

Week 8

## ***First Things First: Relationships in The Right Order*** (Various Passages)

Over the past seven weeks we've answered a lot of questions about singleness, love, dating, and purity. For example, we at least *began* to answer questions like...

**Am I willing to admit that I'm not wise enough to navigate a love relationship without God's help?** At the beginning of the series, I told a story about wise captains who knew there were dangerous rocks beneath the surface that he couldn't see. So that captain would raise a certain flag that signaled, "I need a pilot." Then a pilot who was familiar with the area would jump in his little boat, row out to the ship and come aboard. The captain would turn over control of the ship to this "pilot" who knew those waters well, and the pilot would guide the ship safely into port. But these experienced captains had to have enough humility to admit they needed help!

According to several combined studies by relationship experts:

- More than 85% of dating relationships end in breakups.
- Around 50% of marriages end in divorce.
- The failure rate of second marriages is around 60-67%.
- The failure rate of third marriages is around 73-74%.

But only 7.6% of people are willing to accept responsibility for a failed relationship.<sup>1</sup> In other words, of all the failed dating relationships, most people will say it was the other person's fault! They refuse to humble themselves and say, "God I can't see all the hidden dangers under the surface as I navigate singleness, dating, love, and sex in this confused culture." They won't humble themselves and say...

- I surrender the search and trust You to lead me to the right person at the right time.
- I will focus on running my race rather than finding a relationship.
- I will focus on *being* the right person rather than *finding* the right person.

<sup>1</sup> Stats from "30 Relationship Failure Statistics 2023 (Too Tough To Accept)" on Social.com

- I will look for certain character traits – someone who values purity, causes me to worship God, and is approved by several godly adults in my life (not *just* my friends).
- I will evaluate the person from a distance and over an extended period of time. I won't rush things!

But we *have* seen this kind of humility in the relationship between Isaac and Rebekah – a young couple in the Old Testament. And tonight, we'll see that their relationship even shows us the God-ordained order that should happen in a relationship.

You see, we often get the order completely *backwards*. For example, the order that typically happens in a Middle School/High School relationship is...

- 1) **Physical Connection:** Our attraction to someone is mainly based on their looks. And we try to get their attention by using our own looks – dressing, talking, acting, flirting in a way that will get their attention. Then, in an attempt to *keep* their attention (and to fit in with everyone else), we give in to sexual temptation rather than saving ourselves for our future spouse.

Obviously, we all want to be physically attracted to the person we date/marry, but we often make that the first and most important connection point.

- 2) **Emotional Connection:** We get emotionally attached to this person – thinking about them all the time – fascinated by every picture and word they post on social media. We become infatuated with each other.
- 3) **Mental Connection:** After we're already emotionally attached (and maybe even sexually active), THEN we start to learn things about each other that we didn't know – some good and some not so good.
- 4) **Spiritual Connection:** Somewhere down the road, we often start to realize that we don't agree on what we believe about God and the big questions of life. But by that point, we're already physically and emotionally attached.

So now, we begin to realize that we've built our whole relationship mainly on looks, emotions, and sex. But once we realize that we're not lining up *mentally* (in what we believe) and

*spiritually* (one wants to pursue God and one doesn't); now the emotional high starts to fade and all you have left is the physical attraction. And even the physical attraction starts to fade because you've already gone down that road sexually, so the mystery is gone. And now you find yourself noticing someone new because you've grown bored with the physical attraction, and the whole process starts over again with someone new.

So, the typical order of our relationships is physical, emotional, mental, spiritual. But the Bible shows us that God built and designed us for just the opposite order. God designed us to connect...

- 1) **Spiritually**
- 2) **Mentally**
- 3) **Emotionally**
- 4) **Physically**

In fact, I'm not sure if you caught it or not, but we've seen this order play out in Isaac and Rebekah's relationship...

## **1. Spiritual Connection**

Remember, Isaac refused to pursue any woman who wasn't a genuine follower of God. And Rebekah had the same standard. It was their first and most important rule – they would not pursue an “unequally yoked” relationship...

***2 Corinthians 6:14 “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?”***

In that passage, we learned that a Christian and a non-Christian are *spiritual* opposites – they live in two entirely different kingdoms, headed for two different eternities.

