



CHASING
LOVE

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CONTENTS

About the Author	4
How to Use	6
Introduction	7
SESSION 1: Trust God	8
SESSION 2: True Freedom	20
SESSION 3: Real Love	32
SESSION 4: God's Grace	44
SESSION 5: God's Design	56
SESSION 6: Relationship Status	68
SESSION 7: The Transgender Question	80
SESSION 8: Abuse and Pornography	92
SESSION 9: The Challenge	104
Leader Guide	110
Sources	126
True Love Waits Commitment	128

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



DR. SEAN MCDOWELL is a gifted communicator with a passion for equipping the church—young people in particular—to make the case for the Christian faith. He connects with audiences in a tangible way through humor and stories while imparting hard evidence and logical support for a biblical worldview. Sean is an Associate Professor in the Christian Apologetics program at Talbot School of Theology at Biola University.

Sean also teaches a high school Bible class, which gives him insight into the prevailing culture so he can share his observations with fellow educators, pastors, and parents. In 2008, he received the Educator of the Year award for San Juan Capistrano, California, and the Association of Christian Schools International awarded Exemplary Status to his apologetics training. Sean is listed among the top 100 apologists from all over

the world. He graduated summa cum laude from Talbot Theological Seminary with a double master's degree in Theology and Philosophy. He earned a Ph.D. in Apologetics and Worldview Studies from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 2014.

Traveling throughout the United States and abroad, Sean speaks at camps, churches, schools, universities, and conferences. He has spoken for organizations including Focus on the Family, the Chuck Colson Center for Christian Worldview, Cru, Youth Specialties, Hume Lake Christian Camps, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and the Association of Christian Schools International. Sean is the co-host for the *Think Biblically* podcast, which is one of the most popular podcasts on faith and cultural engagement.

Sean is the author, co-author, or editor of over twenty books including *The Fate of the Apostles*, *So The Next Generation Will Know* (with J. Warner Wallace), *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (with Josh McDowell), *Same-Sex Marriage: A Thoughtful Approach to God's Design for Marriage* (with John Stonestreet), *Is God Just a Human Invention?* (with Jonathan Morrow), and *Understanding Intelligent Design* (with William A. Dembski). Sean is the General Editor for *A New Kind of Apologist*, *Apologetics for a New Generation*, *Sharing the Good News with Mormons*, and *The Apologetics Study Bible for Students*. Sean has one of the leading apologetics blogs, which can be read at seanmcdowell.org.

In April 2000, Sean married his high school sweetheart, Stephanie. They have three children and live in San Juan Capistrano, California.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This Bible study book includes nine weeks of content. Each week has an introductory page containing a conversation starter and notes to go along with the video teaching, followed by content designed for groups and individuals.

GROUP SESSIONS

Each week of content begins with the group session. This section uses the following format to facilitate simple yet meaningful interaction among group members, with God's Word and with the video teaching.

START

This section includes questions and talking points to get the conversation started and to introduce the video segment.

WATCH

This section includes key points from the video teaching with blanks for students to fill in as they watch the video. Toward the end of each session's video a pause icon will appear on the screen. Press pause on the video to allow time for group discussion, then play the remaining clip as you close your time together.

DISCUSS

These four pages include questions and statements that guide students to respond to the video teaching and to relevant Bible passages. Since this study covers difficult topics, it's important to consider the age, maturity level, and needs of your group. Consult with church leadership and parents about any controversial questions that may be covered during group time. Videos under the heading "Bonus Videos for Leaders: Tough Questions," are to help leaders prepare to answer tough questions students might ask during this study. They are *not* designed to be shown to students as educational material.

PERSONAL STUDY

Three days of personal study are provided each week to take students deeper into Scripture and to supplement the biblical truths introduced in the teaching time. These pages challenge students to grow in their understanding of God's Word and to make practical applications to their lives.

INTRODUCTION

This could be one of the most important Bible studies you do at this stage in life.

I realize this probably sounds a bit melodramatic. Doesn't everyone say that? Well, yes, many do. And I may be guilty of overstatement. But as a father, it comes from my heart.

