Linked Wk1

Series Road Map

**Series Overview:** Who and how we date is super important. Culture tells us that relationships and sex are just for fun. It tells us that we can change other people into versions we like more. It values physical attraction to a degree that almost nothing else matters. We’re told to have fun, be carefree, and don’t worry about the consequences because they’re not real anyway. And it all sounds so fun! So fun, in fact, that at first glance it seems like the way to go. But can that really be what God intended for us? To use people? To allow ourselves to be used? To treat our bodies and our hearts with complete recklessness? In this series we’ll discover that healthy bonds and true intimacy are the real gift and God even gives us the directions to see that link establish in our own lives.

**Week Overview:** Growing intimacy with God is the best way to learn how to grow intimacy with a partner. In that relationship we discover who we are, how we operate, and what love and mutual submission looks like. If you want true intimacy in your life, start here.

**Grab the Room (Intro):** Favorite Love Stories – finish with personal favorite

**Tension (What's the Struggle?):** We don’t really understand love. It’s not natural to care for someone over yourself.

**Climb (Rising Conflict):** What love requires vs what we want to do.

**Truth + Supporting Text (Illuminate):** God is love and His love lived out is the perfect example we need to follow. 1Corinthians 13

**THP (What’s the Takeaway?):** Jesus before everything

**Supporting Points (Not Required):** 1John 4:9-12

**Application (Call to Action):** Learn to love first

**Inspiration (What if?/New Reality):** What if the love you shared with your spouse looked like the love we share with Jesus?

*Red – Scripture*

*Blue – Personal Story*

*Green – Prop*

***THP/Main Points – Bold***

Welcome to another night of Northview Students - yours and my favorite night of the week! Tonight we’re starting a new series called Linked, where we’re looking at dating and romantic relationships. And I know what you’re thinking: biblical dating is a topic you get deliriously excited to learn about! And it’s so great that you feel that way because we’ve got a solid month of it!

But seriously, who and how we date is super important. Culture tells us that relationships and sex are just for fun. It tells us that we can change other people into versions we like more. It values physical attraction to a degree that almost nothing else matters. We’re told to have fun, be carefree, and don’t worry about the consequences because they’re not real anyway. And it all sounds so fun, doesn’t it! So fun, in fact, that at first glance it seems like the way to go. But can that really be what God intended for us? To use people? To allow ourselves to be used? To treat our bodies and our hearts with complete recklessness?

I think one of the reasons we struggle with the whole dating scene is because we just don’t really know how to do it. We’ve learned from culture that if we want to be happy, we’ll somehow just have an obscene amount of money. And with that obscene amount of money, we’ll attract people that are so beautiful they seem fake. Spoiler alert: they are fake. But you and your money and your disgustingly beautiful partner will enjoy this whirlwind life of travel and perfection, far from the struggles of stupid things like jobs and responsibilities and taxes.

But let’s get our heads out of the clouds just a little - not too much. Let’s still build some expectations that are a little bit absurd. And let’s start right now with a little game of Best Couples Ever! I’ll show you a series of couples and you have to decide which couple you want your future to most look like…

Couples: John B & Sara, Randall & Beth Pearson, Ellie & Carl, Jim & Pam, Nick & Jess, Noah & Allie, 11 & Mike, Homer Simpson & food

So what do you think? Take the next minute and talk about which of our Best Couples Ever are your goals…

*Personal Story of who your favorite couple is. If you’re married, don’t be afraid to mention you and your spouse. You know I am. Bonus points if you provide a picture!*

There are a lot of great couples out there! And if I had to pick one of these for myself, it would definitely be Nick & Jess. I love it when weird people find other weird people that perfectly compliment their own particular brand of weird. But my favorite couple of all time is this one right here: It’s me and Megan! Humble brag – I have the absolute best marriage ever. Better than any I’ve ever seen. And don’t get me wrong, it’s not that Megan and I take awesome vacations or spoil each other with awesome things. And it’s not looks. I’m a 7 at best. It’s not that either of us are world class professionals at anything or we’ve built a glorious home. We’re not notable, not particularly successful at anything. We’re just us. If we were on a show, no one would ever watch it. They’d probably think we’re boring and weird. And they wouldn’t be wrong. We’re both really weird. And people don’t even realize that Megan’s the weirder one. She just hides it better.

