

DATING

Pocket Bible Study & Journal

A STUDENT LEADER'S GUIDE

To date or not to date: That's a question for many of today's teens. So where do you and your friends look for answers? From movies and magazines to Facebook and your favorite aunt, there's no shortage of ideas out there about the modern dating scene. But how do they stack up against God's Word?

If you're curious about God's take on dating, the *Dating* Pocket Bible Study & Journal was written just for you. From biblical dating techniques and relationship red flags to choosing dates and defining sexual purity, Hayley DiMarco packs a wealth of biblical advice into this short study. And why keep this treasure trove of dating information to yourself? Ask a few friends to join you in this study!

This free downloadable leaders' guide gives you all the tools you'll need to lead a *Dating* Bible study with your peers. You'll find activity suggestions, discussion helpers, and plenty of simple leader tips. So grab a copy of *Dating*, print off this guide, and then invite your friends to turn to the Bible for some real answers about dating God's way.

The Plan of Attack

The *Dating* study has been broken down into six sessions, and you'll want to take at least one hour for each—more, if you can swing it. Here's a look at how to lead your friends through each week's study.

- **GET IT ROLLING:** A low-key discussion starter to get everyone interested in the session's topics
- **THE KEYS:** As your discussion unfolds, you and your girls may take a few rabbit trails along the way. With this list of key points in hand, you can steer the conversation back on track when the discussion wanders.
- **THE QS:** Since you probably won't have time to discuss every single question, I've specific questions have been highlighted for you and your friends to discuss. (You might want to mark these in your book ahead of time.)
- **WRAP IT UP:** : Two tools to help you tie up your sessions:
 - **FINAL Q:** This question helps you connect to the study in a personal way. Allow enough time for everyone to share a response with the group.
 - **CHALLENGE:** Before you head home, read the parting challenge for that week and make a commitment to put it into practice.

Prep Work

To get the most out of this group Bible study, you and your friends really need to complete the study on your own time first. So dish out copies to everyone at least one week before your first meeting and ask them to get crackin' on lesson one.

I know your life is probably crazy busy and you may feel like there's no room in your schedule for personal Bible study. But I'll bet that if you all sit down together, you and your friends could identify one hour every week to get this study done. Be creative: Maybe you can all meet at McDonalds one morning a week to eat breakfast and work on your studies. Or institute a "Media Ban" one hour each week when you won't use any forms of technology (calling, texting, etc.) to talk to each other; then use the time to work on your Bible study instead.

Trust me, it's time well spent—and what you give up will never be better than what you'll gain from reading God's Word. So be the group cheerleader when it comes to prep work: Apply a little friendly pressure if you need to.

A Different Approach

If you and your friends absolutely can't find any time to prepare your Bible study in advance, consider one of these alternatives:

- Work through the material together as a group during your meetings. If you take this approach, please plan on your sessions lasting *at least one and a half hours* in order to do justice to the material.
- *Meet every week for twelve weeks*, but alternate between personal study time and group discussion. For example, your first week would be spent in a "study hall" setting with everyone working quietly on the first lesson. (You may still want to end these individual study times with a few minutes of group prayer.) Then, on week two, you can have some group discussion, using the activities and questions in this guide. Continue to alternate until you complete the study.

Being the Leader

Without any adults around, you and your friends will probably feel really comfortable talking with each other: This is one of the great advantages of a peer-led Bible study group! But if you're not careful, that comfort level can easily turn your well-intentioned Bible study into one more chat session. In no time at all, your conversation can derail from God's Word to the words of that hottie in homeroom. Not cool, right?

As the leader, it's your job to hold the group accountable and keep the conversation focused on God's Word. I know it's tricky when you try to wear the hats of leadership and friendship at the same time: You don't want your friends to think you've morphed into a dictator or anything. So try these tips to keep discussion rolling in a meaningful way:

- Steer the crew back on course: If the conversation gets derailed, try saying something like "Hey guys, can we talk about that after the Bible study and turn to question #1?" or "I really want to talk about this later, but for now, let's stick to our Bible study."
- Listen. Good leaders do a lot more listening than talking. Avoid putting words in the other people's mouths or overreacting to comments that you don't agree with. Don't force your own opinions on everyone else: It's okay to respectfully disagree.
- Dig deeper. When someone gives a simple response, ask them follow-up questions such as "Why do you feel that way?" "What do you mean when you say . . . ?" "What else do you think God's trying to tell us here?"

