHILLS.ORG

You live in a world where any person can form any type of relationship they want to form. You can be married or not, be dating or not, be in a relationship or not, have friends with benefits or not. There is no longer a cultural “norm” for the structure of a relationship.

So, are we better off today? Do you have a better chance of finding and building the relationship you desire, or is it tougher? Good news is that research shows the desire for intimate relationships has increased dramatically. Today, more people are searching for good, healthy, intimate relationships. Bad news is: fewer people are finding them, and even fewer people have the ability to keep them healthy and strong.

This guide is designed for people who are in a relationship but not yet married. The goal of this challenge is to ask and answer the following questions:

- Do I know what a healthy, intimate relationship looks like and feels like?
- Do I personally need to grow in order to build a strong, healthy, intimate relationship with someone? (I call this finding the love of your life and keeping it.)
- How do I know if the person I am dating is the one?
- Where does our relationship need to go?

The 30 day challenge begins with a covenant between you and your boyfriend/girlfriend. The purpose of the covenant is to create a context where you can discover the answers to the questions above.

Here is how it works:

- Each of you must get a work book. You will go through the workbook in your own (unless you are engaged to be married and have a ring and a date for the wedding)
- On your dates, talk about what you are discovering or learning. Share only what is appropriate for the stage of your relationship.

Covenant:

- I covenant together to make time each day (15 minutes) to go through the guide.
- I covenant to not be sexually involved during the entire 30 day challenge.

What do you mean- no sex!

Read: Genesis 2:24-25

God teaches in the Bible that we are created for an intimate relationship. The “one flesh” relationship is melding together of two minds, two hearts, two souls into one. It even molds two physical bodies into one culminating in the birth of new life.

Often, people use the term “soulmate” in describing this Biblical phenomenon. People say, “I am searching for my soulmate.” However, soulmates are not found, they are discovered and developed.

The Bible has much to say and teach about how two people become soul mates. So you have a choice. I can try and find a soul mate the easy way by following the way of the world, or I can choose another path. A path few people choose but will bring me what I deeply desire the most. This is a tougher choice than you think. Why? The Bible says in Proverbs 14:12, “There is a way that seems right to man, but in the end leads to death.” There is so much that seems right about the world’s approach to finding your soul mate and becoming one flesh. It takes a tough minded, clear thinking person to look at the evidence before them and see if the world’s way is delivering or simply leading more relationships to death.

Here is why you should not have a sexual relationship with the person you are dating:

- There are three aspects, or ingredients, to every relationship where the 2 people have become “one flesh” or soul mates:
 - Physical passion.
 - Emotionally bonded.
 - Spiritually connected.
- Physical passion is the easiest to pursue and initially the most intense. Research shows that when two people first start having sex, it is an hormonal volcano- there are all sorts of hormones being released into the blood stream.
- Emotional bonding takes time and experience together. Talking, shared experiences, begin the process. There is more and that will be discussed later. It just takes time and energy to feel close to someone.
- Spiritual connectedness is the most critical aspect of finding your soul mate and also the most difficult to develop. This process takes a realignment of core values, facing your inner fears and the wounds that caused the fear, faith, commitment and perseverance. This is tough to reach, but many do it and experience what God has designed.

It takes time, effort and even some self evaluation to discover your soul mate. So in our fast-food culture, why not just do the second best thing? Have sex. It initially makes you think you have emotional bonding and spiritual connectedness; but, in reality you don't.

As a matter of fact, with all those hormones telling you there is something happening that is not, how will you know if it is really happening? This is why God says, "I created sex, I created sexual intimacy. It was my idea. So, believe Me when I say I know that it is important to keep it in the right order. If you don't, what I was hoping for you to experience - pure joy in being "one flesh"- just won't happen."

Again, by making a commitment to keep sexual intimacy in the proper order, you will be able to discover who is meant to be your soulmate and how to develop that relationship.

Challenge:

After you have read the above section, think about having this discussion with the person you are dating:

- How hard will it be for the two of you to not be sexually active?

- Why do you think it will be that way? What does it say about you if you think it is impossible? Does this say something about your relationship? Are you afraid of what it might say about your relationship?

- Why do you think it is so hard to believe that God knows what He is doing in helping you find and develop a relationship with your soul mate?

- Do you think the two of you can make the choice to follow God's approach? On your next date together, (a time when you can complete a conversation) discuss how you both feel about the last question.

Sex and Dating

Now it is time to discuss sex and dating. Let's begin by brainstorming and writing out why you think casual sex and recreational sex is so popular right now:

Do you think it is possible to build a healthy relationship that begins with sex? Why or why not?

Research has shown that when two people have sex, they go through stages of hormones being released into their blood stream which affects mood, outlook, energy, etc. It begins with an adrenaline rush with a release of dopamine. Second, norepinephrine which makes your heart pound and your palms sweat. Finally, comes phenylethylamine which causes a state of peace, ecstasy, calmness and trust. Wow! Isn't love great?

But then comes tachyphylaxis. What is that? A desensitization to a toxic substance produced by inoculation from small doses. In other words, over a period of time, this excitement from sex wears off and it becomes normal. How long does this process of normalization take? About 36 months.

