

# DATING FOR A NEW GENERATION

BY HEATHER THOMPSON DAY

*That your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless....* —Philippians 1:9–10 NIV

**W**hen I was in high school, I had a major crush on Rocky. He starred on the football team, played varsity all four years on the basketball team, and had college scouts at every baseball game. We met in the eighth grade. I had attended private school all my life but, in the middle of my eighth-grade year, I found myself seated in my town's public school for reasons that would deem another whole article. Rocky was the first boy, or person, at all to acknowledge my existence.

"You're new," he said, tapping my shoulder from behind in English class.

"I am," I responded sheepishly. I had talked to boys before, but not ones who didn't know what went on a haystack. I felt like a complete outsider. I always had been extremely well-known in my small Adventist elementary school. For the first time in my entire educational existence, I knew what it felt like to be a stranger.

"I'll show you around," Rocky said, smiling. And he did.

For the next five years, Rocky not only walked me to new classrooms, he also helped me navigate a broken heart. He invited me to his family dinners, made me cookie milkshakes, and told me how beautiful I was. I was 15. The only male who had ever told me I was beautiful was my father, and he liked me without straight hair and makeup, so I could hardly trust his judgment. When Rocky told me I was beautiful, I found myself hoping he was right.

We shared a locker every year. He made me cards out of construction paper on Valentine's Day. He told everyone who would listen that I was his best friend; each time he said it, I swallowed the lump in my throat that grew larger.

Eventually, I grew up. I went away to college. I was halfway through my freshmen year when Rocky called me. He wanted to meet for dinner. We ate and laughed. He told



jokes I pretended I had never heard him say before. He put his arm around me, and I felt the rejection fade. Nonetheless, he was too late.

That was the last conversation I ever had with Rocky. For the first time in our entire relationship, I wasn't the one being rejected, and I guess, since we didn't share a locker

anymore, there was no need to keep pretending we were something that we weren't.

I teach communication courses at a community college. One of my favorite chapters to walk my students through is the chapter on relationships. There are several communication theories dealing with how we start, maintain and end relationships. I only want to walk you through one key concept in this article, but I think it may be eye-opening — it's the relationship cycle. Relationships have six stages.

## CONTACT

The first stage is contact. In this stage, you meet. Some research suggests that within the first four minutes of meeting someone, you have already made up your mind as to whether or not you like that person. During the four-plus years I have been teaching, I have learned one thing about the theory of four minutes: Typically, men agree with it.

## INVOLVEMENT

The next stage of relationship development is involvement. This is when you test to see if your initial judgments were correct. You hang out in groups, you text, you stalk their social media accounts, you know standard protocol.

## INTIMACY

The third stage of relationship development is intimacy. There is something important about intimacy; it includes both private and social bonding. The couple has a private conversation about their relationship status, and then makes the private commitment public knowledge. They tell friends, invite each other to meet their families, post it on Facebook, etc.

I always tell my students, "If you think you are in a relationship with someone because you are committing to each other privately, but you do not ever make it public, you are not in a relationship." Affairs, casual sex, secret texts are not relationships. True intimacy is both private and public. If you are not experiencing both sides of intimacy, you simply aren't experiencing intimacy.

## DETERIORATION

The fourth stage of relationships is deterioration. This is where relationship bonds weaken. Almost every relationship will deteriorate, even healthy marriages. Some signs of deterioration are that the two of you talk less, show affection less, hang out less. Don't panic. Deterioration is normal.

## REPAIR

The fifth stage is repair. Nearly all relationships will go through forms of repair that should bring you back to intimacy. Remember: Relationships are not broken because they do not always stay in stage three. This is normal relationship movement.

## DISSOLUTION

The sixth stage of a relationship, and the last, is dissolution. If the repair does not work, you will end up here. Some people skip the fifth stage altogether and head straight for dissolution. Dissolution says that your bonds are broken,

and you separate both privately and publicly. It is a reversal of intimacy.

Here is what I think is bizarre: Social media has completely changed relationship development. Rocky and I went through the six stages and, at stage six, we stopped speaking. I couldn't tell you today what he is up to and, quite frankly, I don't care. With the introduction of social media, however, many of us never really enter stage six. We never really end the relationship, because with the tap of a finger we can see pictures, read thoughts, and relive old feelings all over again.

This is totally rewiring the process. It's natural and normal for relationships to die. Today, we are perpetuating relationships, sometimes forever. What are the effects of this on our new relationships? How are marriages affected because of the social media relationships we never let die? How is stage three (intimacy) in our current relationships affected by the fact that we never fully went through stage six (dissolution) in our last relationship?

Social media can be credited with changing the way relationships are born, but it is also bringing along an interesting side effect: Relationships aren't dying. This last point is, to me, as noteworthy as the first.

I did not write this article to give you all the answers; I just wanted to raise some pertinent questions. Here is what I know: When I was 18 and decided I was not going to be in a relationship with Rocky, we never spoke again because ... well, why should we? I also know that 50 percent of marriages are ending in divorce, and in 2012, more than a third of divorce filings contained the word "Facebook" in them.

We have to stop thinking that relationships should be like vampires and that good things don't come to an end. It's simple communication theory. Every romantic relationship, except your current one, should experience stage six. There is a reason why, in high school, when couples broke up, they stopped sharing a locker. Relationships were not meant to be vampires. Don't breathe life into what was meant to be dead.

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Heather Thompson Day lives in Berrien Springs, Michigan. Her desire is to share the life lessons she has learned with young adults who struggle to find balance in the Christian life. She is a published author, including *Hook, Line, and Sinker*, which is available at <http://www.adventistbookcenter.com>.