But let me tell you a little about my marriage and maybe you’ll understand:

I have never had to walk a difficult road alone. Megan has always been right by my side as my biggest supporter. Oftentimes she’s even more passionate about my hurts than I am.

I always have the perfect person to share my joys with. Megan is the first person I turn to when I’m excited or get good news. And she cheers for me and believes in me even more than I do.

I know that at the end of every day is peace, comfort, and joy. My favorite way to end the day is to hop in bed, chat and laugh for a while, and binge a show while we fall asleep. It might sound boring to you, but I look forward all day to just being with Megan in the evenings. No matter what the day has brought, I know in just a couple hours all will be right with the world again.

Outside of my faith in Jesus, my marriage with Megan is the most constant, comforting, joyful, and encouraging thing in my life. Her presence in my life is proof of a loving God that gives better gifts than we could ever imagine.

And that’s what I want for you too. I want you to one day enjoy the type of marriage that doesn’t leave you wounded and broken, but leaves you in awe every single day over how amazing love is. And that’s why we’re doing this series. Because building that type of relationship is difficult, even unnatural. If it were easy, over half of marriages wouldn’t end in divorce.

So what does it take to grow this marriage? We’re going to answer that over the next few weeks, but the best place to start is always the same: look to Jesus. When we step back and look at the love, the grace, and the kindness He shows to us, we start to realize what it takes to grow a love that never breaks, a love that never leaves or forsakes. The best example of love is what He shows to us. That’s why God gave us the covenant of marriage in the first place - to show us the love that Christ has for His covenant love: the church.

So tonight, we’re going to zero in on this one idea right here: **Jesus over everything**

Because the reality is that showing real love is completely unnatural to us…

When someone is cruel to me, I naturally want to return the cruelty right back to them. I want to get even. I want to make them feel how they made me feel. But how does Jesus love me? Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Even when I turn my back on Jesus, He never turns His back on me. He doesn’t just welcome me back to relationship with Him, He pursues me until I do! He died, BEFORE I gave my heart to Him. He died *hopeful* that I’d give my life to Him. He lives hopeful and active that I’ll respond to His love. That’s not natural! That’s a choice Jesus makes over and over again. And if we really want to grow a truly loving relationship, we need to learn how to do that by walking with Jesus.

When I’m going through my day, I naturally look out primarily for myself. Even from birth, our first inclination is to not just be cared for, but to focus our energies and efforts on caring for ourselves. We’re expected to grow out of this selfishness, but so few actually do because it’s so unnatural! We naturally look out for number one. But how does Jesus love us? He allowed Himself to be tortured and killed so we could have a relationship with Him. And I guess I’d kinda get it if His death guaranteed everyone would return to Him, but that’s not what happened. He was tortured and killed just so we had the OPTION of returning to Him. He put Himself completely out there, even though He knew that millions of people would just turn their backs on Him. That’s putting yourself low and looking out for others! We need to learn how to do that by walking with Jesus.

I like having things my way. Anyone else in here that way – do you like having your way? I like calling the shots and making the decisions. Matter of fact, I can even get a little bent out of shape when things are happening in a way other than what I would do. I like control and I like it when people fall under my authority. I guess I’m just selfish that way. That’s why submission is so difficult for me. Submission is the act of yielding ourselves to the authority of another. It’s allowing someone else to call the shots and coming under a mutual plan. This mutual submission is a concrete directive for marriage we’re given in the book of Corinthians. But we hate that idea. We want the control; we don’t want to share it. But look what Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane. The night that Jesus is betrayed, He goes out to the garden and prays. He tells God the Father that, shockingly, he doesn’t want to be beaten and killed in a gruesome way. He even asks God to “let this cup pass from Him” or in other words, save me from this! Jesus could have walked away right then. He could have made the decision to make His own plan that didn’t include having his flesh ripped from His body. But Jesus knew the plan. He knew that this is what was required, so He submitted Himself to the Father and to the plan anyway. We need to learn to submit by walking with Jesus.

