

MICHAEL TODD

How to Win at
**DATING,
MARRIAGE,
and SEX**

**STUDY
GUIDE**

RELATIONSHIP GOALS

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RELATIONSHIP GOALS STUDY GUIDE

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RELATIONSHIP GOALS

How to Win at
DATING, MARRIAGE,
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STUDY GUIDE

MICHAEL TODD

with Eric Stanford



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INTRODUCTION

A goal is the result or achievement toward which effort is directed. Take away the goal, and what good is the effort? Imagine a target archer with a bow and arrow. If he doesn't have a bull's-eye target, he can aim and shoot if he wants, but the arrow is not going to hit anything purposeful. So, what's the point?

Many of us don't have our aim directed when it comes to relationships. We take whatever comes. We do whatever's comfortable. But we don't really know where we're going or why.

Don't believe me? Have you ever known a girl who dated pretty much any guy who happened to show an interest in her, without ever stopping to think about the kind of guy who would really be right for her? Or a couple who have dated for a long time and have gotten so comfortable with it that they aren't making any move toward marriage? Or a married couple who have let their former passion turn into a mere partnership for child rearing and home maintenance?

And it's not just romantic relationships. How about a parent who doesn't have any plans for how to stay close to his kids as they turn into adults and leave the home? Or somebody who moved into the neighborhood a year ago and still hasn't made a single move to get to know her neighbors?

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Maybe you're the kind of person who somehow has never gotten around to making conscious relationship goals and has just fallen into the relationship ruts. But more than likely you've got some kind of goals, targets, or markers of success in mind when it comes to relationships. That's better. Still, even if you do have targets, I want you to be open minded about whether these are the *right* targets. You might need to reexamine them. Because, see, it's possible to have a target for your arrow that's the *wrong* target.

Let's say you're single and ready to mingle and you've made a list of things you want in a significant other. One could be "He's got to be at least this tall and make this much money," or "She's got to have a cute face and a tiny waist." This shows that most of our lists tend to be a little (or a lot) superficial and might reflect, not what we actually need in a partner, but more of just what we want at the time.

Or let's say you want to make more friends. Whom are you interested in knowing better? Is it just because they're good looking, have money, or have surface similarities with you? What about what's on the inside of them?

It's good to take aim at relationship goals. That's a whole lot better than just passively letting society or the media or our family experience teach us how to do relationships. But we also have to make sure we have the right goals, ones that will contribute to the life we ought to be leading.

God will help us find the right target for our relational arrows. And it will be better than what we could find anywhere else.

Culture's views on relationship are a moving target. Culture says marriage looks like this in one decade, then like that in another decade. The term *dating* used to imply physically going out somewhere. But now we have “Netflix and chill,” and you don't have to be committed to anybody to cross the line into private areas.

You can take aim at new relationship goals to help fulfill your purposes in life and keep you in line with God's eternal truths.

God wants every single one of us to have successful relationships, but we have to have a goal that is stable enough for us to aim at. So, let me point out to you that the only thing that is unchangeable, unwavering, and immovable is the Word of God. Isaiah 40:8 tells us, “The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever.” So, I dare you—no, I double-dog dare you—to let the standard of your relationships be God's Word, even if it's just for the time it takes you to go through these five sessions. Let's just see what would happen in our hearts, minds, and lives if we would follow the stable, biblical model of relationships instead of following our own feelings or other people's examples.

In your Relationship Goals group, you can take aim at new relationship goals that will help you fulfill your purposes in life and keep you in line with God's eternal truths.

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I don't care how old you are, how many relationships you've had, or what your current relationship status is—you *can* do relationships differently. You just need the right goals, ones that will enable you to get a W.

—Michael Todd

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This participant's guide works in a lot of different situations, including in small groups, in book discussion groups made up of either single or married people (or both combined), or by a dating or married couple who want to grow closer. However you choose to use this participant's guide, I hope that you will maximize your experience by using it alongside the book *Relationship Goals*.

If you're studying *Relationship Goals* in an established group, you probably already have a clear sense of how your meetings should be organized and conducted to fit your context. But if you want a little more direction, here are some suggestions to get you started.

