



COMMUNICATOR GUIDE

Awkward / Week 4

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SERIES SUMMARY

A 4-week series about sex and relationships.

WEEK 1: What we do with our desires matters.

WEEK 2: Just because you *can* do something doesn't mean you *should*.

WEEK 3: How you treat others and yourself matters to God.

WEEK 4: Focus on becoming love before looking for love.

SCRIPTURE

"Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NLT).

TEACHING OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

- Regardless of whether we're interested in dating, are allowed to date, or are actually dating, here at church, we think talking about sex and sexual desires is important.
- Despite what we may see in shows, movies, and social media, dating and relationships aren't always perfect and they don't always turn out the way we expect them to.

TENSION

- Maybe right now, we feel like we're ready to date, but we aren't allowed to yet. Or maybe, dating is all our friends seem to be talking about, but we just don't really care all that much. Maybe we want to date someone, but no one has seemed to notice us yet. Or maybe we've just started dating for the first time.
- When we think about dating, we focus a lot on what we want the relationship to look like.

- Even if you're not dating or not interested in dating right now, understanding what we should be thinking about when it comes to dating and relationships is important.
- How can we make sure we're focusing on the right things when it comes to dating both now and in our future?

TRUTH

- Paul wrote a message to the people of Corinth to remind them of what God says is best for them. Paul listed what God says love looks like: patient, kind, faithful, hopeful, and lasting. (*1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NLT*)
- Don't we usually think about the type of love Paul mentioned as being about the *other* person in our relationships?
- Instead of focusing on finding all this great stuff in other people, we need to stop and look at ourselves.
- No matter if you choose to date or choose not to date, one step you can take toward becoming the person God created you to be is to practice sexual integrity.
- We need to put these characteristics into practice before we even think about dating someone.
- Focus on becoming love before looking for love.

APPLICATION

- Instead of using dating as a way to look for the "right" person, let's focus on developing the characteristics of love that Paul listed for us.
- First, pick one of the characteristics on Paul's list that you want to develop in yourself.
- Then, practice what you pick.
- If we're going to become love before looking for love, we're going to need to focus on growing the characteristics necessary to be the type of person we would want to date.

LANDING

- When you develop the characteristics God wants you to have and treat the other person the way He created you to, it can help you practice sexual integrity, both now and in future relationships.
- Just imagine if dating could be a really positive experience for both you and the person you're dating.
- Even if you're not dating yet, what if focusing on becoming the loving person who God created you to be could set you up for a better dating life if and when that day comes?
- That's why we've spent the last four weeks talking about sex and sexual desires here at church.
- We don't want the conversation to stop here. That's why you have your Small Group!
- What's one characteristic you want to develop in yourself?

THINK ABOUT THIS

It's a lot easier for middle schoolers to talk about others than it is for them to talk about themselves. That's why talking about the qualities they want to find in someone else first is important. They'll be able to identify those things in others and doing so will help them shift their thinking back to themselves. Do your best to help your middle schoolers understand *why* it's important to focus on themselves. We don't want to give them a false hope that simply becoming the kind of person they want to be will magically equate to a happy dating life. Rather, we want them to understand the value and peace that comes with becoming the kind of person God wants them to be. Finally, remember that you may have students who have experienced sexual abuse on some level. This conversation could lead them to eventually open up to you about that, so be prepared to follow up, support, and point them toward help if and when they do.

INTERACTIVE 1: LESS THAN PERFECT

OVERVIEW

For this Interactive, you'll show a clip from a movie or TV show that depicts an awkward (but appropriate!) dating moment.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- A clip from a movie or TV show that shows a cringe-worthy dating moment. Keep it short and make sure it's appropriate for your students.
- A computer and screen large enough for everyone to view the clip.

INTERACTIVE 2: THE PERFECT RELATIONSHIP

OVERVIEW

For this Interactive, you'll read descriptions of what a perfect relationship looks like and ask students to show if they agree by running to different sides of the room that correspond with their answers.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- All of your middle schoolers
 - Space in your environment for students to move freely
 - The phrases in the Tension section of this week's Teaching Script
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TEACHING SCRIPT

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BOTTOM LINE

FOCUS ON BECOMING LOVE BEFORE LOOKING FOR LOVE.

INTRODUCTION

4 MINUTES

How does the idea of talking about dating sound to you?