On and on I could go. There are examples all over the New Testament that shows what covenant love looks like. But instead, I want to look at a letter that was discovered hundreds of years ago. The Apostle Paul wrote to a church located in a port city off the coast of Greece called Corinth. In this letter he clearly shows what love should look like. So let's read this together, and as we do I want you to picture how powerful of a love this would be if it were lived out in a loving relationship…

If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn’t love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God’s secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn’t love others, I would be nothing. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn’t love others, I would have gained nothing.

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.

Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will become useless. But love will last forever! Now our knowledge is partial and incomplete, and even the gift of prophecy reveals only part of the whole picture! But when the time of perfection comes, these partial things will become useless.

When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely.

Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.

That’s an incredible picture of love! And that’s what Paul instructs us to do for each other. Let's look one more time at just the middle section we read…

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That kind of love seems impossible! It’s definitely unnatural at the very least. But we learn to love this way when we spend our life walking with Jesus. To be honest, I’m not even aware of another way to learn this type of love. That’s not to say that Christians are the only people on Earth that can have a good marriage. People of all races and religions and cultures have successful marriages. But regardless of race or religion, we’re all made in God’s image. To be trained to love the way a dynamic marriage requires, the only way I know is to follow Jesus and learn to love by the way He loves His bride: us! And the only way we can receive the fulness of His love, His plan, and His wisdom is to put Jesus before everything, putting Him, a relationship with Him, and learning from Him before anyone and anything else.

So tonight, I’m not asking you to gamble on God. I’m not asking you to take a step toward someone or something that has yet to prove themselves. That’s what dating is. What I’m asking you tonight is to commit, maybe even for the first time, to follow a Savior that already made the first move. Who risked it all for the sake of your heart. Who knew that you could say no, but pursued you anyway.

God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us. -1John 4:9-12

Jesus is pursuing you with a love that you can’t even fathom. And the beneficiary of this love isn’t even Himself – it’s you! And He’s not just offering us salvation and relationship for eternity, He’s offering it in this world too. A loving covenant so powerful it reflects the love you’ll experience for eternity in Heaven. That’s the love I’ve found here on Earth in Megan. That’s the love I want you to experience also. And the first and most important thing you need to learn is **Jesus over everything.**

Take a moment and picture this reality! A life that you’re experiencing the full expression of God’s love. And not only that, but you’re united in marriage to a partner who is doing the same. And because you’re both walking and learning from Jesus, you’re able to show that full expression of love to each other! And in your marriage, there is no yelling matches or needless fighting. There are no power struggles or worries over you receiving the love and support you need. Instead, there’s nothing but joy and confidence and respect and trust. Imagine that marriage! It sounds too good to be true. And maybe you’ve never even witnessed that kind of marriage first-hand. But it’s possible! And even though you can’t work on your marriage right now, you can at least work on your love right now. And the best way to do that is to put **Jesus over everything.**

I’m going to end tonight by offering a moment for you to respond to Jesus. To make the decision right now to make Jesus your number one over everyone and everything. Jesus saw your sins, He saw your struggles, and He entered into the chaos. He lived the life you couldn’t so He could die the death that should have been yours. Not the physical torture, but eternity apart from God. He was mocked, beaten, nailed to a cross, and killed for your sins. But in three days, He raised from the dead, conquering death, conquering hell, and paying the price for you. And now He’s offering you a relationship with Him. He’s asking you to join Him in this life and the next. What will you say?

But maybe you’re here tonight and you’ve given your heart to Jesus already. Your eternity is secure and you’re at peace with the creator of everything. For those that feel that way, let me ask you this: what’s first in your life? Someone is sitting on the throne. Something is more important than anything else. What is it? What’s taking the place of Jesus in your life? What determines your decisions? What is THE MOST IMPORTANT thing? Is it Jesus? Or is it something else?

Use this time to lead out new decisions and recommitments...