THE GROUP EXPERIENCE

To encourage conversation in your Relationship Goals group, try to keep the group size to no more than a dozen people. Meet in a place where you can sit comfortably to discuss the questions. There's enough material for about an hour of meeting time, though you can shrink it or stretch it if you need to, depending on how your group manages the discussion time.

This whole journey is about progression, not perfection. It's important that you have a place to share honestly. So, more than anything, make sure that you're in a group of

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people you trust. God doesn't bless who you pretend to be. He blesses who you really are.

THE SESSION FORMAT

The sessions are designed to follow a simple format. You'll find an introduction you can read, opening and closing prayers, and a starter question that will help to get the conversation moving. Then you've got three steps:

Step 1: Personal Need—a simple activity or some questions that will help you identify the personal relevance of the topic for you, individually.

Step 2: Group Discussion—a menu of discussion questions designed to help the group understand and apply truths from the book *Relationship Goals*, supplemented with Bible studies that will help you dig into relevant passages.

Step 3: Action Step—your turn to decide what kind of relationship goals you are going to aim for in response to what you've learned in the session.

THE GROUP LEADER

One person should serve as the facilitator of the group sessions. This isn't junior high, and there's no need for anyone to lecture or dominate the group. But someone should take responsibility for keeping the discussion rolling.

Even if someone has had more experience in relation-

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ships, I encourage everyone to value everyone else's experience. The leader of the group should see this as an opportunity for service that can be done only with humility and compassion. You don't have to be a relationship expert; you are just helping to facilitate the conversation.

RELATIONSHIPS

This study is all about relationships, right? So, make these sessions an opportunity for building relationships among the group members. Spend time getting to know one another, encouraging and praying for one another. You might want to have your discussion over a meal or serve snacks. By the authority invested in me as a pastor and the author of *Relationship Goals*, I hereby give you permission to make your group fun!

READING SCHEDULE FOR RELATIONSHIP GOALS

If you haven't already read the book *Relationship Goals*, do so as you work your way through these sessions.

- Chapter 1: Read before session 1.
- Chapters 2 and 3: Read before session 2.
- Chapters 4 and 5: Read before session 3.
- Chapters 6 and 7: Read before session 4.
- Chapters 8, 9, and conclusion: Read before session 5.

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SOME SPECIAL ADVICE: BE HOT!

So many people who are looking for a relationship are trying to find a girl or a guy who is *hot*. And they try to look as *hot* as possible themselves so they can get attention. “Bro, she’s smokin’ hot!”

For the purposes of this discussion group, let me suggest that you forget how you look or how smooth you act and try to be HOT—Humble, Open, and Transparent.

Your group is going to be talking about relationships. Singleness. Dating. Sex. Marriage. Divorce. It’s going to get personal *fast*. It might get pretty hot in the room! And so, you might be tempted to hold back on your own personal story or what you’re thinking and feeling or the mistakes you’ve made. That’s your right, if that’s what you want to do. But once again I’ve got a dare for you: be vulnerable and share openly with your group past the point where it feels comfortable to you, because that’s where you’re going to expose parts of your heart that need healing. You can’t walk in freedom until you walk in truth (John 8:32).

Or here’s another way to look at it: We all want to become more in our relationships. But before we can become, we have to be. *Be* is the beginning of *be-come*. We have to

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deal with where we really are first. Positive transformation comes afterward.

To make all this work, your group needs to agree to be a safe place for everybody to be HOT. Got me? You don't judge. You don't tease. You don't gossip. If somebody wants to keep something confidential within the group, all he has to do is say so—and it's done. This kind of trust will make it possible for your group not just to discuss some ideas but also to minister to one another. And isn't that what you want?

*Be vulnerable and share openly
with your group, because that's
where you're going to expose parts
of your heart that need healing.*

If you're hurting on the inside because of issues with relationships, the Enemy wants you to keep the problems hidden so they continue to ooze like a fresh wound. He wants you listening to his accusations, lies, and discouragement, not taking in words of truth or hope. But Revelation 12:11 tells how the brothers and sisters foil the Enemy's plans.

They have defeated him by the blood of the Lamb
and by their testimony.

Did you catch that? “By their testimony.” We can't defeat the Enemy without God's grace in Christ (the Lamb),

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but something else that's crucial is our own testimony—our story of how we've gone wrong, our thankfulness for how Jesus stepped in, our witness to how God is restoring us and moving us toward our purpose. As these stories are shared in a group, we bring the healing truth to one another.