- Allow silence. Try counting to 10 before you say anything further. Sometimes it takes a few moments of awkward silence before someone else will speak up.
- Bring quiet people into the conversation. Invite them to talk by saying something like “Sara, I’d love to hear what you have to say about that, too.”
- Bring God into it. Pray about your Bible study group and ask God to direct your discussion.

Help Is On the Way!

Nice job with all this leader guide stuff, you may be thinking, but I’m still a little intimidated about leading my peers. I mean, what if they bring up questions I don’t have a clue about? I’m no expert here! Here’s the deal: Just because you’re the group leader doesn’t mean you have to be a Bible guru for your friends. If you’re not sure about an answer, it’s okay to admit that. Most people respect a person who’s humble enough to admit when they don’t have all the answers.

If you want to dig a little deeper into any of the topics and passages you find in the study, though, consider these sources:

- **iFuse.com** Connect with other students who are leading a peer group Bible study to share questions and encouragement.
- **Hungryplanet.tv** Download videos of Hayley introducing each section of the PB&J series.
- **Biblegateway.com** A great place to check out verses in multiple versions of the Bible or to look up Bible commentaries about verses that confuse you.
- **Study Bible** You may want to invest in a study Bible that offers helps such as historical background, maps, interpretations of confusing passages, and thoughts about how to apply the passages to today’s world.
- **Adults** Don’t be afraid to seek help from the adults in your life. Most youth pastors, youth volunteers, parents, and teachers would be honored to answer questions you might have.

Accountability 101

A peer-led Bible study gives you and your friends a good opportunity to hold each other accountable for the things you learn. I recommend saving ten minutes at the end of your Bible study for some accountability and prayer.

If you’re not too sure what accountability really looks like, here are some great questions to discuss with each other:

1. Where are some areas where you feel like you’ve really grown spiritually lately?
2. Are there any areas where you’ve been falling short spiritually? (And if anyone says “no,” you can go ahead and start praying that God will open up their eyes because we *all* have stuff to work on!)
3. What factors are leading you into that spiritual weakness?
4. What can you do differently this week so that you don’t repeat your past mistakes?

You don’t have to ask every question every time: It’s really just about building the habit of sharing your spiritual life with each other. Try not to be judgmental or negative with each other. But don’t just laugh off your weaknesses either: It doesn’t do anyone any favors if you just justify each other’s sins. The idea is to be a support system for each other: Celebrate the spiritual victories and offer encouragement for ways to overcome spiritual weakness.

SESSION ONE: TO DATE OR NOT TO DATE

Get It Rolling

Give each person a scrap of paper and a pen. Ask everyone to write down their favorite famous couple (real or fictional), and then collect all the papers in a hat. Now take turns drawing out a slip of paper, reading the celebrity couple name, and trying to guess who wrote that couple's name down. If time allows, rate each of the couples' relationships as healthy or unhealthy.

The Keys

- You need to honor your parents as you make dating choices.
- The Bible doesn't include any verses about dating, but it *does* tell us a lot about building good relationships.
- Dating is something you are going to have to take a stance on, with help from your parents, your own beliefs, and God.

The Qs

Dating, Waiting or Still Debating, questions 1 and 9

Exodus 20:12, questions 3, 4, and 5

I Corinthians 6:12, questions 2 and 3

Romans 14:14, question 3

Romans 14:23, questions 2 and 3

Wrap It Up

FINAL Q: Based on this week's study, are you leaning toward dating or waiting? Why?

CHALLENGE: Every day this week, say a prayer for God to help you make good dating choices.