If you build a relationship on hormones, the longest it can last is 36 months.

Challenge:

- On your next date, discuss your perceptions about why people use sex to develop intimacy and whether or not you think it is effective.
- Remember to only discuss at a level appropriate to the stage of your relationship.

Sex and Dating

This may sound strange to you but God created you to have sex. It was His idea in the first place and He is the one who created your body to experience all those sensations, emotions, feelings and intimacy when it happens. From God's perspective, it is a beautiful thing. He wants you to be sexually fulfilled.

God also says it is a powerful thing. When something is powerful, it is wise to handle with care. Electricity is a wonderful thing. It impacts every area of your life. Yet it is a powerful thing and if handled improperly, you get fried.

This is why God gives us the proper order in which to enjoy sexual fulfillment. If we follow our instincts, we end up getting burned. If we follow God's principles, we end up lighting up our entire life!

We are created to desire intimacy and sex. These drives can be overwhelmingly strong. In order to follow God's approach, you can't just deny the drive He put inside you. You have to create a positive context in order to handle with care.

Now honestly, there are people who see this Biblical position and say, "You're such a prude, I should be able to have sex with anyone I want whenever I want." So I say to them, "You're such a denigrator! You take this awesomely spiritual thing and just denigrate it. You reduce it to a silly, biological act like rabbits do. You steal its beauty, you denigrate its importance and use it for your own selfish drives."

Challenge:

- List out the circumstances in which you made really poor sexual choices. (example: after a night of tequila shots)

- Now make a list of situations to avoid, including situations where you would be with someone you deeply love but are not married to.

- On your next date, discuss the guidelines you came up with.

Sex and Dating

Have you ever tried to “put the brakes on” a sexual relationship? It is really tough. Therefore, when you start to date it is important to put together a program to follow in order to keep the sexual component in the proper order.

A good plan will focus on positive dating experiences that give you an opportunity to discover as much about the person’s nature as possible. Often, people have no plan at all in their dating life. They simply hope someone is interested, and when someone shows interest they start “hanging out.” Before long, they just hang out at home with no plan. This approach leads right to sex, if for no other reason than it is a boring approach. The point of dating is not to try and delay sex as long as possible so it “feels” more right. The point of dating is to see if the other person is as mature as you are and is going in the same direction as you are going. Always think through a dating plan.

Challenge:

- Write out a dating strategy. Begin by listing the top core values you want in a mate:

- Now brainstorm events, activities, interactions, and experiences where you can discover these core values:

- On your next date, share your list of events and experiences you think would healthy and allow you to discover one another’s core values.

Digging for the Truth about Yourself.

Read Colossians 3:1-14

We are created by God to be connected intimately to other people. This is why loneliness is such a devastating experience. Jesus said that most of us are drawn to be married, and only some are gifted with the ability to be at peace with being single. This means that your desire to be in a relationship is normal, it is an expression of your soul. Therefore, the first step in discovering and building an intimate relationship with another person is to follow God's plan.

Challenge: answer the questions honestly.

- In all your past relationships, how often did you ask God to guide you through the steps of building them?

- In your past relationships, did you spend any time trying to discover God's plan for dating and marriage? If so, what did you learn?

- Do you believe those relationships began healthy and strong by following God's plan, or did they start off on an unstable foundation?

- What are you trying to do differently in building this new relationship?

- During your next date, share what you are wanting to do differently in order to build a healthy relationship.

.

Discovering Yourself

Read: Proverbs 3:5-6

When you put sexual intimacy in the proper order, you discover that both emotional bonding and spiritual connectedness take more effort. One reason for this is that many people have neglected their spiritual and emotional health, and the result is they are unable to build these bonds effectively.

The first step in developing emotional bonding and emotional connectedness is to build yourself.

If you have dated or built a relationship with someone, you know how important trust is to a healthy relationship. Once it is broken, it's really hard to rebuild. Wouldn't it be great if you knew how to date only trustworthy people? Wouldn't it be great if you were only attracted to people you knew to be trustworthy? Well, you can. The stronger your trust in God grows, the more you know what trust is. You will know what it looks like, what it feels like, smells like, tastes like. Only then will you know how trustworthy the people are who you are dating.

Here's how:

Challenge:

1. Are you trusting God and following Him in your journey of faith?

2. Are you trusting God and following His plan in your financial world?

3. Are you trusting God in your personal world by practicing forgiveness, kindness, honor and respect?

It is important to build trust of God in every area of your life. People who learned how to trust God, know trust. Therefore, they know when they are building a relationship with a trustworthy person. The more you grow in your trust of God, the more attracted to trustworthy people you become.

- On your next date, discuss the areas of your life where you are growing in trust.

What Is Your Concept of Marriage?

Most people enter into marriage dreaming of everything they are going to get out of it. They are “in love”! They dream about living together with someone, never being lonely, tons of sex and romance, great weekend getaways, someone there to take care of you. The truth is that if you approach marriage from this frame of reference, then you are not ready to be married.