I can also speak from personal experience. Having been married to my high school sweetheart for over two decades, I am still reaping the benefits from what I learned in similar studies when I was a student. The older I get, the more grateful I am for the people who helped me think biblically about love, sex, and relationships. I hope you have the same experience with this study. If you really take this material to heart, I firmly believe it could be a game-changer for you.

So, how can you maximize this time? Here are three tips to keep in mind.

MAKE SCRIPTURE YOUR ULTIMATE GUIDE

As you will see, this study is rooted deeply in Scripture. The goal is to understand what the Bible says about sexuality and apply it to our lives. We want to become like the Bereans who examined God's Word every day to see if what Paul said was true (Acts 17:11). Rather than conforming Scripture to your feelings, thoughts, and desires, I encourage you to commit to do the opposite: conform your life to what God's Word says.

HAVE AN OPEN MIND

Undoubtedly, something in this study will challenge your thinking; it might even make you uncomfortable. Given the controversial nature of many topics today—especially in the areas of sex, love and relationships—you may be tempted to immediately dismiss some of these ideas. Don't fall for that trap! Seek to understand first and be willing to change your mind.

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS WITH OTHERS

One of the best ways to learn something is to share it with other people. The discussion in this study will be helpful, but if you really want it to sink in, talk about it with others. Talk with your parents. Post what you learn on social media. Discuss it with your friends. Be gracious and kind but share what you learn with the world!

This is going to be fun, and I am honored to go on this journey with you. May God strengthen and guide you as you dive into this study.





TRUST GOD

START

What are you chasing in life? Good grades? Success in sports? A high-paying job? The right boyfriend or girlfriend?

Maybe you care about some—or even all—of these things. But do they capture the depth of what you're really seeking? As good as these things can be, my suspicion is that you want your life to be about something bigger. You want your life to matter.

In this session, we'll learn what it takes to have a meaningful life. We'll discover the essence of what love truly is and how it will drive us to pursue the things that matter the most.

WATCH

Watch the Session 1 video. Fill in the blanks as you follow along. When the icon appears on screen, pause the video. Play the remaining clip at the end of the group discussion.

1. You have a _____ who loves you and who wants the best for you.
2. Satan isn't trying to convince you God doesn't _____.
3. They actually don't question the _____ of God; they question the _____ of God.
4. Difficult things are _____.
5. God is _____, and He actually wants the _____ for us.

DISCUSS

Read Matthew 6:31–33.

“Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

What are you most anxious about in your life right now?

Write out the promise Jesus gives us if we put His kingdom and righteousness first.

Jesus invites us to embrace a higher calling—living not for our own pleasure and goals but seeking first the things of God. This road is tough and requires sacrifice, but it’s the most meaningful life we can live. So, how do we begin to seek God’s kingdom first?

Read Mark 12:28-31.

And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Simply put, the greatest commandment is to love God and love other people. If we want to seek God’s kingdom first, then we must learn how to love God and other people.

But what does it look like to truly love others?

Read 1 John 3:16.

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

This doesn’t necessarily mean God will literally ask you to lay down your life. What it means is that the way of love involves humbling ourselves in obedience to what God has called us to do. But Jesus isn’t just our model of love; His death on the cross for our sins enables us to love. He makes us new creations—new people who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, can give up things the world says we need for the sake of loving God and others well.

What are some practical ways you can lay down your life for others?

Still, the clash between Jesus’ invitation and world’s invitation could not be more extreme. The world tells you to *live for yourself*. Jesus says to *die to yourself*. The world says to do whatever you want. Jesus says to cultivate the right wants.

How do you grow those “right wants” in your relationships? How do you seek God and His kingdom in your relationships with other people? Let’s focus on what it means to love God and others with our sexuality and in our relationships in this unique cultural moment.

TRUST AND LOVE

One of the most important ingredients of love and relationships is trust.

Who do you trust most in your life?

Who has the biggest influence on the way you think and act?