SESSION TWO: REALLY BIBLICAL DATING

Get It Rolling

As a group, name as many biblical couples as you can think of in two minutes. Assign someone write down the names on a whiteboard/paper as you go. Now look over the list and identify the reasons for each marriage: Was it romance? A parental decision? Politics or legal concerns? Something else? According to your list, what was the most common reason for marriage in biblical times? What do you think is the most common reason for getting married today?

The Keys

- Dating isn't just for fun—it has a purpose, and that purpose is marriage.
- Sex is meant for a permanent relationship—marriage.
- Biblical dating techniques included parents making marriage decisions for their children, men earning the family's approval for the bride, and men paying a dowry to the girl's family.
- In biblical times, marriage was more a fulfillment of legal, political, or family obligations than a case of true romance.

The Qs

Matthew 19:4-6, questions 4 and 5

Genesis 1:28, questions 3 and 4

1 Corinthians 7:9, questions 1 and 2

Genesis 29:18-20, questions 4 and 5

Genesis 24:34-51, questions 2 and 5

Genesis 24:53, question 2

Exodus 22:16-17, question 2

Ruth 3:7-13, questions 2 and 3

1 Samuel 18:20-25, question 5

1 Kings 3:1, question 1

Hosea 3:1-3, question 3



Wrap It Up

FINAL Q: What were some of the underlying values in biblical dating techniques: Would you like to see more or less of those values today?

CHALLENGE: Every day this week, say a prayer for God to bless your future spouse.

SESSION THREE: PURITY AND TEMPTATION

Get It Rolling

As a group, create a list of all the places where you see images or hear talk about sexual stuff (TV, friends, health class, locker room, etc.). Try to come up with as many items as possible in 2-3 minutes. Now go back over your list and decide if each item generally portrays sex in a godly way. Label each item with a “yes” or “no” based on whether it aligns with God’s definition of sexual purity. Based on your results, what would you have to do to avoid all sexual temptations in our culture? Is it possible?

The Keys

- Physical purity begins with mental purity.
- Talking about sexual stuff is just as bad as thinking about and doing sexual stuff.
- Being tempted isn’t a sin; it’s what you do with that temptation that determines your sin output.
- If you’re willing to prepare and put in the work ahead of time, you’re more likely to find success in saying no to sexual temptation.

The Qs

Matthew 5:28, questions 3 and 5

Proverbs 23:7, questions 1 and 5

Colossians 3:8, question 4

Matthew 15:11, question 4

Ephesians 5:3, questions 3, 4, and 5

Colossians 3:5-6, question 2

1 Corinthians 6:18-20, question 1

1 Corinthians 6:9-11, question 3

James 1:12-15, questions 2 and 3

1 Corinthians 10:13, questions 3 and 4

2 Timothy 2:22, questions 2

1 Corinthians 5:9-11, questions 3

Proverbs 4:23, questions 3

Romans 1:25, question 2

2 Peter 2:19, questions 2 and 5

Matthew 6:24, question 2

Song of Solomon 1:2, question 2

Wrap It Up

FINAL Q: How does the Bible’s idea of purity compare to the idea of “abstinence until marriage”? Which standard have you been using to define sexual purity?

CHALLENGE: As you brush your teeth every morning this week, say a prayer for God to help you stay pure when it comes to sexual temptations in action, thought, or words.

SESSION FOUR: HONESTY OR TMI

Get It Rolling

Write the following categories on a piece of paper or a whiteboard: Outright Lies, White Lies, Half Truths, Being Honest, Using Truth to Hurt, Giving Too Much Info, Lying to Yourself. Working as a group, think of an example for each category based on the dating or marriage relationships you've seen in popular TV shows, movies, or books. What was the ultimate result of each incident for the relationship? Do you think that would have been the outcome in real life?

The Keys

- If someone will lie once, they'll be willing to do it again.
- God hates lies because they destroy relationships.
- Lying to yourself by thinking the worst, concentrating on your and misery, is the opposite of honesty.
- You don't have to tell everyone everything in order to be honest, or to be real.

