

Module 3: Purity: Rethinking, Reorienting, or Restarting

“Purity: Rethinking, Reorienting, Restarting” is the third module of Abundant Life: You Were Made for More. Confusion – tears – pain – joy – exhilaration – these are all words that describe love for teens. For some, the subject of dating brings up feelings of intense pain, and for others it brings up immense joy & fullness. Either way, teenagers care deeply about dating, and there is a very real craving to pair off at an early age. Unfortunately, many teens haven’t had great examples of what healthy relationships look like, whether due to family conflict or negative cultural influences. So, it’s no wonder that there are a multitude of good and bad feelings that go along with dating. Statistically, the vast majority of youth want to get married and if statistics hold like they have for hundreds of years, the vast majority of them will. The rumors of the death of marriage have been greatly exaggerated.*

*The goal of this module is to take the teachings in the first two modules about identity and cultural issues and apply them. These teachings first cover how to date and who to date. Then we’ll dive into forgiveness & healing from relational brokenness or sexual sin, and then talk about redefining the mission of marriage. *Mark Regnerus and Jeremy Uecker, Premarital Sex in America: How Young Americans Meet, Mate, and Think About Marrying (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).*

- **Teaching 1: The Pursuit: Who to Date and How to Date**
 - *Theme: Let’s be honest – we haven’t had the best example of what relationships were created to look like. Coupling and decoupling (pairing and pairing off) is dangerous – especially when we treat a relationship with another person like something we go to the store and pick up. Dating is not like selecting your perfect first day of school outfit – you don’t get to do that with a human. You can’t make a list of characteristics that you “need” in a person, and BAM, expect them to come out of thin air, flawless. Dating occurs between two very flawed people, both of whom are immensely loved by God. No matter how hard we try, we still manage to get this so wrong. In order to get it right, we have to look to the One who made us, who created us to be in relationship. The term “dating” isn’t really in the Bible, so how do we know what the parameters are? Just because, culturally speaking, times were different back when Jesus lived, doesn’t mean that what He taught is now ancient history. God addresses sex, purity, relationships, and marriage all throughout the Bible. We’re going to talk about how to date, who to date, and how to pursue God’s guidance in this process. We’ll also talk about purity and how the larger idea is not just about abstaining from sex but rather engaging in a lifestyle, investing in abundant life. Dating with honor is doable, even amidst all of*

the confusion, especially when we see it is possible and desire it, because we know it's what is best for us.

- **MAIN QUESTIONS:** How do we know who to date and how to date? What should we be looking for in another person who we are romantically attracted to? What does the Bible say about negotiables and non-negotiables when it comes to dating? What's the difference between abstinence and purity?
- **Main Points:**
 - 70% of students will have their first sexual experience by 19. *WHY?*
 - I think that it's because we really have come to believe that God's way, the way we were created, doesn't quite measure up to the world's way.
 - Every good invention comes with an instruction manual – what to do and what not to do – but I fear that a lot of us only know what God says not to do. That is actually preventing us from having a higher view of sex, and that's preventing us from wanting God's best, because we don't even know what His best is. Too often, we automatically default to what the world is telling us is "normal."
 - What's the real goal of dating? If we look in the Bible, the answer is marriage. Now, I'm not suggesting we go back to some 17th century way of dating, where your parents set you up with someone and you literally meet them when you are marrying them - that's crazy sauce, too! No, what I'm saying is that we need to think more about why, how, and who we are dating, instead of just doing what everyone else is doing.
 - The Bible actually has a lot to say about romantic relationships and how sexual intimacy fits into them.
 - *Fire analogy* - Let's think about sex as a fire. The gift of fire can be amazing, or it can be destructive, depending on what boundaries surround it. If it's in a fireplace, fire is good – it's comforting, warming, and creates an atmosphere of love. The same is true for sex. When inside of marriage (the boundaries God outlines in the Bible), sex is a gift that God has given us, and we shouldn't ever feel ashamed about that. Sex inside of marriage is safe and secure. When fire is outside of a fireplace though, it can be volatile. If sex is like a fire, then when it is outside of marriage or through a computer screen, it has the ability to destroy us. Virtual sex, or pornography, is like a fake fire. Casual sex, which is what the hook-up culture pushes, is like igniting a pool of lighter fluid. It ignites with a big flash and then disintegrates to nothing.

