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## “He’s Just Not That Into You” –Postmodern Secular Romance

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**Monday, November 22, 2004**

Sex and romance remain big issues in popular culture—and for good reason. In a fallen world, issues of sexuality and romantic love are prime candidates for corruption and confusion. HBO’s Emmy-winning Sex and the City may serve as the most potent symbol of the secular distortion of romance and the postmodern confusion of sexuality that is now taken for granted in many sectors of American society.

The latest evidence of this tragic confusion is found in the book He’s Just Not That Into You: The No-Excuses Truth to Understanding Guys—the best-selling nonfiction book according to recent reports. Written by two authors connected with Sex and the City, the book is the perfect introduction to the sad, empty, highly-sexualized, and amoral world of modern romance.

Authors Greg Behrendt and Liz Tuccilo pack quite a punch in this little book. As the authors explain, the book grew out of an accidental conversation in the writers’ room of Sex and the City. As Liz Tuccilo explains, the female writers were “talking, pitching ideas, our personal love lives weaving in and out of the fictional lives we were creating in the room. And just like on any other day, one of the women on staff asked for feedback on the behavior of a man whom she liked. He was giving her mixed messages—she was confused. We were happy to pitch in and pick apart all the signs and signals of his actions. And just like on any other day, after much analysis and debate, we concluded that she was fabulous, he must be scared, he’s never met a woman as great as her, he is intimidated, and she should just give him time.”

But, that female conversation was interrupted by a male consultant for the program who walked into the room, Greg Behrendt. “On this day,” Liz reports, “Greg listened intently to the story and our reactions, and then said to the woman in question, ‘Listen, it sounds like he’s just not that into you.’”

This simple observation dawned as a great metaphysical discovery on the part of the female writers. “We were shocked, appalled, amused, horrified, and above all, intrigued,” Tuccilo reports. “We sensed immediately that this man might be speaking the truth. A truth that we, in our combined hundred years of dating experience, had never considered, and definitely never considered saying out loud.”

Greg Behrendt also provides his side of the story, explaining that he had the “good fortune to be the only straight male on the predominantly female writing staff” of Sex and the City. He confirms Tuccilo’s version of the story. “When a guy is into you, he lets you know it,” Behrendt instructs. “He calls, he shows up, he wants to meet your friends, he can’t keep his eyes or hands off of you, and when it’s time to have sex, he’s more than overjoyed to oblige.” According to Behrendt, “Men are not complicated, although we’d like you to think we are.”

The strategic conversation in the Sex and the City writers’ room became the catalyst for He’s Just Not That Into You as Behrendt and Tuccilo combined their talents and insights to write the book from a combined male and female perspective. The end result is something like a primer for romance according to the worldview of Sex and the City—but this time corrected by a male influence. The fact that this male influence has to be identified as heterosexual tells you a great deal about how postmodern this worldview really is.

The book is divided into sixteen chapters, most offering what is intended to be a significant lesson for women as they try to understand the men in their lives. According to Behrendt and Tuccilo, a woman should understand that a man is “not that into you” if he is not calling her, is not dating her, is not having sex with her, is having sex with someone else, only wants to see her when he’s drunk, doesn’t want to marry her, is breaking up with her, has disappeared on her, is married, is a selfish jerk, a bully, or is “a really big freak.”

The authors offer a series of excuses women make in order to rationalize the fact that the relationship is not moving forward in a way they would desire. The issue here is really quite clear. According to Behrendt and Tuccilo, women are looking for men who will initiate the relationship, sustain its development, engage in sexual relations in order to establish compatibility, and then move into deeper maturity on the way to marriage. This is the fairy tale as presented in both *Sex and the City* and this illuminating little book.

In the background to all this is the fact that many women are experiencing great grief in relationships with disinterested, immature, and lecherous men. However, the most interesting insight from this book is the fact that there must be many women—this is *The New York Times*’ best-selling nonfiction book, after all—who are doing their best to rationalize why the men in their lives appear to be disinterested in romance and responsibility.

The authors dismiss excuses such as “he doesn’t want to ruin the friendship,” “maybe he’s intimidated by me,” “maybe he wants to take it slow,” and “maybe he forgot to remember me.”

At times, the authors write with a combined voice, while individual messages from Behrendt and Tuccilo are inserted into the text. Behrendt does the hard labor in this partnership, serving as the wise and experienced man who can offer his testosterone-filled insights into the decadence, disinterest, and depravity of his fellow men.

The book is a litany of female complaints against men, followed by hypothesized reasons why men fail to deliver on their commitments. “Annie” wrote the authors to explain that her date almost never calls when he says he will, even when it is supposed to be only a few minutes later. Greg responds on behalf of the writing team, suggesting, “Here’s the deal. Most guys will say what they think you want to hear at the end of a date or phone call, rather than nothing at all. Some guys are lying, some guys really mean it. Here’s how you can tell the difference: You know they mean it when they actually do what they say they were going to do. Here’s something else to think about: Calling when you say you’re going to is the very first brick in the house you are building of love and trust. If you can’t lay this one stupid brick down, you ain’t never gonna to have a house, baby. And it’s cold outside.”