Well, I'd guess it mostly depends on *who* you're talking about it with. Talking about your crush with your friends isn't that big of a deal. Writing about dating in your journal doesn't seem too risky. But talking to your parents or your Small Group Leader here at church? To some of you, that might sound SUPER awkward. Or maybe some of you might think that actually doesn't sound too bad!

No matter how you feel about it, we think talking about dating, sex, sexual desires, and all the stuff that comes with it is too important to just skip over. Now, we know that not everyone in this room is allowed to date yet. And we know that not everyone in this room wants to date yet! But we think it's important to have conversations like this one here at church because we want the best for you in all things, including dating!

And we also know that what's "best" for you when it comes to dating can be difficult to figure out. We see movies, TV shows, and influencer couples that give us these "too good to be true" images of dating and relationships all the time. But here's the thing: Dating and relationships aren't always picture-perfect. You may have experienced this in your own relationships or have noticed it in the adult relationships around you. They can be awkward, frustrating, disappointing, confusing, messy, and weird. The truth is relationships can be less than perfect sometimes.

Let me show you an example of what I mean.

INTERACTIVE: Less Than Perfect

This is where you'll show a clip from a movie or TV show that depicts an awkward (but appropriate!) dating moment.

I don't know about you, but what we just saw was totally cringy, awkward, and embarrassing! But I think that's just the way relationships are sometimes! They don't always turn out the way we expect them to, and they aren't always picture-perfect.

TENSION

5 MINUTES

If you haven't experienced a similar situation to what we just saw, I'd guess you could probably talk to almost any adult or older teenager in your life who has their own less-than-perfect dating story. And that's because dating just has the potential to be awkward!

But knowing that, many of us still probably have an idea of what we hope a dating relationship might be like. Maybe right now, we feel like we're ready to date, but we aren't allowed to yet. Or maybe, dating is all our friends seem to be talking about, but we just don't really care all that much. Maybe we want to date someone, but no one has seemed to notice us yet. Or maybe we've just started dating for the first time.

INTERACTIVE: The Perfect Relationship

This is where you'll read descriptions of what a perfect relationship looks like and ask students to show if they agree by running to different sides of the room that correspond with their answers.

No matter what category we fall into, we probably still have an idea of what a perfect relationship should look like. Let's see what you think the perfect relationship should be all about! If you agree with each statement I say, run to *[area of the room]*. If you disagree, run to *[another area of the room]*.

- A perfect relationship is one where they get along with all of our friends.
- A perfect relationship is one where we both look like Instagram models and take the *best* couple photos.
- A perfect relationship is one where we enjoy the same activities, like sports.
- A perfect relationship is one where our longest Snapchat streak is with that special someone.
- A perfect relationship is one where we're never jealous of the person they sit next to in math class.
- A perfect relationship is one where we have dinner at their house to meet their parents.
- A perfect relationship is one where we get to hang out whenever we want outside of school.
- A perfect relationship is one where we laugh at the same things.
- A perfect relationship is one where our palms don't sweat like the Amazon rainforest when we hold hands.
- A perfect relationship is one where we both make the *best* couple TikTok videos for everyone to see.
- A perfect relationship is where we don't have a lot of drama or fights.

When we think about dating, **we focus a lot on what we want the relationship to look like.** We think about who we want to date, what we want the relationship to be like, and the kind of stuff we want to do together. And while all of that stuff is definitely important to consider, I think when it comes to dating and relationships, **we often forget to ask what we should be focusing on before we even start dating.**

It's important because our answer impacts what dating looks like for us and even who we choose to date. Look, even if you're thinking, *"This is deep and all, but I'm not even trying to date right now,"* I get it! But it's still an important question for us to think about because we're laying the foundation for our future relationships right now. So, even if you're not dating or not interested in dating right now, understanding what we should be thinking about when it comes to dating and relationships is important.

So, when it comes to dating and relationships, where should we look for help? How can we make sure we're focusing on the right things when it comes to dating both now and in our future?

TRUTH

4 MINUTES

Well, there's actually some pretty old advice that might just be helpful for us today. A couple thousand years ago, a guy named **Paul** wrote a letter to the Christians in a town called Corinth. Now Paul was a guy whose life had been completely changed by Jesus. After encountering Him, Paul started sharing the message of Jesus with people all over the world. And one of the places Paul went to spread this message was Corinth.