- Dating should be a way of evaluating if you want to partner with that person for the rest of your life.
- True love does not request access to your body while simultaneously avoiding any responsibility to care for you emotionally and financially. Try to make it sound as romantic as you want, but it is a selfish endeavor and God does not acknowledge it as honorable. If your partner gives you a hard time about your decision to remain pure, then you have all the proof you need to show that he or she is just trying to get something from you, versus loving you as you deserve to be loved.
- The best way we can honor Jesus is to choose to honor our bodies – and the first step to doing that is realizing how complex of a person you were created to be (*chastity conversation*).
- *How does physical attraction fit into dating?* When you're looking for a partner to date, physical attraction should be on the list of things that are important to you – it's not a bad thing to list at all! But it shouldn't be the sole reason you are interested in someone. Our attraction to beauty is a very good thing. God made us this way! In a sense, this attraction is rooted in our innate attraction to the beauty of God, which we will experience in Heaven. But we must also be aware of how our culture has warped our understanding of beauty. When you're married, even when you're "allowed" to have sex according to the Bible, 98% of your time as a married couple will be spent doing things that are not having sex.
- A boyfriend-girlfriend relationship, as close as it may feel, can only declare, "I might want all of you." Please don't give all of yourself away to someone whose best is a solid "maybe."
- *Application* - I think this is what God wants from us. If we ever date someone, regardless of whether or not we marry them, I want them to be able to say... "I am a better person for having spent time in proximity to that person." I believe that is a great aim in dating, and I think God would agree. You want the net effect of your presence in any relationship to be that the other person is better – that they trust and love God more because of your presence in his or her life. If you leave a trail of broken hearts and confused people, then you need to evaluate what you're doing.
- *Key take-away:* If you have chosen to trust God with your eternal destiny, you can also trust Him with your dating life.

- God doesn't want us to struggle through our relationships and our dating lives – He wants more for us. You were made by a King – and your body, heart, and dignity are worth valuing accordingly.
 - *Main Scriptures:*
 - James 1:17
 - Psalm 145:16
 - Psalm 84:11
 - 2 Timothy 2:22
 - Psalm 51:10
 - Hebrews 12:1
 - *Small Group Questions:*
 1. What are nonnegotiables v. negotiables in dating?
 2. Have you ever thought about choosing a partner in this way, or have you often jumped into relationships without any period of evaluating the friendship?
 3. What does culture tell us is “normal” when it comes to relationships?
 4. Why does God value purity, and why does He instruct us to keep it within the context of marriage?
 5. What is the goal of dating? How do you make sure that goal stays at the center, even as a teenager?
 6. Do you want to get married? What are your conceptions of marriage, what does your family history of marriage look like?
 7. Does this picture of a relationship scare you, intrigue you, excite you, etc.? Do you truly believe that this is God's best for you?
- *Teaching 2: A Blank Slate: How the Gospel Changes Your Story*
 - *Theme: Sex. In a world overwhelmingly obsessed with it, why is the Church so silent about it? While our secular culture twists, perverts, cheapens, and idolizes sex, there are gaping holes in the Church's guidance of young people. The result has been generations of sexually illiterate people, who are drowning in the repercussions of overwhelming sexual struggles. It may look like touting virginity and misunderstanding purity; we have sexual brokenness in our hearts from the things we've watched or seen or pieces of ourselves we've given away without going “all the way.” We're dealing with all sorts of sexual sins that don't have to be the final act of sexual intercourse. The reality is that God cares about the condition of the heart, not the technicalities of our virginity, and He calls us to a greater vision of sexual understanding because of who we are. We all have a sexual past, and it's about time someone starts talking about what God thinks about those pasts. God was safe. God is safe. God*

never changes. God is for us, not against us. Shame does not come from God. Shame is produced by our sin. Guilt says, "I've made a mistake." Shame says, "I am a mistake." In Genesis 3:10, Adam hid from God, because he was naked and afraid. The very One that Adam should have felt safe with was God; but the opposite happened. He felt shame, and he hid. When sin entered the equation, it was Adam's projection of his sin that caused him to see God as unsafe. We're not punished for our sin, but by our sin. Adam and Eve were the ones who changed, not God. Our ability to see ourselves, God, and others for who they really are becomes distorted because of sin and shame. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. Jesus came to save us from our brokenness, and, even today, no person is too far gone to be out of His reach. That's the message. That's the promise.