That response pretty much sums up the style of the book and the depth of its advice. Actual functioning, mature, working marriages are a far-off vision for these women. In an odd note, Liz Tuccilo tells of working with Greg Behrendt on the book in New York City, noticing that Greg “would often call his wife just to tell her that he couldn’t really talk to her right then, but he was thinking of her and would call later.” This kind of loving gesture is obviously foreign to Tuccilo’s experience. “It didn’t look like the most difficult thing in the world,” she said, “but it sure seemed nice.”

Moving on to other issues in the romantic relationship, Behrendt and Tuccilo suggest that “hanging out” is not the same thing as dating. If a man does not take responsibility to invite a woman on a date, make appropriate arrangements, and invest in the experience, he’s just not that into you.

Inevitably, the issue of sex arises in just the way we would expect, coming from writers for *Sex and the City*. According to these authors, if a man is attracted to a woman, he will move directly to initiating sex. “If he were into you,” they explain, “he would be having a hard time keeping his paws off you. Oh the simplicity of it all! If a man is not trying to undress you, he’s not into you.”

They completely dismiss men who do not move immediately to demand sex or men who think that sex ought to wait for marriage.

In a chapter that would seem to be unnecessary, even for the lovelorn readers of this book, Behrendt and Tuccilo explain that if a man is having sex with another woman, he is probably not a good candidate for future romance. Get this line: “If he’s sleeping with someone else without your knowledge or encouragement, he is not only behaving like a man who’s just not that into you, he’s behaving like a man who doesn’t even like you all that much.”

How do you take that advice apart? According to the Sex and the City worldview, it would presumably be just fine if the man were having sex with another woman with her knowledge or encouragement. The sex itself is not bad, wrong, or problematic according to Behrendt and Tuccilo. The issue is cheating. Writing to “Fiona,” Greg Behrendt offers this advice: “Well, you can choose to believe he is sorry. You can choose to believe he will change. But in my book, lying, cheating, hiding is the exact opposite of the behavior of a man who’s really into you.” Got it?

The following chapters offer similar advice, instructing women on the wiles and basic immaturity of men. You don’t have to read between the lines to see that these writers assume that men will use women and that women are so desperate for romance and sex that they are willing to be used.

Interestingly, marriage remains very much on the horizon. The women whose unfulfilling relationships presumably form the market for this book are desperately seeking to be married. “Every man you have ever dated who has said he doesn’t want to get married or doesn’t believe in marriage, or has ‘issues’ with marriage, will, rest assured, someday be married,” Behrendt and Tuccilo explain. “It just will never be with you.”

In an interesting exchange, “Danielle” wrote a letter explaining that the main man in her life is “just not ready” to get married. After dating for five years, “I’m only twenty-eight and people get married much later these days. And sometimes it takes longer for guys to grow up than girls. So I want to be understanding, but I’m just not sure how long I’m supposed to wait. Does he need more time or is he just not that into marrying me?”

Greg responds, “I hate to tell you this, but here’s why he feels rushed: He’s still not sure you’re the one. Yep, my lovely, I know it’s hard to hear, but better to hear it now than ten years from now. So you can stay with him and continue to audition for the part of his lucky wife, or you can go find someone who doesn’t need a decade or two to realize you’re the best thing that ever happened to him.”

He’s Just Not That Into You is the perfect portrait of postmodern romance. With romantic love isolated from the Christian worldview that gave it birth, sex, romance, and whatever is considered love are combined in a tragic mix of confusion. Nevertheless, the book—and the fact that it now ranks as the top-selling nonfiction title—tells us something Christians need to know about the worldview, experience, and tragic emptiness of so many people in modern secular America.

Feminists promised American women a festival of liberated delights, describing marriage as a domestic prison and male leadership as oppressive patriarchy. What are feminists to make of this book, these women, and this advice? Clearly, these women desperately want men to grow up, initiate relationships, lead, and move toward marriage.

Tragically, these authors—and the millions they represent—see sex as a way of luring, securing, and enticing men into romantic relationships. When these relationships fail—as this book proves they so often do—women are left feeling used, abused, empty, and hopeless. He’s Just Not That Into You represents one of the most tragic and depressing books published in recent years. Nevertheless, those of us who know the Bible’s understanding of sex, romance, and marriage should pay attention to this book and realize why the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is good news in more ways than one—rescuing us not only from sin, but from this tragic pattern of emptiness, disappointment, and confusion.

The hundreds of thousands of women reading this book desperately need the right advice—but that’s the last thing they’re going to get from a Sex and the City writing team.