The Q

Leviticus 19:11, questions 2 & 4

John 8:44, questions 3 and 4

John 8:31-32, question 2

Proverbs 26:28, question 3 and 4

Revelation 22:15, question 3 and 4

Philippians 4:8, questions 2, 3, 5 and 8

Ecclesiastes 10:12-14, question 3

Ecclesiastes 5:2-3, question 1

Proverbs 15:28, question 1

Proverbs 21:23, question 1 and 2

Wrap It Up

FINAL Q: Based on the Bible passages you've read, how will you determine the "right amount of truth" to share in your dating relationships?

CHALLENGE: Pray every day this week that God will help you be a truthful person. Then ask a trusted friend (not a bf/gf!) if they think you might have any problems with the truth—either lying too much, or on the other hand, giving really personal info away too easily.

SESSION FIVE: WHO SHOULD YOU DATE

Get It Rolling

Give each person a scrap of paper and have them jot down the top five things they look for in a boyfriend or girlfriend. Take turns reading your lists: For each item shared, take a group vote to see if anyone else had that characteristic on their list. As you share, create a “Group List” where you write down any characteristics listed by at least 50 percent of the group. Look at your Group List: Do you think anything important is missing? Would you change anything if this was a list of things you’d want in a husband or wife? Would you want the same things if you were 40?

The Keys

- Don’t date nonbelievers, bad believers, or angry and hateful people.
- When it comes to dating, you get what you give: If you have good character traits yourself, it’s easier for you to find someone else who has them.
- If you want a relationship that works, find someone who is hungry to be more godly and shows evidence of moving in that direction.
- Don’t do the dating thing alone: Get good advice.

The Qs

2 Corinthians 6:14–16, questions 3, 5 and 6

2 Timothy 3:1–5, question 1

1 Corinthians 5:11, questions 2 and 4

Proverbs 22:24–25, question 2

1 John 4:20–21, questions 2 and 4

Galatians 5:22–23, question 4

Colossians 3:12, questions 4, 5, 7, 8 and 9

Matthew 16:24–25, questions 2 and 4

Ephesians 6:1–3, question 4

Proverbs 25:28, question 2 and 5

Proverbs 15:22, question 3 and 4

Proverbs 22:1, question 4

Wrap It Up

FINAL Q: Based on what you’ve read in the Bible, have you changed any of your standards about choosing a boyfriend or girlfriend? If so, what standards have you changed?

CHALLENGE: Identify one wise friend or family member who you could talk to about your crush or bf/gf. Ask for their honest opinion about the person you are dating (or would like to date). Pray about the feedback they give you.

SESSION SIX: FINDING THE ONE

Get It Rolling

Ask everyone to stand in a line at the center of the room for this activity. Identify one side of the room as “Agree” and the other as “Disagree.” Then read the following questions and have people go to the side of the room that reflects their opinion. If there are people on both sides of the center, give a few moments for brief discussion about their differences of opinion.

There is only one person whom it is God’s will for me to marry.

God will erase all the bad stuff that comes from past mistakes.

The Bible can answer every dating question.

There may be multiple people whom it would be okay for me to marry.

It is possible to change God’s plan for your life.

You can’t make good dating choices without input from others.

The Keys

- God’s will is summarized in the Bible, so don’t make any dating choices that go against his Word.
- For specifics that aren’t directly addressed in the Bible, it’s a good idea to seek God’s will through prayer and talking to other people.
- When choosing between two godly things you can’t go wrong. And always remember that God works everything out for the good of those who love him.
- When it comes to your dating life, you aren’t an island: Enlist the help of friends and family in order to keep the faith.

The Qs

2 Timothy 3:16-17, questions 3 and 4

Psalms 19:7-8, questions 3 and 5

Deuteronomy 4:2, questions 2, 4 and 5

1 Thessalonians 2:13, questions 1 and 3

Acts 17:11, question 5

Romans 8:28, questions 3, 4 and 5

Acts 16:6-7, questions 2 and 4

Isaiah 14:27, questions 2 and 3

Deuteronomy 6:6-9, question 3

Wrap It Up

FINAL Q: What biblical dating lesson has connected with you the most through this six-week study? How do you plan to live it out?

CHALLENGE: Pray for each other this week, that God will help you stay accountable to each other for dating God’s way.