The Bible says in Philippians 2:3-4,

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

If you are not ready to go into a marriage with this commitment, then you aren’t ready to be married. Most people fear going into marriage with this mindset because they are afraid the other person will take advantage of their commitment. But this is exactly the point of this whole 30 day experience: learning how to build a relationship with another healthy person so you can walk into marriage with this commitment in mind.

These principles are true. They transcend you. Self centered people personalize the principles in order to conclude they don’t apply to them. Somehow they are different, smarter, better, wiser, etc. The bottom line is they do apply to you. Maybe the reason you have a series of failed or bad relationships is because you never follow God’s plan, you always follow your own. Remember, people always follow their instincts, but if your instincts are wrong, then you aren’t building a strong, healthy, intimate relationship.

Challenge:

- What concept of marriage do you have? Why?

- Does the person you are dating right now reflect the Biblical concept of marriage or the self concept of marriage?

- On your next date, you don’t need to ask each other if you planning on getting married. But you can discuss what concept each of you have of marriage. So have that conversation.

The Purpose of Dating 1

In our culture today, relationships are about hookin' up, bailin' out, gettin' some, playing the field, friends with benefits, and just "seein' where it goes." I call this "Jello" dating. It's kind of like someone spending each day throwing jello up against a wall. One day in the fall, the temperature drops to the point where the jello actually sticks. So the person thinks to them-self, "Hey, there's my soul mate!" Unfortunately, the weather always changes. "Jello" dating simply does not work. There are all kinds of studies, research, Biblical teaching, and philosophy that show why. You don't need to hear that right now, so how about common sense. When you picked out your first car did you just guess randomly? Guys: When you choose your baseball glove, snow skis, mountain bike, career or apartment, did you just randomly guess? Gals: did you pick out your clothes, cell phone, fashion style, or friends, just randomly? Then why would either of you approach the most important decision in your life, other than knowing God, with such randomness?

Dating should have a purpose. When you date someone, whether or not you are conscious about it, you have a goal in mind. People who take a moment to become self aware about this goal will be likely to date and build relationships with purpose instead of "jello" dating. Consequently, they will have success in discovering and developing a soul mate.

Here is the truth: God has a purpose for your life, and therefore, He has a purpose for your relationship. If God has a purpose for your life, and that purpose includes discovering and developing a soul mate, then doesn't it just make sense to follow His plan on how to do that? Doesn't it just make sense to seek out His wisdom and ask: What should I be looking for in a person in order for us to become soul mates? What are the most important qualities? Why shouldn't I trust my instincts? God has answers to all these questions and more.

Dating is all about Discovery and Development. Discovery is the process of uncovering the qualities that make building a healthy, intimate relationship possible. Developing is about actually building the relationship. Over the next few days, the focus will be on what you should focus on discovering.

Challenge:

- What do you think are the most important qualities you should be looking for in the person you are dating?

The Purpose of Dating 2

Men, let's begin with you (ladies, listen in). Your goal in dating a woman is to discover if she would be a good partner. If you answer this question first, you can be guaranteed you will find sexual fulfillment later on. If you try to see if you are sexually compatible first, you won't find either. Why? Because the best sex ever created is sex in the context of a spiritual connection. The spiritual connection has to be developed first. So what should you focus on discovering in this relationship?

Guys:

1. Does she have the capacity to give respect over a long period of time?
Guys, I want you to understand the importance of a woman who respects you. Your capacity to go far and live out your dreams is heavily influenced by the wife you will have as a partner. If she honors and respects you, you find the passion and energy to accomplish almost anything. Now, you need to be able to give something to respect, and you need to look and see if she gives respect where respect is due and in all things does she honor people.
2. Does she enjoy recreation with me or is she doing it to be with me?
Guys do things all the time. Is she doing things only to be with you, or does she authentically enjoy doing things as much as you. Focus on discovering your compatibility in this area.
3. Does she practice good money management? There is nothing that can stress out a marriage and give grief your entire life if either one of you manage money poorly. You need to make sure you both see eye to eye on how to manage it.
4. Does she have a certain amount of self confidence and take care of herself? Her image of her body determines her confidence. If she is confident, she will be more open to you. You want a woman who is open with you over the course of your marriage.
5. Does she want to have a family and is there any evidence she knows how to manage children and a home? If you ever get married, the chances of having children are high. When you have children in the home (a 20-25 year proposition) you spend a majority of your time as a couple parenting. Do you want a good experience or a bad one?
6. Does she have realistic sexual expectations? This is not about seeing if you are sexually compatible. The notion you need to have sex early on to know this is a lie that cheats you more than her. You need to see what her expectations are about it. Is it something she cherishes and looks forward to or is it something she uses to develop relationships? If it is something she uses, then your sexual relationship as a married couple will be very frustrating.

The Purpose of Dating 2

Jesus says in Matthew 19:11-12 that only some people have the gift of being single. Therefore, if you have not received the gift, then you are drawn to discover and develop a soul mate. This may be why you are in a relationship right now. Yesterday the challenge was for the guys concerning what they should be looking for in their discovery process. Hopefully, as a gal, you looked over the challenge questions with great interest. Today, I hope to challenge you in what to look for in your discovery process as a woman. God's design for you is different than a man. You bring different things to the relationship and need different things from the relationship in order for him to become the intimate soul mate you desire.