All I did was write the *Relationship Goals* book. *You* are the minister in your Relationship Goals group. So be HOT about your problems and your progress. And let others be HOT too.

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Session 1

RELATIONSHIP GOALS PURPOSE

Based on chapter 1 of *Relationship Goals*: “Taking Aim”

Session Aim: To recognize the need to have targets in our key relationships, aligning our purposes in these relationships with God’s amazing purposes for us.

#RelationshipGoals has been a trending topic worldwide for years now. Search for this hashtag on social media, and you’ll find celebrity couples posing at exclusive clubs, stills from romantic movies at the point where the boy gets the girl, cute couples kissing on a beach or cuddled up in bed, a boyfriend-girlfriend pair holding balloons in the park and giving the impression that their relationship has never been anything but pure happiness. And when people re-post these pictures with the hashtag, what are they saying? They’re saying, “I want a relationship like that!” Kim and Kanye, Jay and Bey, Prince William and Kate, Will and Jada, some unidentified couple who look really good in a picture that happened to go viral—we can easily become

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obsessed with their seemingly perfect images and make them our idols and ideals.

Okay, maybe you've never noticed the #RelationshipGoals tag online, much less posted anything with it. But if I were to ask you to think about the relationship you want, would an idealized picture flash into your mind? Maybe it's you with a tall, handsome pro athlete who takes you on shopping sprees. Or maybe it's you beside a girl who's hood like Cardi B but has a sweet side like Carrie Underwood. Is he an amazing listener with a classic swag like George Clooney and a job that pays both his bills and yours? Can she cook like your mama and get just as hype as you do when your team scores?

The Bible, in fact, is the greatest source for relationship wisdom, and it's time we started applying it to relationships as they really exist.

Now, if you just asked *What's wrong with that?* in your head, allow me to submit to you that maybe there's more to relationship than what pop culture has taught us or our own imaginings have dreamed up. Maybe our society sells an illusion of intimate relationship that's more like a mirage—the closer you get to it, the more you realize it's not real at all. Maybe the things we tend to celebrate are built on unstable foundations and are bound to eventually fall.

We live in a world that has more and more relationships and less and less love, more and more sex and less and less

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intimacy. I wrote *Relationship Goals* because I want others to minimize the pain from bad relationships and start to benefit from the rewards of good ones. Relationship Goals groups are for people who want to talk through these issues with others. Together you can help each other learn how to win in relationships. I'm glad you're in!

OPENING PRAYER

Holy Spirit, we invite You to come into this group and make it Your own . . . right now! Teach us truths we need to know. Soften our hearts to receive the truth. Begin healing our hurts. Help us to treat one another with respect and help each other move into a life of more holiness, more meaning, and more happiness.

God, whatever we've been through in our relational lives in the past, help us to trust that You have good things ahead for us.

Amen.

STARTER QUESTION

What made you want to be a part of this Relationship Goals group? What are you hoping to get out of it?

STEP 1: PERSONAL NEED

What's your relationship personality? To start thinking of what you're like as a relater, check out the statements below. Keeping in mind all your important relationships (family, friendship, romantic, professional, and so on), circle the number from 1 to 5 that best describes you.

I'm slow to form relationships.	1 2 3 4 5	I'm quick to form relationships.
I think carefully about the relationships I form.	1 2 3 4 5	I tend to go with my gut in choosing relationships.
My relationships tend to last a long time.	1 2 3 4 5	I tend to go through relationships quickly and move on.
I typically think of relationships as a possible source of hurt or risk.	1 2 3 4 5	I typically think of relationships as a source of happiness and fun.
I have just a few relationships that mean a lot to me.	1 2 3 4 5	I love having lots of relationships.

This is not a right or wrong, better or worse quiz. This is an exercise for you to evaluate how you relate to others and probably some things you never stop to think about.

Based on this nonscientific quiz, and other ways you've gotten to know yourself, how would you summarize your

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relationship personality—how you generally feel about relationships and go about pursuing them?