Paul teaches us that a believer and an unbeliever have no “**accord**” with one another (vs.15). I told you that we get our English word “symphony” from this word (*symphonesis*) and it describes beautiful music that comes together when all the players are reading the same sheet music, following the same conductor as he controls the direction and tempo of the music. But a believer and an unbeliever are NOT reading from the same sheet (Bible) and they're not following the same conductor (Jesus)!

Typically, the spiritual aspect of a relationship is the *last* thing to be considered but if you want to do relationships the way God designed, you have to *begin* with the spiritual connection!

## **2. Mental Connection**

If you start with the spiritual connection (both of you pursuing Christ), then you're set up to connect mentally. For example, if you're both following the same "sheet music" (Bible), you'll agree on the answer to life's greatest questions...

- Where did we come from?
- Why is the world so broken? What went wrong?
- What is the cure for everything that is wrong?
- What is our purpose in this life?
- What happens when we die?

If you start with the spiritual connection, and both of you are studying and submitting to God's Word; now you can have a solid mental connection...

***Philippians 2:5 "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus."***

***Romans 12:2 "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."***

But, notice what happens if one of you is not a true follower of Christ...

***1 Corinthians 2:14 "The natural [unsaved] person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly [foolishness] to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned [understood]."***

If you don't start with the spiritual connection, you can't share the "mind of Christ" within your relationship, which means you're living in two different kingdoms, following two different masters, and headed for two vastly different eternities!

For example, what do both of you believe about...

- **Salvation?** Are you saved by faith alone in Christ alone? Or by some form of good works?
- **Heaven & Hell?** Are they real places or just metaphors?
- **Who is God?** Is He just some distant, cold deity that created the world and walked away leaving us to figure it out on our own, or is He intimately involved in human history – offering us the opportunity to have a personal, intimate relationship with Him?



**Do you even know what you believe about these things, much less what the person you're interested in believes? And what are you basing those beliefs on? The Bible? Your own opinion? The stuff you read and hear in your social media feed?**

Isaac and Rebekah agreed on the answers to life's big questions because they were getting their answers from the same source – God's Word!

This is why you need to take relationships extremely slow so you can get to know the person and what they believe. And I would encourage you to spend time with them mainly in a group setting (not just the two of you) because when you're alone, it's too easy to jump ahead to the physical!

### **3. Emotional Connection**

If you're both Christians, and you're both on the same page mentally, THEN there can be a deep emotional connection.

And, ideally, you're looking for someone who not only stirs your emotions *for them*, but they also stir your emotions *toward God*. Remember, Rebekah's love for God was so evident; it moved Abraham's servant to fall on his knees and worship God! And if you read their entire story, you'll see that she had the same effect on Isaac.

This is why Isaac and Rebekah allowed their parents and other trusted people to have such a huge influence on their relationship. They knew that their own emotional attachments could blind them to potential red flags in their relationship. So, they relied heavily on the unbiased advice from other godly people in their lives.

### **4. Physical Connection**

Once you give yourself to another person spiritually, mentally, and emotionally; the only remaining way to give yourself to them is physically

– which begins on your wedding night and continues throughout the rest of your life together. This is what makes your wedding night so special – it’s the culmination of all these deep and meaningful connections!

Isaac and Rebekah followed this God-given design/order. They weren’t about to approach a sexual relationship with each other until they had gotten married. In fact, Rebekah “covered herself” when she was about to meet Isaac for the first time.

She was making it clear that their relationship would not be built on the wrong design/order. And, because Isaac had the same type of relationship with God, Rebekah’s modesty only made him even more attracted to her. He knew his job was to honor her and protect her, even from their own sexual desires!

This *is* the biblical order of relationships, but our culture flips this order on its head. The devil has subtly deceived us into doing relationships backwards. Why? Because “He comes only to steal, kill, and destroy.” And this is why so many dating relationships/marriages fail.

But most people refuse to surrender to God’s design/order for relationships. But Isaac and Rebekah navigated their relationship the right way, in the right order!

Will you?

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### **Small Groups**