Gals

1. How does he show/communicate affection? Gals, ongoing expressions of affection will be the glue that keeps you bonded to your soul mate. Men tend to be good at expressions of affection during courtship, but after 3 years of marriage things can change. Discover now what that change will look like.
2. Is he a conversationalist? In marriage women need conversation like men need sex. You may be drawn to the strong silent type, but then you will be disappointed in 20 years of him never talking to you.
3. How open and honest is he with everyone, including you? Women cannot function long term in a relationship unless there is openness and honesty. Do you see this character trait in him?
4. Does he have any sense of responsibility and/or ambition? In order for you to become soul mates, you cannot be the driving force in providing. You can make sacrifices for a period of time, but pressure on you to provide undermines your sense of value and security.
5. How does he manage his emotional state? The quickest way to create distance in a relationship is ongoing bitterness, resentment and outbursts of anger. Watch this closely if you want to develop a soul mate.
6. Does he have a spiritual commitment and where is he developing it? You aren't looking for a guy who is interning with the pastor. You are looking for a guy who takes this commitment seriously and proves it by his actions.

If you focus on discovering the answers to these questions, you will know whether the possibility exists for you to develop a soul mate.

Develop Yourself By Service

Read Philemon 1:6

The author of this passage states that when you share your faith, you grow. The more you grow, the more your ability to build healthy, strong, intimate relationships grows. A research study of over 3,000 people who had just gotten married found that the number one thing that caused men to marry a woman was her character, including her outlook on life. For women, trustworthy ranked high on their list for reasons of saying yes to marriage. Character counts, and your character won't grow unless you find a place to serve. So sell your tv, stop watching movies all night long and go make a difference in this world- your future relationship depends on it.

Challenge:

- List the character traits you think you need to develop

- Based on your earlier relationship inventory, was there a common character trait all your past relationship partners had? What can you develop in order to avoid this future attraction?

- Make a list of all the activities where you volunteer or serve:

- Where could you volunteer in order to develop yourself and meet people with better character?

- On your next date make sure and discuss how the two of you could find a place to serve together. Serving together will not only grow you, but you will discover more about one another.

Pursue Core Values

By now I hope you have discovered that the path to great intimate relationships is by growing and developing yourself. Research proves that men and women tend to marry people with the same social, economic, and core value status. It is also proven that people with stronger core values, maturity, confidence and direction in life have better marriages, stronger relationships and more satisfying sexual intimacy.

Therefore, the most significant thing you can do is grow closer to God. The more you know about Him, the stronger your faith becomes, the more your core values reflect His core values, the more you will grow and mature.

Challenge:

- Make a list of all the things you have done to grow spiritually over the last year:

- Now list all of the spiritual activities you and your boyfriend/girlfriend are actively pursuing in order to grow spiritually:

- On your next date, discuss what things the two of you should focus on in order to grow spiritually separate and together.

Build Core Values

What core values will change you the most? What spiritual disciplines make the most difference in a person's life and grow them towards maturity? The Bible lists three basic core values that will grow you the fastest:

First is faith. This means throwing out your way of living life and following God's way. Practically speaking, this means asking God how you should approach life every single day.

Second is learning the Bible, particularly the New Testament. Most people don't learn the Bible because they think it doesn't make a difference in everyday life. This couldn't be farther from the truth. The Bible tells you how you should perceive life and how you should think about what is going on in the world. It shows you what really matters in life and what really doesn't make a difference when it is all said and done. These are core values. Soul mates share the same core values. It is not possible to discover the core values of another person if you have no idea what your core values are in life. The more you learn the scriptures, the clearer your core values will become.

Third, believe it or not, is tithing. Why? Because tithing produces responsibility, a mature sense of priorities, and trustworthiness. Most people never find or build intimate relationships because they are irresponsible. Remember the research that showed character as the main reason men married their wives? What is the biggest hindrance to good character? Irresponsibility. Where are people the most irresponsible? How they manage their money. When a person begins tithing to God, they grow in responsibility.

Tithing also produces the right priorities in life. When you are tithing to God, He becomes involved in your decision making process of what to spend money on. Could there be any other more effective way to set good priorities in life than having God do it with you? Tithing also builds trust- between you and God. As our trust in God grows then you know what it is to trust another person and whether or not that person is trustworthy.

Challenge:

- Write out 3 things you will change today in order to grow: (try and pick something that reflects each of the three listed above)

- On your next date, discuss the changes you want to make and why.

Build Yourself Through Prayer

Praying to God is the process of changing your mind so it aligns with the mind of God. Most people have tried praying and give up because they don't think it works. It seems as if God is simply not listening. If He is listening then He isn't saying anything back. This is primarily because most people pray in order to change God's mind about their own life. For instance, they often pray like this: "God, please change this for me, I can't handle it." or "God, make _____ happen." It is not wrong to pray this way but it misses the real target as to why we pray and how prayer impacts our daily life.