How you answer these questions influences every decision you make. This is especially true in the area of sexuality and relationships. Our world is filled with messages that don’t line up with Scripture. And we often find ourselves asking: Who will we trust?

God is a perfect heavenly Father, and He is worthy of our trust. He knows everything, has unlimited power, and loves us more deeply than we can even grasp.

Read Romans 5:8.

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

We all have times when we doubt God loves us. What does this verse tell us about those feelings?

Here's the truth: God loves us because of who He is, not because of anything we did. Jesus didn't require us to repent before He laid down His life for us. He didn't die for good people; He died for sinners. God paid the ultimate price through the death of His Son so we could have eternal life. So, do you trust Him? Do you trust this God?

In the garden of Eden, Satan tempted Adam and Eve by trying to undermine their confidence in God's character. He caused them to question: Did God really have their best interest in mind, or was He keeping them from something better?

Read Genesis 3:6.

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

What three things did Eve notice about the fruit?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What does this tell us about sinful activities that may tempt us?

Adam and Eve ultimately lost confidence in God's goodness and ate the fruit. They doubted His character, and their disobedience brought immeasurable suffering to the world. We're faced with the same kind of choice today.

What are some "fruits" of this world that look pleasurable, fun, and satisfying, but are ultimately harmful and sinful?

How does our culture justify these things?

The voices in our culture can be powerful and convincing, especially since we hear them nonstop through social media, school, television, celebrities, and so on. As a result, we are tempted to stop trusting God and wonder, "Did God really say ...?"

Satan aims to undermine God's character because we evaluate God's commands in light of His character. Scripture teaches that God is good, so we can trust His commands. Not only is God good, but His commands are intended for our good. They are not random or unreasonable. They stem from His character and are intended to help us thrive in our lives and relationships.

List some actions and behaviors that you know are truly right or wrong.

How do you know those things are right or wrong?

God is the source of both the physical and moral laws of the universe. The world operates according to physical laws, which humans discover, and moral laws, which are written on the human heart. In other words, we can know right and wrong because God has placed these laws on our hearts (Rom. 2:14-16).

There is a physical reality and a spiritual reality, and it is only when we align our lives with both that we can be truly free. Following Jesus puts us in touch with reality, and living Jesus' sexual ethic allows us to thrive.

Why should you trust God and His Word in all things, including love and relationships?

The world says to follow our hearts, to put ourselves first, to do whatever makes us happy. But many of the things we chase to make us happy will ultimately disappoint us. Jesus promises us that if we "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," God will grant us true, lasting happiness (Matt. 6:33).

DAY ONE

Good Rules

Write down some words that describe what the world thinks about Christianity and all of its “rules.”

Are they usually positive or negative? Why do you think this is the case?

What are some biblical commands you sometimes find difficult to follow or understand?

Why do you think God made these commands?

Let’s see what the Bible says about God’s rules.

Read Deuteronomy 10:12-13.

“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?”

List the three things Israel was commanded to do to show appropriate fear (honor or respect) to God:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Why should we follow God’s commands?

The verses above say God’s commands are for our own good. Has anyone ever told you that before? As tough as it is to believe sometimes, rules do exist for our own good. Think about your favorite sport. What would it be like if there were no rules? If the players just ran around the field or court doing whatever they wanted—no boundaries, no fouls. The game wouldn’t be a game anymore—it would be chaos. The rules of a game make the sport what it is; rules are what differentiate football from baseball from basketball.

Now let’s take this one step further. Think about society.

What would it be like if society had no government or laws?

Would you feel more or less safe in a society without rules?

With no laws, people could steal or hurt others without consequences. People would literally get away with murder. As harsh as they may seem sometimes, rules ultimately exist to protect us.

The same goes for God’s laws. He knows what will help society and individuals thrive. For example, let’s look at three of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20):

- “Do not lie.”
- “Do not steal.”
- “Do not murder.”

Imagine what society would be like if everyone followed just those three rules.

So isn’t it possible that God knows what is best for us concerning every other command He has given us, especially when it comes to love and sex?