STEP 2: GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What was the last post you saw with the hashtag #RelationshipGoals? What does this post say about the culture that surrounds us?
2. Name up to three other misleading images of the “perfect” relationship that you have seen in the media lately—whether in a movie, on a billboard, on social media, or elsewhere. Do you believe the images we see of “perfect” relationships are dangerous, neutral, or helpful in our own relationships and friendships? Why?

3. What rules of romantic relationships did you hear growing up? In what ways were you taught or shown how to follow them?

4. Michael says, “It’s no secret that the church hasn’t done a great job at confronting real-life issues, so many of us didn’t have much choice but to allow movies, TV shows, each big cousin who had a new girlfriend every Thanksgiving, and the slew of Instagramamous people who take great filtered photos to become our relationship gurus.” In what ways did television, movies, or social media shape your view of relationships while you were growing up?

5. What examples of healthy relationships—whether parent/child, husband/wife, or friendships—did you have around you as you grew up? How do you think they influenced your view of relationships today?

6. In what ways have the church and Jesus followers influenced your view of relationships?

7. In general, are you the kind of person who likes to set goals or the kind of person who likes to wing it? What about in relationships, specifically?

8. Describe a time when having a clear relationship goal helped you achieve what you wanted. Or describe a time when not having a clear relationship goal led to trouble.

We live in a world that has more and more relationships and less and less love, more and more sex and less and less intimacy.

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9. If someone were to look at your relationships today—in business, school, romance, friendship, or family—what would that person say is your primary goal? Is that what you want it to be? Why or why not?
10. In which of your relationships are you feeling the lack of a goal the most? Why?
11. Michael introduces the idea that our relationship goals are supposed to be in alignment with our major life purposes and the dreams God has planted in us. As you see it, what is the connection between relationships and purpose?
12. Ephesians 2:1–10 beautifully pictures God’s mercy to us, taking us from spiritual death to spiritual

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life, from enslavement to evil to an invitation to do good things.

Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else.

But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for

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the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

- a. Do you consider yourself to be saved? If so, tell the group about your salvation experience. If not, it’s okay—you belong here even before you believe.

- b. What are some of the most obvious ways God has shown His love to you and changed your life since your salvation?

- c. What do you think it means that “we are God’s masterpiece”?

- d. Where are you in understanding and pursuing God’s purposes for you—the “good things” He planned for you long ago?
13. Michael points out that culture offers us an unstable picture of relationships. In contrast, the Word of God is unchangeable, unwavering, and immovable. How has the Bible influenced your vision for the relationships in your life?
14. “Progression, not perfection” is Michael’s mantra for relationship goals. Is that encouraging to you? If so, why?

15. What does getting a win in relationships mean to you?

Having a goal without aim is senseless, but having a goal without God is pointless.

STEP 3: ACTION STEP

In chapter 1, Michael says there's no pressure to get everything right with our relationship goals all at once—but there *is* pressure to get started. So, let's do that. Write down one to three relationship goals for yourself as you know them at this point. In the course of this study, you'll add to and refine your goals. If you're willing, share your relationship goal(s) with the rest of the group.

- 1.

2.

3.

What connections do you see between these goals and what you believe to be God's purposes for your life?

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, we pray that, for every person in this group, today will be the start of better understanding what You want from us and how our relationships can help us achieve those goals. You have been so loving and good to us. We just want to respond by doing

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what pleases You. We commit ourselves to that now and throughout the rest of this relationship goals study.

In the name of Jesus, amen.

PREVIEW OF SESSION 2

Next time, we'll be looking at our relationship with God and how putting that relationship first helps all our other relationships fall into line, including our dating relationships. The topic of session 2 is the basis of doing relationship goals differently—don't miss it!

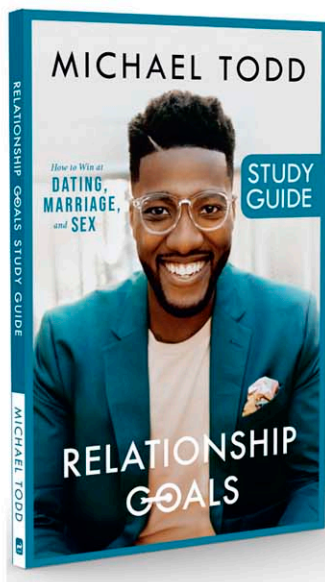
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