On the other hand, if the goal of prayer is to align your mind so it aligns with God's mind, what would that prayer be like? What would the answer be like? When you discover the answer to these questions, you begin to pray like never before. Your spiritual life begins to grow like never before and your relationships will be transformed like never before. Praying this way means you are beginning to take the most significant steps towards building an intimate relationship with someone else.

Challenge:

- Write out the way you have always prayed to God.

- Now write out a prayer that reflects the priority of changing your mind so it aligns with God's mind:

- On your next date, discuss how you pray to God and what you think you should do differently.

Accountability

Read: Mark 6:7

One final element every person needs to grow is accountability. What in the world does this mean? It means that if left to our own, we quickly fall right back on our instincts. So far, your instinct has not worked well for you.

Every person needs a small group of friends who are going in the same direction they are and encourages them along the path. Even Jesus sent His disciples out in two's. What you need is a small group, discipleship group, coffee group, etc. (all of the same gender as you) in order to keep growing spiritually. You don't need to find a "I want to get married" group or a "I need a date" group. You need a group that will help you grow spiritually. Remember, the goal here is to mature in every area of your life. Why? Because people seek out and develop relationships with people who are in the same point in their journey through life. If you aren't growing, then the chances of you meeting someone who wants to build an intimate relationship is small. If by chance you do meet someone, the chances of that relationship succeeding is small because the people building it are immature.

Challenge

- List below all of the relationships in your life- friends, relatives, etc- that you would allow to speak truth into your life. These are people you listen to when making decisions.

- You are in a relationship right now. Is there anyone in your life that you are submitting this relationship to for direction and advice? Why or why not?
- Call your church, or the pastor over the area you are in, and ask how to join a group. If there is not a group for you, then ask how you can start one. Get this ball rolling. It can change your life.

What Does God Want for You in a Spouse

As you grow spiritually, you become more wise in your relationship choices. First of all, you are more confident in building relationships. Instead of fearing you will lose the relationship, you are confident in what God wants to do in your relationship. Confidence comes from a knowledge of who you are and where you are going in life. You get comfortable in your own skin. Secondly, you are able to determine more clearly who would be a good fit for you. People who are growing spiritually know they want to build relationships with other people who are growing spiritually. Third, you know quickly whether or not this has Godly possibilities or should remain only a friendship. People who get married are people who date more often and have a clear understanding of what kinds of people they should be dating. Therefore, the more you grow as an individual, the higher quality relationships you will attract in your own life.

The key is to grow in the right direction. God wants a spouse for you that is committed to you and your spiritual growth. Someone who respects you, honors you, and understands you. Someone who is willing to sacrifice themselves in order for you to discover the ministry God has for you. He also wants someone who understands and seeks to meet your sexual and intimacy needs. A life partner and healthy family.

So how can you find this type of person? Be one yourself. All of the previous days have been designed to get you to take serious stock of who you are and where you are going in life. I believe that if you do not ask these important questions, and struggle to come up with honest answers, you are really just a player in the relationship world. You are only looking to fill your own need.

Challenge:

- Take some time today and talk to God about who you are becoming. Ask Him to reveal to you what areas you need to grow in. Write down what comes to mind as you are praying.

Growing Yourself Grows Your Relationship

The last week was designed to grow the relationship you are currently in by focusing on growing yourself. The more an individual grows, the more they can "bring to the relationship".

Research shows that people tend to be attracted to people, date people and marry people who are in the same stage they are in. If your financial world is a wreck, your emotional world a wreck and your spiritual world at the bottom, the likelihood of being with a person in the same stage as you is very high. On the other hand, if you are growing spiritually, and your financial world is in order and you are emotionally healthy, the possibility of discovering and developing a soul mate is very high.

Focus on your spiritual growth above all else. By developing your personal spiritual walk, God automatically transforms the other areas of your life as well. Spiritual growth is the fastest way to transform all the other areas of your life. A strong spiritual focus requires keeping the sexual aspect of your relationship in the right order. This is tough to do because as soon as a spiritual connection begins to develop, your drive to be with one another sexually increases. What you are experiencing is God's design for a man and woman to become "one flesh". God didn't throw in sexuality as an after thought, or give it as a concession. He designed it to be an incredible spiritual experience that is the apex of a relationship between soul mates. So the attraction becomes stronger, not lesser, and this is a good thing, as long as you keep on track with what you are trying to accomplish- build a real relationship.

One final note: some relationships are threatened when one of the people in the relationship grows. It is important to discover if your relationship is like this or not. If it is, then it is not a relationship that has the potential for long term intimacy.

Challenge:

- How much have you personally grown over the last year? How?

- Is your current relationship growing? How do you know?

- On your next dating time, talk about about what growing spiritually together would look like in your relationship.

Your Concept of Marriage Revisited

In Day 8, you were challenged to articulate your concept of marriage. This is an important step in order to know what type of relationship you are currently in and where it is going.

Getting married is the most important relationship you will ever have other than your relationship with God. It impacts your life at every level. Since it is so powerful in its capacity to make life great, it is also capable of destroying your life and making it absolutely miserable. This is why I don't understand the cavalier attitude people have toward marriage.