Has this lesson changed the way you view God’s commandments? If so, how?

What steps will you take to show God that you trust He knows best?

DAY TWO

The Real Message

List some ideas or slogans about love and sex that are prevalent in our society today.

Society is filled with messages about love and sex that are contrary to what Christianity teaches. *Is sexual activity really that big of a deal? Does porn really hurt anyone? As long as sex is consensual, there's nothing wrong with it, right? Are you really going to judge someone else for how they love? Why embrace a view of sex, love, and gender that seems so closed-minded? Isn't the Christian sexual ethic unrealistic today anyway?*

Be honest. Do you agree with any of these ideas? If so, why?

What do these questions have in common?

These messages contain many of the themes being championed in our society today: tolerance, equality, diversity, and inclusion. Generally, these are all good things. As Christians, we believe all human beings have equal intrinsic worth and everyone should be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their beliefs or lifestyle. But this does not mean we have to affirm everyone's choices and actions.

Let's look at one of the most common messages in our culture and see what the Bible says about it.

Are you really going to judge someone else for how they love?

The world has adopted the notion that it is wrong to judge people for any of their life choices, especially when it comes to sexual behavior. Many are quick to point out that even Jesus says "do not judge" (Matt. 7:1). But there's more to the story.

Read Matthew 7:1-5.

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do

you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

What are the specific reasons Jesus says not to judge?

Before we can "remove the speck" from others' eyes, what must we do?

Is this passage really teaching us to never judge at all, or is it teaching something else? Explain.

Far too many people read the first three words of this passage and stop, thinking it teaches us to never judge anyone. But as we can see, this is not the point at all. This passage teaches us how to judge *the right way*. These words affirm that people do have specks in their eyes (sins), and it is evident that these specks need to be removed. But if we are struggling with those same sins, we can't go around "fixing" others until we have overcome them ourselves. *That* is the point of the passage.

Jesus offers another clarification on proper judgment in John 7:24. Check it out:

"Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

What are some examples of judging only by outward appearances?

What do you think Jesus is referring to when He says to judge by "right judgment"?

God's Word is our final standard for right and wrong—not our friends, not celebrities, and not culture. The Bible definitely has things to say about love and sex, as we will learn in the upcoming weeks. While Christians should never be harsh and unloving toward others, we should never compromise biblical truth just because the world considers God's sexual ethic narrow-minded and intolerant.

The truth is this: "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple" (Ps. 19:7).

DAY THREE

Worth It

I won't lie. Following Jesus' ethic for love and sex isn't always easy. Many times it will clash with the culture around us. You've probably heard reports of Christian bakers, florists, and photographers who have been sued or put out of business for refusing to provide service for same-sex weddings. Maybe you'll never be in a position like theirs. But you may still be shamed and ostracized for choosing Jesus' sexual ethic over the culture's. This can be very discouraging, so we need to remind ourselves of God's promises for our lives. In the end, following Christ will be worth it.

Read Romans 8:28-29.

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

What is the promise for those who love God?

What is the end goal of believers? Who will we become like?

How awesome is it that we get to become like Jesus? That is the goal of every Christian. But, of course we don't accomplish this on our own—we have God's help along the way.

This passage doesn't begin by saying some things work together for good or just the minor things in our lives. No, *all* things work together for good. This means no matter what we go through—good or bad—every bit of it will work out for good in the end if we follow God and His purpose.

Paul didn't just write these words—he lived them. He had been beaten and shipwrecked, and he faced constant dangers and difficulties throughout his life (2 Cor. 11). Yet earlier in his letter, he said this:

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. —2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Why did Paul say to not give up?

Paul faced serious difficulties in his life. Yet, what did he consider them?

What do these kinds of experiences do for us?

So, what must we keep in mind whenever we face difficult situations?

We can't always see what God is up to when we struggle. Still, we have to trust who we know Him to be. He is good, and all things work together for our good and His glory. He promises that you absolutely will face difficult circumstances, but He also promises that you will never face them alone. Our God is always with us, even in the trials.

He is a God we can trust—no matter what.