- **MAIN QUESTIONS:** What happens if I've gone too far? What happens if I've already had sex? What are the results of being sexually active before marriage? How does shame play a part in our relationship with God? What does God say about shame, and can we be set free from our shame?
- **Main Points:**
 - My favorite thing about Jesus used to be that He created us – with care, with purpose, inviting us into living an abundant life. Somewhere along the line, though, the weight of the world, the expectations of those around us, and the temptation of living only for ourselves comes crashing down on us. My favorite part about Jesus now? Even after I've been crushed, sometimes willingly by my own choices, He doesn't leave me there. God doesn't just create – He recreates. He doesn't just forgive – He abundantly pardons.
 - *Sex in the Bible is holy* – the Hebrew word used in Genesis for sex is "echad." It's describing being fused together at the deepest level, becoming one, the bonding of two people into one entity. It's a much higher view of sex than the culture has been feeding us.
 - The first tactic Satan used in the garden was to get Eve to say no to God's best, by convincing her that God wasn't who He said He was, that He didn't really have her best interest in mind, and that she'd be more powerful by herself. The first lie that Eve believed was that she wouldn't face any consequences for her sin, that even in her disobedience she could live. Isn't that interesting... **Today, Satan is still using the same tactics.**
 - *Consequences of sex -*

- Each year, there have been 20 million new sexually transmitted diseases reported. 50% of all new STD's are transmitted by people ages 15 to 24. In other words, 25% of teenagers will contract an STD each year.
- 1 in 3 women get pregnant before the age of 20, and about 1 in 3 of those teens will seek abortions. Over 200,000 teens get an abortion every year. Abortion is such a controversial topic in our society, because choice is choice, and my body is my body, right? Well, I'd argue that that's not the point. By our choices, literally, we are demeaning human life. Every life was created, every life has purpose, and every life is sacred. That's what the Bible says, and even when I don't feel that way, it is true. You may think abortion has nothing to do with you or that you'll never come into contact with it, but statistically, it will impact you or someone you know – 1 in 4 of women in the Church have had an abortion. If it isn't abortion, maybe it's unplanned pregnancy.
- Proverbs 14:21 says: *“There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end, it leads to death.”* So, where do we go from there? Where do we go when the damage is already done, and we're left feeling so ashamed that we can't talk to anyone?
- Sexual brokenness can first be traced back to a basic mistrust in the character of God.
- When we forget who God is, it's easy to believe who the world says He is. When we forget who He really is intrinsically, we forget how He created us first and foremost out of love, for love, to love. When we forget whose we are, we forget what we are worth. When we forget what we are worth, we are much more likely to fall into the temptation of the world. When we fall into that temptation, we are much more likely to make it a lifestyle, because that's what Satan does. While God is in the business of creating and recreating, Satan is in the business of destroying us by small, seemingly unnoticeable grievances that lead to our ultimate defeat. He makes the world look appealing, and He disguises sin as the most beautiful comfort in the world.
- The woman at the well is a great passage to insert here for Scriptural teaching & discussion (identity, brokenness, etc.).
- End by offering hope and restoration through confession and repentance for those experiencing shame and hurt from past decisions.

- *Main Scriptures:*
 - 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5
 - John 8:1-11
- *Small Group Questions:*
 1. What does it mean when the Bible says that we are new creations?
 2. Talk a little bit about sexual brokenness; what are some ways of sexual brokenness that do not include having sex? How is virginity different than purity?
 3. Have you ever thought: “Is God really good?”
 4. Why is how Jesus treats the Samaritan woman significant?
 5. Have you ever judged someone’s sexual history, while neglecting the impurities that reside in your heart? Why is it important to realize that we are *all* sexually broken?
 6. What does it mean to be defined by your Savior and not your sin? How does that make you feel?
- **Teaching 3: Marriage: Why It Matters**
 - *Theme: Most young people today do not bring to their dating relationships and marriages a great vision of God - who He is, what He is like, how He acts. They don't bring an all-consuming admiration for Him, reverence for Him, absolute surrender to Him, and deep satisfaction in Him. Instead, they bring a deep desire to be fully known and deeply loved by their spouse. The truth about marriage has been distorted by our culture. Marriage has a purpose that is far beyond our own happiness. Marriage was created by God, as a gift to us, with the specific purpose of being the closest thing to His love for the Church that we can experience here on Earth; the goal of this teaching is to once again reiterate that humankind is desperate for deep companionship, and that has been rooted in us since creation. Then, I want to talk about how we should think about and define marriage in a way that will help us navigate the highs and lows of living with another person who is sinful, just like us. We'll talk about what marriage is, what it isn't, and what the goal of a healthy marriage is. Lastly, we will hit on the point that if marriage was meant to glorify God's love for us, then we must realize that marriage is not the ultimate thing, and we must find more satisfaction in God than in our marriages. By doing this, when we are loving Jesus the most, we will love our spouse way better than we ever could on our own.*
 - **MAIN QUESTIONS:** What does creation tell us about marriage? What was marriage actually created for, and why has marriage developed into something that does not at all look like what the Bible says it should be?