If you are dating, marriage must be a consideration. Even among those who swear on a stack of Bibles they will never get married again. Why? Never underestimate the way God created you. If you were created for close, intimate relationships, then you will be drawn to them whether you like it or not. Those who refuse to consider marriage are "backing into" their relationships, meaning they have no idea what they are doing. Those who keep this as a consideration are walking into relationships with their eyes wide open.

Here is the choice you have before you: you can approach love like gambling in Vegas, you might get lucky even though the odds favor the house or you can approach your relationship with purpose. If it is just roulette, then you must be satisfied with wherever the ball lands, and often, it lands in the wrong spot. If you approach this relationship with purpose, then you are saying that God has a plan for relationships that bring you an experience you never thought could exist between two people. If this is the case then your choices, your values, your actions, and your spiritual growth will impact the relationship.

Challenge:

- Where do you see this relationship going right now? Is it too early to tell?
-

- What else do you need to discover in order to know where it is going?
-

- If you have been dating for more than 3 months, you should be having a conversation about where the two of you see this going.
- If you have been dating less than 3 months, you should be thinking about the "where is this going" conversation and what answer you hope to get.

Developing Your Relationship God's Way

Over the last 16 days you have been focusing on developing yourself, discovering what you bring to the relationship and how improving yourself impacts the quality of the relationship you will have.

Research shows the single most important factor in determining whether or not a couple will stay together is "how they resolve conflict". Healthy, strong relationships do not have a different level of conflict than relationships that are unhealthy, they have just "learned" to resolve conflict quickly. Conflict resolution skills are best established early on in a relationship.

One of the covenants was to abstain from sexual contact during this 30 day challenge. Why? Because when a couple is sexually active, all of those hormonal things are going on. One specific hormone, phenylethylamine, causes a feeling of increased trust and connection. Therefore, if a couple is sexually active first, they believe they have developed conflict resolution skills when in reality they just have hormones. When this is the case, 36 months into the relationship they find they no longer have a "connection". Why? Because the skills that bring about an emotional and spiritual connectedness have not been developed.

Discovering whether or not you can develop these skills with your significant other is one of the primary points of dating before you make a life long commitment.

Challenge:

- When you have a conflict with either your mother or father, what do you do to try and resolve it? (example: talk it out, ignore them, etc.)

- When you have a conflict with your friends, how do you resolve it?

- What skills do you believe God is asking you to work on and develop so you can build the relationship you want?

What to Look For in Building a Strong Relationship

As you are building a relationship, you need to discover more than if they look good in a bathing suit. You need to know if the two of you have the potential to build a healthy relationship.

One of the most important places to learn what it would be like to be married to the person you are dating is to watch how their Family interacts. The family is where a person establishes many of their sub-conscious relational skills. Discovering the relational patterns of your boyfriend or girlfriend's family will be the best indicator of how they will relate to you after being married for three years.

Every healthy relationship has good communication skills. A person's family is the best place to see the manner in which they communicate with the people that are close to them. When you are dating someone, you tend to put your best foot forward. By watching how a person communicates in their family will reveal their authentic communication skills. How does the person communicate with their parents? How do the parents communicate with each other? If the parents are divorced, it is even more important to get a good feel for these dynamics.

Other patterns to look for is if there is a free flow of communication or is communication suppressed? How do people treat each other when things are going well. If you are willing to watch and take note of these patterns, you will be able to know more accurately if you can build a life long relationship.

Challenge:

- How often do you get to interact with your significant other's family?

- What patterns of communication have you noticed?

- How would you react if your significant other communicated to you in the way they communicate with their family? Be objective as possible. Remember, if you marry them, you become their family.

On your next date, discuss one another's families. What do you like about their communication? What do you dislike? Why?

Families - What To Look For

When interacting with your significant other's family, watch how they express affection. Affection is one of the most important relational needs for women. Ladies, if you want to know how your boyfriend will express affection to you after you are married, then watch how he expresses affection in his family. It is true that people grow and can change, but it is also true that patterns are established in families. When a person believes that their approach to affection is "normal" (meaning the pattern they grew up with) the process of changing is difficult. So take note of how his father expresses affection to his mother. See how he reacts when his father expresses affection to members of the family.

Men, it is important for you to notice how your girlfriend responds to her father. Does she have a good relationship with him? Is it strained? What is their communication style? What forms of affection do they use as they interact with one another?

It is not possible to discover everything about a person by watching their family. Stay away from trying to make specific conclusions or even what is motivating behaviors with their family. Don't try and be Dr. Phil. Your goal is simply to get a "feel" for what seems normal to them in family relationships.

One final thing to consider: our culture has raised an entire generation of adults in broken families. This makes the process of discovering family interactions more complicated, but still an important thing to do if you are going to give a life long commitment to this person.

Challenge:

- Write below what you enjoy most out of your relationship with your father:

- Write below what you enjoy most out of your relationship with your mother:

- During your next date, be sure and talk about your relationship with your parents. Be open and honest about it.