After he spent time in the city, Paul wrote the people there a message to remind them of what God says is best for them. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul included a couple of sentences that can help us here. In fact, I think it's exactly the kind of stuff we should think about when it comes to dating and relationships. Check it out:

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance (1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NLT).

Here, Paul listed what God says love looks like: patient, kind, faithful, hopeful, and lasting. When we think about that kind of love, isn't it exactly what we want other people to give us? I mean honestly, don't we usually think about the type of love Paul mentioned as being about the *other* person in our relationships? We want the other person to be patient. We want them to be kind. We hope they're faithful. When we read a list like this, we usually see it as a long list of the things we want to find in the person we're dating.

And to be clear, that's not bad at all! God does want us to have this kind of love in all of our relationships. He wants us to look for these types of characteristics in other people when it comes to everything from friendships to dating.

But we shouldn't just look for them in other people. Instead of focusing on finding all this great stuff in other people, **we need to stop and look at ourselves**. We need to consider if we're that kind of person as well. Becoming the person God made us to be is so important. And a huge part of that is allowing God to develop all the great characteristics on Paul's list in ourselves. What Paul wrote about 2,000 years ago is still what our lives and our love should be made of today.

No matter if you choose to date or not, one step you can take toward becoming the person God created you to be is to **practice sexual integrity**. Basically, that means choosing to respond to the sexual things we feel, think, and desire in a way that respects ourselves, others, and God. Dating may be a very real way for you to learn to live out the important characteristics Paul wrote about. But you don't have to wait until you start dating to practice sexual integrity or to learn to live out these important characteristics. In fact, we need to put these characteristics into practice before we even think about dating someone!

Think about it like this: **Focus on becoming love before looking for love.**

APPLICATION

2 MINUTES

So, I don't know where you are with all of this dating stuff. Maybe you're already dating or aren't allowed to date. Maybe you're waiting to date someone, or you're just not ready or interested in dating yet. That's all okay! Wherever you are, you have the opportunity right now to live out the characteristics of love that Paul wrote about in his letter to the Corinthians.

The reality is that God has given us all the power we need to become the type of people He wants us to be. So instead of using dating as a way to look for the "right" person, let's focus on developing the characteristics of love that Paul listed for us. Let's **focus on becoming love before looking for love.**

How can we do this?

First, **pick one of the characteristics on Paul's list that you want to develop in yourself.** Maybe you could use more patience. Or you'd like to be quicker to forgive. Or you want to cut back on the rude comments you make to those you care about the most. What if you just started by picking one characteristic in yourself that you want to grow?

Then, **practice what you pick.** Seriously, try it. If you have a tendency to be rude to those you love, practice giving compliments to them on purpose instead. If you tend to be impatient, practice being patient in your responses to people this week. Or instead of holding a grudge, practice bringing up and talking through something that hurts your feelings.

None of this is easy, but all of it can be so good. Real love takes a ton of work. If we're going to become love before looking for love, we are going to need to focus on growing the characteristics necessary to be the type of person we would want to date. A person who is kind, patient, honest, humble, hopeful, and all the other things that Paul mentioned.

LANDING

1 MINUTE

Look, dating can definitely be awkward, but it won't always be that way. And when you choose to focus on the stuff that's important before you start dating, you're taking a step in the right direction. When you develop the characteristics God wants you to have and treat the other person the way He created you to, it can help you practice sexual integrity, both now and in future relationships.

Just imagine if, for you, dating could be a really positive experience for both you and the person you're dating. Even if you're not dating yet, what if focusing on becoming the loving person God created you to be could set you up for a better dating life if and when that day comes? Imagine if choosing to focus on becoming love before looking for love set you up to have the best dating life possible? I know it might feel early to talk about dating for some of you, but **it's never too early to become the person God created you to be.**

And that's why we've spent the last four weeks talking about sex and sexual desires here at church. Even though these topics can be awkward to talk about, I really believe they are important conversations we need to have, especially in middle school! And we don't want the conversation to stop here. That's why you have your Small Group Leader and your Small Group!

So today, I want you to keep the conversation about dating going with your Small Group. If nothing else, you can encourage each other to build characteristics that help you grow in love with each other. And that's a pretty cool place to start!

So as you move toward Small Group to continue the conversation, think about this question: **What's one characteristic you want to develop in yourself?**



TRANSITION INTO SMALL GROUPS