What's the meaning of marriage? Will our marriages ever fully satisfy us if we make them all about us?

○ **Main Points:**

- Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (Matthew 6:33).
- Discuss the difference between *love and infatuation*.
- The reason so many relationships end is because, honestly, we get bored with each other - think about it. None of us are enchanting enough to keep someone entertained and interested for five to six decades. That just isn't gonna cut it. Eventually, your spouse is going to have heard all of your jokes, all of your stories, and if you aren't growing and constantly pursuing one another, you aren't going to be interested for more than a few years, let alone a few decades. We have to go deeper than that. Infatuation is not a good enough reason to get married; you may think you're in love with someone, but after that initial period of 12-18 months (the average length of infatuation) and the neurochemical reaction fades away, what is your relationship going to be left with?
- What does the first marriage in the Bible look like, and what does it teach us? (*Marriage isn't all about us.*)
- *Tim Keller's definition and purpose of marriage:* "Marriage is a lifelong, monogamous relationship between a man and a woman. According to the Bible, God devised marriage to reflect the saving love for us in Christ."
- Unity by marriage tells a *bigger story* - marriage is not just for our joy, but it is also a metaphor, a parable, a symbol of something great and universal and eternal - the union of Christ with His bride, which is His Church. It is a visual representation of Christ loving His Church.
- **Truths:**
 - Sex outside of marriage cannot exhibit the Gospel, because it enjoys the benefits of the covenant without the commitment to the covenant.
 - Same sex marriage cannot exhibit the Gospel, because Christ is not married to another Christ. Christ married and bought His bride, who was distinctly different yet like Him due to her oneness with Him.
 - Adultery cannot exhibit the Gospel, because it distorts the true beauty of covenantal commitment that God has placed

on His Church - He promises never to leave us or forsake us.

- All forms of sexuality expressed outside of the marriage covenant are a sin before God Himself - and some of us don't like that.
- Ephesians 5 explanation - In Ephesians 5, Paul offers the remedy to Genesis 3; a remedy that relies on the cross of Christ and the filling of the Holy Spirit! Wives are to submit (instead of seeking to dominate). Husbands are to love their wives (instead of ruling them). The Cross makes a way back to God's original intent for marriage: union, fruitfulness, and common purpose.
- *Fear of submission* - What I have discovered is that when single women express their concerns about submission to their husband's leadership, they speak about the fear of being micromanaged or of having their dreams crushed. But I would suggest to you that is not a fear of submission to leadership; that is a fear of submission to bad leadership. In marriage, you are not signing up for submission to all men. You are vowing to respond to one man. This is why it is so important to pick the right man. Ladies, be discerning in dating. Don't settle for a selfish man and hope he will change. Get the right guy. Good leadership is a gift, not a burden.
- *Bottom line*: Seek first the Kingdom of God, and your marriage will be better for it.
- *Main Scriptures*:
 - Matthew 6:33
 - Mark 10:9
 - Ephesians 5:25-33
- *Small Group Questions*:
 1. Why is the first marriage in the Bible what all marriages should be based on? Do you believe that because God created marriage, that He sets the boundaries for marriage?
 2. What are some ways that you see marriage being broken?
 3. Do you believe that the institution of marriage is still good, despite the broken pictures that we see around us?
 4. What do you want your future marriage to look like?
 5. What are the benefits of marriage?
 6. Why should sex be kept inside of marriage?
 7. What is the mission of marriage, and why is it all about God, and not about us?