Families - What to Look For

The main thing to look for in their family of origin is “how do they resolve conflict”. As you discovered in Day 15, conflict resolution skills are critical to relationship success and are the number one predictor of intimacy in a marriage. This means if you want to discover and develop your soul mate in life, then work on developing these skills in your relationship.

People don't like conflict so they avoid it with people they are dating. They are afraid a conflict will chase the guy away, or cause her to withdraw . These are legitimate concerns, but they must be overcome. He may have six pack abs, but if he isn't able to work through a simple conflict with you, then you will never become soul mates. She may be the hottie of hotties, but if she withdraws every time there is a disagreement, then you won't have a strong and healthy relationship.

You do not grow closer by avoiding conflict, you only create emotional distance. So it is important to go against the instinct to avoid conflict with the person you are dating. Now don't go out and pick a fight with the person you're dating to see how it goes. Instead, watch how the person interacts with their family members. If they refuse to speak to them, this may be sign of poor conflict resolution skills.

Challenge: Focus on these questions

- How did you know your parents loved each other?

- What was it like when your parents argued? Who always won? Who thought they won, but didn't? How did they treat each other after a fight? Did you ever feel it was resolved?

- When you have a disagreement with your significant other, what do you try to do in order to resolve it?

- What are your top conflict resolution skills?

What to Look for in Dating

Look for **Actions** that reveal character. Character is one of the most important qualities in a person. It determines who they are when it counts. A person can have great relationship skills and charm your socks off, but if they have poor character, it won't matter. They will end up making decisions that are completely self-directed.

For instance, relationship skills without character is just charm: something people use to get what they want and once they have it, you are left holding the bag. They will make promises to you and not follow through, which is exceptionally disappointing because you know they can do what they promise and then they chose not to do it. It is very hard not to take this personally. You wonder what is wrong with you. Why are they so charming and nice with other people, but won't follow through with me? The truth is their character is underdeveloped, which is a nice way of saying they don't have any.

Please keep the goal in mind of what you are trying to accomplish. You are trying to discover and develop your soul mate. You have chosen to do it God's way. Be honest with yourself enough to realize that being close to a person with no character is an illusion of intimacy, it is not the real thing.

Challenge:

So how do you discover what a person's character truly is like?

- Evaluate how the person treats people they interact with outside of their circle of friends and co-workers? How does she treat the waitress, the mechanic, the lady who does her dry cleaning? How does he treat the waitress, or the car wash guy, or the people who work under him?
- Is the person involved in any activity that requires generosity? If you are dating someone, it is easy for that person to be generous towards you. If you want to know how they will treat you after you are married, watch how generous they are with others.
- How do they talk about their past close relationships?
- How do they talk about the other sex in general? Do they make statements that are disrespectful? Derogatory?
- Watch how they talk and how they act.

Discover a Person's Compatibility

Someone once said, "opposites attract, then they get married and attack." Compatibility is a key measure in finding and building a healthy relationship. Compatibility is more than just personality cohesiveness, the capacity to make each other laugh or enjoy one another's company. Compatibility is most critical in values, lifestyle choices and conflict resolution skills.

It takes approximately 90 days, or three months of good interaction to get a realistic feel for a person's compatibility. However, most often people get sexually involved very quickly and the result is they don't even think about whether or not they are compatible with the other person. All the hormones running through their bloodstream tell them "everything's great!". When red flags pop up, they minimize their importance and quote John Lennon, "All we need is love." This is true, but what you are experiencing is not love, it's sexual. Believe me, sexual acts does not conquer all.

Keep sexual contact in the right order, spend time investigating how compatible with the other person you are. This can be done in a three month period of regular interaction. Spend time talking, but also do as many things together as possible that require interacting with other people at the same time. Spend time being active in recreation, do things with family and friends, work on projects together, go volunteer together.

As you do things with the other person, ask yourself, "is this good?" "Am I enjoying what we are doing as much as I am enjoying them?" "What is happening here between us?"

Challenge: Determine your compatibility quotient

- What is the best way to discover a person's core values other than talking?
- How can you find out how a person responds to stressful situations?
- What are your top three core values in life?
- When you are stressed out, what do you do? (go to the gym, watch tv and eat dingdongs, listen to music, read, go outside, etc.)
- When you get mad do you withdraw? Blow up and it's over? Let it burn and simmer?
- On your next date, each of you should evaluate where your personalities mesh and where you think they don't.

Discover a Person's Experience in Relationships

No one wants to hear someone go on and on about their ex. This is a definite sign they need more time to get healthy. On the other hand, it is important to know a person's perspective on their past significant relationships.

Relational history will reveal the most important aspects of who a person is deep down. It can show a person's true core values, whether they are good at resolving conflict, how they approach problem solving and what they believe is intimacy.

Men, it is important to note that women constantly analyze their relationships so they are ready to share their insights at the drop of a hat. So you need to be sure and focus on the actions they took, not the feelings they had about what happened. Ask follow up statements to determine what words mean to them. For instance, if she says, "I tried to work it out but he wouldn't respond." ask, "What steps did you take to work it out?"

Women, men tend to conclude it didn't work out and move on. What you need to look for is any sense of self awareness about the relationship. Ask questions about what he thinks he could have done differently. If he says nothing, that is immaturity. He at least could have said, "Never asked her out in the first place."

Challenge:

- How aware are you of your past relationships and how they ended?

- In your current relationship, how much have you been willing to share? How open have you been?

- What fears do you have about sharing your past with your current boyfriend/girlfriend?

- On your next date, plan on discussing your relationship history.

Discover a Person's Sexual Expectations.

Read: Hebrews 13:4

A person's Sexual expectations reveal much about their maturity in building strong, healthy and intimate relationships. If a person wants to have sex immediately, they obvious use sexual contact in order to feel close to people (unless they are a player, which means they are just out for sex). They have never learned how to build a real relationship. Do you believe you can build a healthy relationship with someone who doesn't know what one is?

Men, this concept is especially important for you to comprehend. Your sexual expectations reveal your understanding of strong and healthy relationships. If you believe you can't "know" a person, or feel close to them, unless you are having sex, then you will only develop hormonally based relationships (which means they won't last more than 36 months). Therefore, make a commitment to yourself- keep sex in the proper order of relationship building.

Women, this concept is important for you as well. Once a woman has sexual contact with a man, she begins the process God describes in the Bible as "becoming one flesh". It won't be until the hormonal excitement wanes that you will be able to see clearly the nature of the relationship you are in. Therefore, keep sex in the proper order of healthy relationship building.

If sexual contact has been a major factor in your dating life or past relationships, it is difficult to chart a new healthier direction. Sexual expectations and drives are powerful and can be the primary driver of your instincts. Therefore, you need to set good boundaries that keep you focused on building healthy relationships.

Challenge:

- When dating, don't be afraid to ask about a person's sexual history. I don't mean regular blood tests, or the gory details. Questions like, "When you look back at your past relationships were the best ones sexual in nature, or was their something else?" "When you date someone, how long do you think it is important to wait before getting sexually involved?"

90-Day Evaluation

If you start dating someone and you go out at least twice a week over that period of time, you can have enough information and experience to make a decision about whether or not the relationship should move forward in a more serious manner.

The biggest mistake women make is to date men who string them on. They hope he will eventually get to the point where he would want to make a serious commitment. If he isn't ready to make a commitment after three months of dating, then move on.

Men make the mistake of dating beyond three months because they just haven't thought about it. The truth is that if you haven't been able to evaluate whether or not this relationship has potential to move forward and become what you really want in life in three months, then it isn't going to happen. This doesn't mean you need to propose marriage at the three month mark. It simply means that if you haven't got a sense of the relationship's importance in your own life, then you need to move on.

Challenge:

- Men, write out a conversation you can have with the woman you are dating. (List out where you see the relationship going, what you want the next stage to accomplish and how you would ask her if she is willing to go the next step.)

- Women, write out a conversation you can have with the man you are dating in order to let your intentions be made known at the three month mark.

Key point: if you are dating and can't see yourself saying this to the person you are dating, then move on. One more significant point: if you want to confuse the whole process and turn your brain upside down so you make poor decisions- just have sex.

Staying the Course

Read: Colossians 3:1-4, 10-14.

The most important decision to make is how to keep your principles and ensure that what you have learned and the experience you have had filters down into every part of your life. This is critical if you don't want those old instincts to rise up and take over.

The Bible calls this "staying the course" and uses the word perseverance many times. Perseverance is not a word most people really like to hear, but it is a virtue that gives God permission to change your life.

Perseverance will only occur if you build a context of perseverance in your life. Hebrews 10:24 says, "Let us not forsake the meeting together, as is the habit of some, but let us stimulate one another toward love and good deeds." Who are you hanging around with that stimulates you towards good things?

Steps that accomplish perseverance:

- Being connected to the right communities. Find a good church, one that is concerned about healthy relationship building and connect to it. How do you know they are committed to building healthy relationships? They submit to the authority of the Bible and focus on doing it God's way, not some self-help way.
- Keep your inner spiritual walk with God growing.
- Discover a ministry (place of service) and do it.
- Once every two years go on a short terms missions trip.

These are not difficult things to do. They are simple adjustments in your daily life that accomplish dramatic spiritual growth. The end result will be you becoming a more quality person, and quality people attract quality relationships.

- When you do date, use the **FACES** acronym:
 - Family interaction
 - Actions that reveal character
 - Compatibility
 - Experience in relationships
 - Sexual Expectations.

The Final Day:

Read: Philippians 3:12-14

You have completed the 30-day challenge! My prayer for you is that you were able to discover things about yourself and your girlfriend/boyfriend you never knew before. I pray you found an answer to those questions from Day 1. Finally, I pray that you are both making a Godly decision about the future of your relationship. Remember, Jeremiah 29:11, "I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, but to give you a hope and a future."

God's plan is for you to discover and develop a "one flesh" relationship.

Challenge:

In the space below, write out the most significant thing God has done in your life over the last 30 days.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

As the passage states above, don't consider yourself having obtained it yet. See these past 30 days as a beginning, not an end, and let God use them to continue to draw you closer to Him in order for you to experience the desires of your heart.